

# Afghanistan Transition:

## The Death of Bin Laden and Local Dynamics



*May 2011*



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## The Death of Bin Laden and Local Dynamics

A report by the International Council on Security and Development (ICOS)

Field Assessment: Kabul City, Afghanistan, April-May 2011

Research Locations:

- **Kabul University**
- **Northern Afghanistan** - Bamyan, Panjshir, Mazar-i-Sharif
- **Kandahar Province** - Kandahar City, Arghandab, Panjwayi, Zhari, Maiwand
- **Helmand Province** - Lashkar Gah, Sangin, Nawa, Marjah, Garmsir

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## About The International Council on Security and Development

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ICOS is a project of the Network of European Foundations' Mercator Fund. The work of the Mercator Fund is underpinned by the principle that the global philanthropic community has a vital role to play in promoting and implementing the work necessary to bring about positive social and political change.

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### ICOS Fieldwork Experience

ICOS has been conducting Cultural Analysis studies in conflict zones since 2007, carrying out more than 19,000 interviews across Iraq, Somalia and Afghanistan. This fieldwork has examined the root causes of current crises, in order to help achieve measurable and direct policy results. Previous ICOS Conflict Zone field research includes:

- *Afghanistan Transition: Missing Variables (November 2010)*
- *Afghanistan: The Relationship Gap (July 2010)*
- *Operation Moshtarak: Lessons Learned (May 2010)*
- *Iraq - Angry Hearts and Angry Minds (June 2008)*
- *Chronic Failures in the War on Terror - From Afghanistan to Somalia (April 2008)*
- *On a Knife Edge: Rapid Assessment Field Survey, Southern and Eastern Afghanistan (May 2007)*

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## Background

In April 2011, research interviews with 1425 men were undertaken in 13 districts of Afghanistan and at Kabul University to assess military-aged males' susceptibility to supporting or joining insurgent groups and provide a longitudinal assessment to evaluate the effects of international military operations on their perceptions (numbers and districts available in the methodology section of this report).

This was achieved by questioning the target group on security and development issues including, but not exclusively: the international presence; the Afghan government; the Afghan security forces; the Taliban; and attitudes towards women and democracy.

Immediately following Osama bin Laden's death at the beginning of May, another 600 Afghan men were interviewed on this subject at Kabul University, Panjshir, Kandahar City, Arghandab, Lashkar Gah and Marjah.

## Executive Summary

### The Death of Osama Bin Laden

Research regarding the death of Osama bin Laden, conducted immediately following the event, revealed mixed opinions among Afghan men interviewed. The majority of respondents thought his death was good news, with the most significant pockets of negative opinion present in Kabul University and Marjah district in Helmand. Opinions of those interviewed were split on whether or not his death will signify the end of al Qaeda, but the majority of respondents believe it will have a negative effect on the Taliban.

### Transition and Local Dynamics

The research cycle showed that overall in the north of Afghanistan there is good news for the transition agenda, but there are areas of weakness related to the hearts and minds campaign throughout the country. The relatively positive news in the northern provinces is offset by the decrease in support from interviewees for the NATO-ISAF mission in the southern provinces on a significant number of key “hearts and minds” indicators.

The US troop surge has brought unquestionable military success, with many Afghans interviewed now believing that international and Afghan forces are winning the fight against the Taliban. However, these military successes have also created “**Blowback**”, which is negatively impacting Afghan hearts and minds in the south.

The international coalition has not effectively communicated to the Afghan people the reasons for its presence in Afghanistan. There is a generalised belief among interviewees that the international community does not protect, and does not respect, the Afghan people or their culture and religion. Support is lacking on these indicators from respondents across the country, even in the more stable northern provinces. This has been compounded by a wave of recent negative news stories.

The negative impacts of the military operations revealed by the interviews, and the general backdrop of news in the south, give the Taliban an opportunity to “**Pushback**” and gain ground by capitalising on the increasing resentment of the foreign presence within the local population, which is emotionally volatile, traumatised, isolated, and easily manipulated by outside actors.

The Taliban's psychological campaign has been able to persuade many Afghans of key points of the insurgents' cause, reflected in a deterioration of positive support of interviewees for the foreign presence since the last research cycle in October 2010. The coalition has not been competing effectively with the insurgents in this arena.

The troop surge has not been accompanied by corresponding development and civilian 'surges'. The gains that have been made on the battlefield are being undermined by a lack of analogous efforts in the fields of aid, development, governance and counter-narcotics. In many areas the main instruments of the international community's engagement with Afghan communities are NATO-ISAF soldiers, who have limited capacity to engage positively with the local population while at the same time being responsible for security and clearing operations.

In many poppy-growing areas, the lack of an effective or sustainable counter-narcotics policy leaves farmers engaged in livelihoods they know are considered illegal by the international coalition, without provision for alternative livelihoods. The lack of an effective strategy in Pakistan against safe havens creates additional resentment to the local population caught in the conflict.

A Hearts and Minds surge is needed, with visible and positive impacts on ordinary Afghans' lives, to support a durable transition.

## Key Findings and Analysis

### 1. The Death of Osama Bin Laden – Is Al Qaeda Finished?

ICOS conducted interviews with 600 Afghan men in six districts starting on May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2011, the day after Osama bin Laden’s death. Interviewees were asked if they had heard the news of Bin Laden’s death; whether it was good or bad news; whether it meant al Qaeda was finished; and what it meant for the Taliban’s fight in Afghanistan.

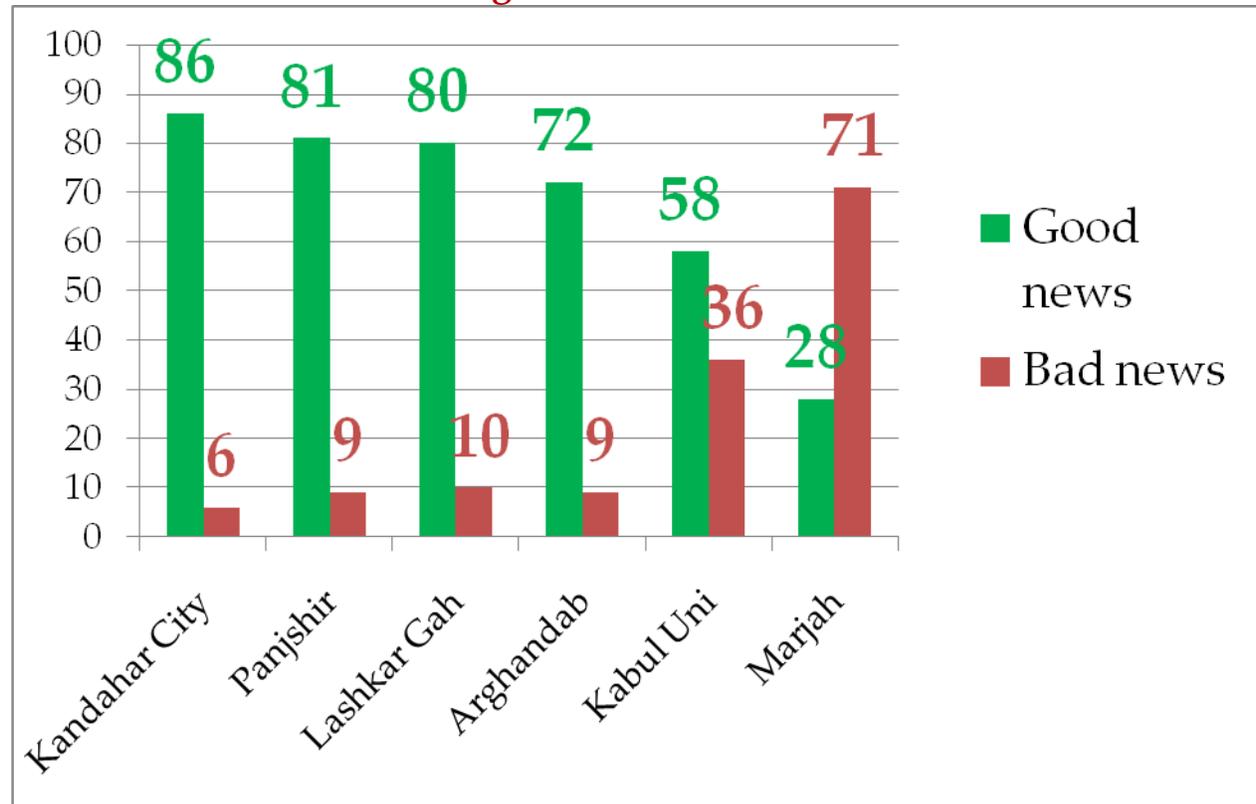
#### Majority of Interviewees Think Bin Laden’s Death is Good News

Sixty-eight percent of men interviewed said the death of Osama bin Laden is good news. High levels of respondents who do not think that Bin Laden’s death is good news are found in Kabul University, where 36% said it was bad news, and Marjah, where 71% said it was bad news.

“I am happy that Osama is dead as he killed Ahmad Shah Masoud, one of the leaders of Afghanistan.”

Man in Panjshir, 19

#### Is Osama Bin Laden’s death good news or bad news?



“Although Osama was involved in destroying Afghanistan we are not happy he was killed by non-Muslims; it was necessary to put him on trial in an Islamic court.”

**Kabul University student, 25**

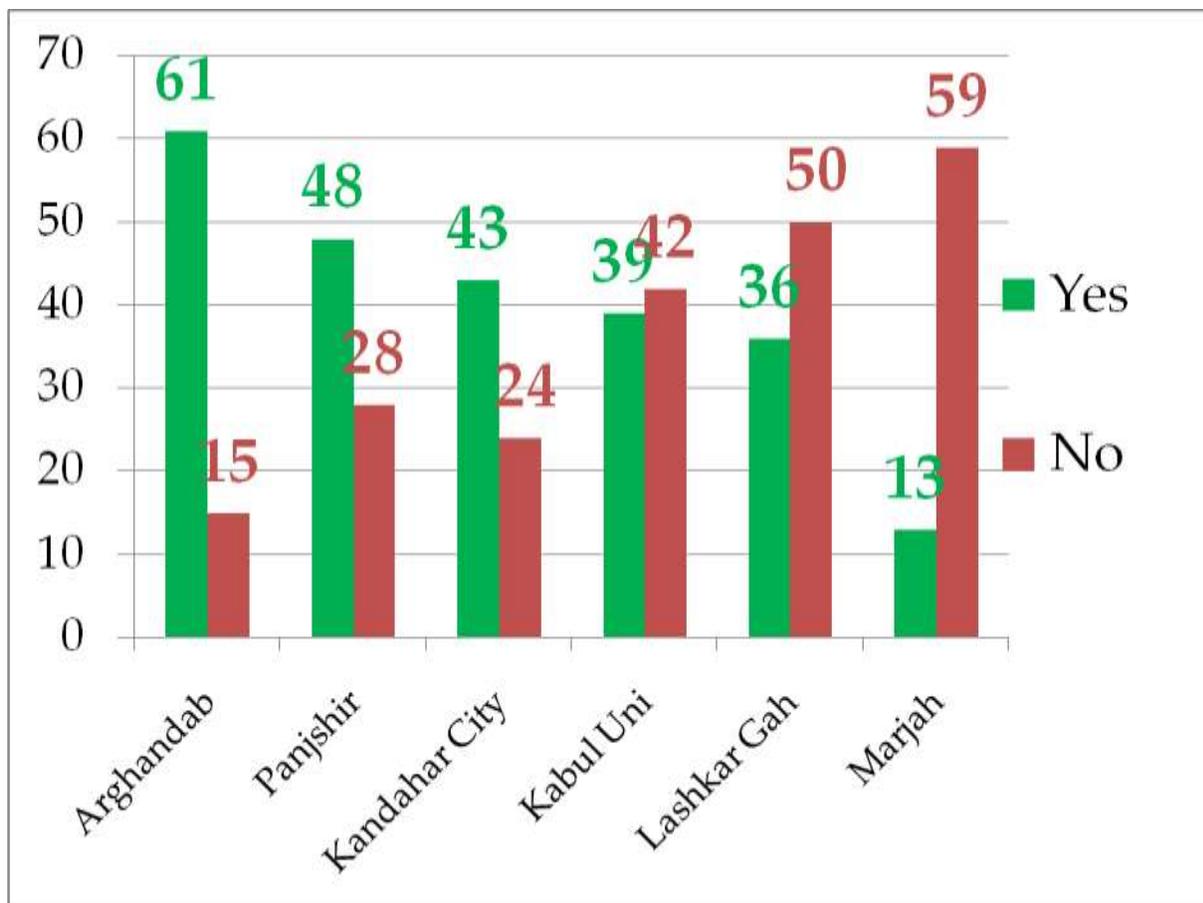
“Osama bin Laden fought our holy war against the Russians so we are very sad to hear of his death.”

**Kabul University student, 17**

**Split Opinions of Interviewees that Bin Laden’s Death Will Finish Al Qaeda and the Taliban**

Opinions of interviewees on the effect of his death on the future of al Qaeda are mixed. When asked if Osama bin Laden’s death means al Qaeda is finished, responses were split around 40%/40%, with the remainder having no answer. However, in Lashkar Gah and Marjah, higher numbers of interviewees do not believe his death means the end of al Qaeda. Fifty percent of respondents in Lashkar Gah, and 59% in Marjah, think Bin Laden’s death does not mean the end of al Qaeda.

**Is Al Qaeda finished now that Osama Bin Laden is dead?**

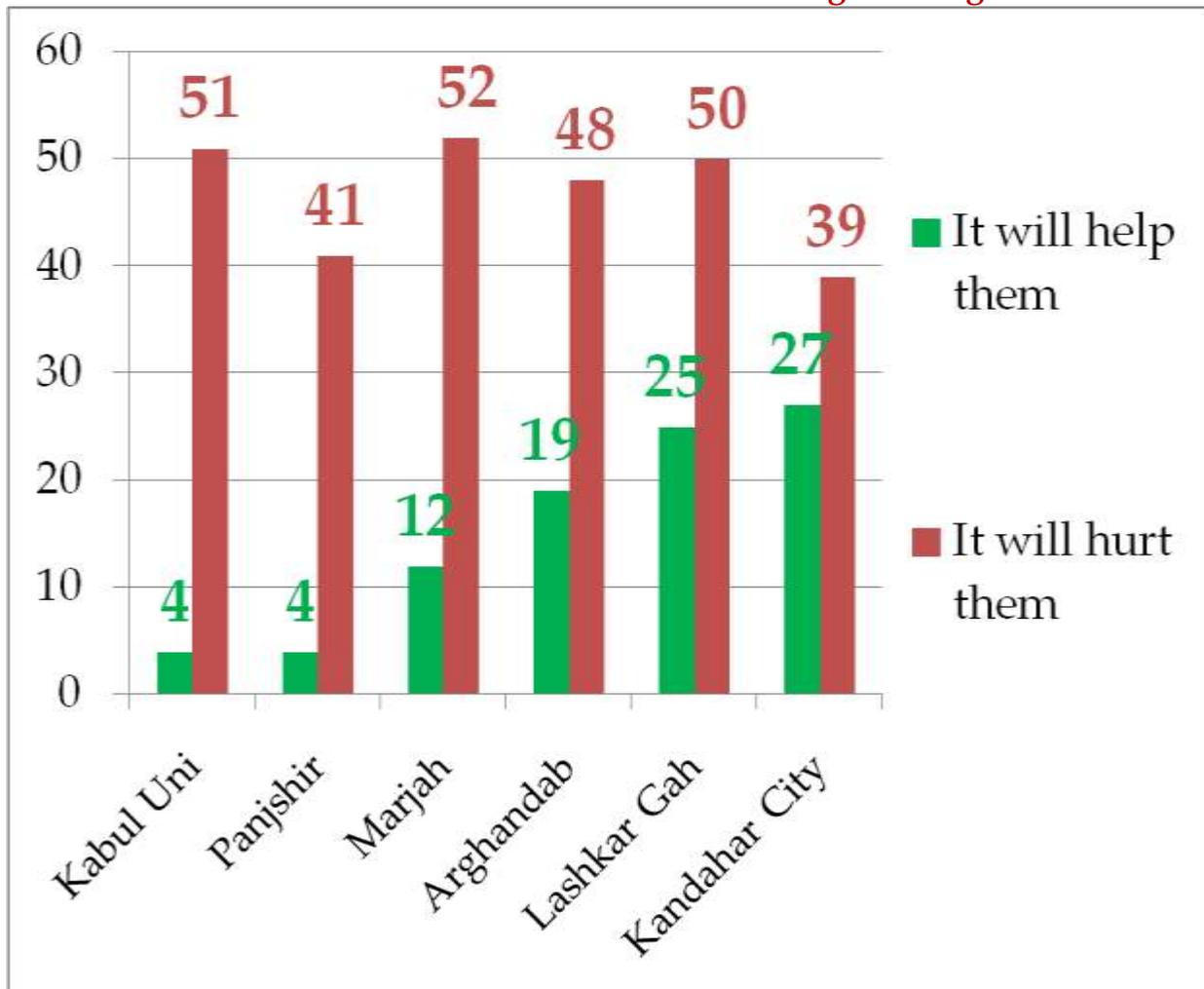


Overall, almost 50% of interviewees believe Bin Laden’s death will hurt the Taliban, with the remainder split between ‘it will help them’, ‘no effect’ or no answer. The interviewees with the strongest belief that his death will *help* the Taliban are found in Lashkar Gah and Kandahar City, where about 25% of interviewees take that view.

