

Afghanistan Transition and Kabul University:

Winning Minds, Losing Hearts



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

Field assessment: Kabul City, Afghanistan, April – May 2011

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About The International Council on Security and Development

The International Council on Security and Development (ICOS) is an international policy think tank working to combine grassroots research and policy innovation at the intersections of security, development, counter-narcotics and public health issues.

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.

About ICOS Afghanistan

Between 2005 and January 2011, ICOS released 36 reports related to Afghanistan, along with numerous academic articles, Op-Eds, policy papers and other publications.

ICOS Fieldwork Experience

The International Council on Security and Development has been conducting Cultural Analysis studies in conflict zones since 2007. In this time, ICOS has carried 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, the International Council on Security and Development (ICOS) carried out interviews with 125 male students at Kabul University. The study was conducted as an extension of a wider phase of cultural analysis in southern and northern Afghanistan, interviewing 1300 men (excluding Kabul University).

Kabul University was chosen as it is one of the country's leading educational centres and has been home in the past to many of Afghanistan's most prominent military and political leaders. It is one of the most likely focal points for a new generation of Afghan leaders to emerge and the opinions and beliefs of its students could be essential to understanding the country's future.

This report was an initial pilot study. It is anticipated that it will be expanded to include universities in other parts of the country and to include female students.

Executive Summary

Young Afghans have a vital role to play as the international community begins reducing its military and civilian presence in Afghanistan and students at Kabul University are likely to be at the forefront of their generation and can be key players in a successful and durable transition.

There is support for international military operations and for the transition from the students interviewed at Kabul University, but although the interviewees in this important group of young Afghans are aligned with the international community's political and security goals, many of them are ambivalent or hostile towards its actions. The international mission has won their minds but not their hearts.

Low levels of ethnic tensions, support for democracy and women's rights among those questioned are positive signs that this generation can play a positive role in the future of Afghanistan.

Almost sixty percent of Kabul university students interviewed believe that an event like those recently seen in Egypt and Tunisia – the 'Arab Spring' - could happen in Afghanistan. The 'youth bulge' in Afghanistan, with 27% of the total population aged between 15 and 29, means an 'Afghan Spring' could have significant impact on the country.

The death of Osama bin Laden adds a new dynamic at the overarching level of the conflict. Some Kabul University students interviewed believe that Osama bin Laden's death is bad news and many believe that it does not mean the end of al Qaeda. Respondents' opinions were mixed on the effect his death will have on the Taliban; a majority think it will hurt them, but significant numbers think it will have no effect.

Widespread lack of knowledge of the 9/11 attacks even among this educated cohort shows that the international community still has much work to do in explaining its presence in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, the international community is considered by those interviewed the 'least worst option': the Taliban and their ideology are rejected by most Kabul University students interviewed.

Kabul University: A Cradle of Change in Afghanistan

Afghanistan's Youth Bulge

Afghanistan's population is extremely young, with a noted 'youth bulge'. This is defined as a proportion of young adults (from age 15 to 30) to the overall adult population higher than 30 to 40%. In Afghanistan, an estimated 42% of the population is aged 15 or under: 27% are aged 15-29. By contrast, only 17% of the population is over 40 years of age. The beliefs and attitudes of the young generation are therefore critical to the country's long-term direction – in a few years they will make up an overwhelming proportion of the adult population.

Kabul University: A History of Political Change

Afghanistan's education system is lacking in resources and is subject to the poor governance that afflicts other sectors. Despite these challenges, its universities still have a clear role as centres of academic, political and ideological ferment. This position reflects a decades-long history of being at the forefront of change (both good and bad) in Afghanistan. As the largest and most cosmopolitan university in the country, Kabul University has a unique significance for the future of the country.

Despite the importance of Kabul University to Afghanistan's history and future, there is almost no publicly available academic research on the university's current political scene¹.

Kabul University was established in 1931 by King Nadir Shah, who pursued a cautious and gradual process of reform, unlike the aggressive modernisation which his predecessor Amunallah Khan had attempted (and which had provoked a conservative backlash which forced Khan into exile). Like other Afghan rulers between the 1940s and 1970s, Nadir Shah prioritised education as a means of national modernisation.

