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# Inside Afghanistan: Unfolding the Afghan Public Opinion from Within



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# Introduction

In August 2021, the Taliban managed to enter the Afghan capital, Kabul, and quickly seized control of almost all of the country, which led to the fall of the Afghan government. This still raises many questions about the reasons behind such abrupt developments, and calls for the necessity of understanding how the Afghan society thinks.

Accordingly, this report attempts to identify the behavior of the Afghan society towards some internal conditions, such as the extent of Afghans' satisfaction with the economic conditions, the services provided, and the degree of corruption. Additionally, this report traces the extent of Afghans' support for the Taliban movement through indirect indicators, as well as assessing the size of the generational, ethnic and geographic variances in terms of support for the Taliban. The report also explores the Afghans' attitudes towards the ability of security institutions to maintain stability without foreign financial assistance. Finally, the report assesses the extent of Afghans' security concerns and how such concerns altered over time.

The report is based mainly on the statistical analysis of the data of a survey carried out in February of 2021 by the Asia Foundation, which was conducted on a representative sample of over 4000 Afghan citizens.

Despite the significance of opinion polls in understanding people's behavior, one should take into consideration the methodological biases that may impact the accuracy of the results. Additionally, some additional biases may be exhibited by respondents based on specific circumstances, the security situation, and even the geographical location, as well as the educational and ethnical backgrounds and other factors perceived in a complex environment like Afghanistan.

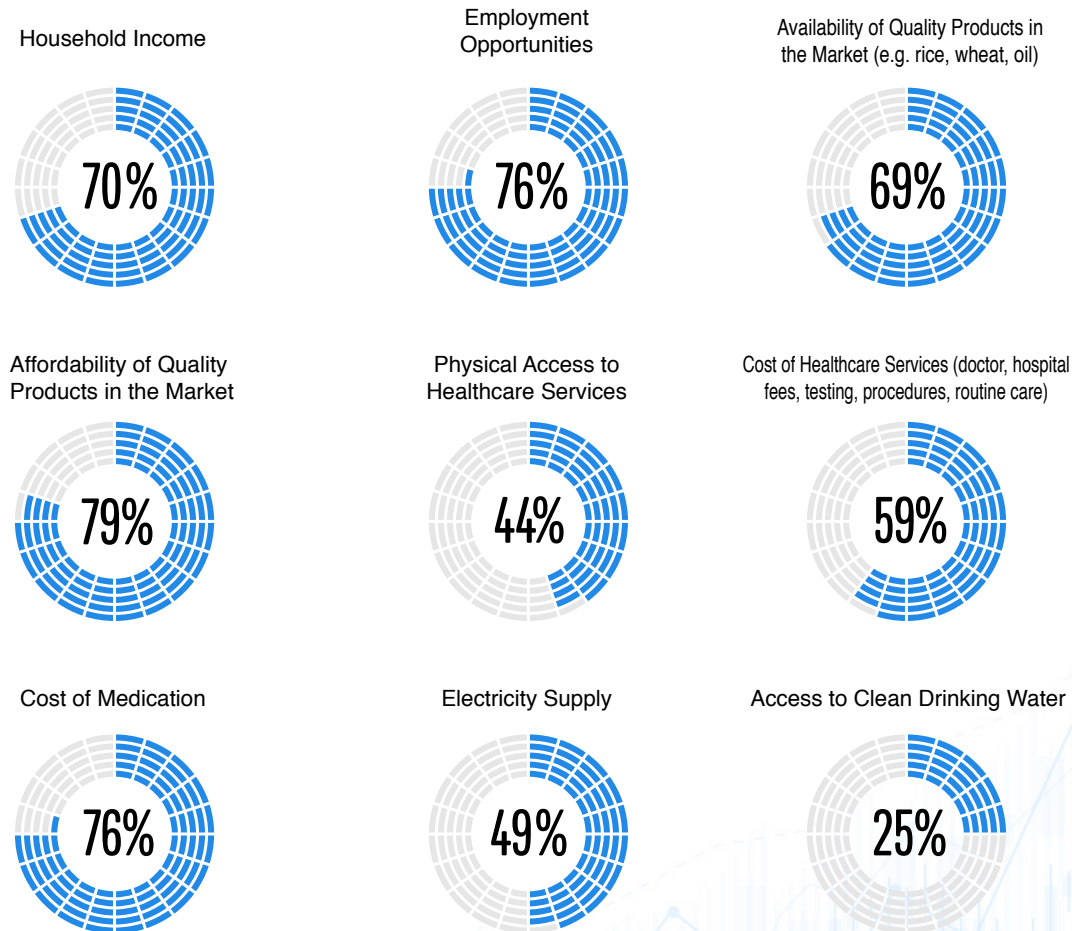


## The Afghans' dissatisfaction with the living conditions

Over the past twenty years, the Afghan governments have failed to achieve any significant progress in improving the economic and social conditions of the Afghans. The situation has further exacerbated over the past few years. According to the results of the “Asia Foundation” survey in early 2021, the majority of Afghans indicated that the economic and living conditions in Afghanistan had worsened. 70% of Afghans said that the financial situation of their families had worsened in the last 12 months, and 76% of them referred to a clear decline in employment opportunities. 69% stated that the availability of high-quality products in the market (such as rice, wheat and oil) has declined during the last 12 months, and so has their ability to afford these products.

