

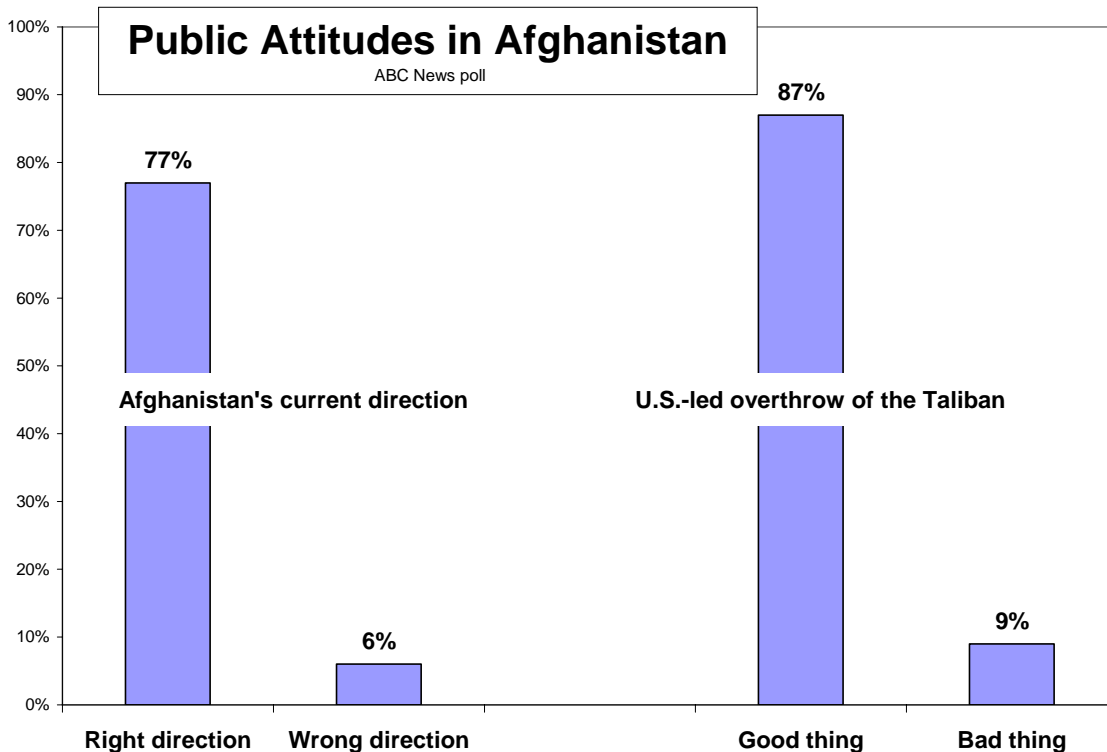
**ABC NEWS POLL: LIFE IN AFGHANISTAN**

**EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE AFTER 5 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 7, 2005**

# Despite Deep Challenges in Daily Life, Afghans Express a Positive Outlook

Four years after the fall of the Taliban, Afghans express both vast support for the changes that have shaken their country and remarkable optimism for the future, despite the deep challenges they face in economic opportunity, security and basic services alike.

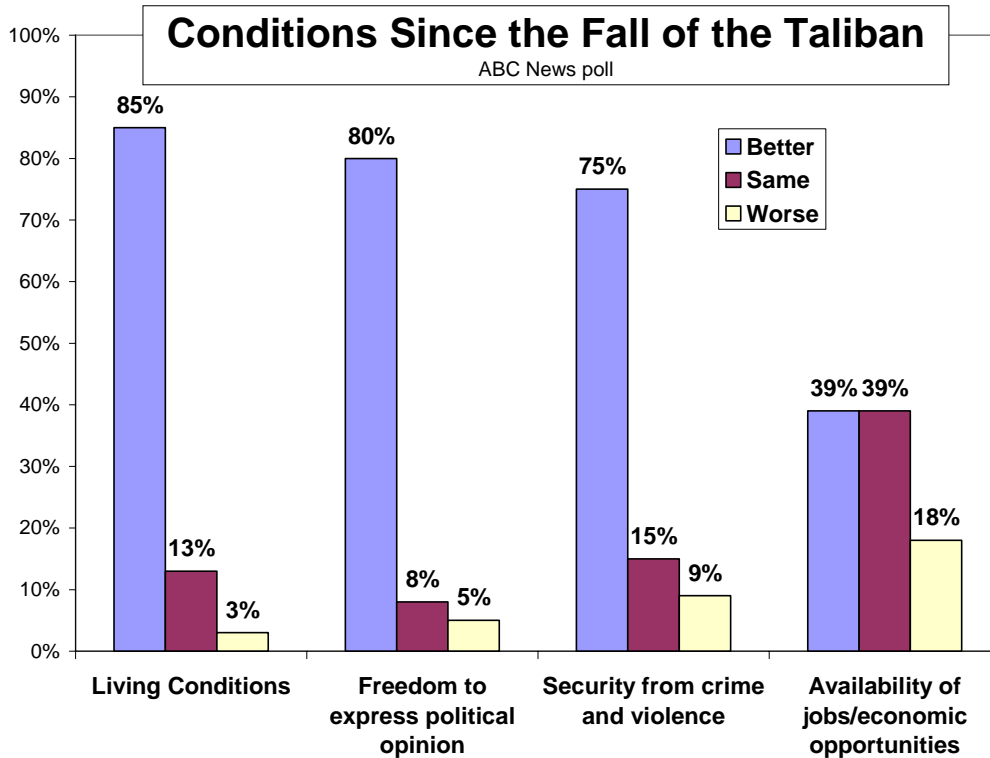
An ABC News poll in Afghanistan – the first national survey there sponsored by a news organization – underscores those challenges in a unique portrait of the lives of ordinary Afghans. Poverty is deep, medical care and other basic services lacking and infrastructure minimal. Nearly six in 10 have no electricity in their homes, and just three percent have it around the clock. Seven in 10 Afghan adults have no more than an elementary education; half have no schooling whatsoever. Half have household incomes under \$500 a year.



