



Opinion Analysis

November 3, 2010

Office of Research

Global Opinion in Perspective

Afghans See Situation for Women Improving

Observers have questioned whether the U.S. mission in Afghanistan has improved the lives of local women. Most Afghans – especially women – say the situation for women has improved, including significant numbers who say they have seen improvements over the past year. Positive change for women does not mean social or cultural norms have been abandoned. Both Afghan men and women see men as the primary decision-makers when it comes to work, education and other life decisions for women. This suggests that women and men are key to future progress on “women’s issues” in Afghanistan.

According to an August 2010 Office of Opinion Research survey, three-quarters of Afghans (74%) think that the situation for women in Afghanistan is better today than under the Taliban. A majority (58%) think that the situation has improved since last year, while a quarter (28%) believe it has remained the same (Figure 1). Women are particularly upbeat: 83 percent think the situation is better today than under the Taliban.

Women’s Education Valued

A majority of Afghans (69%) agree that equal resources should be spent for girls’ and boys’ education. While women are more supportive (75%), a majority of men (64%)

also back equal resources for girls’ and boys’ education.

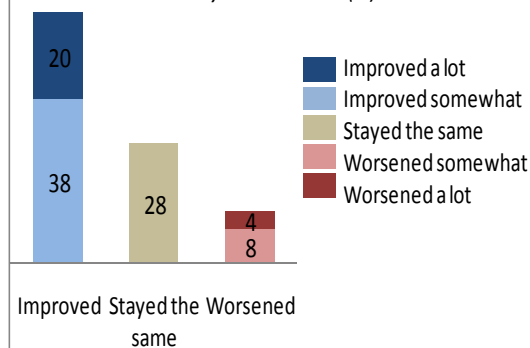
When asked the benefits of a girl’s education, 4-in-10 Afghans say it primarily benefits Afghan society (“educated women will help the country,” 17%; “Afghan society needs girls’ education,” 22%). One-in-five value girls’ education for its own sake (“it will help women become smart,” 17%), and another 1-in-5 say it primarily benefits a girl’s family financially (22%).

Afghans Support Women in the Workplace

Afghans are willing to extend opportunities to adult women as well: three-quarters support women working outside the home (Figure 2),

Figure 1: Afghans See Situation of Women Improved in Past Year

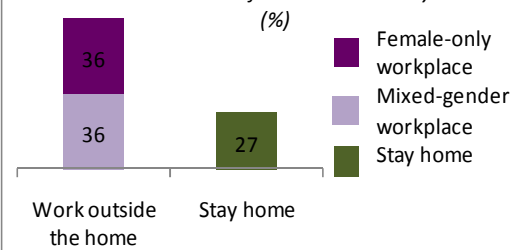
Q: Compared to a year ago, would you say the situation for women in Afghanistan has improved, worsened, or stayed the same? (%)



Source: Office of Opinion Research Survey, Aug. 2010

Figure 2: Afghans Support Women Working Outside the Home

Q: Some people say that women should be allowed to work outside the home in female-only workplaces. Some people say that women should be allowed to work outside the home in mixed-gender workplaces. Others say women should only stay home and tend the household. Which of these is closer to your view? (%)



Source: Office of Opinion Research Survey, Aug. 2010

This report is based on an Office of Opinion Research commissioned survey in Afghanistan. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with a nationally representative sample of 4,607 adults (aged 15+) July 29-August 4, 2010. Margin of error is +/-5%. See page 3 for details about the methodology. M-123-10

This publication summarizes and interprets recent polling data that does not reflect the views of the U.S Government.

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either in a female-only workplace (36%) or in a mixed-gender workplace (36%). However, a quarter (27%) say women should stay home and tend to the household. Men are more likely than women to think women should stay home (32% versus 20%), but a majority of men (67%) still support women in the workplace.

Men Are Key Household Decision-Makers

Despite support for female education and employment, men remain the primary decision-makers in Afghan households. Majorities say that men decide what household items are bought (81%), what clothes are bought (73%), where children go to school (82%), and whether children are sick enough to go for treatment (67%). Majorities of both men (79%) and women (69%) say that men even decide when a woman is sick enough for medical treatment. However, a majority of Afghans say women decide what food is cooked each day (70%).

Views Vary Widely on Appropriate Punishments for Wives

When asked what punishment, if any, is appropriate for wives who transgress beyond traditional boundaries, about a fifth of Afghans decline to respond. Those who do respond offer a wide range of repercussions, ranging from no punishment at all to dissolution of the marriage for transgressions such as unsatisfactory housework or child care or attending a gathering without a husband's permission (Appendix Table).