The results of the survey highlighted the continuous distress of Afghans' access to various services. 76% indicated that the costs of medicine increased during the last 12 months and 25% pointed out the devastating situation with regard to access to clean drinking water over the same period.

## Percentage of Afghans indicated that the following living conditions had worsened in the last 12 months (2021)



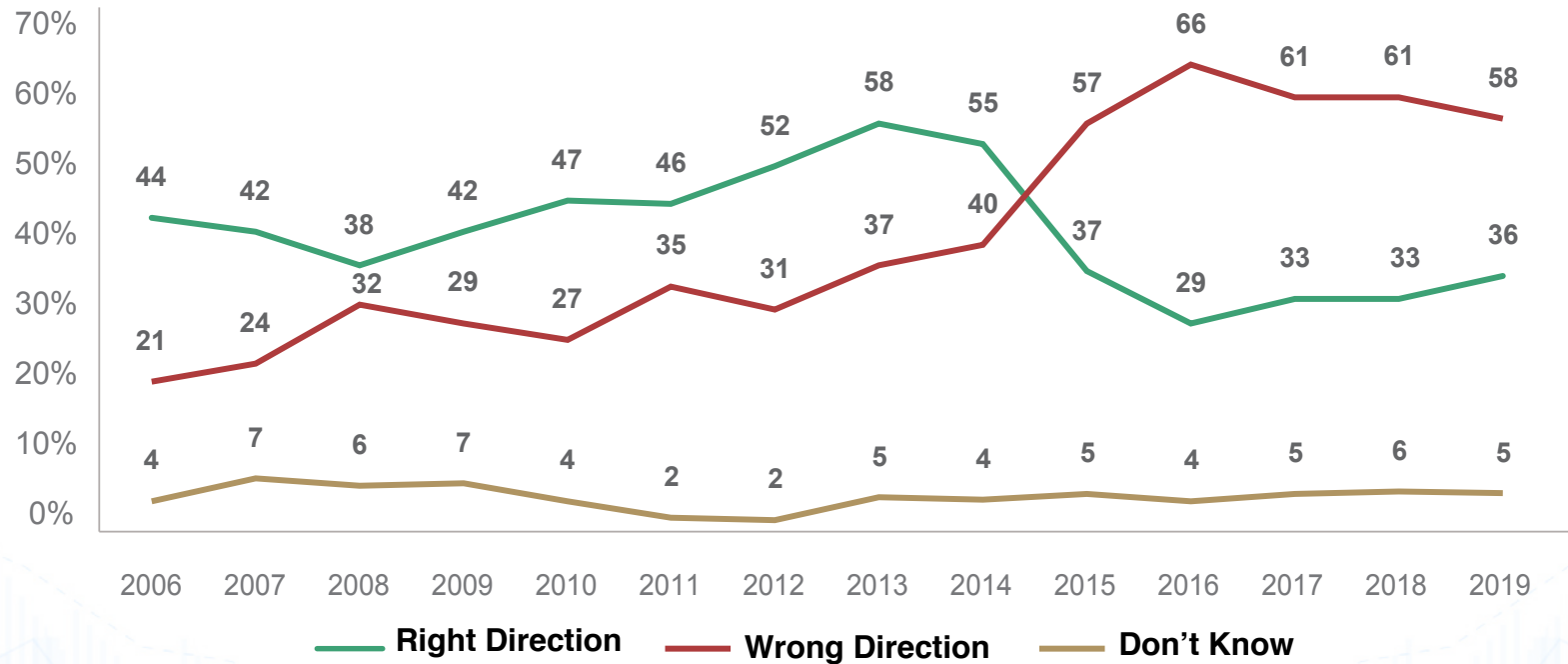
**Source:** Calculated by the researcher through the analysis of “The Asia Foundation” Survey

## Is Afghanistan heading in the right direction?

Remarkably, during the period of conducting the survey, there was a continuous increase in the percentage of Afghans who believe that Afghanistan is on the wrong path. In 2006, only 21% believed that

Afghanistan was on the wrong path, then the percentage increased to 58% by the end of 2019. This indicates the dissatisfaction of the Afghan public opinion with where Afghanistan has headed.

### National mood: Direction of the country



Source: The Asia Foundation, 2019, "A Survey of The Afghan People".

