

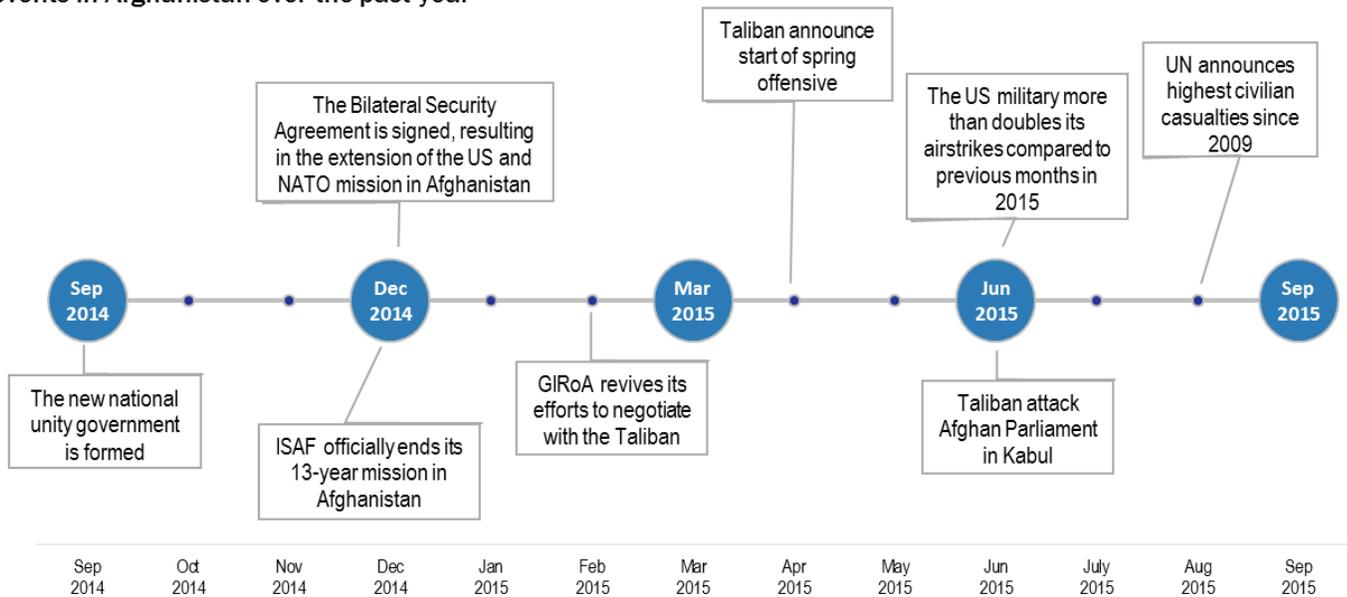


## The Impact of Economy and Security on Perceptions of the Government

### Introduction

Of the many events that occurred in Afghanistan over the last year (November 2014- September 2015), two of the most salient are the official end of ISAF’s mission in Afghanistan (December 2014) and the start of the 2015 fighting season, which has been one of the bloodiest in the past thirteen years. These events have impacted the economic and security situation in Afghanistan and have consequently affected Afghans’ perceptions of the government.

### Key events in Afghanistan over the past year



## Key Findings

- Since November 2014, there has been a significant increase in the number of Afghans who think the country is headed in the wrong direction. Fifty-five percent of Afghans now think the country is headed in the wrong direction (23% in Nov 2014).
- There has been a 13 percentage point increase in the proportion of Afghans who think that Afghanistan's economy is 'poor' (Nov 2014 – 28%, Sep 2015 - 41%).
- Afghans' belief that their overall quality of life is 'good' declined 19 percentage points from November 2014 (73%) to September 2015 (54%).
- Fifty-two percent of Afghans say the Taliban has grown stronger in the last year. This is an 18 percentage point increase from responses provided in November 2014 (34%).
- Seventy-four percent of Afghans have heard of Da'esh. Of those who have heard of Da'esh, 72 percent say they are concerned that Da'esh will take over territory in their area.