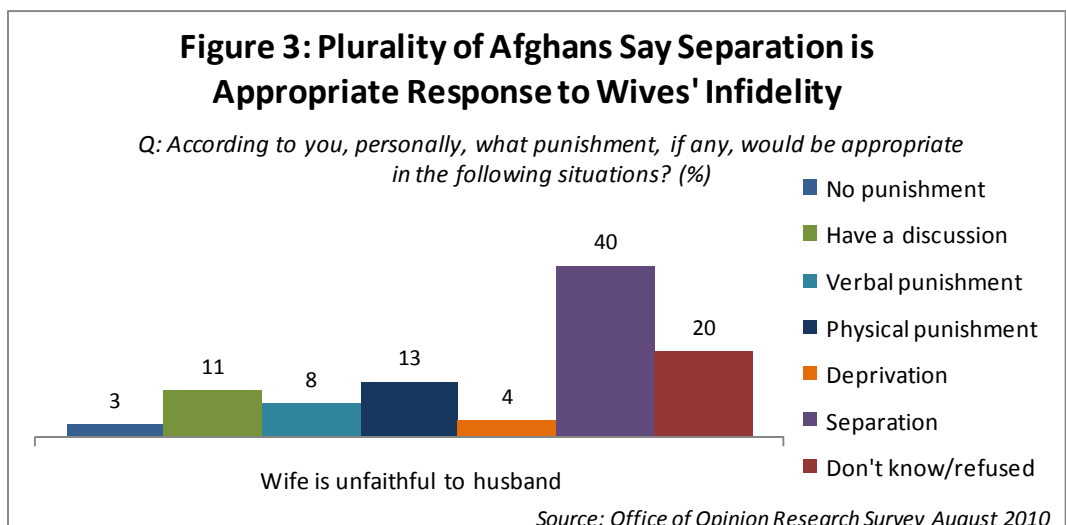
When a wife disobeys her husband, a fifth of Afghans volunteer physical violence as the appropriate punishment.

While Afghans views vary widely on the appropriate response to certain transgressions, infidelity elicits a more uniform reaction: separation. While separation has serious consequences for Afghan women, it is notable that the most socially acceptable response is not corporal punishment or death (Figure 3). This suggests that Taliban insistence on draconian punishment for infidelity does not reflect the standards of justice of most Afghans.

Justice for Women a Family Affair – Except in Western Afghanistan

When domestic abuse occurs, most Afghans say women should turn to family members—not outsiders—for help. About a third (36%) say that a woman should go to her husband's family if she is threatened or mistreated by a male relative. Another third (33%) say that she should go to her own family for help. Only a fifth say she should go to an outside authority figure like a tribal elder (11%), government official (6%), or mullah (3%). Even when women are the victims of crimes or a party to local disputes, most Afghans still say they should take their problem to relatives, not outside authorities (Appendix Figure).

Western Afghans (residents of Nimroz, Herat, Badghis, and Farah – Map in Appendix) are



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far more supportive of women's access to justice than Afghans in other regions. Half (48%) believe a woman should go to an outside authority for help if property is stolen

from her, and a plurality (37%) say she should go to an outside authority if a male relative threatens or mistreats her.

Southern Afghans: Women's Lives Were *Better* Under the Taliban

Southern Afghans (those in Zabul, Helmand and Kandahar – Map in Appendix) are less supportive than other Afghans of women's rights. A majority (62%) of Southerners – even Southern women (56%) – believe the situation for women in Afghanistan was *better under the Taliban* than it is today. Residents have more mixed views of the past year – 4-in-10 (38%) don't see any change in the situation for women, while about a third (36%) think the situation for has worsened and a quarter (25%) think it has improved.

Southern Afghans are less supportive of equal resources for girls' and boys' education (56%) and women working outside the home (52%) than Afghans nationwide. Southern women are somewhat more likely than Southern men to support equal resources for education (64% of women, 53% of men) and allowing women to work outside the home (66% of women, 46% of men). Overall, Southerners are more likely than Afghans elsewhere to see men as the primary decision-makers in all facets of life, even decisions on what foods are cooked each day.

Views on justice for women also stand apart in the South. Southerners – both men and women – are more likely to say women should be punished if they disobey their husbands (74% versus 56% in the rest of the country). Southern Afghans (36%) are more likely than Afghans elsewhere (21%) to advocate physical violence for a wife who disobeys her husband. At the same time, they are *less* likely to think that a wife's infidelity should result in separation (33% versus 40%). More in the South say that infidelity should be dealt with through corporal punishment (19% versus 13%). This may reflect the heightened consequences of being a woman alone in the South, where security and social mores are even more restrictive of women's movement than they are nationwide. Afghans in the South are also less likely than those elsewhere to back outside justice for women. Instead, a plurality of Southern Afghans (43%) see a woman's own family as her source of justice when she is mistreated by male relatives.

