

## IRI Afghanistan Index

### Afghanistan Environment

Over the course of its Afghanistan polling program, which began in 2003, the International Republican Institute (IRI) has tracked a number of indicators to gauge the overall political environment of the population. The poll conducted in November 2009 compared to the pre-election poll in [July 2009](#) indicates a slight increase in pessimism in Afghan sentiment and outlook for the country. Afghans also seem more skeptical about the future of their economic situation compared to the pre-election polls.

- When asked if the country was headed in the right or wrong direction, 56 percent responded right direction, a drop from 62 percent in July 2009. Twenty-seven percent of respondents, up from 24 percent in July 2009, stated that their country is moving in the wrong direction. There was a slight increase in the number of respondents who were unsure of whether the country was headed in the right or wrong direction, from 11 to 13 percent.
- When asked whether their family's economic situation improved compared to five years ago, a 63 percent majority answered positively while only 14 percent stated they were worse off. Twenty-two percent said that their family's economic situation was the same compared to five years ago. When asked about the future of the Afghan economy in the next year, 47 percent of respondents, a drop from 54 percent, were of the opinion that the Afghan economy will improve and nearly one-third indicated it will stay the same. Thirteen percent of respondents said the economy will get worse in the next year.
- Thirty-three percent of respondents, a slight drop from 35 percent in July, stated their country was more stable now compared to one year ago, and 40 percent indicated that it is less stable. One-fourth of respondents saw no difference between the security situation versus one year ago.
- Security and crime remain the top priority facing Afghanistan for 56 percent of respondents. Although the issue of the Afghan economy has dropped from 35 percent in July 2009 to 23 percent in November 2009, jobs and unemployment were ranked second to security at 31 percent. There was also a slight increase in concerns relating to government problems and corruption, up from 10 percent in July 2009 to 13 percent in November 2009.
- More than half the respondents indicated that the current political and security situation in the region was peaceful and stable, while a little more than one-third of respondents indicated the situation to be intense and uncertain. Only 12 percent said that the political and security situation in the region was critical and unstable. This remains constant compared to pre-election polls.

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- When asked if Afghanistan has good relations with the following countries respondents said: Iran (19 percent up from 17 percent), China (14 percent up from eight percent), Tajikistan (14 percent up from 12 percent), United States (12 percent down from 19 percent), Turkmenistan (12 percent up from five percent), Pakistan (nine percent up from five percent), and 12 percent indicated no country has good relations with Afghanistan.
- Despite the difficult security situation, a majority of Afghans, 80 percent, believe they have more personal freedom since the fall of the Taliban.
- Nationalism seems strong as nearly eight out of 10 respondents indicated they consider themselves Afghan first while 14 percent indicate they consider themselves Pashtun and 15 percent responded Tajik first.
- A great majority of Afghans, 75 percent, seem to be willing to vote for a president who is not from their ethnic group, representing cross-ethnic nationalism among Afghans.
- Political parties have increased in favorability since May 2009 but dropped slightly since July 2009. When asked their opinion on national political parties, almost two-thirds of the respondents answered favorably, compared to 33 percent in May 2009 and 67 percent in July 2009.
- More than two-thirds of respondents, 68 percent, were of the opinion that the government should hold talks and reconcile with the Taliban. However, 25 percent answered that the government should not reconcile with the Taliban, up from 14 percent in the May poll.
- When respondents were asked if the number of elected women was adequate, 41 percent indicated that there were too few women while 38 percent indicated that the current number of female elected officials was adequate. Only 14 percent stated that there were too many women in elected office.
- When asked whether they would vote for a woman for parliament 63 percent answered favorably, for provincial council 61 percent answered favorably, and 47 percent answered they would vote for a woman for president. However, when respondents were asked if they voted for a female candidate in the 2009 presidential and provincial council elections, a great majority, 88 percent, said they did not vote for a woman for president and 65 percent said they did not vote for a female provincial council candidate.
- Half of the respondents in the post-election poll, up from 30 percent in May, indicated that there were too few young people in elected government positions. One-third of respondents stated that there was adequate representation of young elected officials while only 11 percent indicated that there were too many. However, when asked who they think would be better in elected office, half of the respondents stated that those older than 25 were able to perform their tasks better.

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### Performance of Government

Employment opportunities and a better economy were the top issues Afghans want President Hamid Karzai to address. However, Afghans have also expressed significant concerns about corruption in Karzai's government and were more willing to look to local leaders for issues such as security and representation.

- To improve their lives, almost half of the respondents want President Karzai to focus on the economy and job creation, while 19 percent were of the opinion that by providing security the President would improve their lives.
- More than 80 percent of respondents believe corruption was a serious problem in Afghanistan, which remains unchanged from the May poll.
- Fifty-nine percent of respondents in November stated that the post August 20, 2009 government has performed poorly in dealing with corruption issues, a significant increase of 44 percentage points from May 2009.
- When respondents were asked if they, a friend or a relative have had to pay a bribe for services, 74 percent indicated health services in a public clinic or hospital, 74 percent indicated politicians in order to get a job, 71 percent indicated bribing a local official in order to secure a license or permit, 72 percent stated bribing a municipal official, while 60 percent stated that they offered a bribe or gift to a police officer in order to get out of a traffic violation.
- Respondents were asked to grade a number of government institutions and other organizations using a scale from one to five where five is the best grade. The Afghan National Army (ANA) scored the highest grade for its overall performance at 3.67. A close second with 3.41 was the President, media received a grade of 3.35. The opposition candidates along with the Taliban received a grade of 2.15 and 1.9, respectively. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) received a grade of 2.78.
- Respondents were asked two questions about their Community Development Council (CDC) Shuras—local councils that promote good governance and need-oriented reconstruction. Eighty-four percent of respondents feel their CDC Shura members should be responsible for local village security. Eight-five percent feel their CDC Shura elders should represent their voice at the national government in Kabul.