Reflecting Afghanistan's growing international profile, Kabul University was established with German aid money, and other Western states sponsored different faculties. The university quickly became one of the leading educational hubs in the region, embodying Afghanistan's brief moment of leftist and secularist thinking, and was widely known for its medical school amongst others.

¹ A notable exception being: Giustozzi, A (2010) *Between Patronage and Rebellion: Student Politics in Afghanistan* Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit. Available at: <http://www.areu.org.af/Uploads/EditionPdfs/1004E-Between%20Patronage%20and%20Rebellion%20-%20Student%20Politics%20in%20Afghanistan%20BP%202010.pdf>

Different leftist factions – from social democrats to Maoists – as well as Islamist groups were active on the campus, despite opposition from political leaders. The dominance of different groups ebbed and flowed according to “ideological fashion”, but in many cases the new political groups “represented a generational break with the political and social attitudes of earlier political groups”². Tension between leftists and Islamists became one of the defining dynamics of student politics in the university.

A Training Ground for Afghanistan’s Leaders

It was in this ideological melting pot that many of Afghanistan’s future powerbrokers were first seriously exposed to political life. Anti-Taliban hero Ahmad Shah Massoud studied engineering there in the early 1970s. He joined the student wing of the Jamiat-i-Islami party, which was led by future President Burhanuddin Rabbani and which later formed the core of the Northern Alliance. Rabbani himself had been a student of Islamic Law and Theology at the university and later served as a professor there.

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the warlord and head of Hezb-i-Islami, was also involved in the Jamiat’s student wing, despite being in prison for his role in the murder of a student from a rival (Maoist) group. The ideological disputes between Hekmatyar’s radical faction and Rabbani’s moderates soon caused a split in the university-led movement, foreshadowing the first phase of the civil war.

Conflict and Decay – The University During the Wars

During the war in the 1980s the university became stifled by the Communist government, which feared internal radicalism and instability while it struggled to defeat the mujahideen. Dozens of staff members were executed and many more fled the country. With the fall of the government of President Najibullah (himself a Kabul University alumnus) in 1992, the university fell victim to the civil war between former mujahideen commanders. The facilities were largely destroyed in the bitter street fighting throughout Kabul.

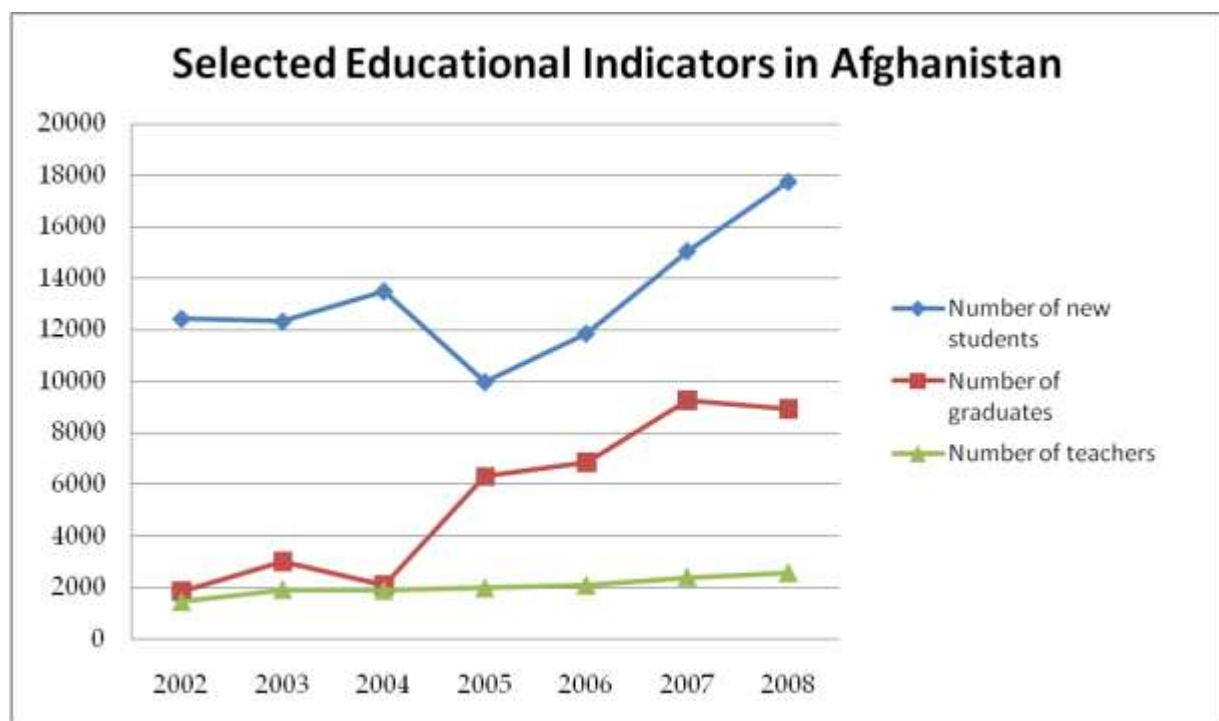
Under the Taliban, between 1996 and 2001, the university remained run-down and dilapidated. Young women, who had made up a considerable proportion of university students even into the 1990s, were completely barred from education. The clerical movement’s insistence on the Quran as the basis for all education reduced the ability of