Small proportions of respondents in all areas actually think his death will actually help the insurgents.

“By killing Osama the Americans will increase the level of insurgency by the Taliban and al Qaeda against themselves.”  
**Kabul University student, 23**

**Does Bin Laden’s death affect the Taliban and their fight in Afghanistan?**



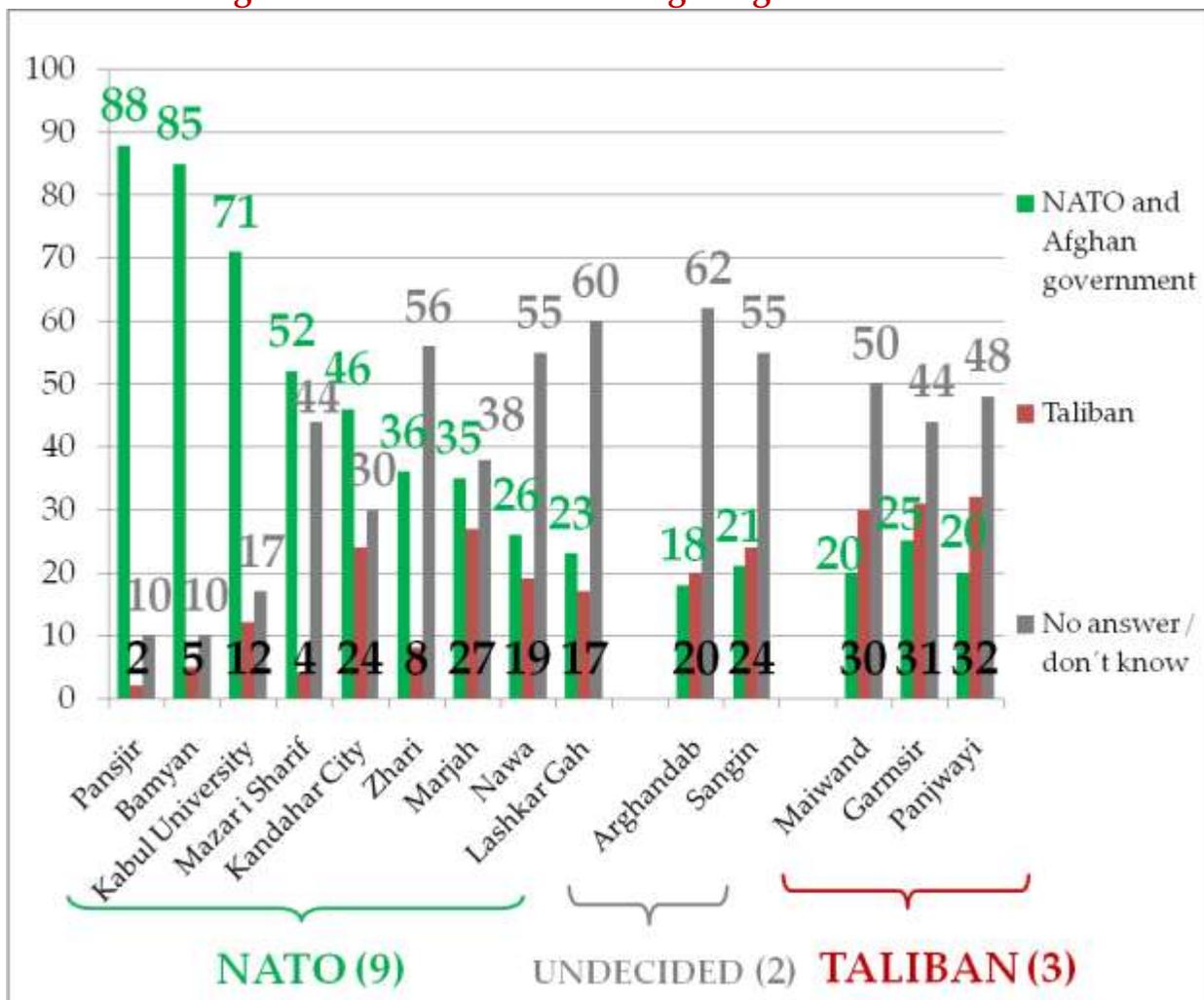
## 2. Good News – Military Achievements are Unquestionable

In nine of the fourteen research areas, more interviewees think NATO and Afghan Government forces are winning the war, as opposed to the Taliban insurgency.

Only in the districts of Panjwayi and Maiwand (both in Kandahar province), and the district of Garmsir in Helmand province, do more interviewees think the Taliban is winning the war.

High numbers of respondents in southern Afghanistan either do not know or have no answer, while very few do not know or do not answer in northern Afghanistan.

### Who is winning the war: NATO and the Afghan government or the Taliban?



**Good news for transition: preference for formal justice in the north, tribal mechanisms in the south – widespread rejection of Taliban justice**

The research shows that there is a strong division of approaches to dispute settlement between the northern and southern research districts, but that interviewees in both reject the Taliban’s provision of justice. In the north, a total of 65% of Afghan men interviewed would take their disputes to a government-run court. In the south however, 55% of interviewees indicate a preference for settlement through a tribal or elders’ court.

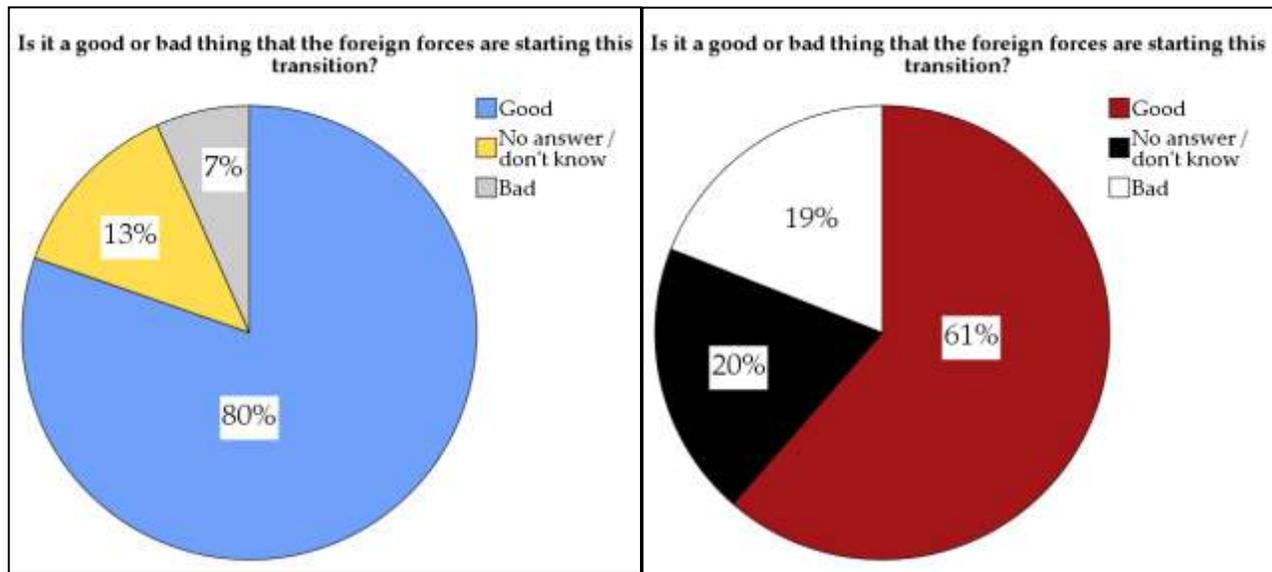
Taliban justice is not popular, with only 16% of respondents in the south preferring this method of obtaining justice, while no interviewees in the north considered this as a possibility. The fact that support for Taliban justice is low even in the conservative south is an encouraging sign for the international community and the Afghan government.

<b>Where would you take a dispute for resolution?</b>				
	<b>Tribal or elders court</b>	<b>Government-run court</b>	<b>Taliban court</b>	<b>No answer / don’t know</b>
<b>North</b>	30%	65%	0%	5%
<b>South</b>	55%	25%	16%	4%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>4%</b>

**Strong support for start of transition**

Afghan men were provided with the following description of the transition process: *Transition involves the NATO forces gradually handing over responsibility for security to the Afghan police and army.*

Sixty-one percent of those interviewed in the south and 80% in the north think that it is good that this transition process will commence soon.

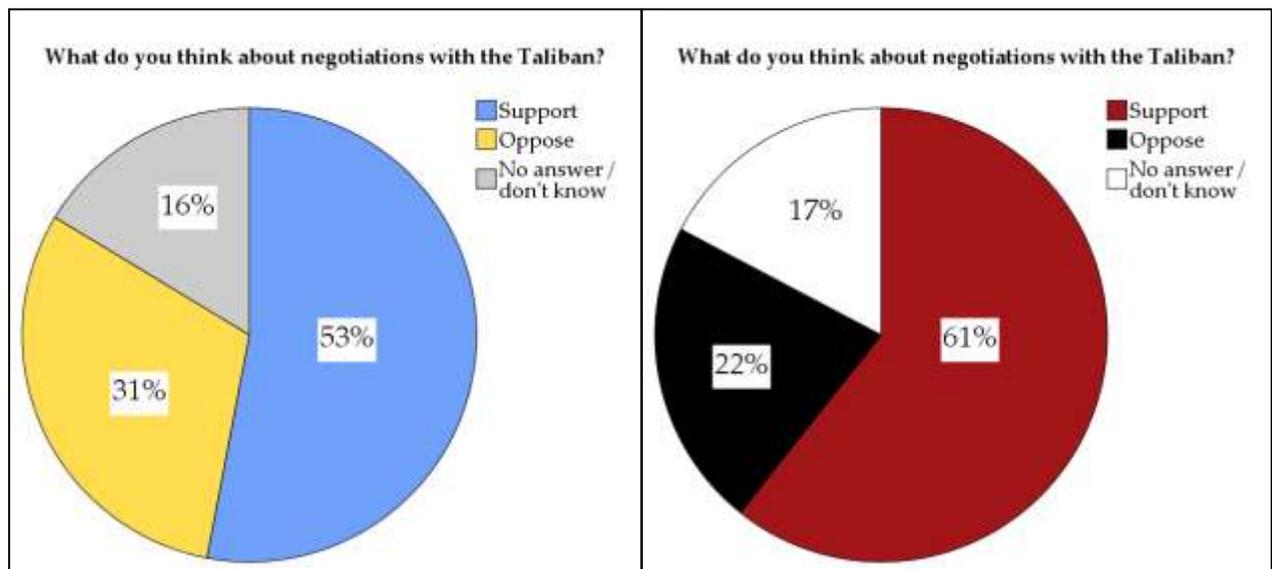


Northern Afghanistan

Southern Afghanistan

### Encouraging Support Attitudes Towards Reconciliation and Reintegration

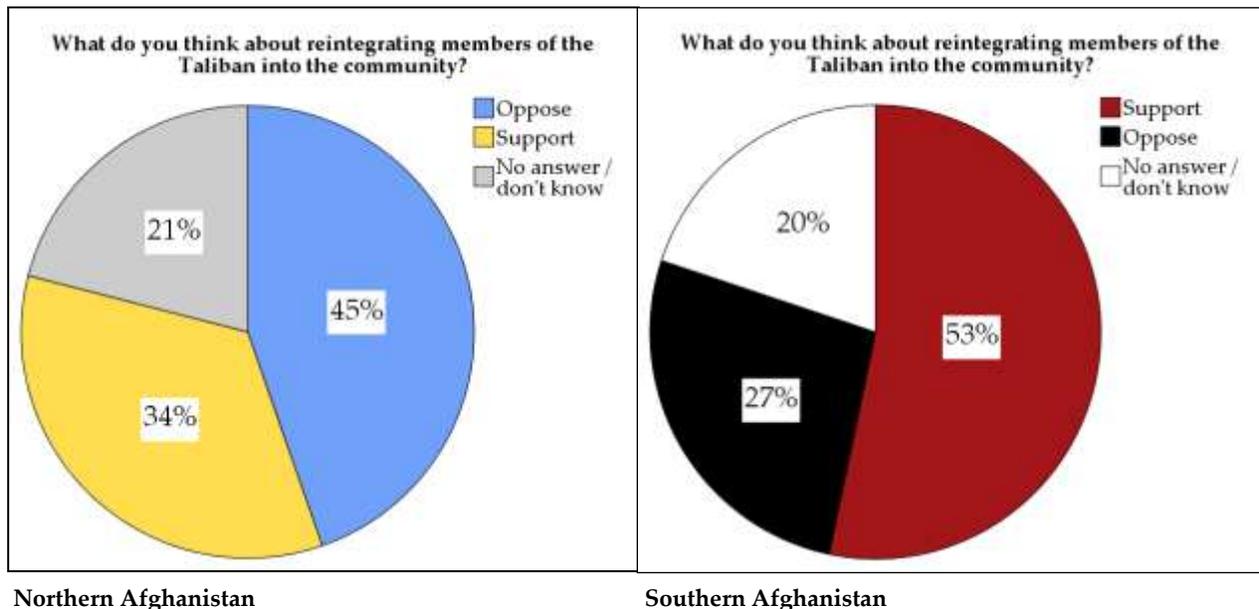
Afghan interviewees show considerable support for negotiations with the Taliban leadership and reintegration of rank-and-file insurgents back into the community. In southern Afghanistan, 61% of interviewees support negotiations to end the war and in northern Afghanistan the figure is 53%.



Northern Afghanistan

Southern Afghanistan

There is also relatively high support for Taliban reintegration, with just over half of respondents (53%) supporting it in the south and 34% in the north.



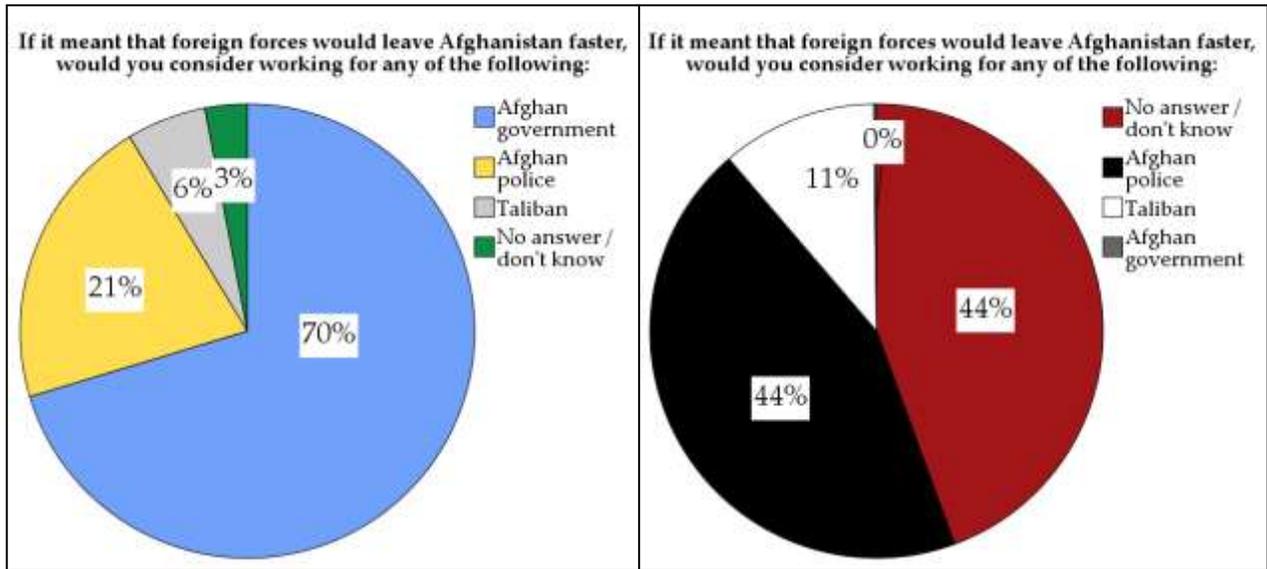
Opposition to reintegration is particularly high among Panjshir interviewees - 70% of respondents do not support it. This reflects the region's historical role as an anti-Taliban stronghold.

**Willingness to accelerate NATO-ISAF withdrawal by joining Afghan government**

If it meant that foreign troops would leave Afghanistan sooner, 70% of respondents in the north would be willing to work for the Afghan government and 21% would be willing to work for the Afghan police.