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### Elections

Despite the controversy surrounding the election, a majority of Afghans feel that President Hamid Karzai was legitimately elected. However, only one-third of respondents indicated that they voted in the presidential election and less than one-half thought that the election was free and fair. An overwhelming majority believed that the election was marred with corruption but respondents still seem to have faith in the Afghan election institutions.

- Seventy-five percent of respondents indicated that they were registered to vote, but only 35 percent responded they actually voted.
- When respondents were asked about their motivation to vote in the presidential election, 23 percent, up from 10 percent before the election, indicated reconstruction and development while 17 percent, down from 19 percent in July 2009, indicated security. A steep rise to 16 percent, up from four percent, indicated a wish to vote for or against a specific candidate.
- When respondents were asked who they voted for in the presidential election, no candidate received a majority of 50 percent plus one. Forty-five percent of respondents said they voted for Hamid Karzai, 30 percent for Abdullah Abdullah, while Ramazan Bashardost and Ashraf Ghani received 13 percent and nine percent respectively.
- Almost 60 percent of respondents felt that there should be a registration process for the parliamentary elections, scheduled for 2010, and 74 percent indicated that they would vote in those elections. Twenty-six percent of respondents indicated that they would not vote in the parliamentary and district council elections, citing reasons such as fraud, insecurity and election fatigue.
- When asked whether they thought that the presidential election held on August 20 was free and fair, 44 percent indicated that the presidential election was free and fair. Thirty-five percent indicated the election was not free and fair, and an unusually large number, 21 percent refused to answer or said they did not know. Of those who indicated that the election was free and fair, they stated that the election was transparent, that people were satisfied with the process, and that security was good. Of those that cited that the election was not free and fair, more than 70 percent stated that they witnessed fraud in the election process.
- Two-thirds of the respondents view Hamid Karzai as the legitimately elected president of Afghanistan. However, 81 percent of the respondents believed that there was corruption during the presidential election.

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- A majority of 76 percent of respondents said that they were kept informed by the Independent Election Commission (IEC) during the audit process. A majority of respondents were of the opinion that the IEC organized the election well, and that the IEC was an independent and credible institution. However, 51 percent of respondents viewed the Electoral Complaints Commission decision to have a second round election as being bad for Afghanistan.

### Politics

President Hamid Karzai is held in high regard by respondents and was viewed as the candidate backed by the United States and the international community. When asked why they thought Dr. Abdullah withdrew from the second round, 41 percent of the respondents indicated that Dr. Abdullah knew he would lose, one-fifth cited lack of transparency in the election process, and 12 percent thought he withdrew as a result of international pressure.

- Fifty-seven percent of respondents did not believe that the United States and international community had a favorite candidate. However, in response to whether or not the US and international community had a favorite candidate, 43 percent answered positively and of those 61 percent thought that President Karzai was the favored candidate.
- Fifty-eight percent of respondents rated Hamid Karzai's performance as president as either very good or good, which was unchanged from the July poll.
- When respondents were asked whether they had an unfavorable or favorable opinion of Afghan politicians and their leadership qualities, President Karzai ranked highest with 63 percent favorability. Ramazan Bashardost followed as a close second with 59 percent favorability, an increase from 41 percent in July. Dr. Abdullah's favorability decreased from 48 percent to 42 percent in November, while Ashraf Ghani increased to 40 percent in November from 34 percent in July. Rashid Dostum remained last with a negative 25 percent favorability rating, which is unchanged from the pre-election period.
- In an open-ended question, respondents were asked to pick one person in Afghanistan whom they viewed most favorably. Forty-two percent of respondents picked Hamid Karzai, 16 percent picked Dr. Abdullah, 10 percent Ramazan Bashardost, and seven percent Haji Mohammed Mohaqiq, and six percent Ashraf Ghani.
- Thirty-three percent of respondents indicated that security should be the first priority of the President after the elections. However, 16 percent indicated that the issues of corruption and abuse of power should top the President's agenda in his second term, a four-fold increase from July. Fourteen percent stated that the economy, unemployment and standard of living should be the President's priority. Only one percent chose terrorism as a top priority for the next administration.

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**International Forces and Foreign Assistance**

Afghans seem to be satisfied with the reconstruction projects funded by the international community.

- Sixty-nine percent of respondents indicated they were satisfied with the development projects implemented by the international community. Twenty-eight percent of respondents were not satisfied, citing a gap in reconstruction efforts and local needs as well as a waste of resources.
- Healthcare and education seem to be the most important ways of using foreign assistance, with 94 percent citing healthcare as important and 96 percent citing education. Ninety-four percent of respondents indicated reconstruction projects such as waterworks, road building and sewer construction were important. Eighty-four percent said women's rights and 81 percent said democracy support were important uses of foreign assistance resources. When respondents were asked to choose one important issue among the above, one-fourth chose education and healthcare, one-fifth building roads, sewer and water, 19 percent indicated increasing of foreign troops, and 15 percent indicated democracy.

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