## Corruption in Afghanistan

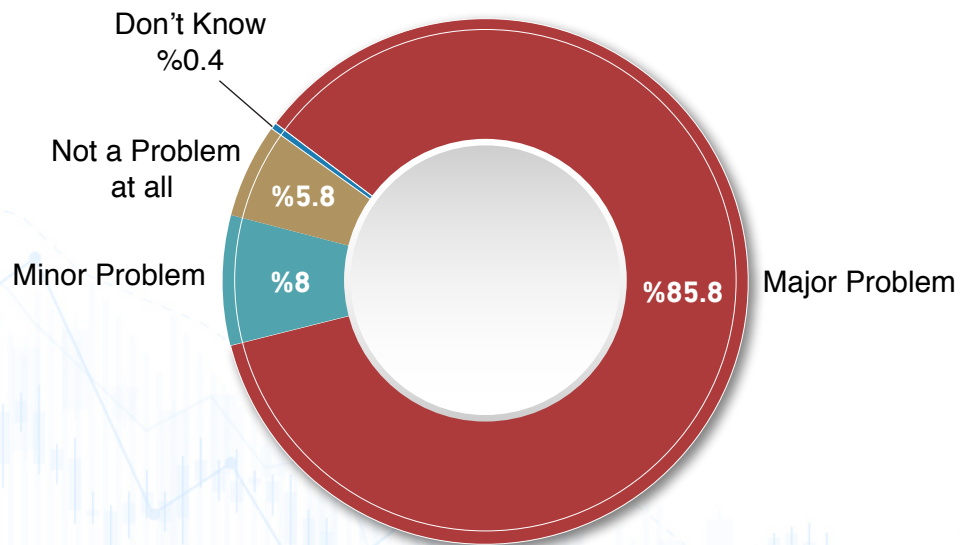
Afghanistan is among the 20 worst countries in the world in terms of corruption, according to the Global Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2020. Afghanistan ranked 165 out of 180 countries, with a score of 19 out of 100 points (0 is highly corrupt, and 100 is very clean).

According to the attitudes of the Afghan people, nearly 86% of them see corruption as a major problem in their daily life,

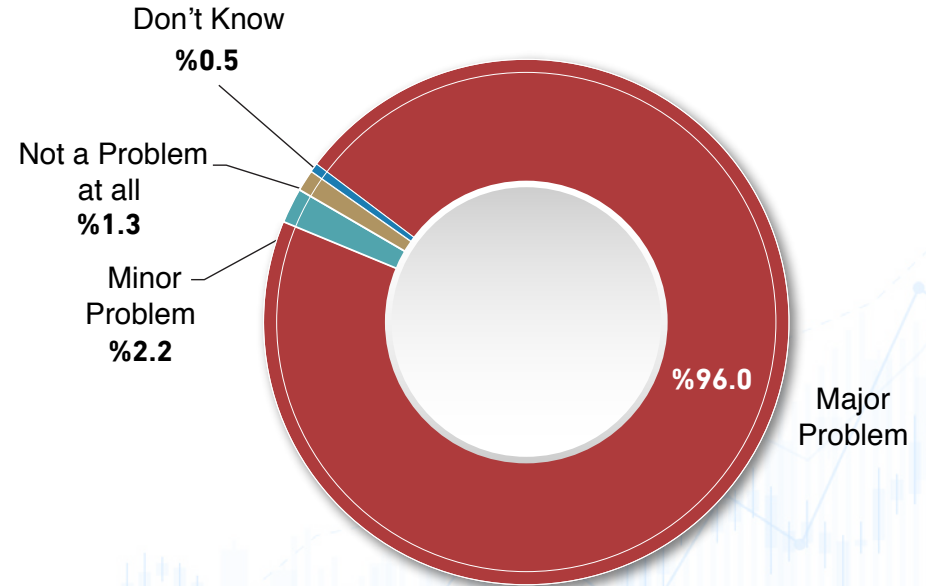
and 96% see corruption as a major problem in Afghanistan as a whole.

Several reports point out that corruption is deeply rooted in all state agencies in Afghanistan, and the Afghan economy has suffered greatly from the influence of corruption. Some attribute the widespread poverty in the country to corruption that has been rampant for years.

