



# An Afghan Futures Report

By D3 and ACSOR-Surveys



## Afghan Opinion on the Status of Women in Afghanistan

Women's rights in Afghanistan have fluctuated under different rulers since the 20<sup>th</sup> century: from Daoud Khan to the mujahedeen to the Taliban to the Karzai Administration. Perspectives on improvements or setbacks have been measured in numerous gender inequality and gap indices: Afghanistan continues to be among the lowest ranked countries in terms of gender equality.<sup>1</sup>

Quantitative metrics, indices, and factors measuring the rights and freedoms of Afghan women – and qualitative scholarly research and journalism documenting Afghan women – are readily available. However, more public opinion research on the rights of women from the perspective of Afghan women is needed to better understand whether the situation for women in Afghanistan has improved. Furthermore, data of the opinions – directly from the viewpoints of Afghan women and men – are needed to understand the future of gender equality in Afghanistan.

Taking into consideration cultural, gender, religious, and political norms, Afghan Futures – a longitudinal data collection effort sponsored by D3 and its subsidiary ACSOR-Surveys – has collected public opinion data from Afghan men and women on the status, security of and violence against, and autonomy of women in Afghanistan.

The results rely on rigorously and statistically randomized sampling methodologies to create an unbiased dataset of the opinions from over 2,000 Afghans, urban and rural, ages 18 years old and older, across all 34 provinces of Afghanistan. Looking back to 2007, the main question for this research is, “has the situation for women in Afghanistan changed, how, and what are the attitudes and opinions regarding the future of equality, empowerment, and access for women?”

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<sup>1</sup> Afghanistan ranked in the bottom ten countries from 2008 to 2012. See United Nations Development Program. “Human Development Reports: Gender Inequality Index (GII).” <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii>. World Economic Forum. “Global Gender Gap Report.” <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2014/>.

## Key Findings

This report examines Afghans' opinions of the status of women, equality between genders, empowerment of women, and security and violence facing Afghan women.

- The results indicate that gender gaps continue to persist in literacy and employment.
- Inequalities are perceived to still exist in access to holding political office, employment, and protection from violence.
- Survey results suggest that violence against women persists within the home.
- Afghan women are willing to cede rights in order for fighting to stop between the Taliban and the government.



## Status of Women in Afghanistan

In the 2015 Afghan Futures Survey, gaps between men and women persist in Afghanistan (see Table 1): more women than men are illiterate, and fewer women are working full time and more are unemployed, compared to Afghan men.

**Table 1: Gender Gaps (Nationwide)**

	Men (n=1057)	Women (n=1009)
Education (D5)		
Illiterate	42%	70%
College graduate	5%	2%
Employment (D6)		
Working full time	50%	1%
Housewife/Unemployed	13%	89%

A gap also persists between urban and rural women in terms of education: 72 percent of rural women versus 60 percent of urban women are illiterate; less than 1 percent of rural women versus 6 percent of urban women are college graduates.

Access to employment opportunities, protection from violence, access to healthcare, and access to education are the top issues that both men and women agree are facing women in Afghanistan today.

Respondents were asked whether or not they support women voting, holding jobs outside the home, holding government office, girl's education, accompaniment by male relatives, wearing a burka, and driving. Overall, 86 percent of the respondents – male and female – support<sup>2</sup> women voting; 71 percent support women holding jobs outside the home; 68 percent support women holding government office; 85 percent support girls' education; and 75 percent support wearing a burka. Less supported activities are going

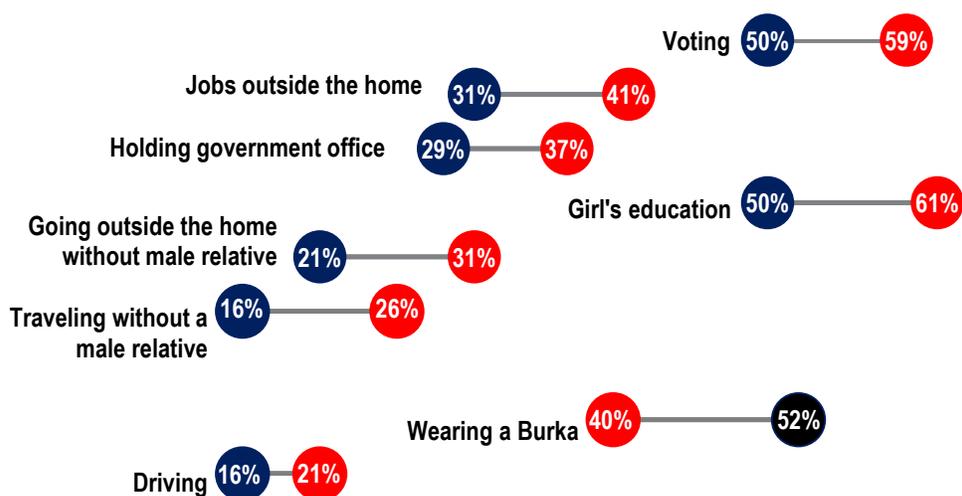
**A gap of nearly 10% exists between the attitudes of Afghan women and men regarding women's right to vote, to work outside the home, to hold government offices, and for girls' education.**