² Giustozzi, A (2010) *Between Patronage and Rebellion: Student Politics in Afghanistan* Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit. Available at: <http://www.areu.org.af/Uploads/EditionPdfs/1004E-Between%20Patronage%20and%20Rebellion%20-%20Student%20Politics%20in%20Afghanistan%20BP%202010.pdf>

the university to function effectively. Subjects which the Taliban deemed un-Islamic – such as sculpture and music – were banned. The liberation of Kabul in November 2001 allowed life to return to Kabul University. However, restoring the ruined campus would require a vast amount of work.

Rebuilding the Campus: Kabul University Today

Nine-and-a-half years after the fall of the Taliban, there has been great progress in restoring Afghanistan's education sector. The number of students in higher education across the country has increased from 22,717 in 2002 to 56,451 in 2008, the last year for which figures are available.



Kabul University is now attended by almost 9660 students, of which around 2336 (24%) are women. There are now fifteen faculties operating, from Computer Science and Pharmacy to Fine Arts and Islamic Studies.

³ Source: Central Statistics Office. <http://www.cso.gov.af/demography/education.html>

Kabul University Key Facts⁴

- **Total students:** 9660 (approximate)
- **Female students:** 2336
- **Ethnic breakdown of students (approximate)⁵:** 40% Pashtun; 30% Tajik; 15% Hazara; 10% Uzbek; 5% other
- **Total faculty members:** 597
- **Female faculty members:** 122
- **Faculties:** Agriculture, Computer Science, Economics, Engineering, Fine Arts, Geography, Islamic Studies, Journalism, Language and Literature, Law, Pharmacy, Psychology, Social Science, Veterinary Medicine

International assistance has been substantial and has come from a wide range of donors. For instance, in 2007 Iran provided \$800,000 to the Faculty of Dentistry and 25,000 books to the university's library. This reflects a wider Iranian cultural influence, since many students and lecturers are fluent in Dari, which is very similar to Farsi. In 2010 Pakistan funded the construction of the \$10 million Allama Iqbal Faculty of Arts, with 28 class-rooms, a library, two computer labs, and its own water and electricity supply.

Meanwhile a number of Western donors have committed funds and technical assistance to the university. USAID has led programs to renovate dormitories for both men and women. Relationships with other universities and foreign governments have allowed Kabul University to develop its capabilities.

Several research centres have been set up with the assistance of outside partners, such as the National Legal Training Center (funded by Italy) and the National Center for Policy Research (funded by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung) and the Center for Policy and Human Development (established with the help of the UN Development Programme)⁶.

⁴ Source: Kabul University website. <http://ku.edu.af/en/>

⁵ Based on interviews with Kabul University students.