In the south this picture is reversed, but there is still a willingness among interviewees to join the government to support the transition process. There, working for the Afghan government is not considered an option, even if that would speed up the withdrawal of foreign forces, while 44% of interviewees show a willingness to work for the Afghan National Police (ANP).

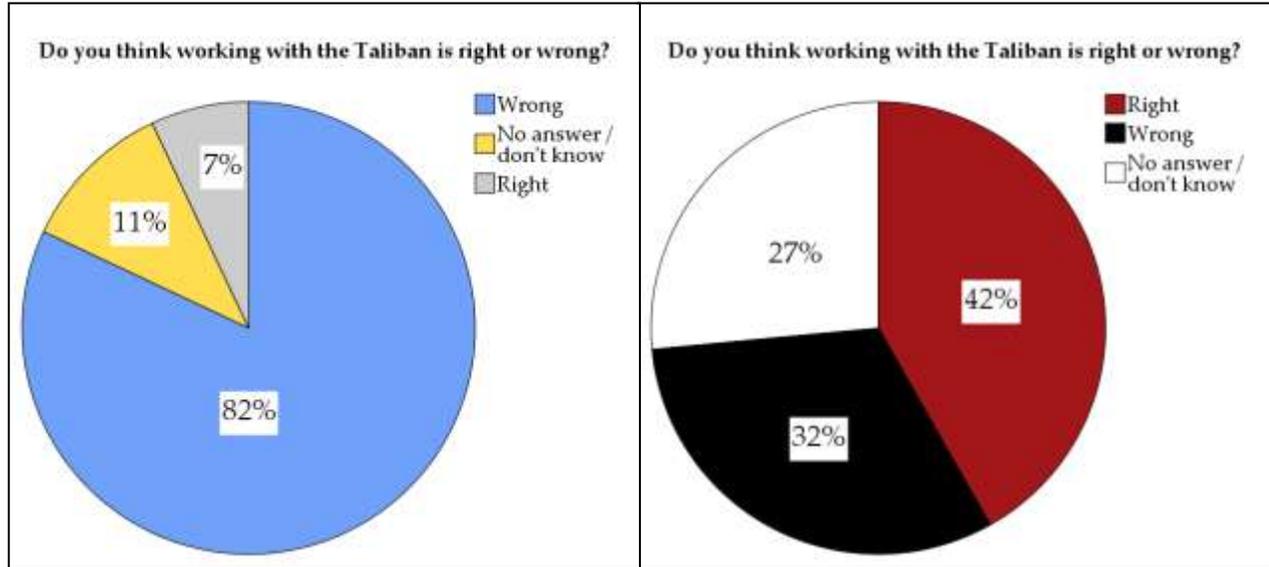
6% in the North and 11% in the South stated they would consider working for the Taliban if it meant that the foreign forces would leave Afghanistan faster.



Northern Afghanistan

Southern Afghanistan

Only 7% of respondents in southern Afghanistan believe that working with the Taliban is right, with 42% in the South as the corresponding number.

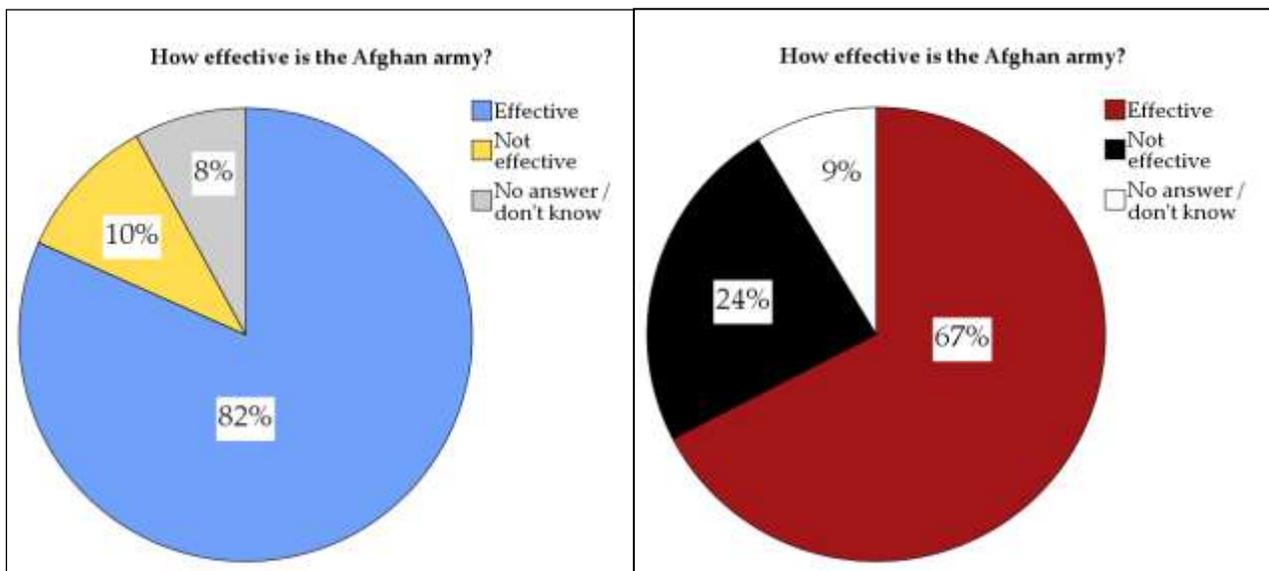


Northern Afghanistan

Southern Afghanistan

**The Afghan army Viewed as Effective; Police only Viewed as Effective in the North**

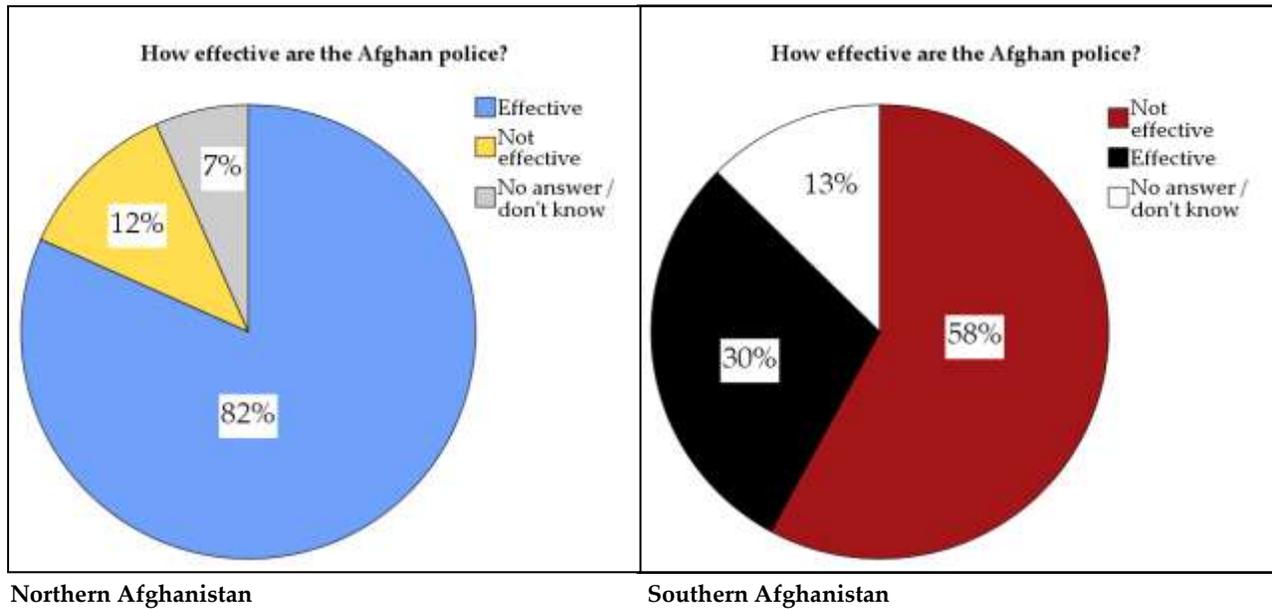
Respondents in both the north and the south show positivity towards the Afghan National Army (ANA). In the north 82% think that the ANA is effective, compared with 67% in the south. Confidence of respondents in the effectiveness of Afghan national security forces is an important indicator for successful transition.



Northern Afghanistan

Southern Afghanistan

For the north, 82% of interviewees think that the ANP is effective, but respondents in the south show a much more negative opinion: 58% think the ANP is not effective while only 30% think they are effective.

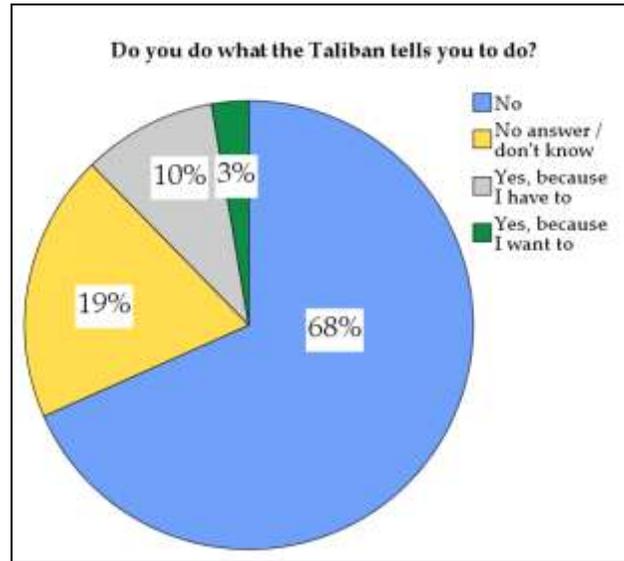


**Taliban lack psychological or political control in the north**

Sixty-eight percent of those interviewed in the north say they do not follow orders from the Taliban. Out of the 13% of interviewees in the north who do follow the orders of the Taliban, only 3% say they do it because they want to.

These results indicate that the Taliban still does not wield much political clout in the northern provinces, despite the fact that in the past few years they have shown that they have operational capacity in these areas.

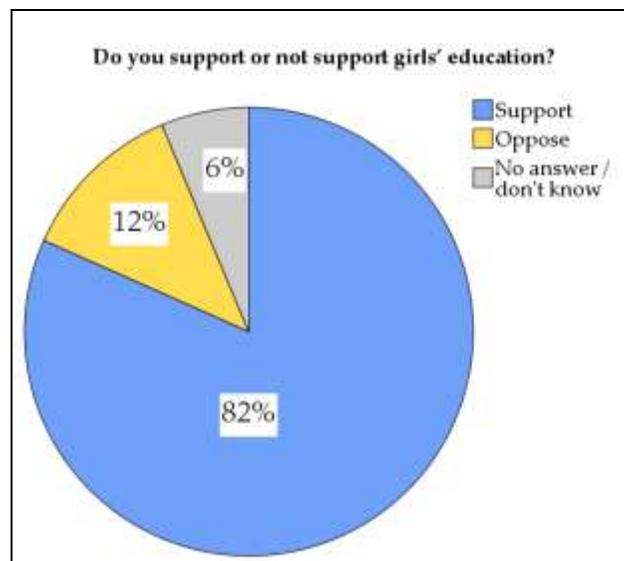
However, the fact that 3% of interviewees in the north do what the Taliban tells them because they want to is nonetheless concerning.



Northern Afghanistan

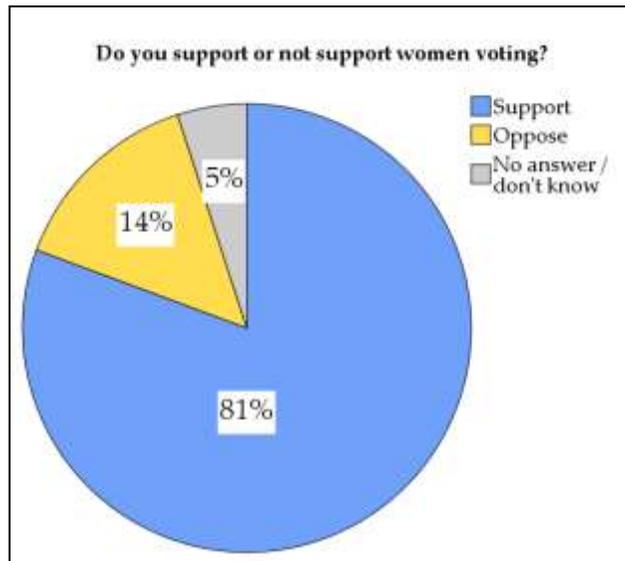
**Positive attitudes towards women’s rights in the north**

There are positive attitudes among northern respondents north towards women’s rights, although among interviewees in Mazar there is some degree of hostility (12% oppose girl’s education and 24% oppose women voting). Nonetheless, overall 82% of northern interviewees support the education of girls and only 12% oppose it.



Northern Afghanistan

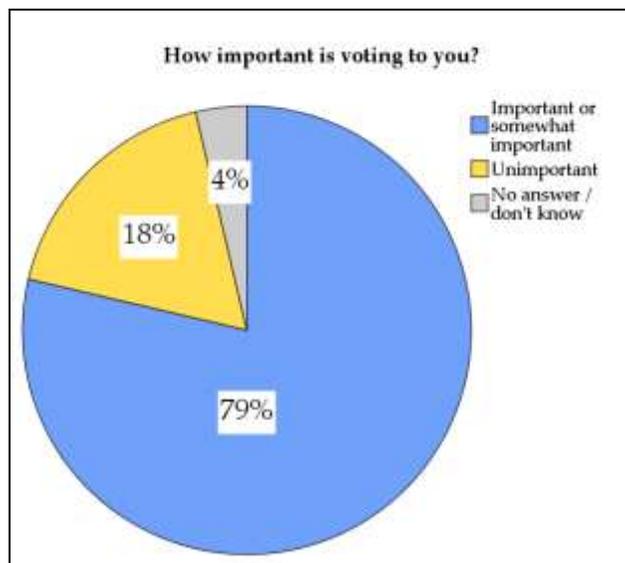
This picture is very similar with regards to support for women voting: 81% of interviewees in the north support it and 14% oppose it.



Northern Afghanistan

**Support for democracy in the north**

Seventy-nine percent of men interviewed in the north think it is important or somewhat important to vote in elections, while 18% think it is not important.



Northern Afghanistan

### 3. Bad News – Hearts and Minds Campaign Under Siege

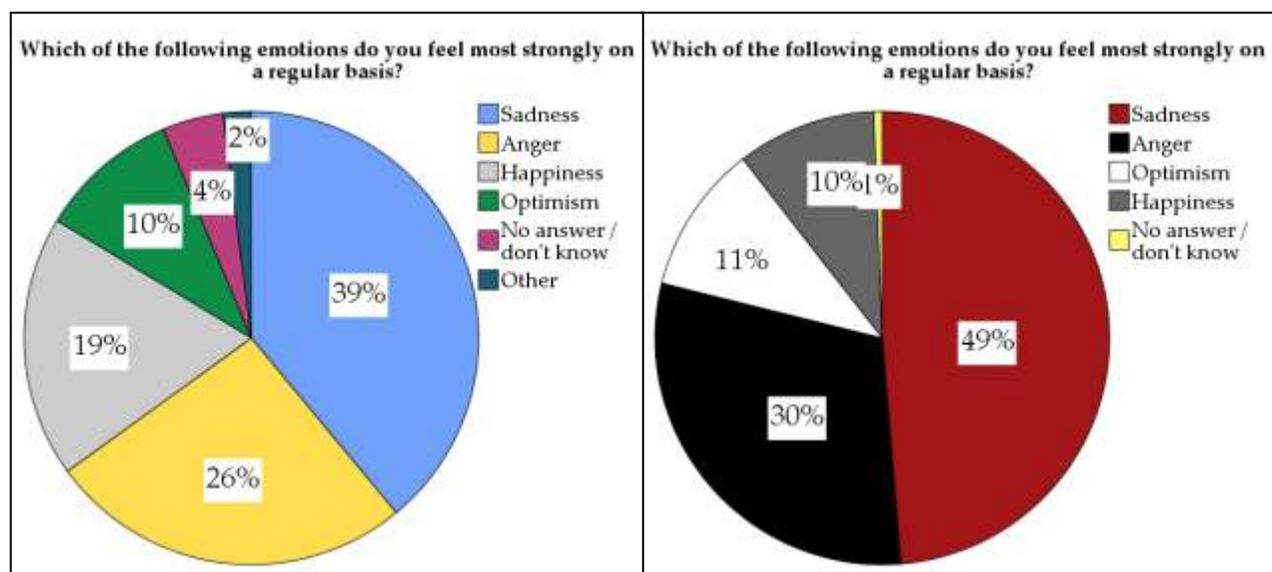
The interview findings indicate that despite the good news outlined above, the international community is not winning the battle for hearts and minds in southern Afghanistan.