### Is corruption a major problem of your daily life?



### Is corruption a major problem in Afghanistan as a whole?



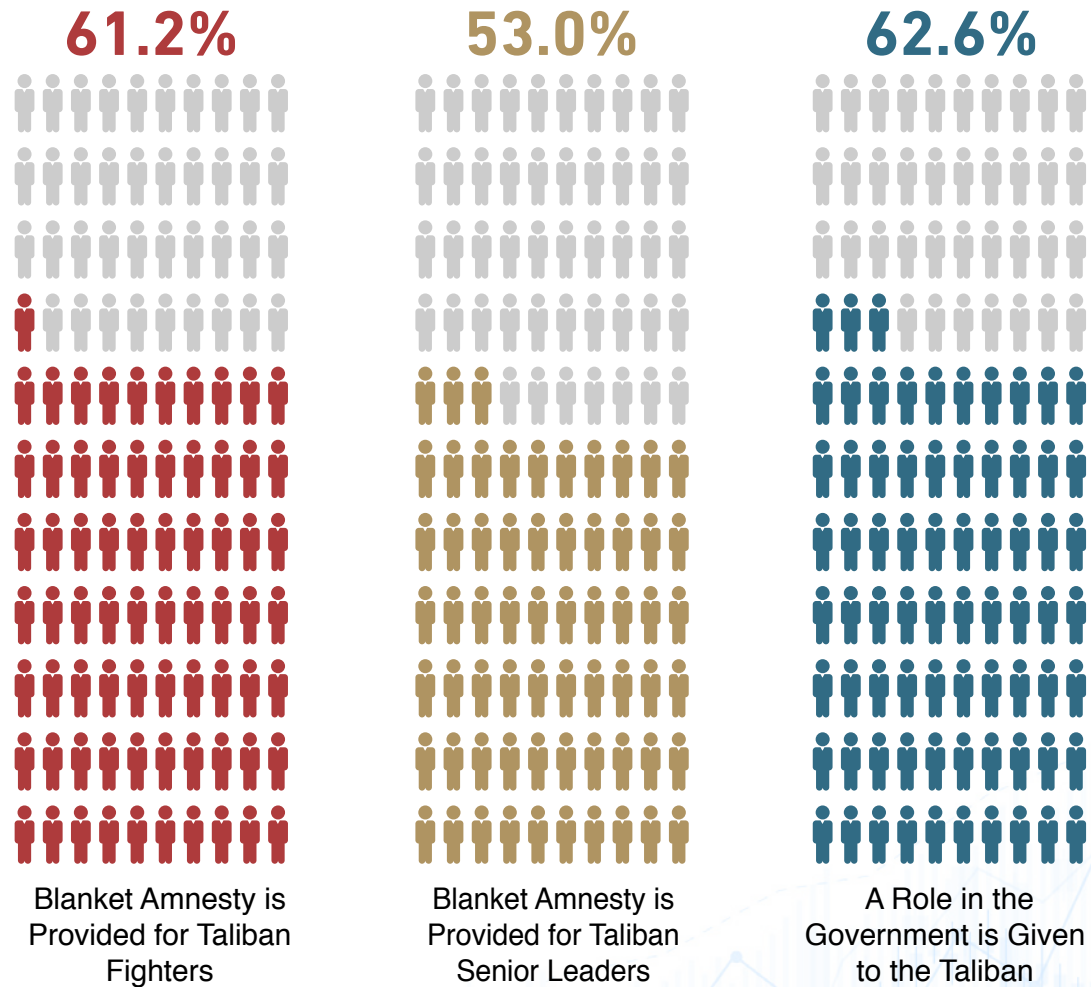
**Source:** Calculated by the researcher through the analysis of "The Asia Foundation" Survey

## An Afghan “tacit” support for the Taliban

When respondents were asked in early 2021 about their willingness to accept a peace agreement if it included some Taliban-related conditions, 61.2% indicated that they would welcome a peace agreement, if it included an amnesty clause for Taliban fighters. Additionally, 53% of Afghans stated that they supported amnesty for Taliban leaders. Furthermore, nearly 63% of Afghans supported giving the Taliban a role in government under the peace agreement.



## Percentage of the Afghans’ support for a peace deal under the following conditions



Source: Calculated by the researcher through the analysis of “The Asia Foundation” Survey