<sup>2</sup> Data for support is reported as a combination of strongly and somewhat.

outside the home (but within the village) without a male relative at 60 percent, traveling outside the village alone at 51 percent, and driving at 46 percent.

Female respondents were more likely than male respondents to be strongly supportive of women’s involvement in eight scenarios – with an approximately 10 percentage point gap between women and men. Female respondents are less likely than male respondents to strongly support women wearing a burka, with a 12 percentage point gap between the genders.

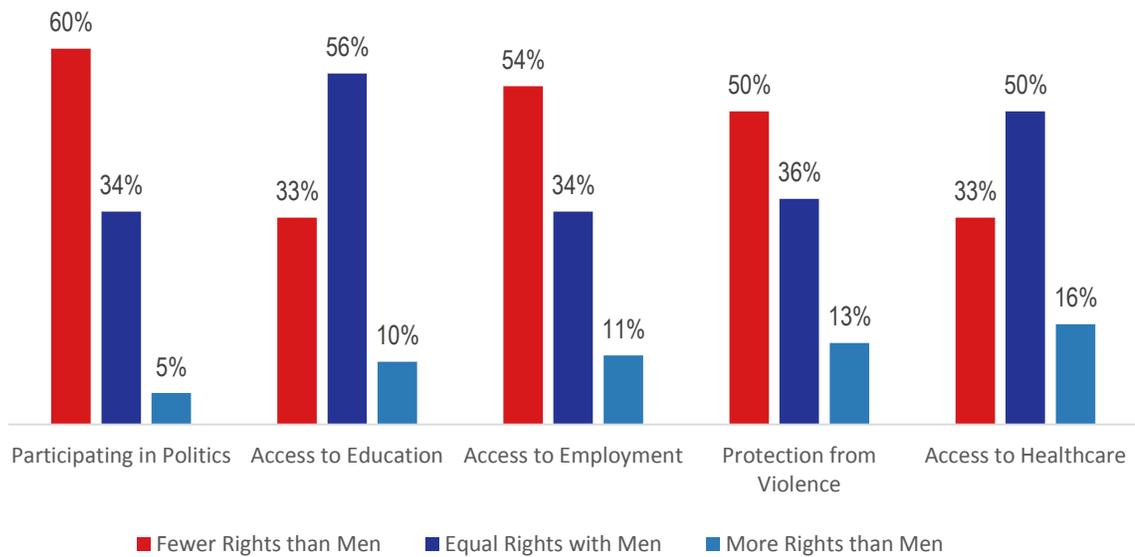
**Gaps in attitudes: women are more likely than men to be strongly supportive of the following freedoms & rights for Afghan women.**



When respondents were asked if they believe women in Afghanistan have fewer rights than men, the same or equal rights, or more rights than men, the results show that women are perceived to have fewer rights than men when it comes to participating in politics, access to employment, and protection from violence (see figure below). Only with access to education and access to health care do the results suggest gender equality. A possible reason half or more Afghans perceive women to have equal access to education and healthcare may be related to the large number of international aid programs targeted at improving female education and maternal health.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> United States Agency for International Development. "Frequently Asked Questions." Frequently Asked Questions. Accessed October 30, 2015. <https://www.usaid.gov/afghanistan/frequently-asked-questions>. Since 2002, the American people have provided the Afghan people with more than \$17 billion dollars in development assistance. Education and health were a key focus of this aid, specifically targeted at girls to get an education and to build health facilities for women and children.

## Perceptions Of Equality: The Rights Of Women Compared To Men



### Violence against Women in Afghanistan

According to Al Jazeera, almost nine of ten Afghan women face [some form] of violence, and Afghanistan is ranked as one of the most dangerous places in the world to be born a woman.<sup>4</sup> This compares to the 2015 Afghan Futures finding that nearly five out of ten female respondents know someone who has been physically beaten by her husband. According to the 2015 Afghan Futures Survey, 36 percent of Afghans think that violence against women in Afghanistan is increasing. Women are more likely than men to say that violence against women is increasing (40% women compared to 32% men).