Yet despite these and other deprivations, 77 percent of Afghans say their country is headed in the right direction – compared with 30 percent in the vastly better-off United States. Ninety-one percent prefer the current Afghan government to the Taliban regime,

and 87 percent call the U.S.-led overthrow of the Taliban good for their country. Osama bin Laden, for his part, is as unpopular as the Taliban; nine in 10 view him unfavorably.

Progress fuels these views: Despite the country’s continued problems, 85 percent of Afghans say living conditions there are better now than they were under the Taliban. Eighty percent cite improved freedom to express political views. And 75 percent say their security from crime and violence has improved as well. After decades of oppression and war, many Afghans see a better life.



More can be done; most say each of these is better, but not “much” better, than under the Taliban. And in a fourth crucial area – jobs and economic opportunity – progress is badly lacking: In this basic building block, just 39 percent see improvement.

In a separate measure, Afghans by nearly 2-1, 64-34 percent, say their own household’s financial situation is bad (most Americans, by contrast, say theirs is good.). Yet that economic discomfort has not produced political dissatisfaction: Ratings of President Hamid Karzai, the current government and the newly elected parliament are all high.

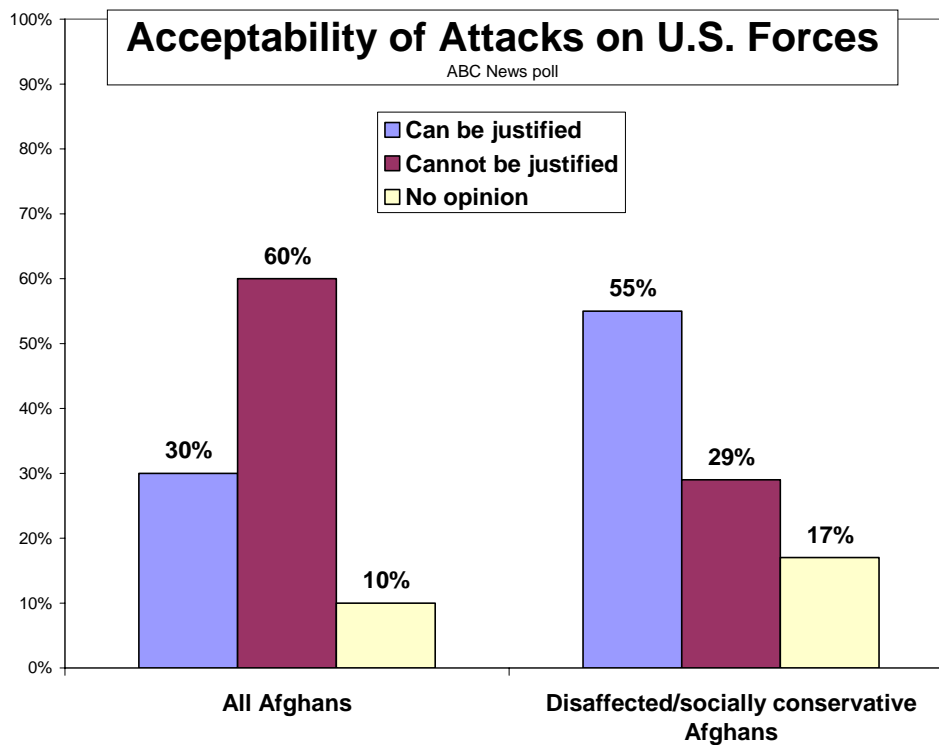
Better hopes for the future are a likely reason. This poll finds broad expectations – expressed by two-thirds of Afghans – that life overall will improve in the year ahead. That optimism, while encouraging, also carries the danger of discontent if those expectations go unmet.

This survey was conducted for ABC News by Charney Research of New York with field work by the Afghan Center for Social and Opinion Research in Kabul. Trained Afghan researchers interviewed a randomly selected sample of 1,039 adults across the country.

**CONCERNS** – Some results may raise particular concerns. One is that, despite broadly favorable views of the United States, three in 10 Afghans say attacks against U.S. forces can be justified. There are about 18,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan, with more than 250 killed to date – including nearly twice as many in 2005 as in any previous year.

Acceptability of attacks on U.S. forces spikes among disaffected and socially conservative Afghans, who account for about 15 percent of the population. In this group just 29 percent say such attacks cannot be justified, compared with 60 percent of all Afghans.