The impact of the conflict, coupled with chronic poverty, unemployment and corruption, has made this key population emotionally volatile, traumatised, isolated and easily manipulated. The Taliban have capitalised on this situation. Although they are being pushed back militarily, the insurgents for the moment have the upper hand in the psychological battle.

As a result, on almost all key indicators the population is hostile towards the international presence and NATO-ISAF forces.

#### Anger and Sadness Prevalent

Most Afghan men interviewed cite anger and unhappiness as the most common emotions they feel strongly. In southern Afghanistan 79% of interviewees say that they feel sad or angry most regularly. In northern Afghanistan, which is more peaceful, respondents also feel very negative emotions (65% feel angry or sad most regularly), reflecting the traumatic effects that the current situation has on the psychology of ordinary civilians all across the country.



Northern Afghanistan

Southern Afghanistan

### Widespread Knowledge of Negotiations and Transition

When asked what they believe to be the most important news story of the past two months, many respondents cite peace negotiations, and the withdrawal of foreign forces. In southern Afghanistan almost 40% of respondents say that negotiations and the transition are the most important news stories recently.

<b>What is the most important news story you have heard over the past two months? (Southern Afghanistan)</b>	
Peace and negotiations	20%
Transition and NATO withdrawal	18%
No answer / don't know	17%
General insecurity	14%
Specific attacks in Afghanistan	9%
Quran burning and subsequent protests	7%
Other	5%
Foreign forces establishing permanent bases	5%
Improved security and better Afghan forces	5%
The Arab Spring	1%

This suggests that the withdrawal of foreign forces and attempts at reconciliation with the Taliban are part of the common public discourse in southern Afghanistan. It is also salient that almost all of the news stories cited by Afghan men interviewed are negative.

<b>What is the most important news story you have heard over the past two months? (Northern Afghanistan)</b>	
Specific attacks in Afghanistan	30%
Quran burning and subsequent protests	25%
No answer / don't know	18%
Other	8%
Reconstruction and development	6%
General insecurity	4%
The Arab Spring	3%
Foreign forces establishing permanent bases	3%
Transition and NATO withdrawal	2%
Peace and negotiations	0%
Improved security and better Afghan forces	0%

In northern Afghanistan there was also widespread knowledge of negative news amongst interviewees. One of the most noted stories was the burning of the Quran in Florida and the subsequent protests across Afghanistan<sup>1</sup>.

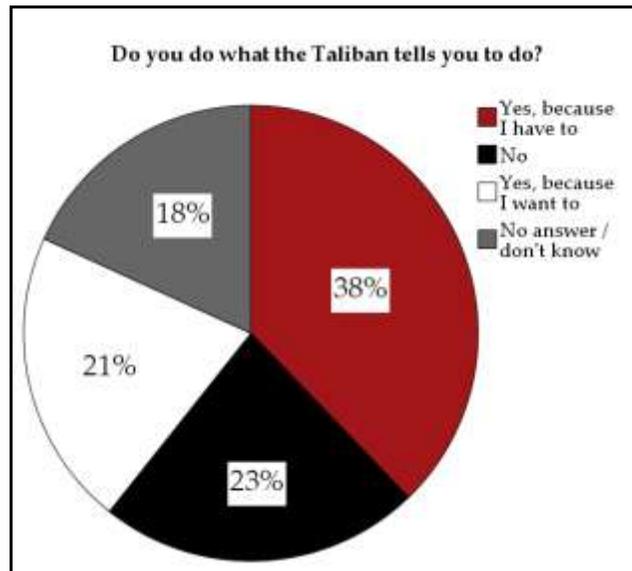
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<sup>1</sup> On March 20 2011 a US pastor, Wayne Sapp, set fire to a copy of the Quran after putting it on 'trial' and finding it guilty of charges including incitement to murder and terrorism. After President Karzai publicised the burning, there were widespread demonstrations in Afghanistan. These culminated in a riot in Mazar-i-Sharif in which seven international UN staff were killed.

<b>What is the most important news story you have heard over the past two months? (Southern Afghanistan)</b>	
	<b>Total mentions for southern Afghanistan (out of 1000)</b>
<b>Peace and negotiations with the Taliban</b>	<b>195 times</b>
<b>Transition and withdrawal of NATO-ISAF troops</b>	<b>183 times</b>
<b>General insecurity in Afghanistan</b>	143 times
<b>Specific attacks in Afghanistan</b>	87 times
<b>The burning of the Quran in the US and subsequent protests</b>	<b>65 times</b> – (In the north, the Quran burning story was mentioned 74 times out of 300)
<b>The foreign forces establishing permanent bases in Afghanistan</b>	49 times
<b>Improved security and better Afghan security forces</b>	49 times
<b>The Arab Spring</b>	8 times

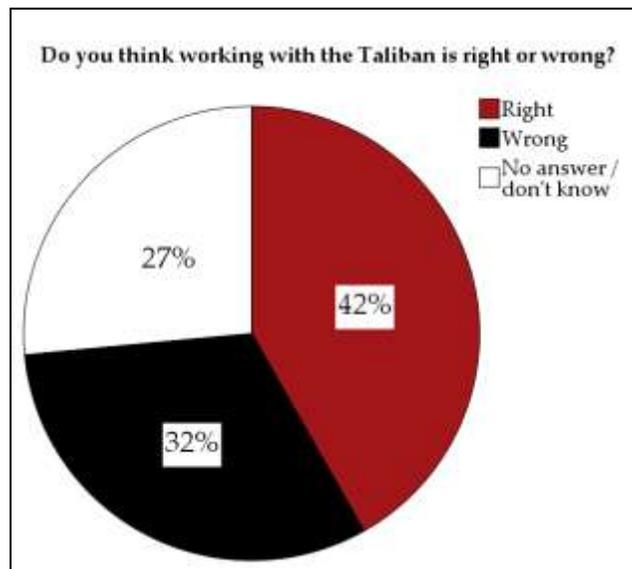
**Population under Psychological Pressure, Intimidation Prevalent**

Almost 40% of interviewees in the south state that they follow Taliban orders because they feel forced to do so, indicating that the Taliban are able to exert psychological pressure on the civilian population. However, it is important to note that 21% say that they follow Taliban orders out of choice.



Southern Afghanistan

Of concern, 42% of southern interviewees think that working with the Taliban is right while 32% think it is wrong.



Southern Afghanistan

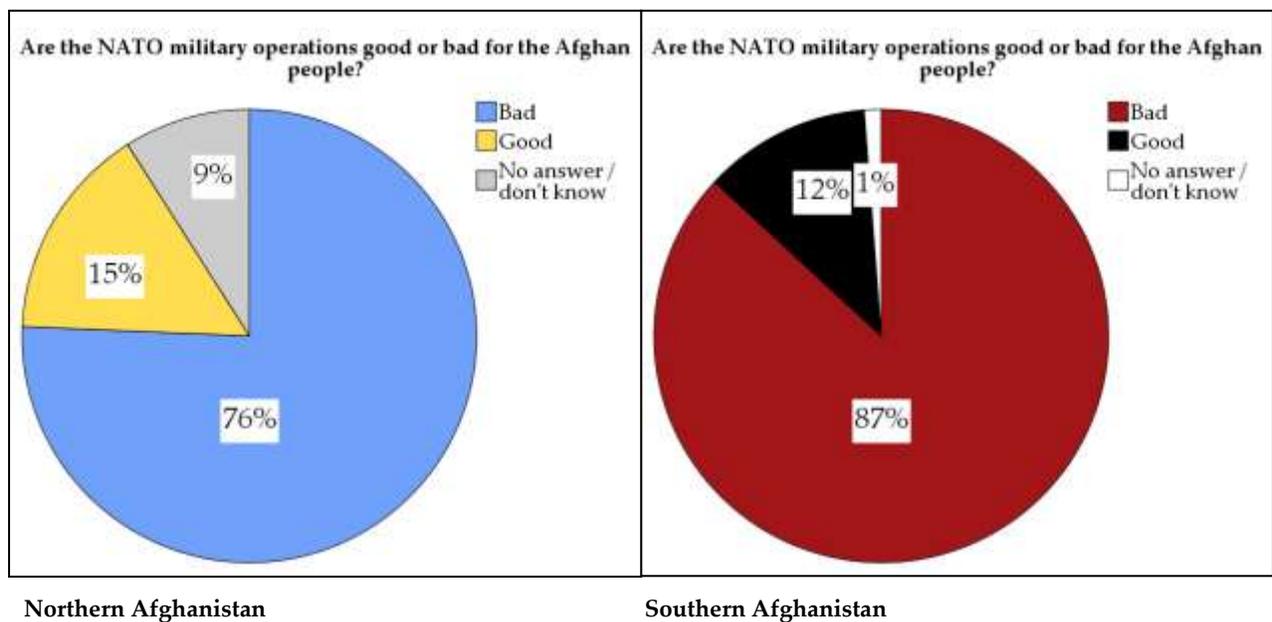
**Blowback/Pushback**

Longitudinal questions on “Hearts and Minds” issues produced predominantly negative responses, especially in the south, with only a few improvements recorded.

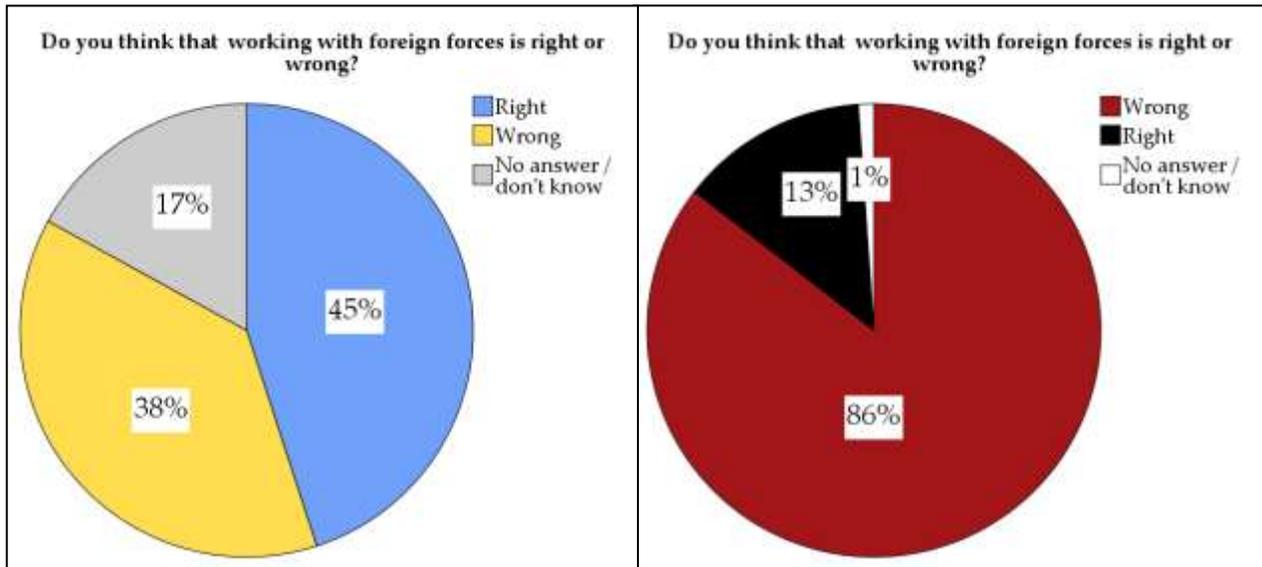
This negative trend may reflect the impacts of military clearances, but evidence also suggests that the Taliban are using unarmed actors in key districts to exert psychological pressure on the civilian population.

**Cannot Protect and Do Not Respect – Hostile Views of Foreign Forces**

An overwhelming majority of respondents in the south (87%) think military operations are bad for the Afghan people.



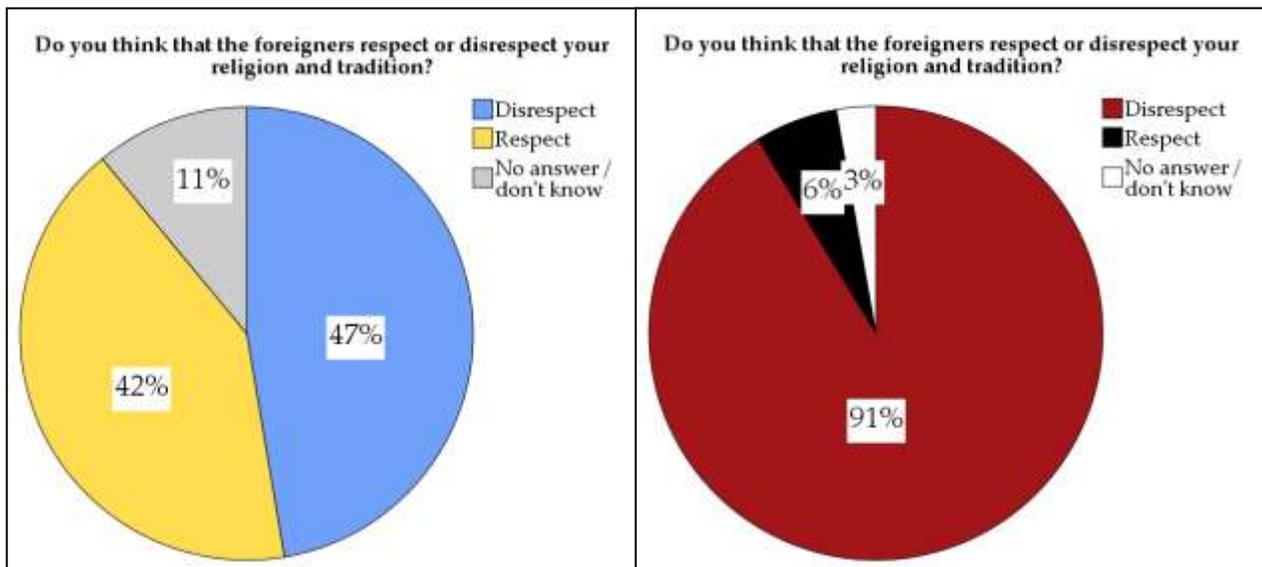
In the south, only 13% of respondents think that working with foreign forces is right, while 86% think it is wrong.



Northern Afghanistan

Southern Afghanistan

There is also a strong sense among interviewees that foreigners disrespect Afghan religion and traditions, particularly in the south.

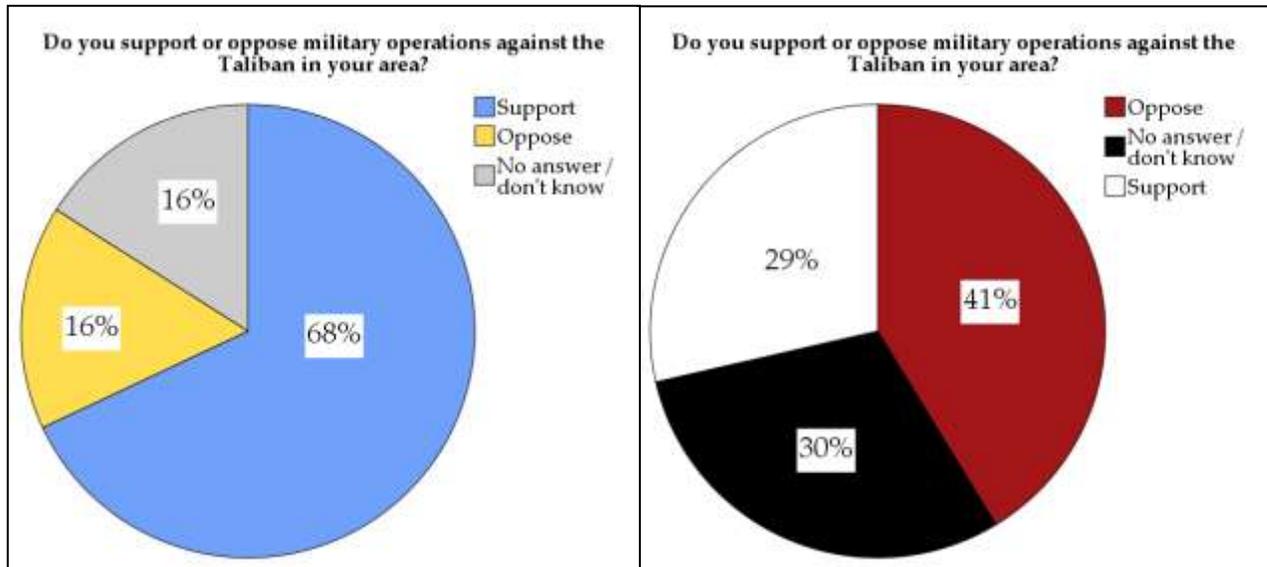


Northern Afghanistan

Southern Afghanistan

Despite overall disapproval of the effect of military operations, there is a limited willingness among respondents to accept the utility of military operations against the Taliban in interviewees' communities. There is fairly high support among interviewees