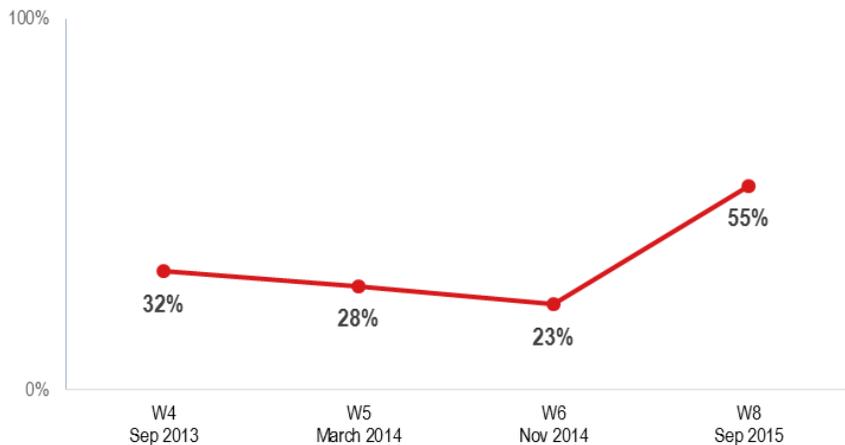
## Conditions in the Village and Economy

Data for Wave 6 (November 2014) of the Afghan Futures Survey were collected two months after Afghanistan's National Unity Government was formed and Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah decided to run the country jointly with Ghani serving as President and Abdullah as Chief Executive Officer. For many Afghans, this signaled the end of a tenuous five-month waiting period that was fraught with allegations of cheating, fighting and demonstrations, and prolonged election audits. Afghans were happy that the country had a new government and they were optimistic about the future. Accordingly, in November 2014, 61 percent of Afghans thought that the country was going in the right direction. Support for President Ghani and CEO Abdullah was also high, with 86 percent saying they had favorable views of Ghani and 76 percent saying they had favorable views of Abdullah.

Since the unity government was formed, most Afghans feel it has made little progress. After a year in office, cabinet member selection is incomplete and the parliamentary elections have been put on hold. The lack of progress in the government may be related to increasingly publicized disagreements and infighting between President Ghani and CEO Abdullah Abdullah, resulting in more negative opinions of the government. Opinions may have also been affected by worsening security. In the past year, civilian and military casualties have climbed and the Taliban has strengthened its offensive and taken over many areas that have been previously controlled by the government. Consequently, Afghans are less optimistic and previous positive opinions of the government have evaporated.

Data collected in September 2015 show a substantial decrease in positive perceptions of the government. The majority (55%) now say the country is headed in the wrong direction compared to just 23 percent in November 2014. Consistent with negative views of the direction the country is going, half or more now have an unfavorable opinion of President Ghani (50%) and Chief Executive Abdullah (58%).

**Opinions about the direction the country is going have shifted. Over half now say the country is headed in the **wrong direction**.**



Economic hardships have impacted Afghans' views of the government. Prior to ISAF ending its mission in December 2014 and restructuring as the smaller Resolute Support (RS) Mission, thousands of Afghans worked in support roles for international forces. When ISAF troops began to leave Afghanistan and military bases around the country started to close, many jobs also left the country.<sup>1</sup> This left a gap in the economy that the Afghan government has not been able to fill. The economic impact of the drawdown of international security forces has been felt across the country. It has been made worse by a surge in Afghan returnees from Pakistan. Many of the returnees have been unable to find shelter or work because of insecurity in their villages.<sup>2 3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Barakat, Sultan and Brooke Smith-Windsor. "Post-ISAF Afghanistan: The Early Months." The Brookings Institution, February, 2015. <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/reports/2015/05/bdc-afghanistan-nato-report/bdc-nato-event-report.pdf> (accessed November 5, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR. "Country operations profile - Afghanistan." <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486eb6.html> (accessed October 25, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Daniel, Frank J. "Coming home to war: Afghan refugees return reluctantly from Pakistan." Reuters.com. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/09/04/us-afghanistan-refugees-pakistan-idUSKCN0R32K420150904> (accessed September 3, 2015).

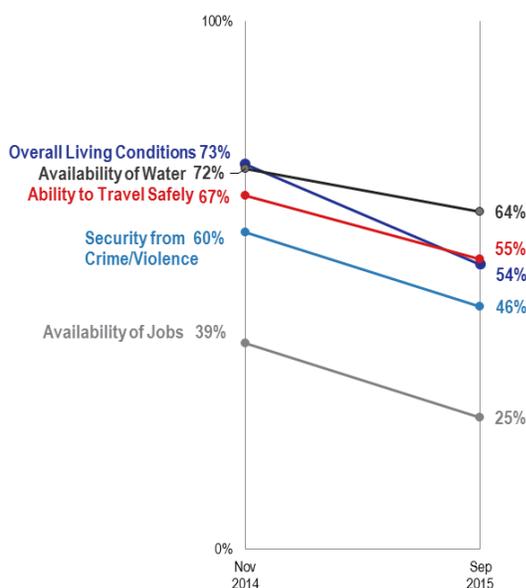
In Afghan Futures Wave 8 (September 2015), 41 percent of Afghans say Afghanistan’s economy is poor compared to 28% in November 2014. Similarly, when asked about the economic opportunities in the area where they live, 75 percent of Afghans say the availability of jobs is bad, an increase since November 2014 when 60 percent reported negative views about the availability of jobs.<sup>4</sup> Residents in Paktia (71%), Kabul (70%), Daykundi (69%), and Parwan (65%) report that the country’s economy is poor more frequently than Afghans in other provinces.