At the same time, even among all Afghans, 30 percent say such attacks can be justified. That may reflect social mores in a country where violence is not an uncommon means of settling disputes, and perhaps specific grievances in areas where administrative or legal remedies are lacking.



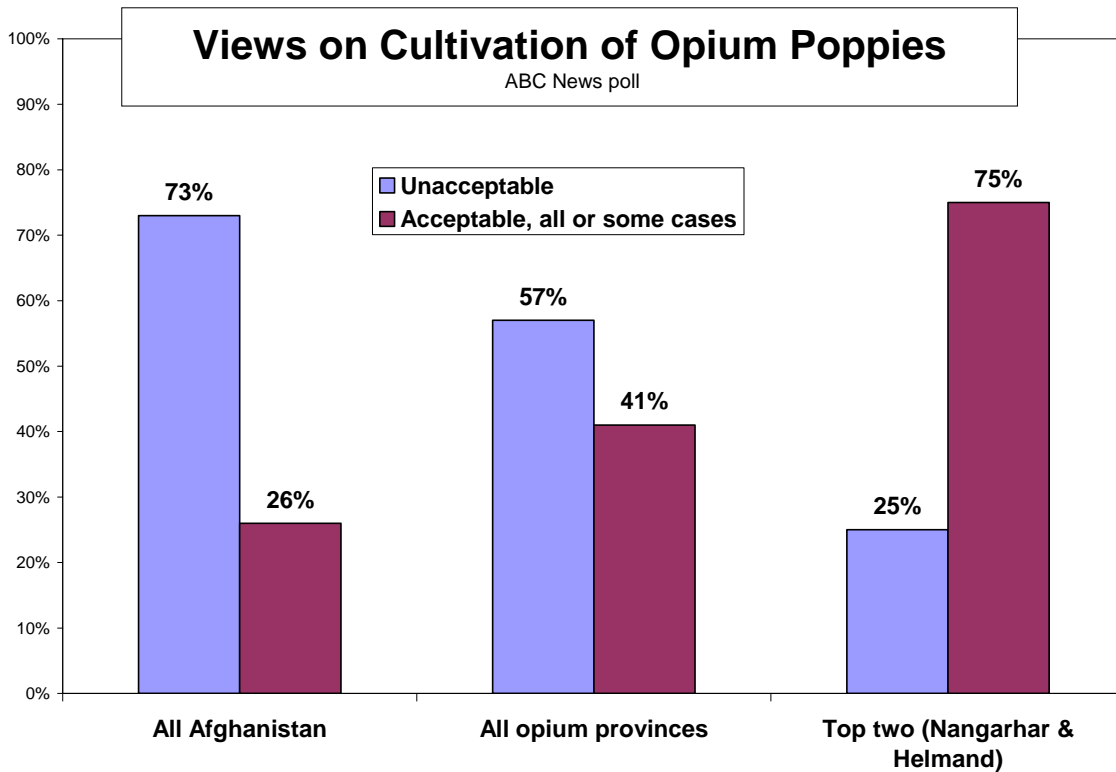
In another result that may give pause, one in four Afghans say there are circumstances in which it's acceptable to grow poppies for opium production, a trade that's soared since the Taliban were ousted. Acceptance of poppy farming – if no alternative source of income is available – reaches 41 percent in the highest opium-producing provinces as identified by the United Nations last year. And acceptability soars in the two provinces

that historically have been the country's centers of poppy cultivation, Nangarhar in the East and Helmand in the West. (While cultivation in Nangarhar reportedly is down sharply this year, it appears that attitudes that tolerate it have not followed.)

Many fewer Afghans – just five percent – say poppy cultivation is acceptable in all cases; more say, rather, that it's acceptable only if no alternatives are available. That suggests that the opium trade may be vulnerable, to the extent other income-earning opportunities – such as the cultivation of alternative crops – can be provided in its place. But it won't be easy: The United Nations estimates that one in 10 Afghans is involved in cultivating opium poppies.

	Growing opium poppies:			Not acceptable
	NET	In all cases	If no alternative	
All Afghanistan	26%	5	21	73
Non-opium provinces	19	3	17	79
Opium provinces*	41	9	32	57
Nangarhar & Helmand	75	20	55	25

