



## The Post-Election Honeymoon is Over

### Assessment of the Unity Government

Almost a year into Hamid Karzai’s second term as President in May 2010, 63 percent of Afghans said the country was headed in the right direction.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, almost a year into the current unity government, just 23 percent say Afghanistan is headed in right direction, which is sharply down from 61 percent when the unity government was agreed upon in September 2014. It is safe to say that the honeymoon period for President Ashraf Ghani’s presidency is over and was short lived. Afghans are very pessimistic about the current government and the future of the country. Not surprisingly, residents of Kabul are the most pessimistic about the direction Afghanistan is headed in. They live at ground zero of the national government and see on a daily basis the corruption and lack of improvement. As Table 1 shows, however, no one across the country is very optimistic about Afghanistan’s current path.

**Table 1: Right Direction/Wrong Direction by REGION**

|                 | Capital | East | North | West | Southwest | South |
|-----------------|---------|------|-------|------|-----------|-------|
| Right Direction | 11%     | 27%  | 21%   | 26%  | 35%       | 30%   |
| Wrong Direction | 79%     | 51%  | 54%   | 49%  | 44%       | 49%   |

The current year has been a very trying period for Afghanistan. This year saw the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) take control of securing Afghanistan and have experienced a casualty rate that many military experts say is unsustainable. The Taliban have been very active since announcing their spring season offensive and have taken territory across Afghanistan, including areas in the North they could not control even when they were in power. When asked if the Taliban has grown stronger, weaker, or stayed the same over the past 12 months, more than half (52%) of Afghans report that ‘the Taliban is growing stronger’, the highest it has been since the Afghan Futures survey series began in 2010.

### Failure to Act

President Ghani’s favorability ratings have dropped from 87 percent in November 2014, to 49 percent in September 2015. Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah does not fare any better: he dropped from 76 percent favorable<sup>2</sup> to 41 percent. The shift is likely due in part to the fact that Ghani and Abdullah have stopped being candidates making campaign promises while seeking office and are now part of

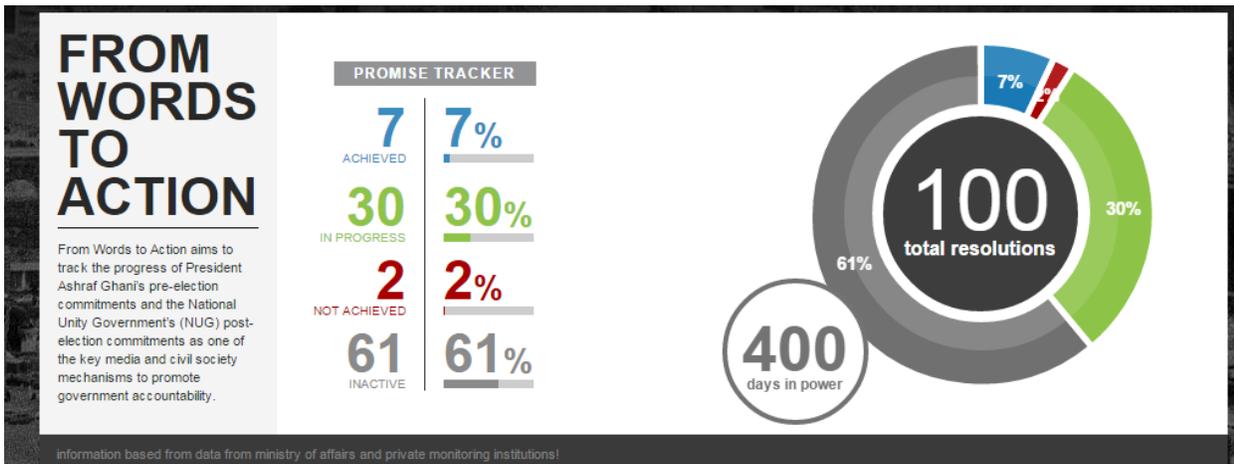
<sup>1</sup> Data is from Wave 1 of Afghan Futures survey series.