Negative perceptions of the Afghan economy in general do not always equate to poor household financial conditions. Parwan is the exception, where a majority of residents say that both Afghanistan’s economy and their household’s financial situation are poor. Across the country, 42 percent say their household’s financial situation is moderate, 31 percent say it is poor, and 27 percent say it is good or excellent. Afghans in Parwan (58%), Logar (53%) and Zabul (50%) most often say the financial situation of their household is ‘poor.’ The weak economy and lack of jobs created hardships for many Afghans and had a negative effect on their overall living conditions. Nevertheless, the majority of Afghans say the availability of food (61%) and water (64%) is good. However, the availability of clean drinking water is reported to have decreased from 72 percent in November 2014 to 64 percent in September 2015.

Afghans’ opinions of services in their village impacts how they assess their overall living conditions. In September 2014, when the availability of services was rated as ‘good’ by the plurality of Afghans, opinions about living conditions were also positive – nearly three-fourths (73%) said their living conditions were good. This has declined to 54 percent in the current wave. People typically blame the government for decreases in the availability of services. Thus, consistent with the decline in perceptions of the availability of jobs and water, we also see a substantial decrease in the percentage of Afghans with the view that the country is going in the right direction.

Exploratory regression analysis shows that perceptions of the economy impact views of the government. Afghans who say their household financial situation and Afghanistan’s financial situation is good or excellent are more likely to say the country is headed in the right direction. Accordingly, Afghans who say their household financial situation

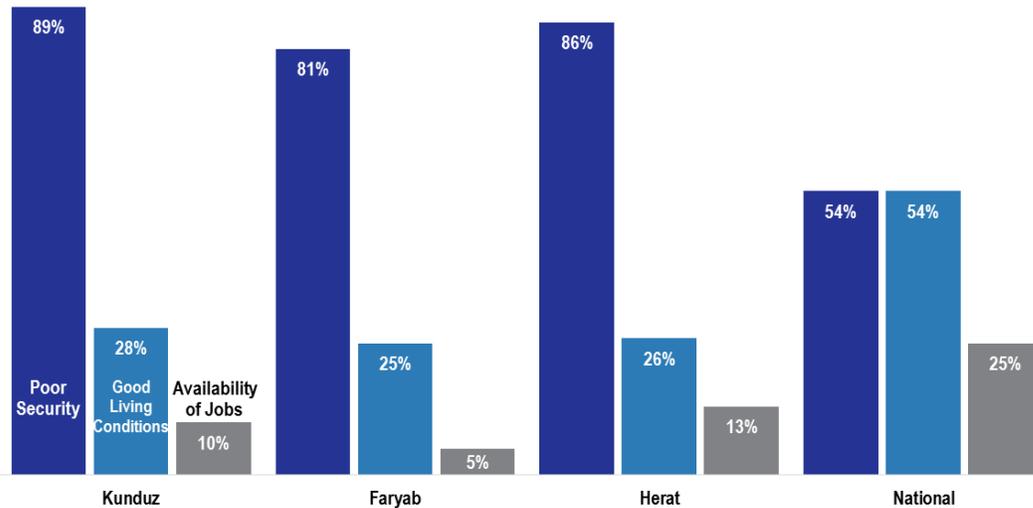
Over the past ten months perceptions about the conditions in the village being ‘good’ have decreased. Overall living conditions and security from crime and violence have declined the most.



<sup>4</sup> The availability of jobs is reported as a combination of “very” and “somewhat” responses.

and Afghanistan’s economic situation are bad are more likely to say the country is headed in the wrong direction (Appendix A).

Afghans in provinces that most frequently report **poor security** from crime and violence report having **good living conditions** and **availability of jobs** less frequently than Afghans overall. This trend is most pronounced in Kunduz, Faryab and Herat.