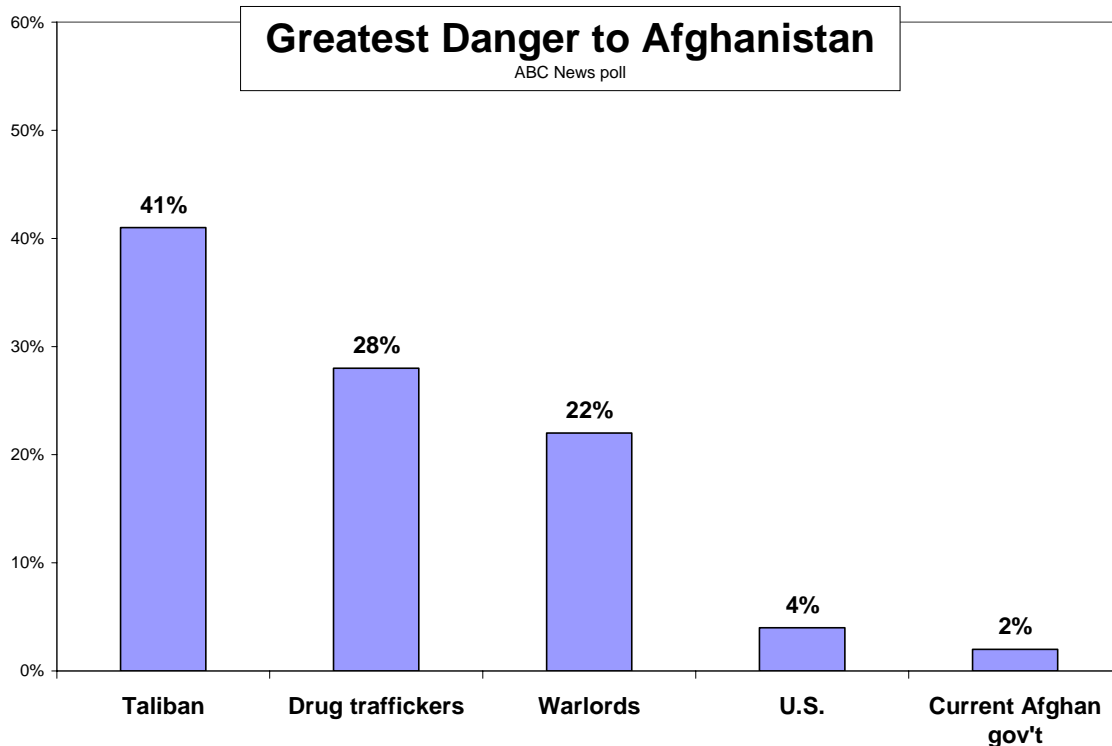
\*Opium poppy >10% of cereal cultivation, per UN 2004.



The survey also finds substantial suspicion of cheating in the recent parliamentary elections. Nearly half of Afghans, 46 percent, believe there was vote buying, intimidation of voters or cheating in the vote count in their area. Still, 77 percent are confident

nonetheless that the parliament will work for the benefit of the people, although far fewer, 34 percent, are “very” confident that will be the case.

In terms of threats the country faces, most-cited is the Taliban, an insurgent group since it was ousted with the fall of Kandahar on Dec. 7, 2001. Forty-one percent call the Taliban the biggest danger to Afghanistan, 28 percent cite drug traffickers and 22 percent say it’s local warlords. (The program to disarm those warlords enjoys vast popular support, detailed below.)



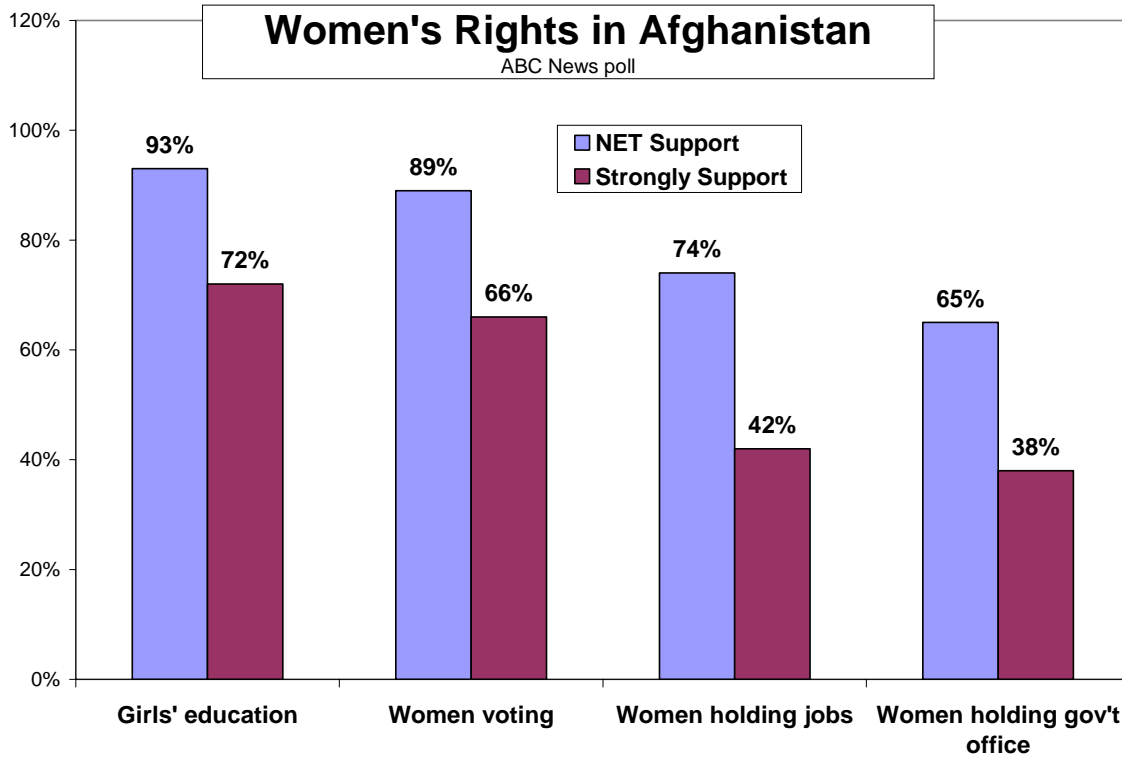
**WOMEN** – The survey also finds broad majority support for women’s rights in Afghan society, albeit, as in other readings, with more modest strength of commitment behind it. Nine in 10 Afghans support girls’ education and women voting, three-quarters support women holding jobs and two-thirds support women holding government office – remarkable in a country where the Taliban so thoroughly repressed such rights. Perhaps surprisingly, support for most of these is nearly as high among men as it is among women.