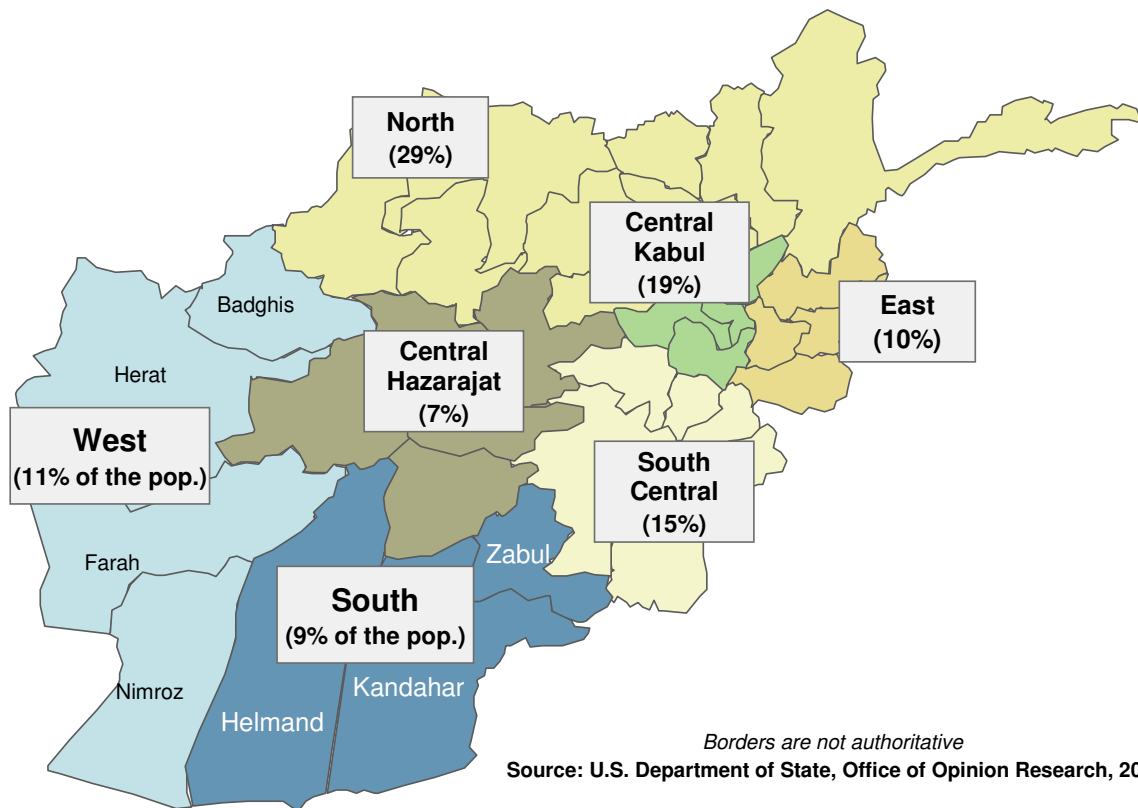
How This Poll Was Conducted

A reputable Afghan polling firm conducted face-to-face interviews for the Office of Opinion Research July 29 – August 4, 2010. The sample size was 4,607 adults age 15 and over. Survey questions were prepared by the Office of Opinion Research. The questionnaire was translated by the contractor and reviewed by OPN staff. Afghan nationals conduct the actual interviews: men interview men and women interview women.

In theory, 19 times out of 20, results from samples of this size will differ by no more than about five percentage points in either direction from what would be found if it were possible to interview every adult in Afghanistan. In addition to sampling error, the practical difficulties of conducting a survey of public opinion may introduce other sources of error into the results. Results for subgroups of the population will have higher margins of error.

Additional information on the methodology of the survey may be obtained from the analyst.

Appendix: Map of Seven Afghan Regions



Appendix Table: Q: According to you personally, what punishment, if any, would be appropriate in the following situations... (%)

	No punishment	Have a discussion	Verbal punishment	Physical punishment	Deprivation	Separation	Don't know/refused
A wife does not complete her household work satisfactorily	13	26	21	14	2	3	17
A wife attends a gathering outside the home without her husband's permission	6	19	21	20	9	6	16
A wife disobeys her husband	3	21	21	21	6	8	17
A wife does not care for the children satisfactorily	5	31	19	15	5	4	19
A wife is unfaithful to her husband	3	11	8	13	4	40	20

Source: Office of Opinion Research Survey August 2010

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