⁶ Suhrke, A., et al (2008) *Applied Social Science Research in Afghanistan: An Overview of the Institutional Landscape* Chr. Michelsen Institute Report. Available at: <http://www.cmi.no/publications/file/3158-applied-social-science-research-in-afghanistan.pdf>

The above list provides only a few examples of the international assistance which has been provided to Kabul University. Donors and partners from all over the world have contributed financial and technical support to the University.

However, serious challenges remain. Infrastructure remains poor and the facilities remain limited, partly due to the boom in enrolment since the fall of the Taliban. The university itself acknowledges the challenges which it faces, including “lack of enough required infra structure such as classrooms, labs, libraries and lack of qualified teaching staff which has been the result of many years of war and destruction”⁷.

Governance of the university is improving under the current Chancellor, Hamidullah Amin. A graduate of Durham University in Britain, who left Afghanistan in 1988 as the Communist government began to crumble, he returned to Kabul after the fall of the Taliban to help rebuild the country’s shattered education sector.

Political Activity at Kabul University

Today, political debate remains important in Kabul University. However, despite the relatively open climate of post-2001 Afghanistan, one analyst notes that due to a ban on political activity, there is “no legitimate space to “learn politics” at Kabul University”⁸.

Self-proclaimed members of the Taliban’s movement at Kabul University have purported that “hundreds” of their fellow students are part of the network, although its secretive nature makes it difficult to identify the full extent of the pro-Taliban presence on campus⁹. Current Kabul University students interviewed are aware of the rumours but believe that it is almost impossible to get concrete information on the subject.

⁷ Source: Kabul University website. Available at: <http://ku.edu.af/en/Page/751>

⁸ Giustozzi, A (2010)

⁹ ‘Afghanistan: Secret Taleban cells spread lessons of jihad in Kabul University’ *The Times*, May 27 2008. Available at: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article4009843.ece>

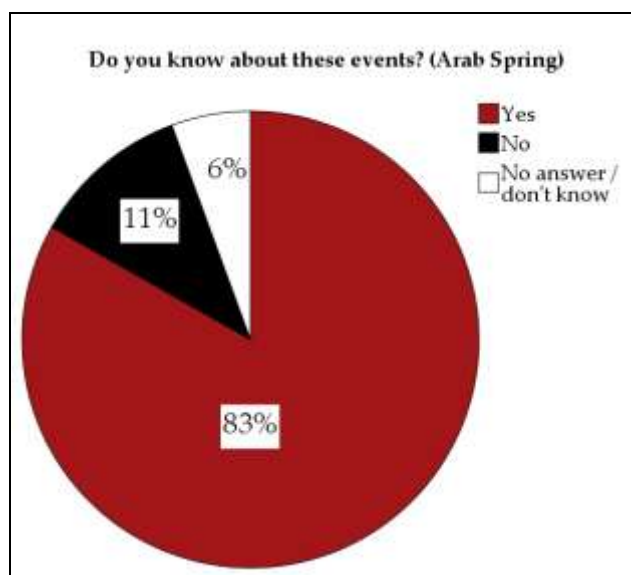
Key Findings and Analysis

1. An Afghan Spring?

Awareness and Support of the Arab Spring at Kabul University

The ongoing wave of popular demonstrations in the Arab world is widely known amongst Kabul University students interviewed. When read the following description of the demonstrations, 83% state that they are aware of the events.

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.