Support for:	Women	Men
Girls’ education	93%	92
Women voting	92	87
Women holding jobs	78	69
Women holding gov’t office	71	59

At the same time, while 89 percent of Afghans support women voting, fewer, 66 percent, strongly support this right. And only about four in 10 “strongly” support women taking

jobs outside the home or holding government office. Even among Afghan women, fewer than half strongly support women working outside the home or holding government office. Personal experience may be a factor: Just 14 percent of Afghan women are employed, compared with about 60 percent of women in the United States.

There also are ethnic and regional differences, with support for women’s rights much lower among Afghanistan’s Pashtun population, Sunni Muslims who are dominant in the South and East of the country.



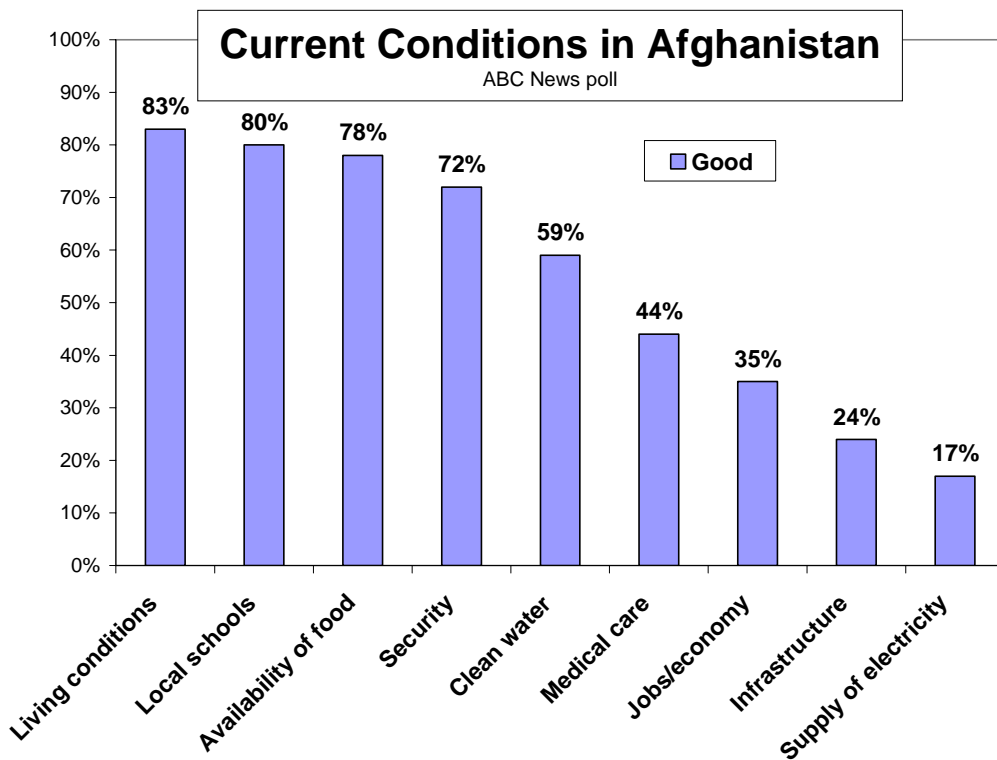
Also, support for women holding political office, in particular, is much weaker in rural as opposed to urban areas, and weakest among rural men.

Support for women holding political office				
All	Urban	Rural	Rural men	Rural women
65%	87	59	51	67

**CURRENT CONDITIONS** – Afghans give positive reports to several aspects of their daily lives: Eighty-three percent rate their overall living conditions positively, and ratings are nearly as high both for local schools and the availability of food. Just over seven in 10 likewise say their security from crime and violence is good. In each of these, though, far fewer – ranging from just 15 percent to 28 percent – say things are “very” good.

Fewer overall, 59 percent, say clean water is readily available, and other basic conditions – medical care, jobs and economic opportunity, roads and bridges and power supply – are rated far worse.

Local conditions in Afghanistan		
	Good (net)	Very good
Overall living conditions	83%	15%
Local schools	80	25
Availability of food	78	22
Security from crime/violence	72	28
Availability of clean water	59	18
Medical care	44	12
Jobs/economic opportunity	35	5
Roads, bridges, etc.	24	2
Electricity supply	17	4



There are significant differences in conditions across the country. Security is better in urban areas (of which the largest by far is Kabul, where about one in seven Afghan adults live); 40 percent in urban areas describe their security as “very good,” compared with 24 percent in rural areas.

Both security and economic conditions are notably worse in the Southwest and East (where the Taliban have been active) than elsewhere. And services seem weakest in the Northwest, where fewer than two in 10 report having clean water, good medical care or good roads, bridges and other infrastructure. In Kabul, just 18 percent lack any electrical power; that soars to more than two-thirds in the North and East.

