



**ACSOR/D3 Systems: Afghan Futures**

**Analysis by Langer Research**

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**Half in Afghanistan Believe the Taliban Have Moderated;  
Most Back Settlement Talks, Even with Territorial Concessions**

Afghans express a growing sense that the Taliban have become more moderate, and the public broadly supports a negotiated settlement with them – even if that means ceding government control of some provinces, the latest Afghan Futures survey has found.

Forty-eight percent in this national survey say the Taliban have become more moderate, double the number three years ago. More, 74 percent, support a negotiated settlement that would allow Taliban members to hold political office, and 65 percent say they would accept a deal that gave the Taliban control of some provinces.

Three-quarters also would back a settlement allowing Taliban members to serve in the armed forces. And most would accept Taliban-inspired restraints on women's ability to appear in public unescorted, although majorities reject other restrictions on women's rights in a settlement deal.

For most, in any case, support for negotiations is premised on the Taliban laying down their arms.

Behind these attitudes lies an increased view that the Taliban have become more moderate since they ruled the country from 1996 to 2001. In early 2009, just 24 percent of Afghans saw the Taliban as more moderate than before; in late 2010, 32 percent said so; and in this survey – amid declining reports of Taliban-directed violence – nearly half see the group as more moderate.

That said, the Taliban hardly are popular: Only 12 percent of Afghans see them favorably overall. That compares with favorable ratings of 72 percent for the Afghan government and, at the time the survey was completed, 51 percent for the United States.

The survey was completed in January and February, 2012, via face-to-face interviews with a random national sample of 2,018 Afghans in all 34 provinces of the country. It's the second in a series of publicly released surveys on attitudes in Afghanistan sponsored and conducted by the



Afghan Center for Socio-Economic and Opinion Research (ACSOR) in Kabul. Langer Research Associates of New York produced this analysis of results.

The survey was completed shortly before two events that may have affected views of the United States and NATO forces – the burning of Korans and other holy books by U.S. forces on Feb. 20 and the killing of 16 Afghan civilians, allegedly by a U.S. soldier, in Kandahar province March 11. ACSOR will repeat such questions, and others related to those incidents, in a follow-up survey to be released in May.

As of early February, fewer than one in four Afghans favored the immediate withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces, with more saying they should stay until Afghan forces are trained (37 percent) or the Taliban have been defeated (27 percent), if not longer. Seven in 10, moreover, said their lives in general had improved since the start of the U.S. presence in the country a decade ago.

Forty-five percent in the survey report development projects occurring in their area, and a majority, 57 percent, also say the country is generally heading in the right direction, 6 points fewer than said so in the first Afghan Futures survey in May 2010.

The survey also found some gains from polling last summer in ratings of basic living conditions. Availability of clean water, education for children, the security situation and freedom of movement all are rated positively by 70 percent or more. But the availability of jobs and electricity continue to languish, both rated positively by 39 percent.

### *Reconciliation*

In addition to substantial support for reconciliation, the survey, as noted, finds new lows in reports of bombings, killings and arson of public buildings by the Taliban. Fewer than a quarter of Afghans report such activities in their area (23, 23 and 21 percent, respectively), well down from their highs of 43, 42 and 45 percent in a 2006 survey.

Among the survey's results on reconciliation:

- Three-quarters support a negotiated settlement that would allow Taliban members to hold political office. At the same time, in response to a follow-up question, eight in 10 of those who support a settlement also say the government should negotiate only if the Taliban first put down their arms.



- Support for a settlement holds steady if an agreement allows the Taliban to join the Afghan national security forces, and it's 65 percent for a settlement that cedes control of some provinces to the Taliban.
- Among groups, backing for a settlement is considerably lower in the Hazarjat region, chiefly populated by members of the Hazara ethnic group, which has been suppressed by the Pashtun-dominated Taliban.
- Fifty-seven percent of Afghans say they would support a settlement with the Taliban that prohibited women from being outside unescorted – not a reach, since in a 2010 survey, even in the absence of the prospect of a deal with the Taliban, Afghans divided 50-50 on whether women should be out unescorted in their own village or neighborhood, and by 61-38 percent opposed women going farther afield without an escort.
- Regardless, majorities are unwilling to give up other women's rights as part of a Taliban deal, including the ability to attend school, vote, work or hold political office.
- Beyond the Taliban, nearly two-thirds also support negotiations with the Haqqani network, another armed insurgent group.

Belief that the Taliban have moderated is a strong factor in views on negotiating with the group: Depending on the conditions, support for a settlement is about 25 points higher among Afghans who think the Taliban are more moderate than it is among those who reject that suggestion. Support for a settlement allowing Taliban to hold political office, for example, includes 86 percent of those who see them as more moderate, vs. 61 percent of those who don't.

Views that the Taliban have become more moderate peak in two areas of particularly strong Taliban influence, reaching 69 percent in the South West, which includes their home base, Kandahar; and 59 percent in the East, along the Pakistan border. This sentiment dives to 33 percent in the West, 38 percent in the Hazarjat and 41 percent in Kabul province.



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### *Methodology*

This survey was conducted Jan. 24-Feb. 3, 2012, by the Afghan Center for Socio-Economic and Opinion Research (ACSOR) in Kabul via in-person interviews with a random national sample of 2,018 Afghan adults in all 34 of the country's provinces. Twenty-three of the 129 originally sampled districts and 33 of the 264 sampled settlements were inaccessible, chiefly for security or transportation reasons, and were randomly replaced. Women could not be interviewed in Pakitka province, which represents 1.7 percent of the national population. Data were weighted by population of province and sex within region. The survey has a theoretical margin of sampling error of 2.5 percentage points. ACSOR is a subsidiary of D3 Systems Inc. of Vienna, Va.

Analysis by Langer Research Associates of New York, N.Y.

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