## Younger generations are less supportive of the Taliban

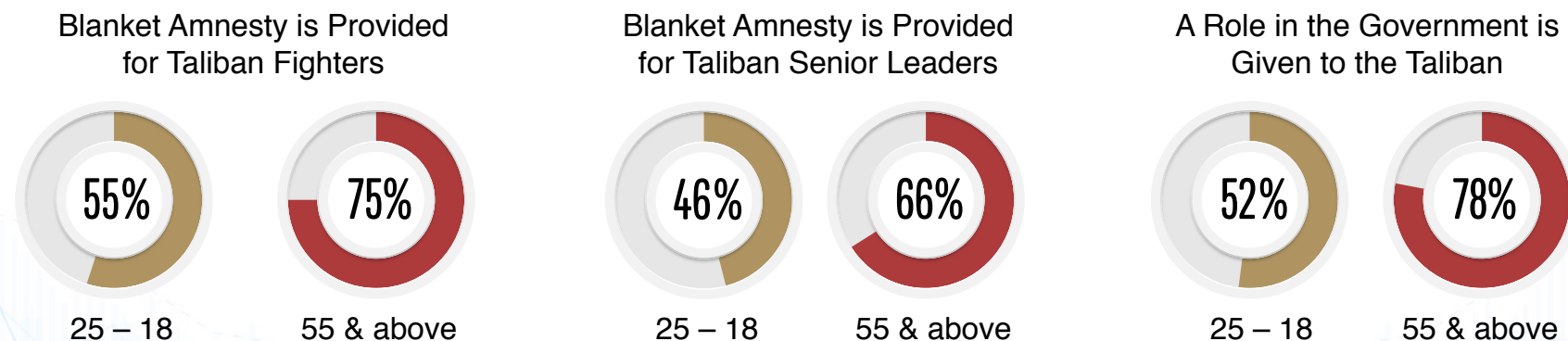
In-depth analysis of the differences between the generations in Afghanistan indicates that there is a large generational gap with respect to the support of the Taliban. The younger generations are less supportive of the Taliban movement. According to the results, about 55% of young people in the age group (18-25 years) were in favor of the peace agreement between the Afghan government and the Taliban movement including a condition of amnesty for Taliban fighters. Meanwhile, 75% of the elderly (55 years and over) support the condition of amnesty for Taliban fighters.

Also, 46% of young people in the age group (18-25 years) supported the condition of amnesty for Taliban leaders, but this percentage increased among the elderly (55 years and over) to reach 66%.

Finally, there was major support among the elderly to give a role to the Taliban in the government as one of the conditions of the peace agreement, with a percentage of 78%. This percentage decreased among youth to reach 52%.

### Generational Variances

#### Percentage of the Afghans' support for a peace deal under the following conditions per generations (2021)



Source: Calculated by the researcher through the analysis of “The Asia Foundation” Survey

## Educated generations are less supportive of the Taliban

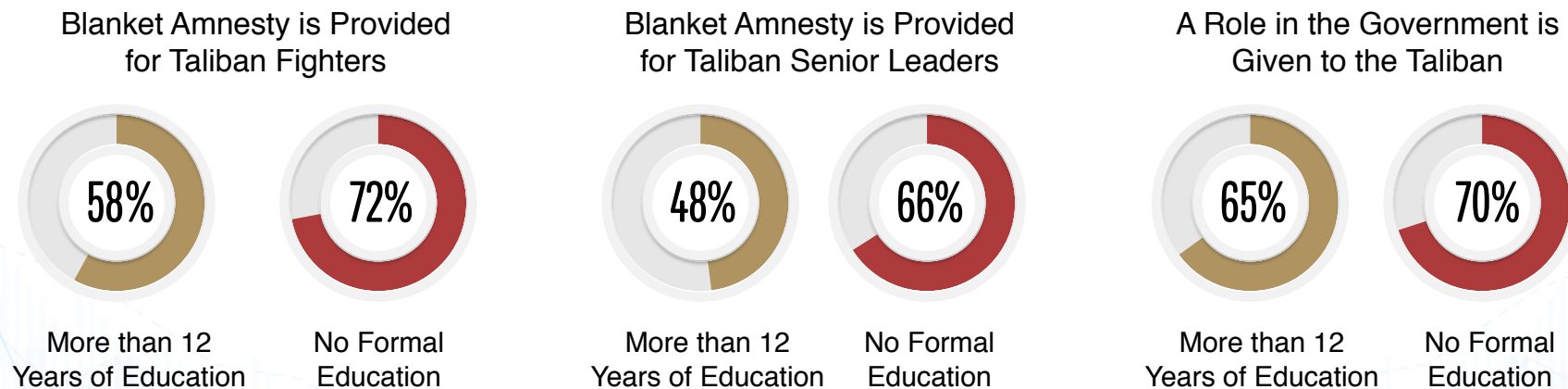
Similar to the generation gap, there is an educational gap in the stances towards the Taliban movement. People with high education were less supportive of the movement. According to the survey results, about 58% of people with higher educational degrees (more than 12 years of education) support that the peace agreement would include a condition of amnesty for Taliban fighters, while this percentage rose among people who did not receive any formal education to reach 72%.

48% of people with a higher education agreed to the condition of amnesty for Taliban leaders, while this percentage rose among people who did not receive any formal education to reach 66%.

There was minimal difference between the highly educated and the uneducated with regard to the condition of giving the Taliban a role in the government as one of the conditions of the peace agreement.

### Educational Variances

#### Percentage of the Afghans' support for a peace deal under the following conditions per educational level (2021)



**Source:** Calculated by the researcher through the analysis of “The Asia Foundation” Survey



## Ethnic variance in support for the Taliban

Afghanistan is a multiethnic and mostly tribal society, and there are no accurate estimates regarding the relative distribution of ethnicities there. According to several estimates, the Pashtun ethnicity is the largest in number (representing at least 40% of the population), and the Taliban belong to this ethnicity. Then come the Tajiks (ranging from 25% to 35%). Additionally, the Hazaras and Uzbeks also constitute significant minorities, about 10% each.