**SECURITY** – Security is especially critical in a country so long wracked by war. When the 77 percent of Afghans who say the country is headed in the right direction are asked in an open-ended question why they feel that way, three related answers dominate: security, peace or the end of war, and disarmament.

Mentions of freedom, democracy and reconstruction follow; women in particular mention freedom for women, who were repressed under the Taliban regime: Twenty percent of women (compared with four percent of men) cite freedom for women as a reason they say the country’s going in the right direction.

Why is the country going in the right direction? (Multiple answers accepted)	
Security	34%
Peace/end of war	31
Disarmament	27
Freedom/free speech	17
Democracy/elections	15
Reconstruction/rebuilding	15

Similarly, when asked the single most important priority for the country, 40 percent of Afghans say security from crime and violence remains paramount. That’s followed fairly closely by creating jobs and economic opportunities, then much more distantly by the need for infrastructure improvements. When first- and second-highest priorities are combined, however, these rank about evenly. There’s much to do.

	First priority	First and second priorities
Security from crime/violence	40%	45%
Economic opportunities	31	49
Improving infrastructure	14	45

Another expression of the importance of security comes in support for the country’s “DDR” – disarmament, demobilization and reintegration – program. Largely Japanese-funded, the program is said to have disarmed 70,000 fighters under local warlords, offering them vocational training in exchange for their weapons. Not only do 95 percent of Afghans support the program, but 72 percent “strongly” support it, by far the highest level of strong support for any program, individual or entity measured in this survey.

**VIEWS OF THE U.S.** – Eighty-three percent of Afghans express a favorable opinion of the United States overall, similar to the 87 percent who call the U.S.-led overthrow of the Taliban a good thing. That compares to favorable ratings of a mere eight percent for the Taliban, and five percent for bin Laden. People who are unhappy with their local living conditions are twice as likely to have an unfavorable opinion of the United States.



Support for the United States is less than full-throated. Far fewer, 24 percent, regard it “very” favorably. And while 68 percent rate the work of the United States in Afghanistan positively, that’s well below the ratings given to Karzai, the United Nations or the present Afghan government (83, 82 and 80 percent positive, respectively).

Still, an 83 percent favorable rating for the United States, and a 68 percent positive work performance rating, are remarkable – in sharp contrast to negative views of the United States in many other Muslim nations. (Another contrast is Karzai’s job rating – 83 percent positive – compared with George W. Bush’s in the United States, where just 39 percent of Americans approved in the last ABC News/Washington Post poll.)

Rate the work of...	Ex./Good NET	Excellent	Good
Hamid Karzai as president	83%	45	38
The United Nations in Afghansitan	82	33	49
The Afghan government	80	27	53
The United States in Afghanistan	68	20	48

Given the Afghan public’s security concerns – and distaste for the Taliban – there is little demand for prompt U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. Just eight percent say the United States should leave now, and only another six percent say it should withdraw within the next year. The most common answer by far: Sixty-five percent say U.S. forces should leave Afghanistan “only after security is restored.”

SHIITE/SUNNI – Notable in this survey is the similarity of views between Sunni and Shiite Muslims, the two doctrinal groups so sharply at odds in Iraq. As in most of the Arab world, Sunnis dominate in Afghanistan – 85 percent of the population is Sunni (including nearly all members of the Pashtun and Tajik ethnic groups) while 15 percent is Shiite (including nearly all ethnic Hazaras).

There are differences: Thirty-two percent of Sunnis say attacks on U.S. forces can be justified, compared with 19 percent of the Shiite minority. And 51 percent of Shiites describe the Taliban (a Sunni group) as the biggest danger facing the country, compared with a (still high) 39 percent of Sunnis.

But few Sunnis or Shiites alike view the Taliban favorably (nine percent and six percent, respectively). Their ratings on improved conditions are similar, as are their expectations for the future and their views on Karzai, the current Afghan government, the United Nations, the United States, the “DDR” disarmament program and women’s rights.

WORK and POSSESSIONS – A simple accounting of household possessions tells volumes about life in Afghanistan. Barely one in 10 households has a refrigerator or a car. Three in 10 have a mobile phone; almost no one has a landline telephone. Nearly everyone has a radio, but barely four in 10 have a TV. About half own a work animal.

Household possessions			
Radio	95%	Motorbike	26
Bicycle	63	Car	12

Work animal	47	Refrigerator	11
TV	43	Satellite dish	9
Mobile phone	31	Landline phone	1

Farming is the main occupation; nearly a third of working Afghans are farmers or farm laborers. As befits the low levels of education, illiteracy is high, 42 percent.

The population is largely rural, with 79 percent of Afghans residing in small villages. And it's a young country, with a median age (calculated among adults only) of 32 years, compared with 44 in the United States.

**METHODOLOGY** – This survey was conducted for ABC News by Charney Research of New York, with field work by the Afghan Center for Social and Opinion Research in Kabul. Interviews were conducted in person, in Dari or Pashto, among a random national sample of 1,039 Afghan adults from Oct. 8-18, 2005. Sampling points were selected at random in 31 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, with households selected by random route/random interval. The results have a 3.5-point error margin. Details of the survey methodology are available upon request.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.go.com/US/PollVault/>.