**36% of Afghans think that violence against women in Afghanistan is increasing.**

**40% of Afghan women report that the level of violence against women is increasing.**

<sup>4</sup> "Afghanistan: No Country for Women." Al Jazeera English. Accessed October 29, 2015. <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/101east/2015/06/afghanistan-country-women-150630115111987.html>.

One reason for this is that violence against women occurs primarily within the home.<sup>5</sup> D3/ACSOR employs gender matching of female interviewers with female respondents, and our female interviewers were able to ask sensitive questions on this topic:

- 44 percent of Afghans overall believe that men mistreat their wives 'very often' or 'sometimes' in their district, however, 48 percent of women report that this happens 'very often' or 'sometimes'.
- 61 percent of Afghans say that family members should intervene if a man mistreats his wife, but only 32 percent of Afghans say that women who are abused should be able to leave in order to protect themselves as opposed to staying with their family no matter what.
- The majority (64%) of women agree that women who are abused should stay with their family no matter what; and, 47 percent of women in this survey report personally knowing someone who has been physically beaten by her husband.

**Five in ten female respondents report knowing someone who has been physically beaten by her husband.**

**Only asked of women by female interviewers.**

The effects of security and violence in the community due to the ongoing conflict with the Taliban have had an impact on the attitudes of Afghan women. Despite the assumption that Afghan women need "more freedoms and rights" to alleviate austere conditions – like those presented above – the Afghan Futures results suggest that women are willing to make concessions in obtaining those freedoms or rights in exchange for a negotiated peace with anti-government elements that would bring stability. In March 2014, the majority of women were willing to cede these rights for a negotiated peace settlement between the government and the Taliban. However, by 2015, fewer women seem to be willing to cede their rights:

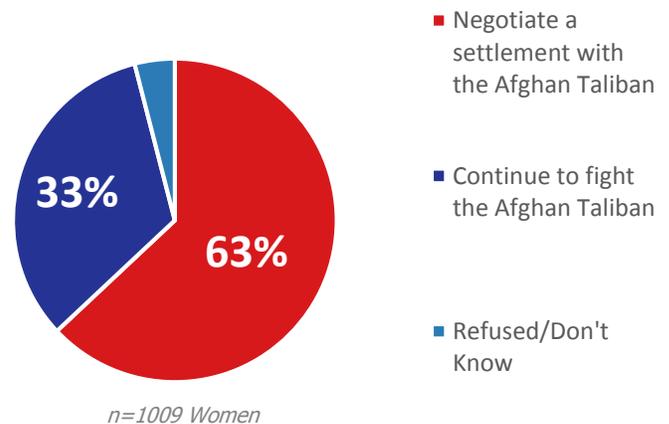
- 55% of Afghan women in 2015, compared to 66% in 2014, are somewhat or very willing to accept not being able to be outside of the home unescorted
- 48% of Afghan women in 2015, compared to 58% in 2014, are somewhat or very willing to accept no longer working
- 43% of Afghan women in 2015, compared to 51% in 2014, are somewhat or very willing to accept no longer attending school

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

- 52% of Afghan women in 2015, compared to 57% in 2014, are somewhat or very willing to accept no longer holding political office.

Only in the case of 'no longer voting,' were 49 percent of Afghan women willing to concede the right in 2014, and 47 percent in 2015. This is the only right where a majority of Afghan women were not willing to cede the right in 2014 or 2015. Afghan Futures data shows that 63 percent of Afghan women agree that the government should negotiate a settlement in which the Afghan Taliban are allowed to hold political office if they agree to stop fighting.



### Future Research

The Afghan Futures dataset from 2015 has additional information regarding empowerment and decision-making. Topics include household decision-making, financial independence, and reproductive autonomy can be examined. This analytical write-up provides a snap-shot of the major gender gaps between men and women persisting and Afghanistan in topical areas such as education, healthcare, and perceptions of violence against women. D3 and ACSOR will be further exploring these themes in our continued research in Afghanistan.

### Methodology

Afghan Futures is self-funded by the Afghan Center for Socio-Economic and Opinion Research (ACSOR-Surveys), a D3 Systems, Inc. subsidiary. Results are based on in-person interviews conducted in Dari and Pashto among a random national sample of 2,066 Afghan adults from September 15-20, 2015. For more information please see the full methodology report at [www.d3systems.com](http://www.d3systems.com).