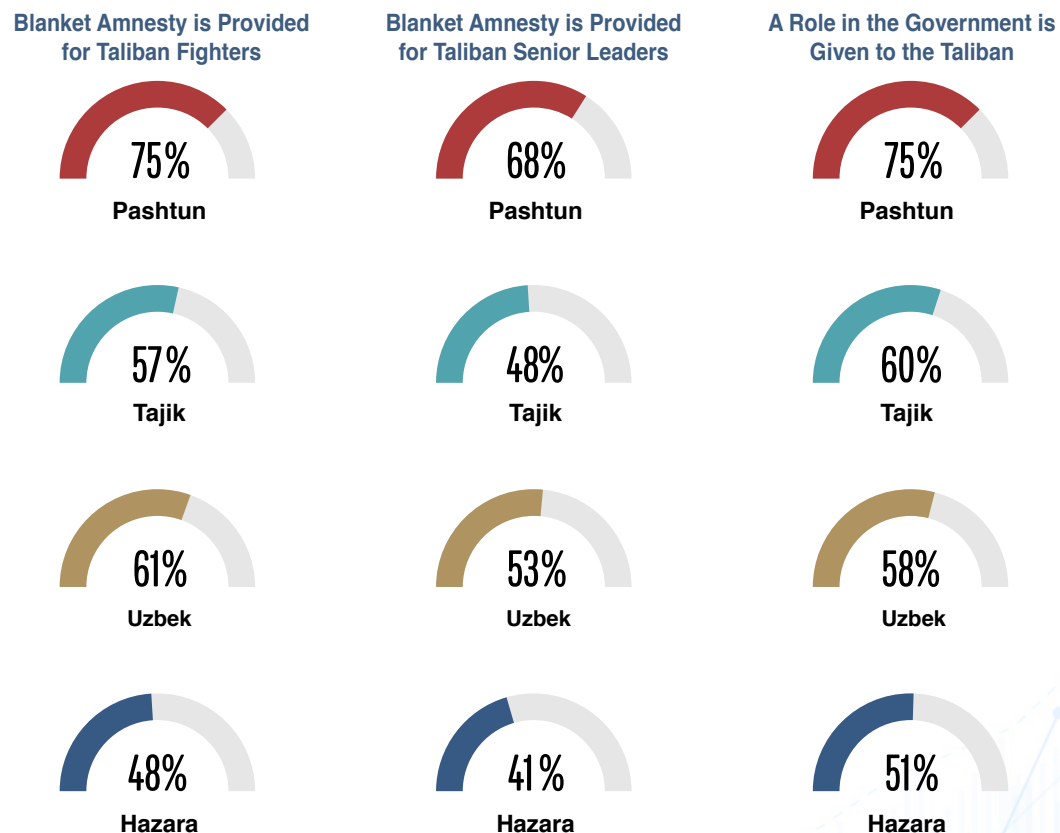
The results point out that the Pashtuns are the most supportive of the Taliban. About 75% of the Pashtun respondents supported that the peace agreement between the Afghan government and the Taliban would include the condition of amnesty for Taliban fighters, and supported giving the Taliban a role in the government. More than 66% of the Pashtuns agreed to pardon Taliban leaders as a condition in the peace agreement.

On the other hand, the rest of the ethnicities were less supportive of the Taliban movement, particularly the Hazaras. About 48% of the Hazaras supported that the peace agreement would include a condition of amnesty for Taliban fighters. About 41% of them agreed to pardon Taliban leaders, and about 50% agreed to giving the Taliban a role in the government as a condition in the peace agreement.

These results indicate that a large percentage of various ethnicities such as Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras are less supportive of the Taliban movement, which will pose challenges to the Taliban over time when heading the state.