Media contact: Cathie Levine, (212) 456-4934.

Full results follow.

1. Generally speaking, do you think things in Afghanistan today are going in the right direction, or do you think they are going in the wrong direction?

	Right	Wrong	Mixed	No opin.
10/18/05	77	6	11	6

1a. (IF RIGHT DIRECTION) Why do you say that? (Up to two answers accepted.)

	10/18/05
Good security	34
Peace/end of war	31
Disarmament	27
Freedom/free speech	17
Democracy/elections	15
Reconstruction/rebuilding	15
Girls schools/women can work/women's freedom	12
Refugees return	12
Travel possible/free movement	10
Good government	9
Economic revival	8
International Assistance	6
Other	1
No opinion	1

2. I would like to ask you about today's conditions in the village/neighborhood where you live. How would you rate the following using very good, somewhat good, somewhat bad or very bad?

10/18/05

	-----Good-----			-----Bad-----			No opin.
	NET	Very	Smwhat	NET	Smwhat	Very	
a. Your living conditions overall	83	15	68	16	13	3	1
b. Security from crime and violence	72	28	45	24	19	5	3
c. Availability of jobs/ economic opportunities	35	5	30	60	41	19	6
d. Roads, bridges and other infrastructure	24	2	21	75	39	37	1
e. The availability of clean water	59	18	40	41	31	10	0
f. The supply of electricity	17	4	14	82	29	52	1
g. The availability of food	78	22	56	20	17	3	2
h. The availability of medical care	44	12	33	55	44	11	1
i. The local schools	80	25	55	19	13	6	0

3. Compared to before the fall of the Taliban government in late 2001, is each item I name much better now, somewhat better, about the same, somewhat worse or much worse?

10/18/05

	-----Better-----				Same	-----Worse-----			No opin.
	NET	Much	Somewhat	NET		Somewhat	Much		
a. Your living conditions overall	85	30	55	13	3	2	0	0	
b. Security from crime and violence	75	31	44	15	9	7	2	1	
c. Availability of jobs/opportunities	39	9	30	39	18	13	5	4	
d. Freedom to express political opinion	80	43	38	8	5	3	2	7	

4. What is your expectation for things overall in your life a year from now? Will they be much better, somewhat better, about the same, somewhat worse, or much worse?

	-----Better-----				Same	-----Worse-----			No opin.
	NET	Much	Somewhat	NET		Somewhat	Much		
10/18/05	67	23	44	13	1	0	1	19	

5a. Which one of the following in your opinion should be the single most important priority for our country? 5b. Which is second-most important?

10/18/05 - Summary table

	First	Second	Total
Creating jobs and economic opportunities	31	18	49
Improving roads, water and electricity supply	14	32	45
Security from crime and violence	40	5	45
Establishing a stable national government	5	19	24
Rebuilding the schools	6	15	21
Improving medical care	1	6	7
Getting U.S. troops out of Afghanistan	2	4	6
Don't know/no response	1	1	2

6. How would you rate the work of:

	----Excellent/Good----			----Fair/Poor----			No
	NET	Excellent	Good	NET	Fair	Poor	opin.
10/18/05							
a. The present government	80	27	53	20	14	5	1
b. Hamid Karzai as president	83	45	38	16	14	2	1
c. The U.S. in Afghanistan	68	20	48	30	22	8	3
d. The U.N. in Afghanistan	82	33	49	16	14	2	2

7. How confident are you that the newly elected parliament will work well for the benefit of the Afghan people: very confident, fairly confident, not very confident, or not confident at all?

	-----Confident-----			-----Not confident-----			No
	NET	Very	Fairly	NET	Not very	Not at all	opin.
10/18/05	77	34	43	16	9	8	7

8. In the parliamentary elections last month, do you believe that in this area there was:

	Vote	Threats to make	Cheating in	None of	No
	Buying	voters choose a	the vote count	these	opin.
		party or not vote			
10/18/05	21	11	26	41	14

9 Who would you rather have ruling Afghanistan today: the current government, or the Taliban?

	Current	Taliban	Other (Vol)	No opin.
	Government			
10/18/05	91	1	2	6

10. Which of the following do you think poses the biggest danger in our country: drug traffickers, local commanders, the United States, the Taliban, the current Afghan government, or something else?

	Taliban	Drug	Local	U.S.	Current Afghan	Something	No
		traffickers	commanders		government	else	opin.
10/18/05	41	28	22	4	2	2	2

11. Thinking about the current disarmament, demobilization and reintegration program to disarm the forces of local commanders - is this something you support strongly, support somewhat, oppose somewhat or oppose strongly?

	-----Support-----			-----Oppose-----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opin.
10/18/05	95	72	23	3	2	1	2

12. What is your opinion of the cultivation of poppies for opium? Do you see this as:

	Acceptable in	Only acceptable if no	Unacceptable	No
	all cases	other way to earn living	in all cases	opin.
10/18/05	5	21	73	1

13. Now I'm going to ask what you think about some people and groups. The Taliban: Is your opinion of the Taliban very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable?