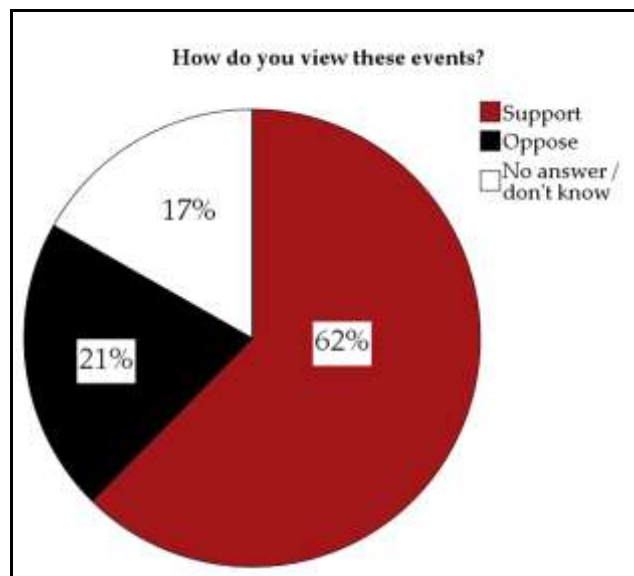
This knowledge is significant in itself. The example of the demonstrations in Tunisia helped to inspire events in Egypt, which in turn led to a series of protests (in Yemen, Bahrain, Libya, Syria, Oman, and elsewhere) directly influenced by the toppling of the regimes of Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak.

The deep-rooted conditions which caused the Arab protests are also present in Afghanistan. There is serious poverty, with 36% of the population below the poverty line. According to the Afghan government, 67% of the population participates in the labour force: however, the employment market is highly unstable, and 90% of the jobs are classified as vulnerable employment that does not provide stable or secure income.

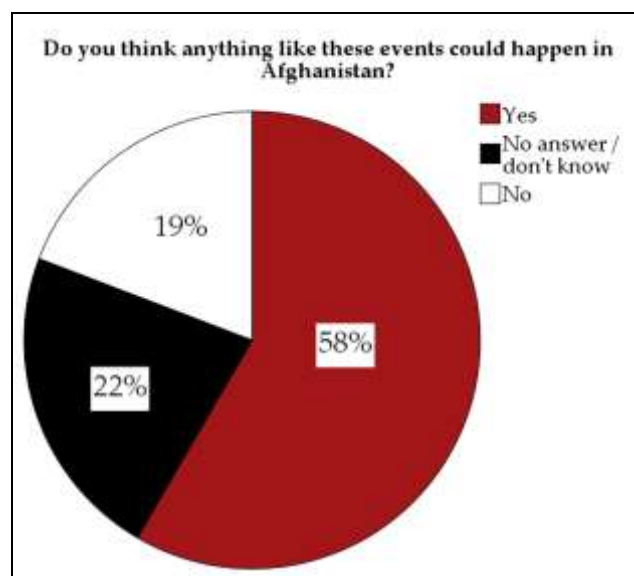
"Although Afghans are not Arabs, and realities are different here politically, economically and socially, Afghans have similar grievances that have come about because of the rampant corruption in the government, increasing violence, lack of job opportunities, nepotism, etc."

Unemployed Afghan university graduate, cited in 'Arab Revolutions Inspire Afghan Youth', NPR, March 31 2011¹⁰

Sixty-two percent of student interviewees support the Arab demonstrations. A fifth oppose the events (21%), whilst 17% have no answer.



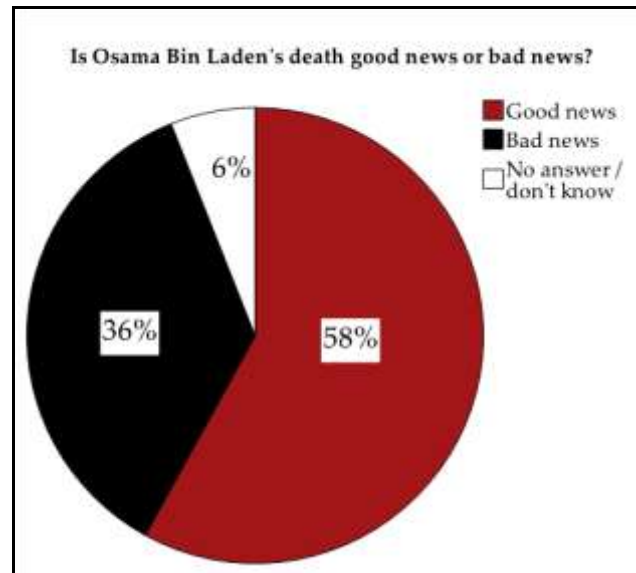
Almost 60% believe that similar events could happen in Afghanistan.