## Ethnic Variances

### Percentage of the Afghans' support for a peace deal under the following conditions per ethnicity (2021)



**Source:** Calculated by the researcher through the analysis of “The Asia Foundation” Survey

## Provincial variances in supporting the Taliban

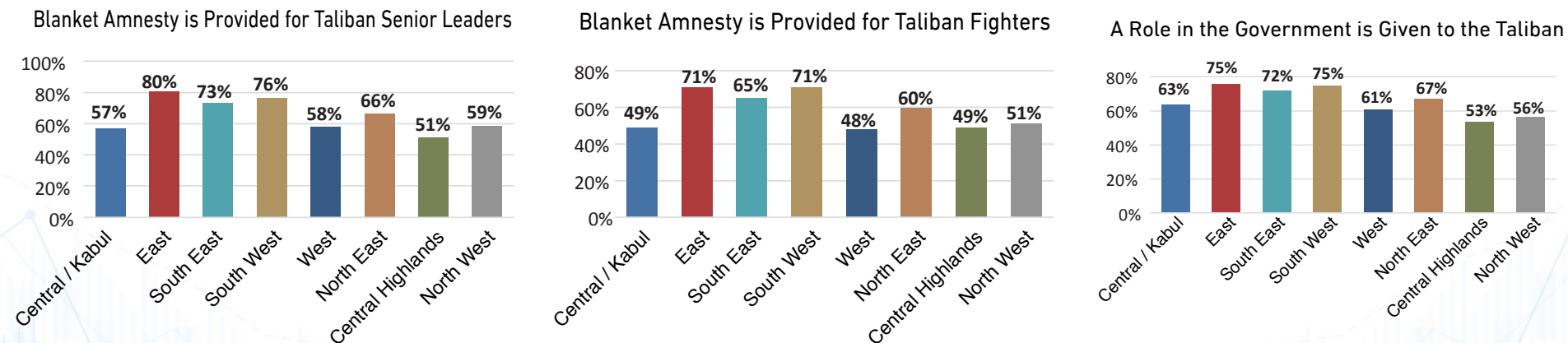
There are also remarkable geographic disparities regarding the support for the Taliban. Notably, the East and Southwest were more supportive of the peace agreement including amnesty for Taliban fighters, and leaders and giving the Taliban a role in the government. However, Kabul, the West, the Central highlands, and the Northwest were less supportive of these conditions.

According to the results of the survey, about 80% of the Eastern

population supported an amnesty for Taliban fighters, while this percentage drops significantly among the population of the Center/Kabul and the people of the Central highlands, reaching 57% and 51% respectively. Furthermore, 71% of the residents of the East and Southwest supported amnesty for Taliban leaders, while this percentage reaches 49% among the residents of the Center/Kabul and the residents of the Central highlands, and 48% among the Western population.

### Provincial Variances

#### Percentage of the Afghans' support for a peace deal under the following conditions per provinces (2021)



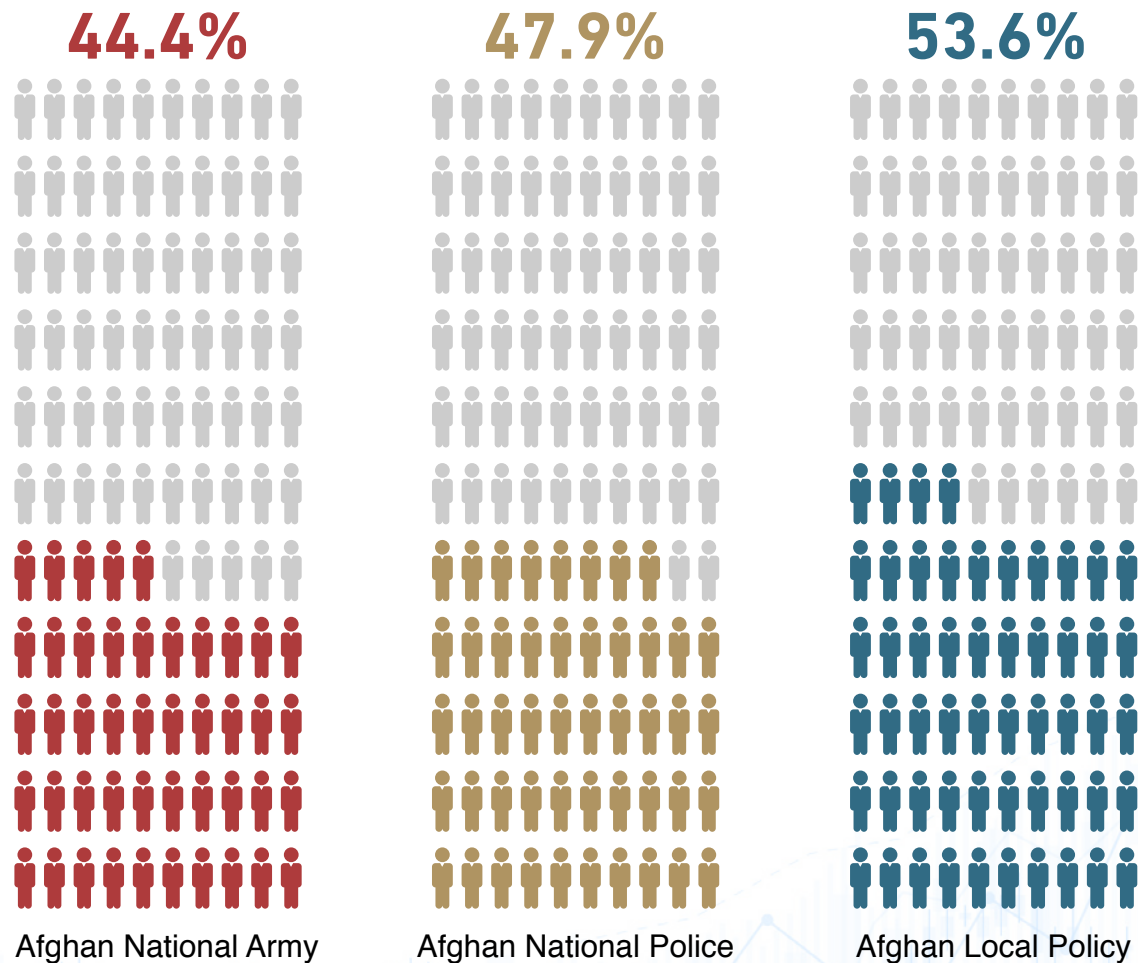
**Source:** Calculated by the researcher through the analysis of “The Asia Foundation” Survey