<sup>2</sup> Favorability ratings are based on a combination of “very” and “somewhat” favorable responses.

the government system with all of its long-standing problems. Every incoming candidate around the world has seen a drop in their favorability ratings when they took on the responsibilities of their office and started making decisions, however, the low ratings for the leaders of the Afghan unity government are exacerbated by poor security, continued corruption, a faltering economy, and an executive branch and parliament that are slow to act on important issues.

The unity government failed to hold the Wolesi Jirga elections in 2015 and was forced to extend the five year terms of all of the Wolesi Jirga members indefinitely.<sup>3</sup> The parliamentary elections have been delayed because of disputes about the allocation of Wolesi Jirga seats.<sup>4</sup> High ranking officials from Ghani’s camp have walked out of the Election Commission.<sup>5</sup>

The Afghan media has continued to hold the government’s feet to the fire. ToloNews even started a website that tracks government resolutions and their status. After 400 days in power, only 7 resolutions have been achieved, and that includes officially making Abdullah Abdullah the Chief Executive.



The story is no better for the unity government when it comes to security; after the dust settled on the attack on Kunduz City, many Kunduz residents turned their ire towards Kabul. Many of Kunduz’s

<sup>3</sup> Johnson, Kay. "Afghan Leader Extends Parliament's Term, Promises Election Date." Reuters. June 19, 2015. <http://in.reuters.com/article/2015/06/19/afghanistan-parliament-idINKBN0OZ20U20150619>.

<sup>4</sup> "...reform proposals is the setting aside of 83 seats for political parties with a national constituency — essentially meaning that party leaders in Kabul would get to choose candidates for those seats based on the votes the party gets throughout all provinces" Mashal, Mujib. "Afghanistan's Electoral Reform Plan Is Met With Skepticism." *The New York Times*. August 31, 2015. [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/01/world/asia/afghanistans-electoral-reform-plan-is-met-with-skepticism.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/01/world/asia/afghanistans-electoral-reform-plan-is-met-with-skepticism.html?_r=1).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> <http://govmeter.tolonews.com/>

residents blame the unity government for not providing adequate security for protection from the Taliban, warlords, and other various AGEs.<sup>7</sup>

The Afghan Central Statistics Office (CSO) reports the national unemployment rate as 25 percent, but other sources put it as high as 35 percent.<sup>8</sup> Three out of four Afghans in the current Afghan Futures survey report that the economic and job opportunities in their area are bad. Respondents are split on their ability to afford the things that they want or need; slightly more than half (52%) rate their ability to afford what they need as good, while 48 percent say it's bad. Less than half of Afghans report being able to afford the food they need (49%) or the fuel they need (49%).

As a reflection of diminishing confidence in GIRoA, Afghans are now saying that the elections were fraudulent, from 44 percent saying the elections were fair in November 2014 to only 23 percent in September 2015. Now less than half (45%) approve of the power sharing agreement compared to 87 percent in November 2014.<sup>9</sup> An even more telling sign that support for the unity government has weakened is both Pashtuns (Ghani's base) and Tajiks (Abdullah's base) now disapprove of the agreement with 57 percent of Pashtuns saying they disapprove of the power sharing agreement and 56 percent of Tajiks disapproving.

Afghans are split on whether Ghani and Abdullah can maintain their power sharing agreement with 47 percent saying they will maintain it and 47 percent saying that it will come apart. If the power sharing agreement were to come apart, more than a quarter (26%) of Afghans believe someone other than Ghani or Abdullah will prevail as the country's leader, which is up from only 3 percent in November 2014.