¹⁰ Available at: <http://www.npr.org/2011/03/31/134982528/arab-revolutions-inspire-afghan-youth?ft=1&f=1004>

2. Mixed Feelings on the Death of Osama Bin Laden

Almost all Kabul University students interviewed are aware of the death of Osama bin Laden on 2 May 2011. Fifty-eight percent of respondents think his death is good news, but more than a third believe it is 'bad news'.



"Although Osama was involved in destroying Afghanistan we are not happy he was killed by non-Muslims; he should have been put on trial in an Islamic court."

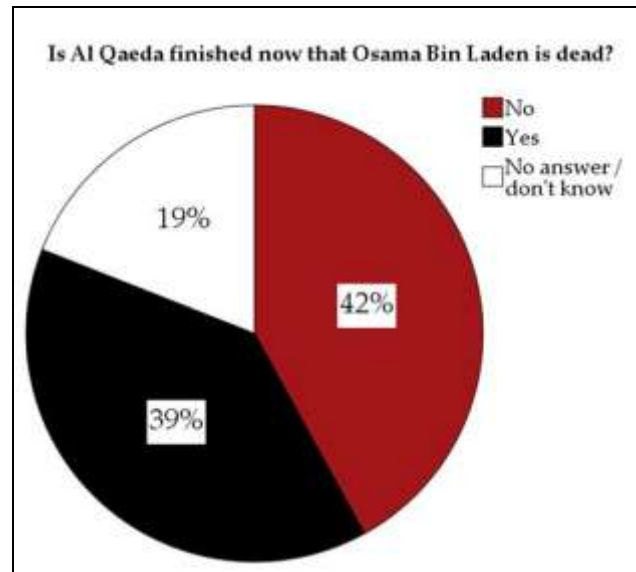
Kabul University student, 25

"The killing of Osama bin Laden is great news as he killed our leader Ahmad Shah Masoud."

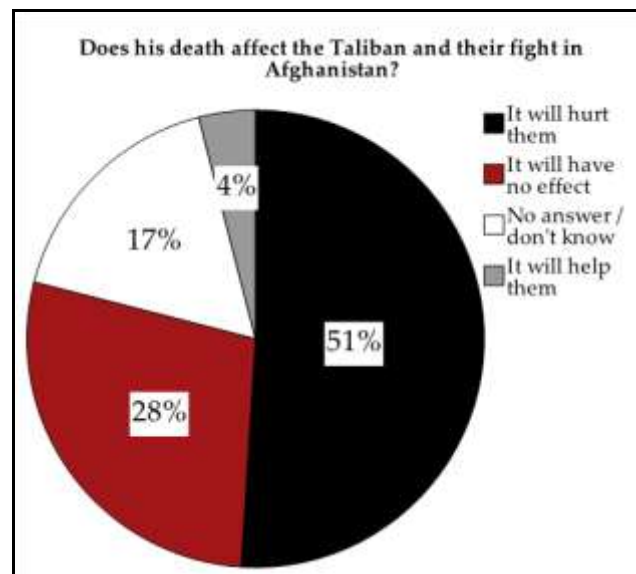
19-year old man from Panjshir

Divided Opinions on the Impact of Bin Laden's Death

Forty-two percent of students interviewed at Kabul University think that al Qaeda is not finished just because its founder is dead and 39% think that it is.



Fifty-one percent think that Bin Laden's death will hurt the Taliban, 28% think it will have no effect and another 17% did not answer or do not know.