### Doubts regarding the capabilities of security institutions

The results of the survey pointed out suspicions among a significant percentage of Afghans regarding the ability of security institutions to provide security and maintain stability without resorting to foreign financial assistance. 44.4% of the respondents believed that the Afghan army would not be able to survive without foreign financial aid, and 47.9% believed that the Afghan National Police would not stand without financial aid. Additionally, 53.6% of the Afghans believed that the Afghan Local Police would not be able to provide security without foreign financial assistance.



### Percentage of Afghans who lack confidence in the ability of security institutions to provide adequate security without foreign financial assistance



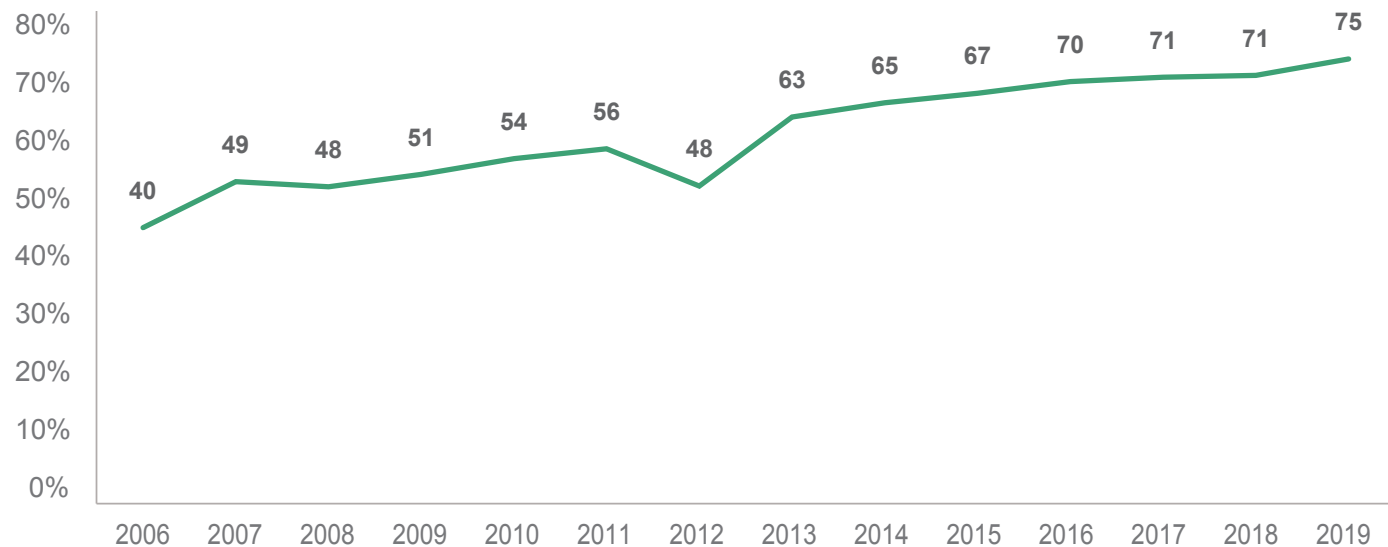
**Source:** Calculated by the researcher through the analysis of “The Asia Foundation” Survey

## Escalating security concerns among Afghans

There were increasing concerns among Afghans regarding their personal security. In 2006, 40% of Afghans were concerned

about their personal security and the safety of their families. This percentage increased significantly to reach 75% in 2019.

### Fear for personal safety (2006 – 2019)



**Source:** The Asia Foundation, 2019, “A Survey of the Afghan People”.

**In conclusion, these indicators confirm that the Afghan society was in one way or another relatively prepared for the return of the Taliban. The society was already suffering from the disintegrating living, economic, social and security conditions. On the other hand, the incongruity of the Afghan society must be emphasized. The educated Afghan youth are less supportive of the Taliban. Additionally, there are generational, ethnic and geographical disparities, which impact their support or rejections of the Taliban. This will impose several challenges before the Taliban in the coming period.**