A Spearman’s Rho correlation was conducted to explore the relationship between security, the availability of jobs and food, overall living conditions, and Afghans’ ability to afford the items they need. The test showed a significant correlation ( $p < .01$ ) between the variables (see Appendix B). This indicates that areas that are less secure also face hardships in terms of economic opportunities. Of Afghans who report that security from crime and violence is ‘very bad’ ( $n=380$ ), 62 percent also say that the availability of jobs is ‘very bad’ in their area and nearly one third (31%) say they have difficulty affording the things they want and need. A similar trend is seen among Afghans who say security from the Taliban and other armed groups is ‘very bad’ ( $n=436$ ), of whom 57 percent say living conditions are very bad and 34 percent say they have difficulty affording the things they want and need.

As the Taliban continue their offensive and the presence of other insurgent groups such as Da’esh continues to increase, it is likely that security will continue to deteriorate, making overall living conditions even more difficult for Afghans. If the government is not able to make progress in the areas of economy and security, its approval rating will likely continue to decline.

### Perceptions of Security

In December 2014, ISAF officially ended its mission in Afghanistan and started drawing down the number of troops to support the smaller Resolute Support mission. The current fighting season is the first fighting period since 2001 that the Afghan security forces have led security operations in Afghanistan. To date, things have not gone well. The current fighting season has been described as one of the bloodiest in the last decade. According to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), there has been

a 23 percent increase in casualties among women and a 13 percent increase in casualties among children, compared to the previous year.<sup>5</sup> Insurgents have also taken control of areas that were previously held by the government. Many areas in the north, south, and around Kabul have experienced an increase in Taliban presence especially in areas including, but not limited to, districts in Kunduz, Badakhshan, Helmand, Herat, and rural areas of Kabul.

Consistent with the Taliban offensive and fighting around the country, there has been a decline in security. In November 2014, only 39 percent said security from crime and violence was bad, but, in September of 2015, more than half (54%) say security from crime and violence is bad. Fifty-five percent also say security from the Taliban and other armed groups is bad. Areas most likely to report poor security from crime and violence are Kunduz (89%), Herat (86%), Faryab (81%), and Nangarhar (77%). Similarly, residents in Nangarhar (90%), Kunduz (84%), and Herat (84%) say security from the Taliban and other armed groups is poor. This is consistent with reports of increased insurgency presence, drone strikes, and fighting in these provinces.

Over the last few months, various drone strikes have been conducted in Nangarhar in an effort to address insurgent activities. In the month leading up to the Afghan Futures Wave 8 fieldwork (September 2015), drone strikes were conducted in various districts in Nangarhar, including Achin, Haskamina, and Sherzad. In Faryab, insurgents have attacked Afghan military convoys and attempted to kill Afghanistan's First Vice President, Abdul Dostum. Kunduz has also been hit hard by the Taliban. By July, the Taliban controlled at least 80 villages in the province.<sup>6</sup> It should be noted, however, that opinions about security presented here were collected prior to the Taliban taking over Kunduz City. Opinions about security and the government will be affected by this incident and may turn even more negative. However, some qualitative discussion with D3 subsidiary ACSOR-Surveys' field team members suggests that attitudes about the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces may improve now that Kunduz is back under government control.

In November 2014, 34 percent of Afghans felt the Taliban was growing stronger. By September 2015, 52 percent of Afghans said the Taliban had grown stronger. Residents in several provinces report with high frequency that the Taliban has grown stronger over the last year. Afghans in Daykundi (91%), Zabul (82%), Kunduz (74%), Faryab (73%), and Wardak (70%) most often say that the Taliban has grown stronger. These areas also have reported increased insurgent presence and fighting in their area. Da'esh is also a concern for Afghans. Three-fourths of Afghans say they have heard of Da'esh. Of those who have heard of Da'esh (n=1,536), 72 percent say they are concerned that Da'esh will take over territory in their area.

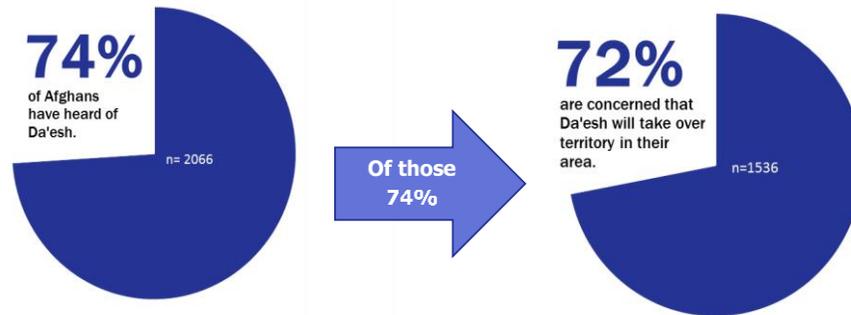
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<sup>5</sup> UNAMA. "Civilian casualties remain at record high levels in first half of 2015."