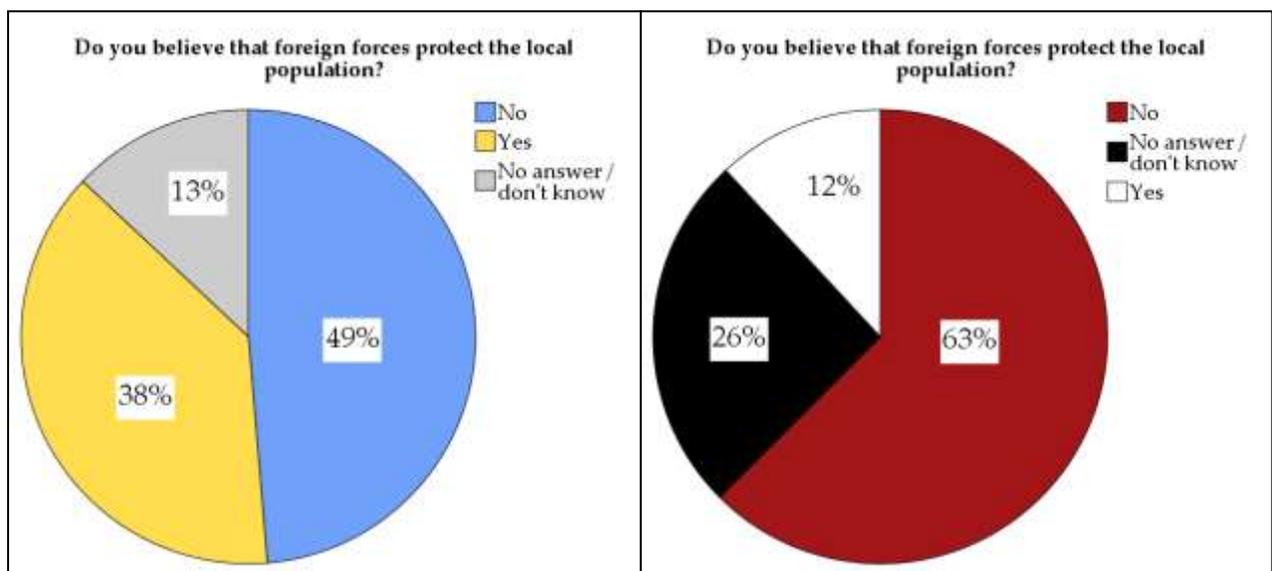
for military operations in the urban areas of the south, Kandahar City (36%) and Lashkar Gah (57%). There is also support from respondents in some areas where control is still heavily contested, notably Garmsir (48%) and Maiwand (42%).



Northern Afghanistan

Southern Afghanistan

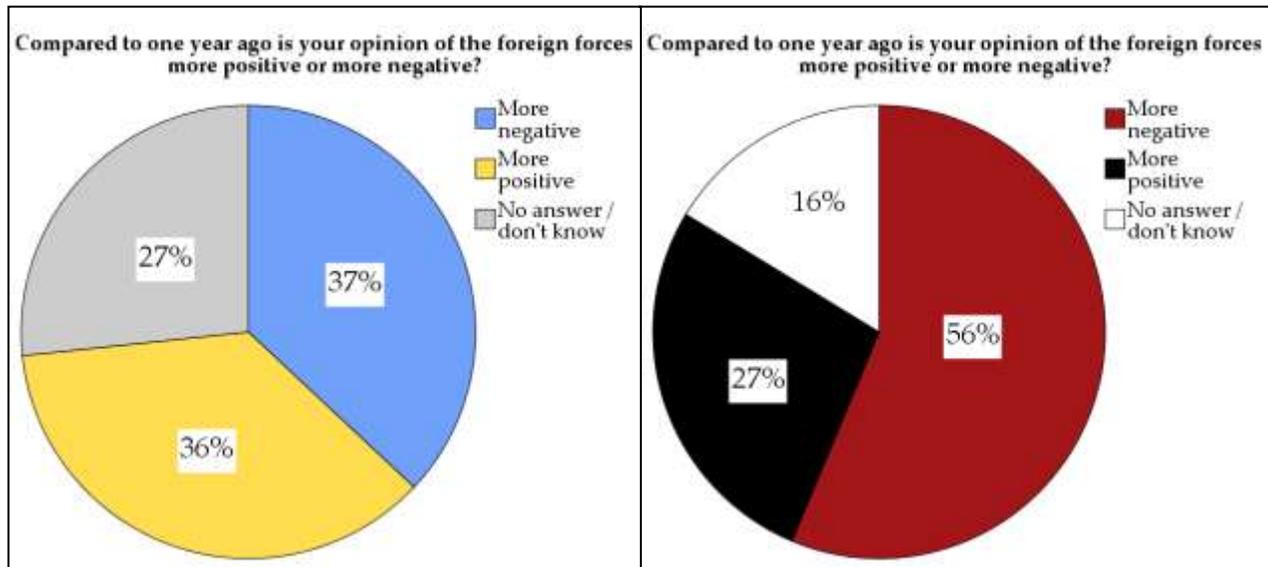
Most Afghan men interviewed (63%) in the south do not believe that NATO-ISAF forces protect the local population. Almost half (49%) think the same in the north.



Northern Afghanistan

Southern Afghanistan

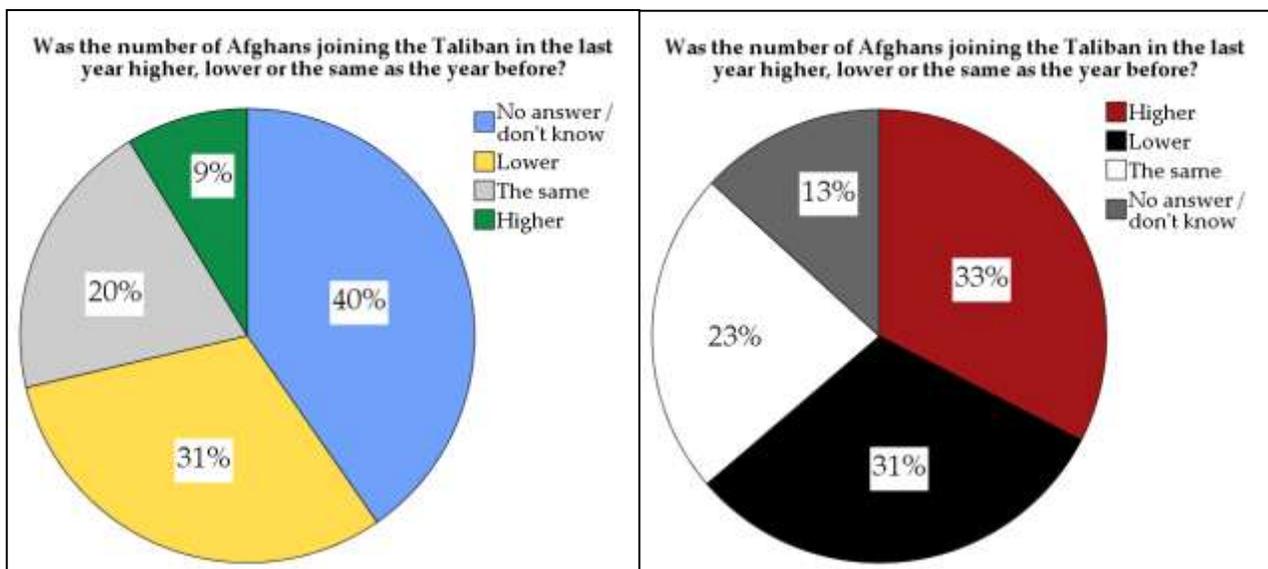
More than half of southern interviewees (56%), and 37% of northern interviewees state that their opinion of foreign forces has become more negative over the past year. Twenty-seven percent of interviewees in the south and 36% in the north say it has become more positive.



Northern Afghanistan

Southern Afghanistan

Only 9% of those interviewed in the north think that Taliban recruitment has increased over the past year. In the south, 33% of respondents believe that Taliban recruitment has increased.



Northern Afghanistan

Southern Afghanistan

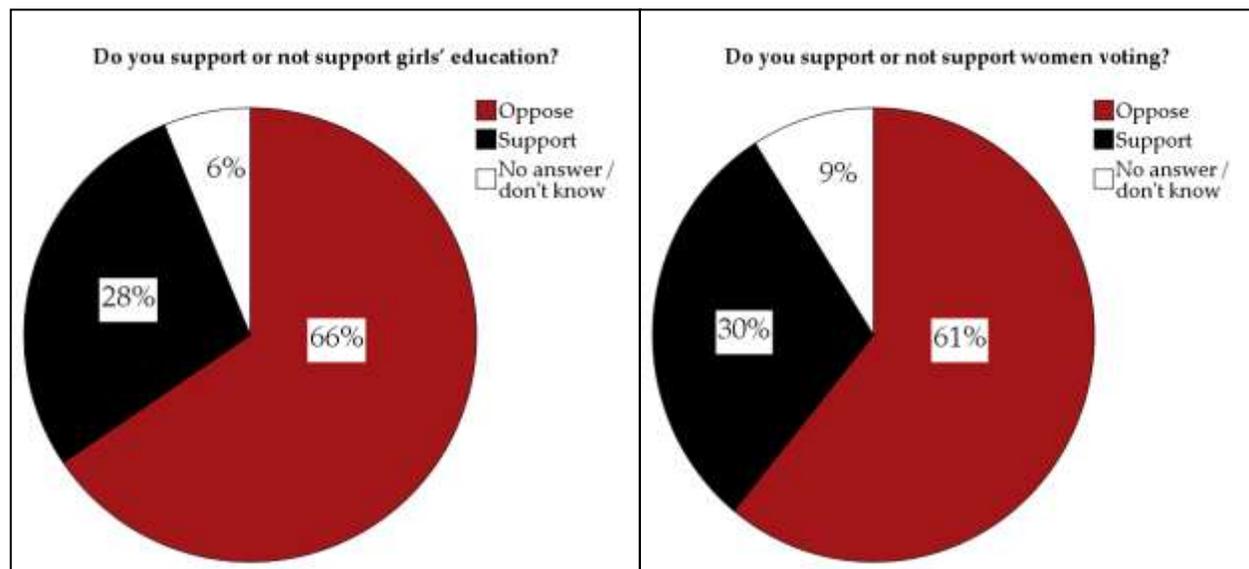
Although this does not clearly denote that the Taliban insurgency is in fact on the decline, it may suggest that the Taliban insurgency is at least not growing in size, possibly confirming the positive impact of the NATO-ISAF troop surge.

### New Opposition to Women’s Rights and Democracy in the South

Afghan men interviewed in Helmand and Kandahar express strong opposition to female education and women voting, and have little enthusiasm for democracy. The figures reflect a decline from October 2010, when 49% of Helmand and Kandahar respondents supported both women voting and girls’ education.

We argue that this is evidence of the Taliban pushing back on their classic propaganda points using unarmed actors in the villages: there is no other clear explanation for this drop in support for women’s roles in society. In northern Afghanistan, interviewees are far more positive towards women’s rights and democracy.

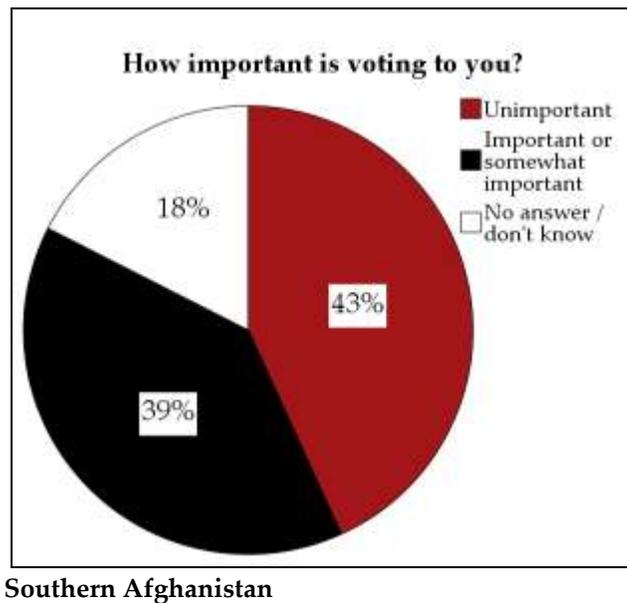
Overall in the south, two-thirds of respondents oppose girls’ education, and 61% oppose women voting. In October 2010, these figures were both 49%.



Southern Afghanistan

Southern Afghanistan

Furthermore, 43% of Afghan men interviewed in the south say that voting is unimportant to them.

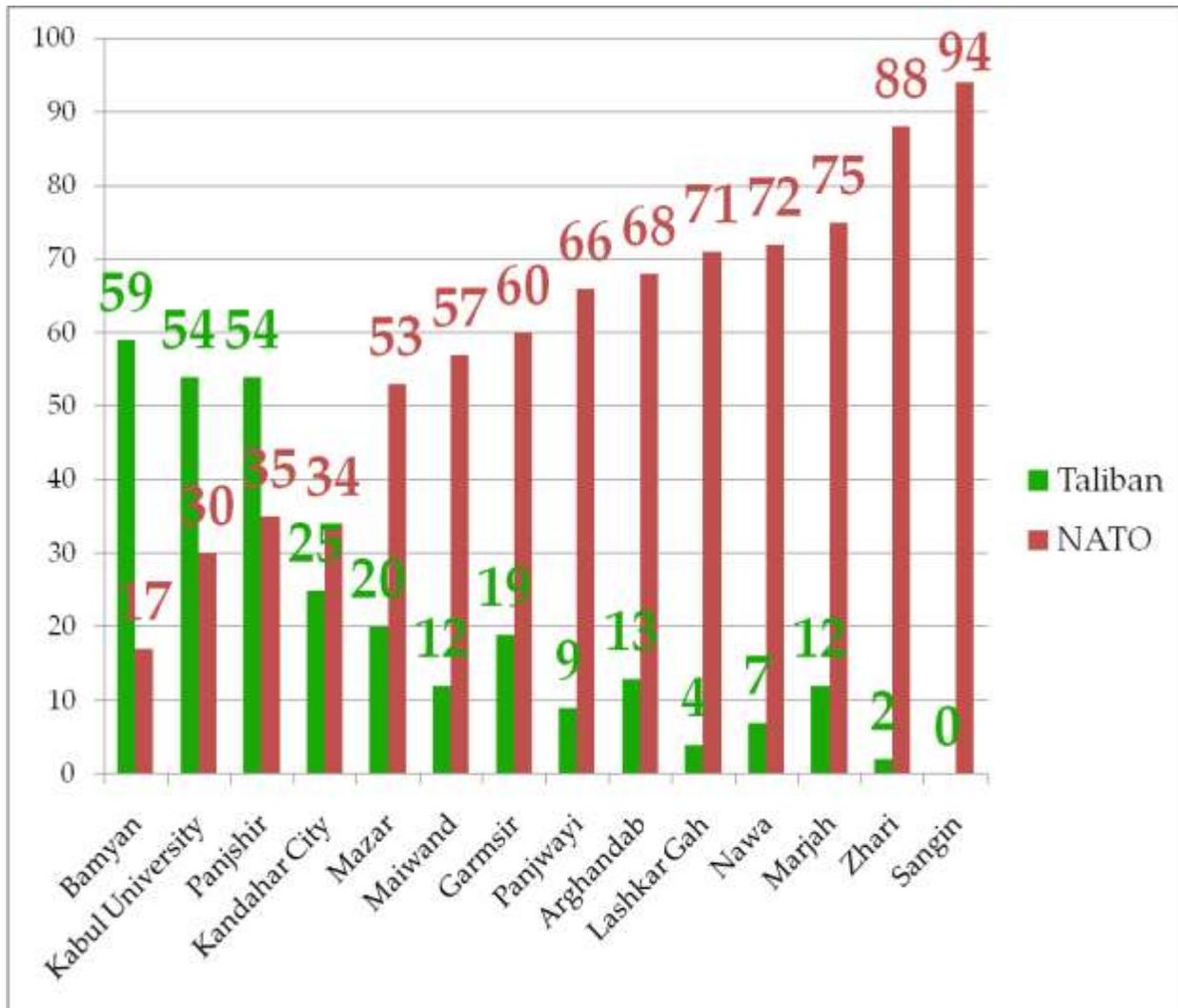


**Who kills more civilians?**

The majority of Afghan men interviewed in southern Afghanistan (69%) blame foreign forces for most civilian deaths, while 12% think that Afghan security forces kill more civilians than the Taliban. Only 10% of respondents think that the Taliban are responsible for a larger percentage of civilian deaths. This is contrary to UN assessments, which attribute 75% of civilian deaths to the insurgents and only 16% to both the international and Afghan forces<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> UNAMA (2011) *Afghanistan Annual Report 2010: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*. Available at: <http://unama.unmissions.org/Portals/UNAMA/human%20rights/March%20PoC%20Annual%20Report%20Final.pdf>

### Who kills more civilians?

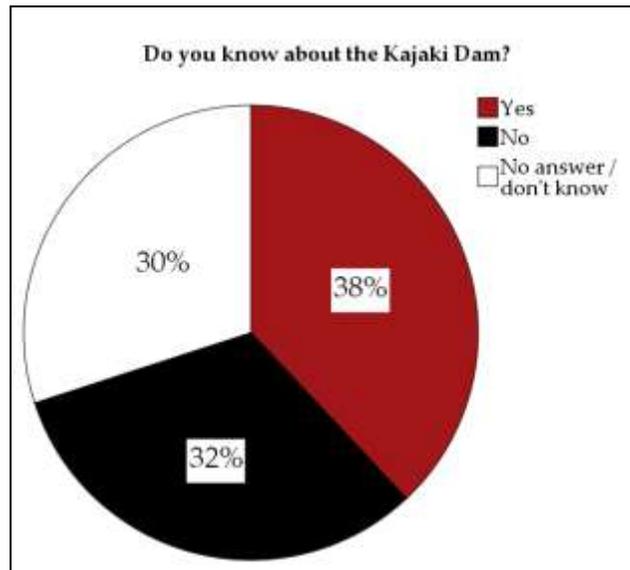


### Lack of Knowledge about the Kajaki Dam

The district of Sangin in Helmand province is home to the strategically important Kajaki Dam, which is key to providing southern Afghanistan with electricity. From 2007 the hydroelectric dam has been the focus of fighting between the Taliban and NATO-ISAF forces, who are trying to provide security so that the dam can be finished and brought up to full generating capacity.