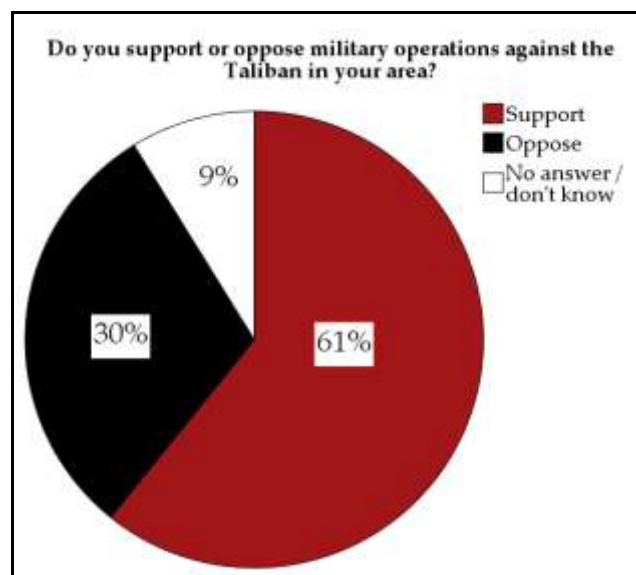


3. Good News: Alignment with International Interests and Hostility to the Taliban

Kabul University students interviewed are broadly aligned with both the security and political goals of the international community: they are hostile to the Taliban and supportive of democracy and women's rights. These attitudes represent a clear opportunity to be seized by the international community for a successful transition.

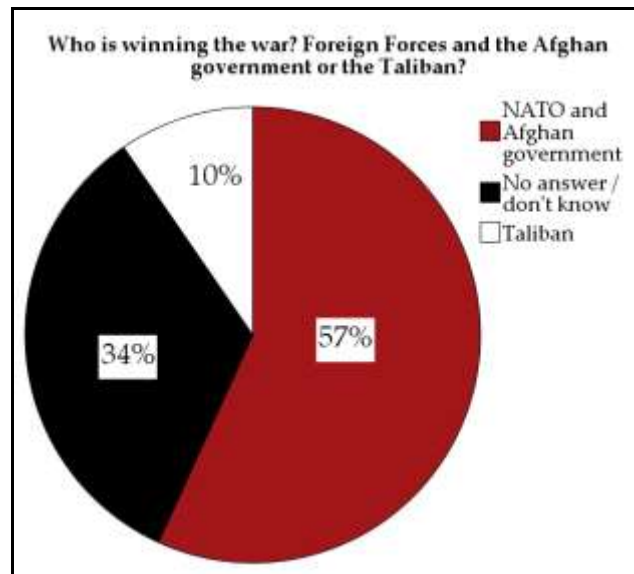
Alignment with International Security Interests

Sixty-one percent of Kabul University interviewees support the military campaign against the insurgency.



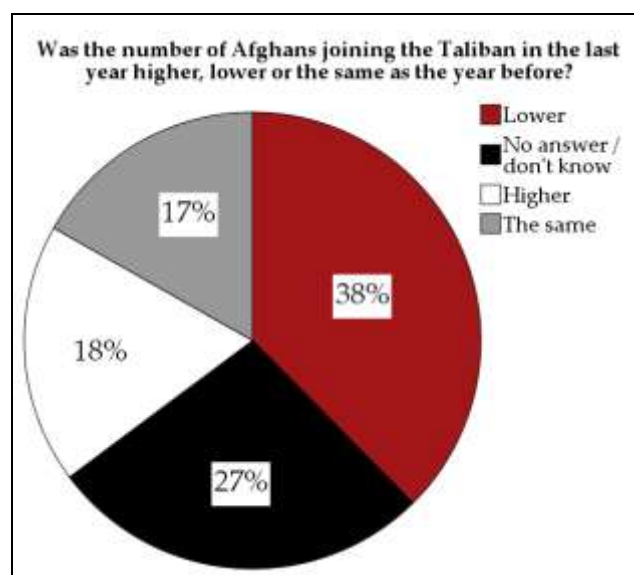
Although this support is not unequivocal by any means, it does suggest that NATO-ISAF military operations are not in themselves opposed by young Afghans interviewed, and that if conducted appropriately, support for these operations could gain greater traction among a key constituency.

Fifty-seven percent of those interviewed believe that foreign and Afghan forces are currently winning the war and just 10% believe that the Taliban currently have the advantage.



As senior US officials have publicly acknowledged, the counterinsurgency in Afghanistan is, even more than a military conflict, a “war of perceptions”¹¹.