<http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16289&LangID=E> (accessed November 3, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Tolo News. "Taliban seize control of several villages in Kunduz." Tolonews.com.

<http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/20636-taliban-seize-control-of-several-villages-in-kunduz-officials> (accessed October 29, 2015).



Afghans believe that securing the country is the responsibility of the government. Thus, when security worsens, so do perceptions of the government. Exploratory regression analysis reveals that Afghans' concerns that Da'esh will take control over territory in their area does not impact views of the direction the country is going. Nevertheless, views about the Taliban do affect opinions about the direction of the country. Afghans who say the Taliban are becoming stronger and that security from violence and crime is bad are more likely to say the country is going in the wrong direction (Appendix A, Model 1). It is possible that concerns about Da'esh taking over territory do not impact views about the direction Afghanistan is going because Afghans' experiences of Da'esh remain relatively few. Many Afghans hear about the group through media, but few have actually experienced Da'esh presence or activities in their area. Conversely, the Taliban has had a long standing presence in Afghanistan and they have made large gains in recent months. Thus, the threat of the Taliban getting stronger and taking over territory in the country is perceived as more real than the threat of Da'esh doing the same.

## 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).

## Appendix A: Regression Analysis

Regression Model: Opinions of the direction the country is going, security and conditions in the village

q1NET ~ q19\_NET - + q5a\_NET - + q5b\_NET - + q38\_NET - + q39\_NET - +  
m6 - + d9a\_NET - + q2a\_NET - + q2b\_NET - + q2c\_NET - + q2d\_NET -

	B	SE	Sig	95% CI for odds ratio		
				Odds Ratio	Lower	Upper
(Intercept -	-3.72	0.22	*	0.02	0.02	0.04
q19_NET – Taliban Weaker/Same NET	0.42	0.15	*	1.53	1.15	2.03
q5a_NET – Ghani Favorable NET	0.67	0.19	*	1.96	1.34	2.87
q5b_NET – Abdullah Favorable NET	0.31	0.17		1.36	0.97	1.92
q38_NET – Afg economy Excellent/Good	0.37	0.17	*	1.45	1.05	2.01
q39_NET – HH economy Excellent/Good	0.52	0.16	*	1.68	1.23	2.3
m6 - Urban	-0.42	0.19	*	0.66	0.45	0.96
d9a_NET - Tajik	-0.41	0.18	*	0.66	0.46	0.95
d9a_NET - Uzbek	-0.07	0.3		0.93	0.52	1.66
d9a_NET - Hazara	-0.21	0.39		0.81	0.38	1.73
d9a_NET - Other/Unknown	-1.22	0.54	*	0.29	0.1	0.85
q2a_NET – Overall living conditions Good NET	1.31	0.18	*	3.72	2.59	5.34
q2b_NET – security from crime/violence Good NET	0.64	0.18	*	1.9	1.35	2.68
q2c_NET – availability of jobs Good NET	0.59	0.14	*	1.81	1.38	2.37
q2d_NET - infrastructure Good NET	0.67	0.19	*	1.95	1.36	2.81

## Appendix B: Correlations

Correlation between security, the availability of jobs and food, overall living conditions, and Afghans' ability to afford the items they need

		How would you rate the following... Security from crime and violence	How would you rate the following... Security from the Taliban and other armed groups	Would you rate the following... Your living conditions overall	Would you rate the following... The availability of jobs / economic opportunities	How would you rate the following... The availability of food	How would you rate the following... Your ability to afford the price of things you want and need	
Spearman's rho	How would you rate the following... Security from crime and violence	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.440**	.515**	.282**	.266**	.240**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
		N	1989	1989	1989	1989	1989	1989
	How would you rate the following... Security from the Taliban and other armed groups	Correlation Coefficient	.440**	1.000	.208**	.139**	.269**	.269**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
		N	1989	1989	1989	1989	1989	1989
	Would you rate the following... Your living conditions overall	Correlation Coefficient	.515**	.208**	1.000	.414**	.336**	.401**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
		N	1989	1989	1989	1989	1989	1989
	Would you rate the following... The availability of jobs / economic opportunities	Correlation Coefficient	.282**	.139**	.414**	1.000	.241**	.304**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
		N	1989	1989	1989	1989	1989	1989
	How would you rate the following... The availability of food	Correlation Coefficient	.266**	.269**	.336**	.241**	1.000	.435**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000
		N	1989	1989	1989	1989	1989	1989
	How would you rate the following... Your ability to afford the price of things you want and need	Correlation Coefficient	.240**	.269**	.401**	.304**	.435**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
		N	1989	1989	1989	1989	1989	1989

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).