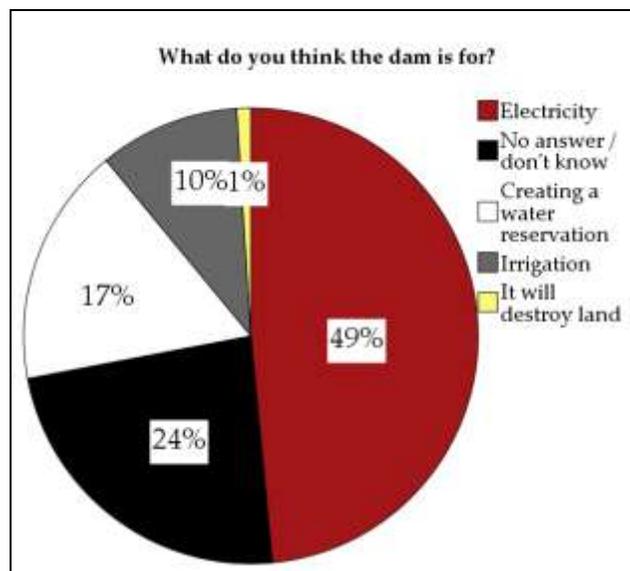
To date, mainly as a result of the fighting in the area, the dam has not been finished. Preventing its completion is an important and symbolic target for the insurgents, while its completion would be a considerable means of winning hearts and minds for the international coalition.

Only 38% of respondents in Lashkar Gah and Sangin (the two districts where interviewees were asked about the dam) are aware of the Kajaki dam.



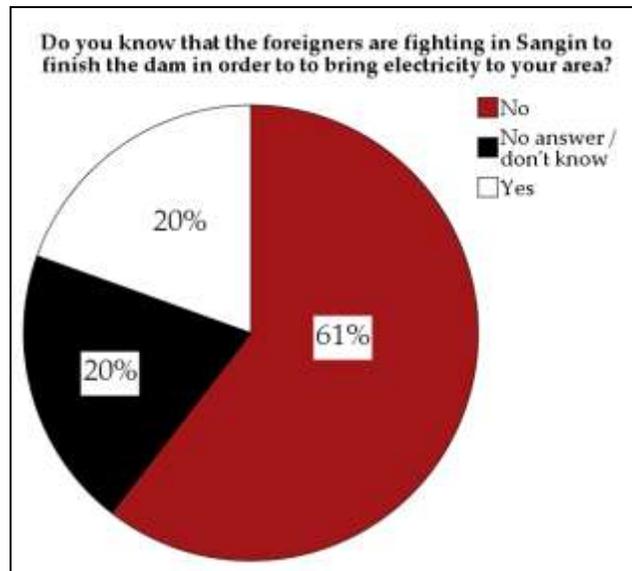
Sangin and Lashkar Gah

There is also confusion over the purpose of the hydroelectric dam. Forty-nine percent of respondents correctly think that it is for generating electricity, but 24% do not know. It is important to note that Sangin residents do not regularly have electricity and electricity in Lashkar Gah is sporadic.



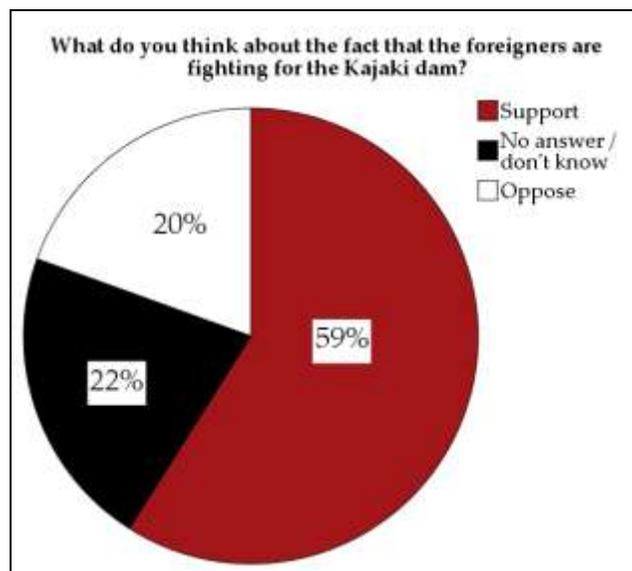
Sangin and Lashkar Gah

Many Afghan men interviewed in Sangin and Lashkar Gah are unaware that NATO-ISAF’s priority in the area is to support the construction of the dam and provide them with electricity, indicating a failure to sufficiently communicate this mission.



Sangin and Lashkar Gah

However when told that foreign forces were fighting in their area to supply them with electricity, interviewees are positive: 59% support the NATO-ISAF attempt to protect the dam.

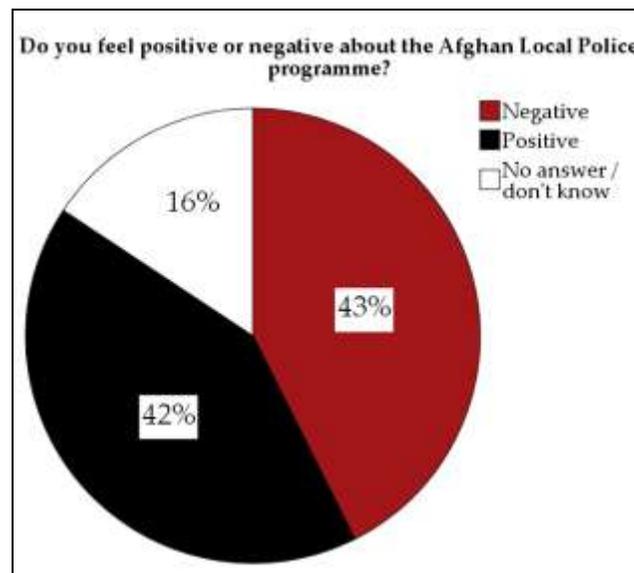


Sangin and Lashkar Gah

### Encouraging Signs Towards Afghan Local Police Programme

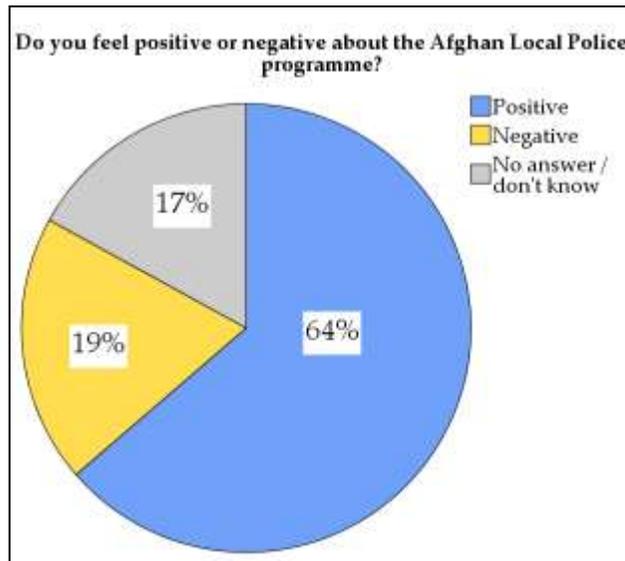
Interviewees are generally positive towards the Afghan Local Police (ALP) programme, and there are encouraging signs of support in areas that actually host ALP units. The ALP is the latest ‘community security’ programme in Afghanistan, which involves the creation of auxiliary security forces who typically receive less pay and training than regular police officers and are tasked solely with defending their own communities.

Afghan men interviewed in the south are somewhat divided over the programme: 43% view it negatively and 42% positively. In districts hosting ALP units, there was substantial support for the initiative, demonstrating that although work needs to be done in order to build support, the programme does have backing among Afghans who were interviewed who live in districts with ALP units in place.



Southern Afghanistan

In northern Afghanistan, the programme is also popular, with 64% of respondents viewing it positively.

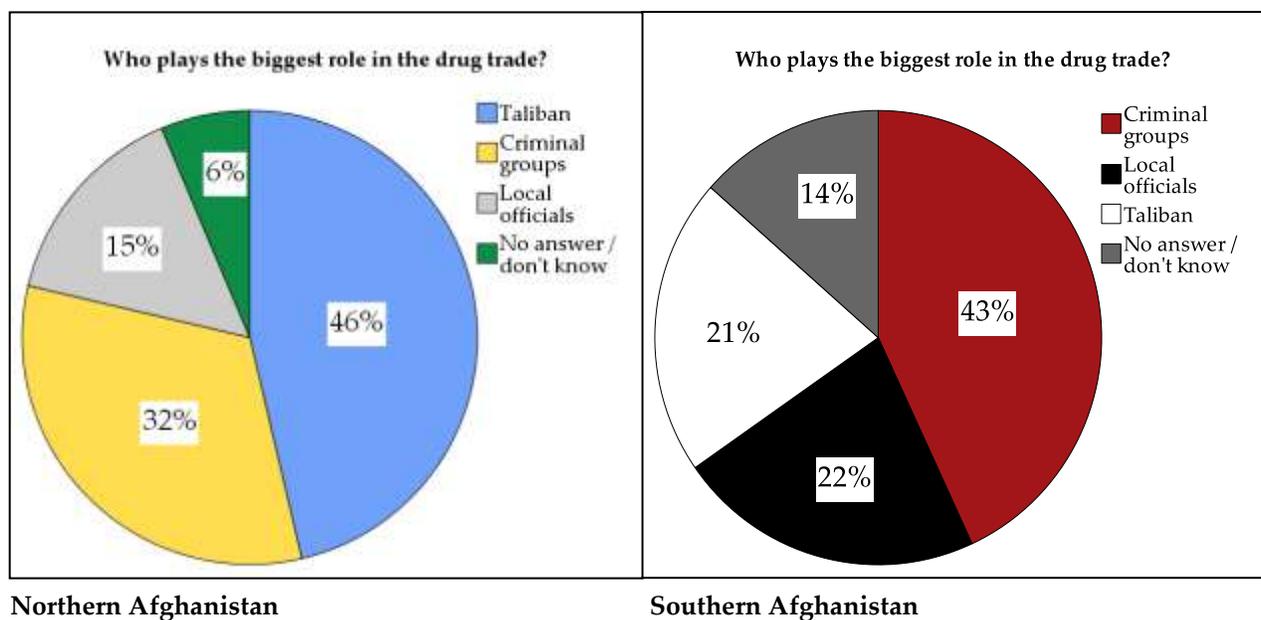


Northern Afghanistan

#### 4. Taliban and Local Officials Perceived as Influential in Drug Trade, Rising Influence of Criminal Actors

The drug trade remains a pervasive influence in Afghanistan. Some analysts believe that it helps to fund the Taliban and contributes to rampant corruption among key political powerbrokers<sup>3</sup>.

Many interviewees support these assessments. In northern Afghanistan 46% think that the Taliban play the biggest role in the drug trade, and 15% think that local officials are most involved. In Helmand and Kandahar 22% believe local officials play the biggest role, while 21% think the same of the Taliban. Criminal groups are believed to play the biggest role by 43% in Kandahar and Helmand and 32% in northern Afghanistan.



The fact that the Taliban, local officials and criminal groups are all perceived to play a role in the drug trade suggests that a nexus between these three groups could develop, based around their mutual interest in drug trafficking. The emergence of these Afghan drug cartels could be facilitated by a drawdown of international forces.

<sup>3</sup> Peters, G (2009) Seeds of Terror: How Heroin Is Bankrolling the Taliban and Al Qaeda. London: Thomas Dunne Books.

## Towards drug cartels in Afghanistan?

The main drug cartels of Colombia were in origin (partly family-based) networks that expanded from small-scale smuggling operations or other illegal activities. For example, in the 1970s, Pablo Escobar's Medellín-based operations started in a similar way as other smugglers in Colombia, concentrating at first on cigarettes and eventually adding other contraband such as washing machines and dryers. Only a few years after working in the contraband business did the switch to the more profitable cocaine trade occur.

Cartel formation in the literal sense of the word started when different groups decided to work together instead of waging a war over lucrative cocaine profits. As such, the Medellín cartel was essentially a group of independent drug dealers that cooperated to share profits and jointly protect their operations. The Cali cartel was run more as a unified business rather than a loose group of independent drug dealers, but again each of its four leaders had built up their own business before joining the cartel.

In Afghanistan, the first warnings about possible cartel formation came in 2009 when the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) mentioned in its Afghanistan Opium Survey 2009 that there was growing evidence that some anti-government elements in Afghanistan were turning into 'narco-cartels'.<sup>4</sup> The trend described in the report was that some insurgents were moving from mainly taxing poppy cultivation or opium production towards producing and exporting the drugs.

If insurgent groups in Afghanistan are becoming more involved in the illegal opium trade, describing them as 'cartels' in the meaning of the Colombian example is not useful, because it would imply that different insurgent groups are starting to work together (or starting to collaborate systematically with local trafficking groups) to create a 'Lashkar Gah cartel' or 'Kandahar City cartel' similar to the Colombian groups.

At present, a 2008 World Bank report still saw no signs of drug cartel formation or any 'monolithic cartel' in Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup> Instead, it described the organisation of the drug

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<sup>4</sup> UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2009 (September 2009), Commentary by the Executive Director.

<sup>5</sup> William A. Byrd, 'Responding to Afghanistan's Opium Economy Challenge: Lessons and Policy Implications from a Development Perspective', *World Bank* (March 2008), pp. 7, 8. Available at: [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2008/03/04/000158349\\_20080304082230/Rendered/PDF/wps4545.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2008/03/04/000158349_20080304082230/Rendered/PDF/wps4545.pdf).

trade in Afghanistan as a pyramid with many thousands of smaller opium traders or shopkeepers at the bottom and no more than 'several dozen' key traffickers at the top.<sup>6</sup>

Although this may indeed be a future scenario, using the 'cartel' label at this moment of time is premature; in addition, the term 'cartel' is associated with extremely high levels of drug-related violence witnessed in Mexico (and in Colombia) that are currently absent in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the illegal opium economy in Afghanistan remains one of the biggest challenges the country faces. Its impact on security and development processes require the Afghan government and the international community to prioritise finding sustainable solutions for the short, medium and long term.