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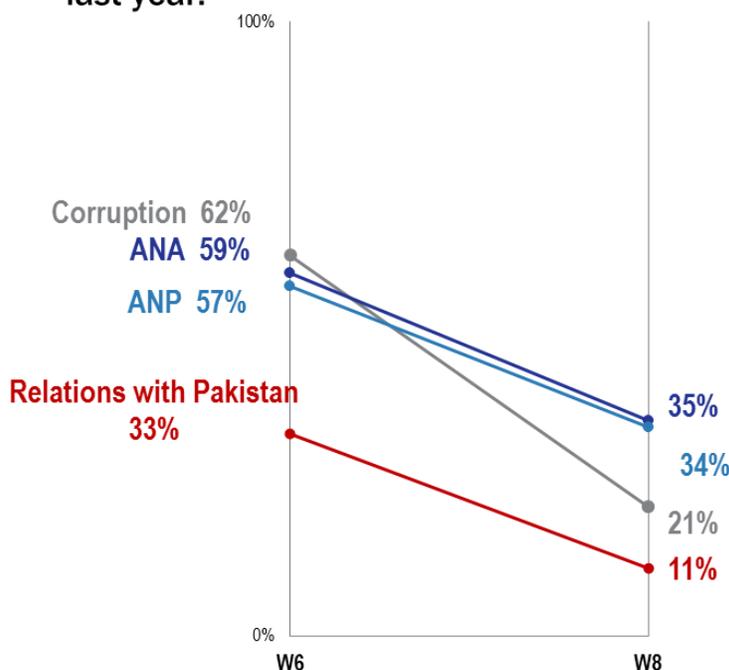
<sup>7</sup> Shaheed, Anisa. "Kunduz Families Accuse Government Of Breaking Election Promises." Afghanistan News-TOLONews.com. October 11, 2015. <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/21828-kunduz-families-accuse-govt-of-breaking-election-promises>.

<sup>8</sup> Latifi, Ali M. "For Displaced Afghans, Extended U.S. Troop Presence Offers Little Solace." Latimes.com. November 1, 2015. <http://www.latimes.com/world/afghanistan-pakistan/la-fg-afghanistan-us-20151101-story.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Approval ratings are based on a combination of "strongly" and "somewhat" approve responses.

Right after the unity government was announced, Afghans seemed very optimistic about the future of Afghanistan reporting that problems related to corruption, the ANA, the ANP, and relations with Pakistan would all overwhelmingly get better. That is no longer the case: when asked if corruption will be better, worse, or stay the same in the next six months only 21 percent said better compared to 62 percent in November 2014. It is the same with perceptions of ANA and ANP effectiveness: 35 percent think the ANA will get better in the next six months down from 59 percent, and impressions that the ANP will improve fell from 57 percent to 34 percent. Only 11 percent of Afghans believe that relations with Pakistan will get better in

**When asked whether the effectiveness of ANA, effectiveness of ANP, corruption, and relations with Pakistan will be better, worse, or stay the same in the next six months, those that said 'better' dropped almost in half from last year.**



the next six months and 59 percent say it will get worse. This is not surprising since relations between the two countries have been tense since the December 2014 attack by the Taliban on the Pakistan military academy and Pakistan’s decision to deport millions of Afghan refugees back to Afghanistan.

### Moving Forward

While these numbers are a clear warning sign for GIROA and its partners, Afghans still overwhelmingly (86%) prefer the current government to the Taliban running the country. When asked about supporting or opposing the presence of various groups in Afghanistan, support<sup>10</sup> for ‘fighters from the Taliban’ has dropped from 22 percent to 12 percent, and support for ‘Jihadi fighters from other countries’ has dropped from 31 percent to 16 percent. The Afghan public is weary of the fighting and despite giving it low ratings still sees the unity government as its best hope for achieving peace and security compared to other options such as the Taliban or warlords.

<sup>10</sup> Support ratings are based on a combination of “strongly” and “somewhat” support responses.

However, the unity government is facing serious hurdles in the future. President Ghani and his unity government have yet to announce a comprehensive economic plan that addresses current employment issues and the looming unemployment that is likely to result as the cottage industry generated by international forces draws down. The government thus far has not fully answered a rejuvenated Taliban that threatens more and more districts, and deadlines for the parliamentary elections continue to pass by without a resolution due to power struggles within the unity government. Simply put, the unity government needs some big wins to gain the support of the people back and, unfortunately for Afghans, but fortunately for the government, there are plenty of areas they can improve upon. The unity government needs to be seen as a driving force in bolstering the economy, strengthening ANDSF, and stopping infighting in the government to create a functional system capable of delivering services to its constituents.

## 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).