	-----Favorable-----			-----Unfavorable-----			No
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Very	opin.
10/18/05	8	3	6	89	15	74	2

14. Osama Bin Laden: Is your opinion of Bin Laden very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable?

	-----Favorable-----			-----Unfavorable-----			No
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Very	opin.
10/18/05	5	2	3	90	6	85	5

15. The United States: Is your opinion of the United States very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable?

	-----Favorable-----			-----Unfavorable-----			No
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Very	opin.
10/18/05	83	24	59	14	8	6	3

16. From today's perspective, do you think it was very good, mostly good, mostly bad or very bad that US military forces came into our country to bring down the Taliban government in 2001?

	-----Good-----			-----Bad-----			No
	NET	Very	Mostly	NET	Mostly	Very	opin.
10/18/05	87	48	39	9	6	3	4

17. At present there are attacks against US military forces in some parts of Afghanistan. Under current circumstances, do you think attacks against US military forces in Afghanistan can be justified or cannot be justified?

	Justified	Cannot be justified	No opin.
10/18/05	30	60	10

18. When do you think U.S. military forces should withdraw from Afghanistan?

	Leave Now	Within 6-12 mos.	1-2 Years	Only after security restored	Remain permanently	No Opin.
10/18/05	8	6	12	65	4	5

19. Now I'd like to ask you some questions about women in Afghanistan. Please tell me if each of the following is something you support strongly, support somewhat, oppose somewhat or oppose strongly?

	-----Support-----			-----Oppose-----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opin.
a. Women voting	89	66	23	10	6	5	0
b. Women holding jobs outside the home	74	42	31	26	15	11	0
c. Women holding government office	65	38	27	34	18	16	1
d. Girls education	93	72	20	7	5	2	0

20. For statistical purposes only, we need to know your total annual household income for last year. Will you please tell me which of the following categories best represents your total family income in the last one year? (in Afغانis)

	<12K	12-20K	20-50K	50-100K	>100K	No opin.
10/18/05	31	20	21	14	4	10

21. Do you have electric power here in your household? IF YES: From your own generator, or from the power lines?

	-----Yes-----					
	NET	Generator	Power lines	Both	No	No opin.
10/18/05	42	20	19	3	58	0

22. (IF FROM POWER LINES) Roughly how many hours a day do you have electricity from the power lines?

	1-6	7-12	12-23	All Day	No opin
10/18/05	38	40	4	12	6

23. Do you or does anyone in your household living at this address own a...

	Yes	No	No opin.
a. TV	43	57	0
b. Satellite dish	9	90	2
c. Telephone (land line)	1	98	1
d. Mobile phone	31	69	0
e. Radio	95	5	0
f. Refrigerator	11	88	0
g. Bicycle	63	37	0
h. Motorbike	26	74	0
i. Work animal	47	53	0
j. Car	12	88	0

24. How would you rate Afghanistan's economy now: excellent, good, fair, or poor?

	----Excellent/Good----			----Fair/Poor----			No
	NET	Excellent	Good	NET	Fair	Poor	opin.
10/18/05	41	8	33	57	38	19	3

25. How would you describe your household's financial situation: excellent, good, fair, or poor?

	----Excellent/Good----			----Fair/Poor----			No
	NET	Excellent	Good	NET	Fair	Poor	opin.
10/18/05	34	5	30	64	50	14	2

Demographics:

Sex: 10/18/05  
 Men 50  
 Women 50

Age: 10/18/05  
 17-24 29  
 25-34 25

35-49 32  
50+ 14

Marital status: 10/18/05  
Married 74  
Unmarried (NET) 26  
Widowed 4  
Divorced 0  
Never Married 22  
No response 0

Education: 10/18/05  
None 49  
Primary (incomplete) 13  
Primary (complete) 9  
Junior high school 11  
Senior high school 14  
University/academy 4  
No opin. 0

Employment status: 10/18/05  
Employed 43  
Unemployed 7  
Housewife (women) 36  
Retired 2  
Student 11  
Other 0  
No opin. 1

Occupation: 10/18/05  
Farmer (own land/tenant farmer) 24  
Farm laborer(other's land) 7  
Laborer, domestic, or unskilled worker 9  
Informal sales/business 8  
Skilled worker/artisan 20  
Office worker/Clerical worker 3  
Professional or technical 8  
Small business owner 4  
Executive or managerial 8  
Military/Police 5  
Other 4  
No opin. 0

Religion: 10/18/05  
Muslim (NET) 100  
    Sunni Muslim 85  
    Shia Muslim 15  
Ismaeli 0  
Hindu 0  
Buddhist 0  
None/Atheist 0  
Other 0  
No opin. 0

Ethnicity: 10/18/05  
Pashtun 40  
Tajik 37  
Uzbek 6

Hazara	13
Turkmen	1
Other	3
No opin.	0

Languages can read:  
10/18/05

None	42
Dari	46
Pashto	38
English	8
Uzbeki	3
Arabic	3
Urdu	2
Russian	1
Turki	1
Hindi	0
Other	0
Don't know	2

Language of interview:  
10/18/05

Dari	32
Pashto	68

Region: 10/18/05

Central/Kabul	21
Eastern	10
South Central	13
South Western	10
Western	10
Northern	29
Central/Hazarjat	8

Locale: 10/18/05

Villages	78
Towns	1
City	8
Metros (Kabul)	13

\*\*\*END\*\*\*