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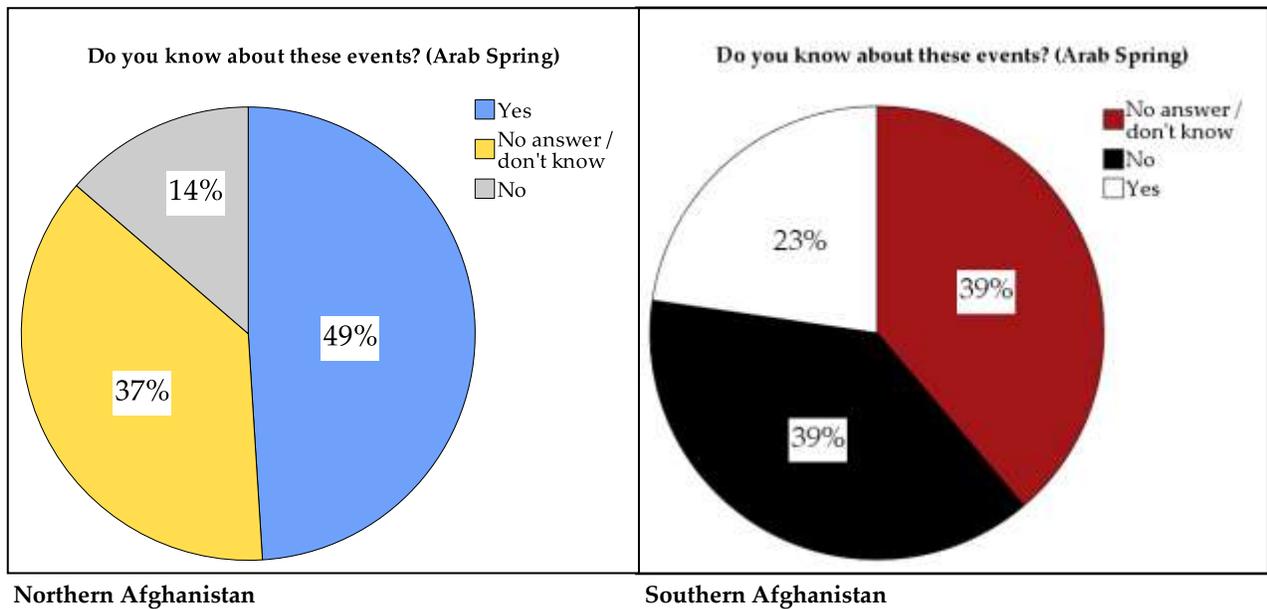
<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp 7, 8.

### 5. Interesting News: Mixed Opinions on the Arab Spring

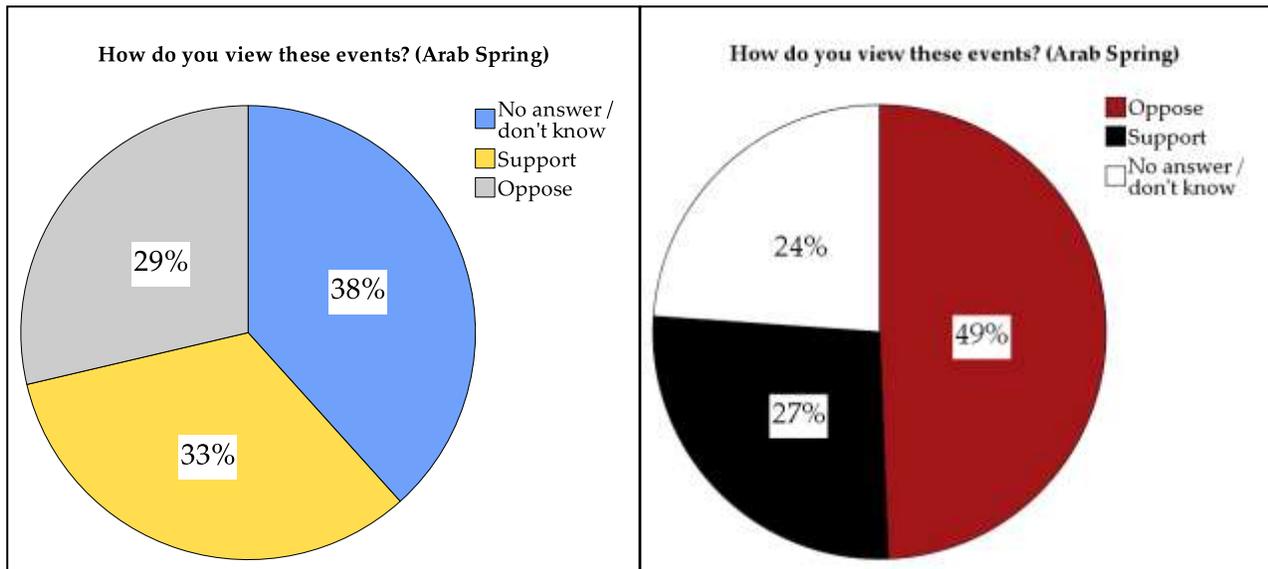
Although the successful uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia have gripped the imagination of millions and led to widespread replications across the Arab world and beyond, in Afghanistan many of the men interviewed are not aware of the Arab Spring and many of those who are feel ambivalent about the wave of protests.

Interviewees were read the following description of the Arab Spring: *Recently there have been several protests in Muslim countries including Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen against corruption, lack of jobs, and lack of democracy, involving many young people.*

In southern Afghanistan only 23% state that they are aware of the Arab Spring; although in northern Afghanistan 49% have heard of the demonstrations, indicating that many of those interviewed do not have access to sources of news outside their country, and that the development of Afghanistan’s media sector remains limited.



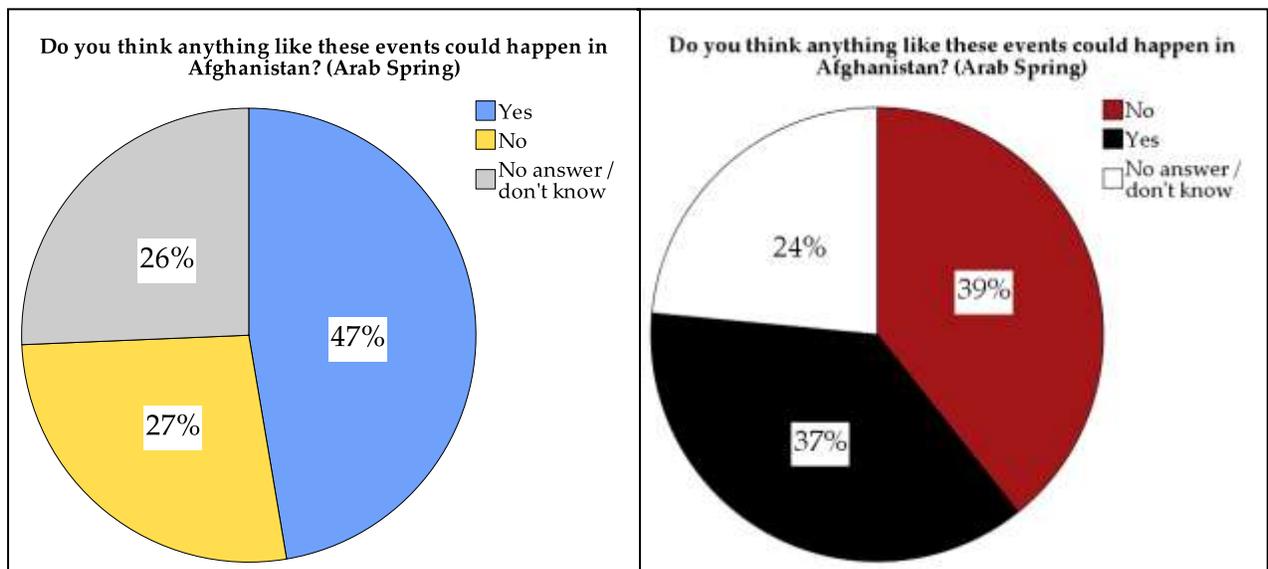
Almost half of southern respondents are opposed to the demonstrations, along with 29% of northern respondents. Large proportions also do not know how they view these events.



Northern Afghanistan

Southern Afghanistan

Thirty-seven percent of interviewees in the south think these events could be repeated in Afghanistan, compared with 47% in the north. Many Afghan men interviewed are unsure, perhaps reflecting their lack of knowledge about the Arab Spring, or a lack of confidence on issues involving this type of political expression.



Northern Afghanistan

Southern Afghanistan

## District Snapshots

### District snapshot: **Kandahar City, Kandahar Province**

**Risk factors: Traditional Taliban stronghold, need to build strong local government as alternative to Taliban, high risks of attacks against police and government officials**

In 1994, the Taliban emerged from this area to eventually conquer most of Afghanistan. This gives Kandahar City important symbolic value for both the insurgency and the NATO-ISAF forces that are working to make the area ready for transition. Security has been improving in the past years, but a series of suicide attacks in early 2011 have generated serious challenges for the NATO-ISAF forces, the local police and the government. Suicide attacks have repeatedly targeted the mayor, the police commanders and other officials as well as government buildings.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of April 2011 the police chief Khan Mohammad Mujahid was killed by a suicide bomber in an ANP uniform. He had already survived two previous attempts on his life. During the data-gathering phase of this Cultural Analysis research, the story was often mentioned as the most important news story people had heard about. His killing is highly symbolic for the strategic attempt of the insurgency to sabotage any progress in the capabilities and commitment of the Afghan security forces, thus potentially jeopardising the transition process.

Another serious test for the district of Kandahar City came just ten days later when almost 500 prisoners escaped from the city's main prison, among whom were many important Taliban commanders. After an earlier prison break in June 2008, this serious incident again indicates that progress in Afghanistan can often be a case of taking one step forward and two steps backward. It also raises serious questions about corruption within the police and the sustainability of the results achieved by the international forces in the area.

Lastly, on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> of May 2011, Afghan police and military were engaged in heavy fighting against the Taliban insurgency within Kandahar City. This shows that Kandahar has lost ground on security issues, and will require significant attention in the next months.

**Field research snapshot: increasing negativity****Bad news**

- 61% of interviewees think NATO military operations are bad for the Afghan people.
- 51% of interviewees oppose military operations against the Taliban in Kandahar City.
- 71% of interviewees think that foreign forces do not protect the local population.
- 52% of interviewees think that the Afghan police are not effective.
- 82% of interviewees think Afghan police members end up fighting for the Taliban.

**Good news**

- 59% of interviewees think it is good that foreign forces are starting the transition.
- 90% of interviewees think that the Afghan army is effective.
- Only 14% of interviewees think the Taliban will return to previously cleared areas after the NATO troops have left.

## District snapshot: **Lashkar Gah, Helmand Province**

**Risk factors: Continued presence of Taliban fighters, symbolic importance to the insurgency, need for the International Community to move a district in the south into transition**

The district of Lashkar Gah is on the list of the first areas that will be transitioned in July 2011. There remain serious concerns regarding district's readiness for transition and whether the Afghan police and army can withstand a renewed summer offensive by the Taliban insurgency. Lashkar Gah is the only area in southern Afghanistan that is selected for early transition, suggesting this could be more of a political choice than one based on a realistic assessment of the security situation on the ground.

In January last year, the Taliban launched an attack on government buildings and the UN office in the city of Lashkar Gah, and since then there have been several serious incidents in and around the city. In addition, the roads in the districts, and especially the main road to Kandahar, have been compromised on several occasions and continue to be dangerous. Several significant military operations in Lashkar Gah and the broader province of Helmand have failed to stem the insurgent attacks and dent their operational capacity to plan attacks and place roadside bombs.

A March 2011 operation by British soldiers in Shindac Mandah, north of Patrol Base Attal in Lashkar Gah district, to clear the area of Taliban fighters confirms that the district may not yet have fully reached the 'build' phase after which responsibilities for security are transferred to the Afghan security forces.<sup>7</sup> The British soldiers were also ambushed while returning to their base in a well-organised attack by Taliban insurgents. Lashkar Gah remains an isolated and vulnerable community.

**Field research snapshot: increasing negativity, but some positive signs for transition**

### **Bad news**

- **73% of interviewees think NATO operations are bad for the Afghan people.**
- **92% of interviewees think foreign forces disrespect their religion and traditions.**
- **71% of interviewees think the foreign forces are not protecting the local population.**

### **Good News**

- **57% of interviewees support military operations against the Taliban in Lashkar Gah.**
- **77% of interviewees think it is good that foreign forces are starting the transition.**

<sup>7</sup> UK Ministry of Defence, 'Ambushed SCOTS troops defeat Taliban attackers' (24 March 2011). Available at: <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/MilitaryOperations/AmbushedScotsTroopsDefeatTalibanAttackers.htm>.

## District snapshot: **Maiwand**, Kandahar Province

**Risk factors: Taliban homeland, poppy cultivation, fragile local government, little popular trust in the government**

Maiwand district in Kandahar province is experiencing ongoing clearing operations and is a focal point of the troop surge. As the Canadian military forces in the area acknowledge, progress is fragile and is at risk of being undone after the foreign forces pull out.<sup>8</sup> Maiwand lies on the road between Kandahar and Lashkar Gah, and is often the source of trouble on the road.

Despite serious insecurity in Maiwand, community participation has increased in recent years, with more tribal *jirgas* taking place to tackle issues such as development, assistance and education. The governor of Kandahar province, Toryalai Wesa, has taken part in some of these *jirgas*, but the tribal affairs in Maiwand to a large extent remain isolated from what is happening in Kandahar City, and are certainly very distanced from decision-making in Kabul.

The main challenge for the coming years is to continue to strengthen the district government. If the local government fails, the Taliban will quickly fill the political vacuum, which would also destroy all hopes for the restoration of local systems of justice, development and other essential services that the Taliban has threatened or disrupted in the past years.

### Field research snapshot: increasing negativity

#### Bad news

- 83% of interviewees think NATO military operations are bad for the Afghan people.
- 95% of interviewees think foreigners disrespect their religion and traditions.
- 55% of interviewees think that the foreign forces are not protecting the local population.
- 66% of interviewees think the Afghan police are not effective.
- 54% of interviewees think the Taliban are respected in Maiwand.

#### Good news

- 42% of interviewees support military operations against the Taliban in Maiwand.
- Only 7% of interviewees think the Taliban is helped by government officials in Maiwand.
- 65% of interviewees think the Afghan army is effective.

<sup>8</sup> 'Battle for Kandahar: If Afghan Gov't Doesn't Improve, 'We're Going to Lose'', *ABC News* (27 May 2010). Available at: <http://abcnews.go.com/International/Afghanistan/maiwand-district-offer-fragile-model-battle-kandahar/story?id=10752195>.

## District snapshot: **Mazar-i-Sharif, Balkh Province**

**Risk factors: Tribal disputes and assassinations, recent protests may have set precedent, independence from Kabul**

The district of Mazar-i-Sharif is relatively secure and the town is one of the safest cities in Afghanistan. Most violence in the area can be attributed to ethnic-related disputes and different local strongmen fighting for money and power.

However, during the period that this research was conducted, on April 1, 2011, seven foreign employees working for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) were killed by Afghan protesters, following the Quran burning by pastors Terry Jones and Wayne Sapp in Florida. In July 2010, an Afghan army sergeant killed two American trainers and another Afghan at Camp Shaheen in Mazar-i-Sharif. Despite these incidents, the district has been relatively peaceful in recent years.

Nevertheless, the recent protests raise questions about whether the Afghan security forces are fully ready to take over from the (mainly German) NATO-ISAF forces in the area, as on this occasion the Afghan police were unable to prevent the killings. Mazar-i-Sharif is on the list of districts that will be 'transferred' as early as July this year, but if there are already doubts about early transition in this relatively safe part of the country, serious questions should be raised in less secure districts.

**Field research snapshot: mixed results but positive signs for transition**

### **Bad News**

- **81% of interviewees say the NATO military operations are bad for the people.**
- **70% of interviewees think foreign disrespect their religion and traditions.**
- **69% of interviewees think foreign forces do not protect the local population.**
- **10% of interviewees would join the Taliban if it facilitated the withdrawal of foreign troops.**

### **Good news**

- **65% of interviewees support operations against the Taliban insurgency in Mazar.**
- **Only 4% of interviewees think the Taliban are winning the war.**
- **74% of interviewees think it is good that foreign forces start the transition.**
- **79% of interviewees think the Afghan army is effective.**
- **68% of interviewees think the Afghan police are effective.**

## District snapshot: **Sangin**, Helmand Province

**Risk factors: traditional homeland of Taliban, illegal opium trade, tribal disputes and the strategic importance of the Kajaki dam**

The district of Sangin in Helmand Province can be considered an essential component of the Taliban's homeland and is one of the most Taliban-ridden districts in southern Afghanistan. As a consequence it has seen some of the fiercest fighting that ISAF forces have been engaged in, claiming the lives of more than one hundred British soldiers in the past four years and more than 25 American soldiers in only the past four months.

The district is an important strategic location in the southern provinces and much-needed progress is very slow. US forces took over command from the British in September 2010 and in January 2011, US marines claimed to have formed a 'bubble of security' which includes Sangin town, the bazaar and the main road through the district, called route 611. However, security remains a serious issue and fighting continues in the surrounding countryside.<sup>9</sup>

The district of Sangin is also home to the strategically important Kajaki Dam. From 2007 onwards, the hydroelectric power dam has intermittently been the focus of fighting between the Taliban and NATO-ISAF forces. So far, mainly as a result of the fighting in the area, reconstruction works on the dam have not been completed, which means the dam is not operating at full-capacity. The destruction of the dam is an important and symbolic target for the insurgents, while its reconstruction would be a considerable means of winning hearts and minds for the international coalition. The field research reveals that only 3% of interviewees in Sangin are aware that foreign forces are in the region to protect the dam, although 54% support the fact that they are doing so.

Sangin district is among the main opium-producing areas of the country, with several tribes competing for a share of the illegal opium economy and the local political power that this often brings.

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<sup>9</sup> BBC News, Sangin: US Marines take fight to the Afghan Taliban (20 January 2011). Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-12241803>.

**Field research snapshot: increasing negativity****Bad news**

- 99% of interviewees think NATO military operations are bad for the Afghan people.
- 46% of interviewees oppose military operations in Sangin.
- 99% of interviewees think working with the foreigners is wrong.
- 51% of interviewees believe foreign forces do not protect the local population.
- 72% of interviewees are more negative about the foreign forces than the year before.
- 99% of interviewees think foreigners disrespect the religion and traditions.
- Only 3% of interviewees know that foreigners are in Sangin to protect the dam.

**Good News**

- 54% of interviewees support for the foreigners fighting to protect the dam.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The US troop surge has undoubtedly brought military progress, with many Afghan men interviewed now believing that international and Afghan forces are winning the fight against the Taliban. However, these military successes have also created “**Blowback**”, which is negatively impacting hearts and minds of those interviewed in the south. This has been compounded by a wave of recent negative news stories like the burning of the Quran and several high-profile suicide attacks.

The relatively positive news from the interviews in the northern provinces is offset by the decrease in support for the NATO-ISAF mission in the southern provinces on a significant number of key indicators.

The troop surge has not been accompanied by corresponding development and civilian ‘surges’. The gains that have been made on the battlefield are being undermined by a lack of analogous efforts in the fields of aid, development, governance and counter-narcotics. In many areas the main instruments of the international community’s engagement with Afghan communities are NATO-ISAF soldiers, who have limited capacity to engage positively with the local population while engaged in combat operations.

The lack of progress by the international community as perceived by the interviews, and the ongoing conflict, are giving the Taliban an opportunity to “**Pushback**” and gain ground by capitalising on the increasing resentment of the foreign presence within the local population, which is emotionally volatile, traumatised, isolated, and easily manipulated by outside actors.

The Taliban’s psychological campaign has been able to persuade many civilians of the merits of the insurgents’ cause. The international community has not been effectively competing with the insurgents in this arena: it has failed build a positive relationship with the Afghan people, failed to engage effectively with communities at the grassroots political level, and has unsuccessfully communicated the reasons for its presence in Afghanistan to the Afghan people.

Efforts must be made to reverse this by demonstrating the benefits which the international presence can bring and persuading Afghans that a better future lies with their own government and the international community, not the Taliban.

In many poppy-growing areas, the lack of an effective or sustainable counter-narcotics policy leaves farmers vulnerable to government-led eradication without being provided

with strategies for alternative livelihoods. Also, many are well aware that militants move across the border for sanctuary and are confused by the lack of strategy for dealing with the insurgent havens in Pakistan.

A Hearts and Minds surge is needed, with visible and positive impacts on ordinary Afghans' lives, to support a durable transition.

## Appendix: ICOS Cultural Analysis Methodology

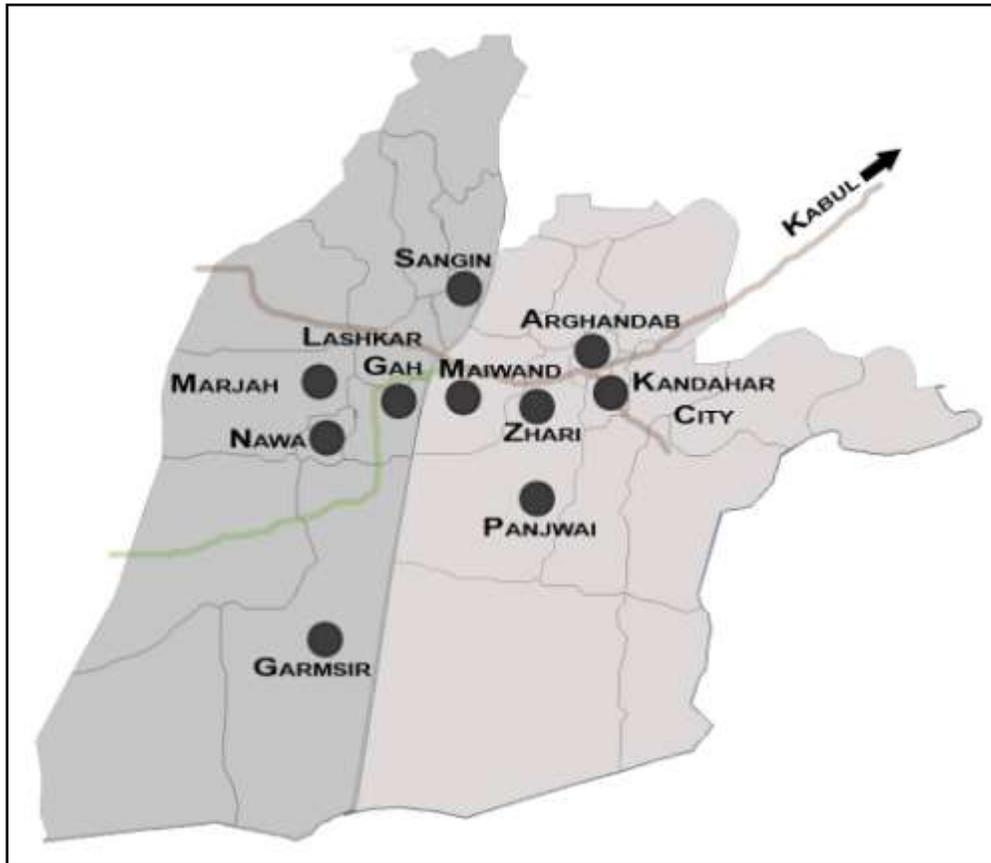
Research was carried out in April and May 2011 on Afghan military-aged males (numbers and districts below) to determine their opinions on key issues and to provide a longitudinal assessment to evaluate the effects of NATO-ISAF military operations on their perceptions. This was achieved by conducting interviews with the target group on security and development issues including, but not exclusively: the international presence; the Afghan government; the Afghan security forces; the Taliban; and attitudes towards women and democracy.

The main phase of field research was undertaken in the last two weeks of April and was completed by early May. Data entry was completed by the 7 May 2011.

In light of the percentage of the military-aged male cohort interviewed, the ICOS field research can be taken as statistically accurate in these areas.

<b>Field Research Areas of Study – Main Questionnaire</b>			
<b>District</b>	<b>Number of interviews</b>	<b>Estimated male 15-30 cohort</b>	<b>Interviews as a percentage of male 15-30 cohort</b>
Balkh - Mazar-i-Sharif	100	53375	0.19%
Bamyan - Bamyan	100	9558	1.05%
Panjshir - Panjshir	100	2225	4.49%
Helmand – Lashkar Gah	100	28781	0.35%
Helmand – Garmsir	100	15301	0.65%
Helmand – Nawa	100	12825	0.78%
Helmand –Marjah	100	11424	0.88%
Helmand – Sangin	100	9554	1.05%
Kandahar – Kandahar City	100	68208	0.15%
Kandahar - Panjwayi	100	11872	0.84%
Kandahar - Arghandab	100	7392	1.35%
Kandahar - Zhari	100	7140	1.40%
Kandahar - Maiwand	100	5852	1.71%
Kabul – Kabul University	125	7324	1.71%

### ICOS Field Research Areas



Research areas in Helmand and Kandahar



### Field Research Extension on the Death of Osama Bin Laden

On 2 May 2011, immediately following the finalisation of the data-collection phase, news emerged of the death of Osama bin Laden. Given the significance of this event, work was undertaken to re-dispatch research teams to ask a short series of additional questions to 600 Afghan men about the death of Bin Laden. The data from these interviews was analysed and incorporated into the main field research report.

Four questions seeking to assess the impact of Bin Laden’s death on the situation in Afghanistan were prepared. All four were closed questions, with an additional opportunity left at the end of the questionnaire for the comments and opinions of the interviewee.

Six locations (see table below) were chosen because they provide a varied spectrum of different local dynamics. The research process began on Monday May 2<sup>nd</sup> with logistical planning and the development of the questionnaire. Research teams began work on Wednesday May 4<sup>th</sup> and finished on Friday May 6<sup>th</sup>. Data analysis work began on Thursday May 3<sup>rd</sup> and was finalised on Saturday May 7<sup>th</sup>.

<b>Field Research Areas of Study – Osama Bin Laden Questions</b>			
<b>District</b>	<b>Number of interviews</b>	<b>Estimated male 15-30 cohort</b>	<b>Interviews as a percentage of male 15-30 cohort</b>
Panjshir - Panjshir	100	2225	4.49%
Helmand – Lashkar Gah	100	28781	0.35%
Helmand –Marjah	100	11424	0.88%
Kandahar – Kandahar City	100	68208	0.15%
Kandahar - Arghandab	100	7392	1.35%
Kabul – Kabul University	125	7324	1.71%

### About ICOS Cultural Analysis Research

The research methodology for the Cultural Analysis is drawn from standard polling and surveying methodology, adapted to the specific security environment and challenges in Afghanistan.

The Cultural Analysis research in Afghanistan uses structured interviews with Afghan military-aged males, conducted in key locations by local interviewers using a tailored questionnaire designed by ICOS. Afghan researchers conduct the interviews, supervised by ICOS's international staff. The findings of the research are examined through the lens of the local context to assess their significance, based on the longitudinal research experience of ICOS in the region.

Social science survey software (SPSS Version 19) is used to analyse the results of the interviews and produce visualisations of the data. The resulting information is then overlaid with ICOS's expertise in security and development policy and analysed in a local context to develop a Cultural Analysis Report and Recommendations.

In advance of a research phase, the exact locations and size of the research sample are determined.

Following the identification of the geographical scope and size of the sample, ICOS develops a tailored questionnaire of approximately 40 questions, relevant to the specific dynamics of the chosen location, including for example questions on perceptions of security, governance and personal aspirations.

### **The ICOS research team**

ICOS Cultural Analysis research is led by international staff members, working from Afghanistan and, where required, from ICOS's other office locations around the world. Drawing on extensive experience in Afghanistan, international staff develop the questionnaires and coordinate the field research process, as well as conducting quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data gathered.

In Afghanistan, international staff utilise ICOS's network of local contacts to recruit qualified field researchers. All researchers are interviewed and vetted for their skills and ability to conduct the work professionally, with full respect for research ethics. Where possible, ICOS employs researchers who have proven themselves to be diligent and effective in previous field research phases. Two to three field teams (of two people) are recruited for each district in which research is being conducted.

All interviewers undergo a training process. ICOS international staff inform them of the purpose of the study; the parameters (numbers and locations of interviews); and the necessity of adhering to research ethics at all times. Training staff emphasise the need for accuracy, completeness and objectivity. Any form of research misconduct is not accepted.

Researchers undertake practice interviews in order to familiarise themselves with the interview process, and are provided with ample opportunities to make any concerns heard.

### **Questionnaire Development**

ICOS questionnaires comprise a combination of *cross-sectional* and *longitudinal* questions, containing both qualitative (open-ended) and quantitative (dichotomous, multiple-choice or scaled) questions. Sometimes *projective and enabling techniques*, such as the use of pictures, are used to understand how interviewees feel about certain political leaders or events. Such methods are found to be particularly effective in researching sensitive issues.

Cross-sectional questions provide a snapshot of the opinions and beliefs of military-aged Afghan men, based on their perceptions at the moment at which they are interviewed. Data is collected in areas as diverse as perceptions of security, governance, the reasons behind the international presence, democracy, women's rights, and personal aspirations and beliefs.

Longitudinal questions are also included in the questionnaires, with the aim of establishing trends over time. These questions reveal changes in the attitudes and opinions of the interviewees over a period of time and are repeated regularly. ICOS has a set of eight existing longitudinal questions which have been asked in two phases of field research (June 2010, October 2010), allowing for close tracking of Afghan perceptions and attitudes. These questions will be asked again in the research phase taking place in April 2011.

Practice interviews (see above) help to identify any flaws in the questionnaire, which can then be adjusted before the final questionnaire is completed.

When the questionnaire is finalised, it is translated into the relevant local language (Pashto or Dari, depending on the research area) by professional translators. As well as a full question sheet, interviewers are also provided with an answer sheet which provides abbreviated versions of each question and provides options to select the answer given by the respondent, as in the English-language example below:

**Question Sheet:**

Q1 Do foreigners respect or disrespect your religion and traditions?
Q2 Why do you think the foreigners are here?

**Answer Sheet:**

<b>Q6 Religion respect?</b>	1: Yes	2: No	0: No answer / don't know
<b>Q2 Why foreigners here?</b>			0: No answer / don't know

In the answer sheet, each answer option in closed questions is assigned a numeric value, for use during SPSS coding (below). In open-ended questions, a space is provided to write down the interviewee's answer.

**Sample Selection**

A stratified sampling method (probability sampling) is used in all interviews in Afghanistan. This means that a sub-category of the overall population is chosen that is most relevant to the field research. The *stratum* that has been selected is the cohort of military-aged Afghan men.

This target cohort is not only one of the largest groups in Afghan society (27% of the total population is aged 15-29, according to estimates from the US Census Bureau); it is also the group that is most relevant to security and development issues and most likely to be recruited to insurgent activities.

Within each district, interviews are carried out within the district centre, which is also usually the area with the highest population.

**Modus operandi in the field**

**Use of local field researchers**

Engaging local researchers aims to reduce the risk of cultural bias or misunderstanding during the conducting of the interviews.

Like most interviewees, the researchers also fulfil the sample criteria themselves (male, military-aged) which facilitates access to target groups and has the additional benefits of increasing trust and making the interviewees feel at ease from the outset of the interview.

Interviewees operate in a two-man team. One reads the questions and directly engages the interviewee, whilst the other circles the relevant answer option (see above) or writes down the interviewee's verbal answer.

### **Ethical and cultural considerations**

Before conducting an interview, field researchers make sure that framework conditions allow for delivering the questionnaire in a respectful, safe environment. In particular, the safety and security of interviewers and interviewees is prioritised at all times, particularly in very insecure areas. If security and logistical considerations do not permit ICOS to conduct interviews in a certain area, alternative locations are used instead.

Throughout the interview process, regular communication is maintained between field research teams and ICOS core staff in the Kabul office.

The interviews are undertaken in the local language: Dari in the Northern provinces and Pashto in the Southern provinces, and sometimes a mixture of these in other areas such as Kabul. At all times in the interview, consideration for cultural and societal codes is closely observed. This is facilitated by the fact that all field researchers are Afghans.

### **Research protocol**

Within the districts, interviews are carried out in the district centres at random public locations, such as bazaars, mosques, main streets and outside universities. Prospective interviewees are approached and when agreeing to participate in the interview, respondents are informed of the purpose of the study and are assured of their anonymity and the confidentiality of their answers. Interviewers are fully trained to only interview Afghan men of military age.

The interviews are undertaken in accordance with professionally accepted ethical research principles, guaranteeing the anonymity, confidentiality and safety of the interviewees. Each interviewee is assigned a number (upwards from 1) to facilitate anonymity.

Interviews are conducted in public spaces but researchers make sure that no one other than themselves and the interviewee are able to hear or interfere with the process. If some part of the interviewees’ answers is subsequently quoted in research reports, this is done anonymously in the following way:

*“We do not have enough books at the University library. This is a serious problem.”*

Afghan student in Kandahar City

**Collection of field research data**

Each field research team delivers their completed answer sheets to the ICOS field office in Kabul. The data is entered into customised Excel sheets on password-protected computers in field offices at the end of each day of interviews. To ensure security, all data is also uploaded onto a remote server each day. The field research teams are available during the data entry phase to clarify any ambiguity in the answers.

ICOS international staff also supervise the data entry phase. Any research results that appear to be flawed at this stage trigger a new team being sent to redo the work in the relevant location.

The Excel sheets which are set up to be compatible with SPSS for the next phase of analysis. They are also designed to highlight correct answers (within the parameters for that question) and incorrect answers which fall outside of the parameters. This makes identifying any flaws straightforward and intuitive. For instance, in the example below the options available are 0 (No answer / don’t know), 1 (respect) or 2 (disrespect). The third answer is outside the parameters provided in the question:

Interviewee	Do foreigners respect or disrespect your religion and traditions? (0-2)
1	1
2	0
3	3

**Data Analysis phase**

Standard statistical analysis software (SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 19) is used by ICOS international staff to analyse the Excel sheets. Data is

exported from the Excel files into SPSS and used to generate visualisations of the data in the form of pie charts, bar charts and percentage tables. Longitudinal data is visualised in tables which track the responses of interviewees to the longitudinal questions over time.

ICOS policy analysts assess this data, identifying relevant findings and tracking trends in the longitudinal questions. ICOS's expertise in research and analysis is used to interpret these findings, producing narrative reports which discuss the implications of the research findings for the policies of the international community and the Afghan government.