Eighteen percent of students interviewed believe that the number of recruits joining the Taliban has increased over the past year, while 38% believe that it has decreased and 17% think that the number of recruits had stayed the same.

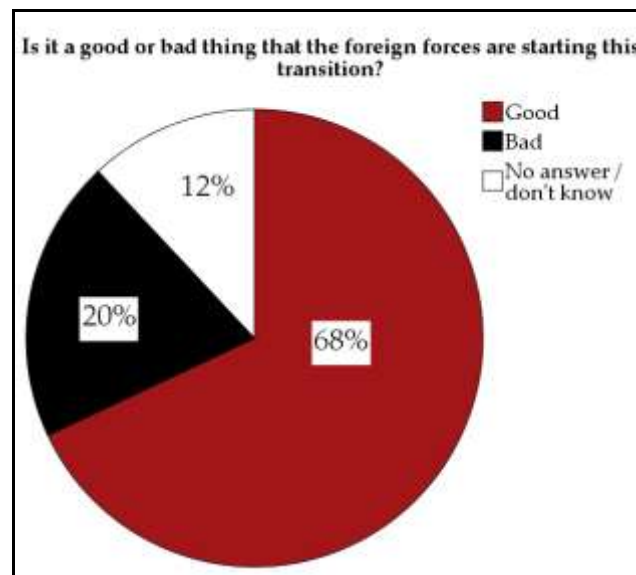


¹¹ 'Afghanistan Conflict an 'information war' BBC News 11 February 2010. Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8511477.stm>

Support for Transition Process

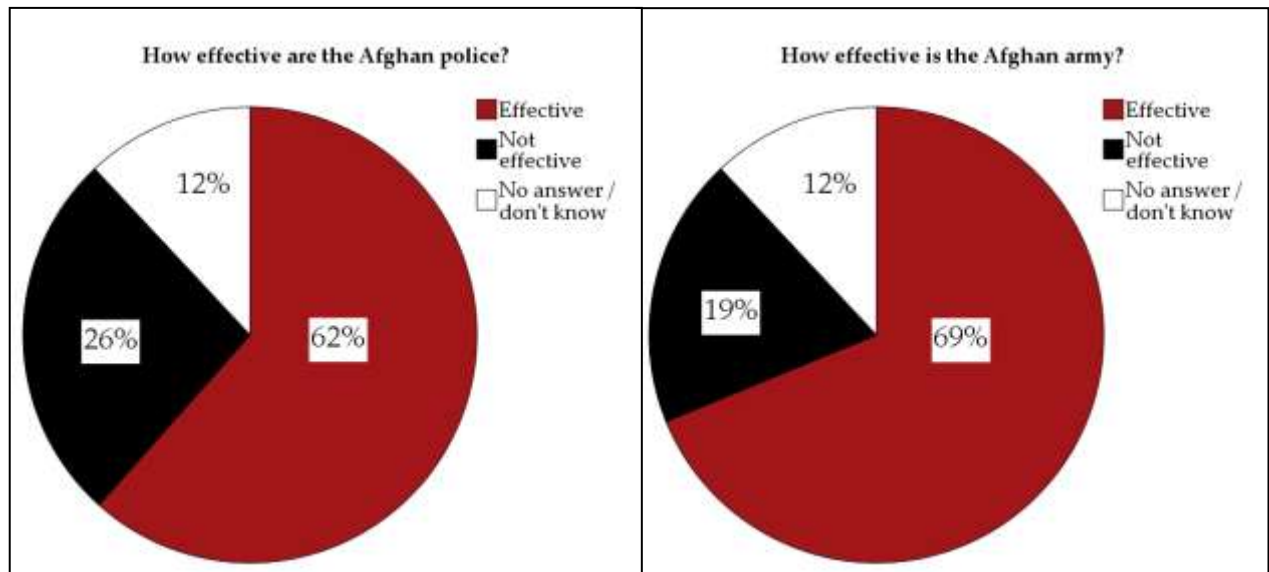
Strong support is expressed by respondents for the transition process. Interviewees were read the following description of transition - *Transition involves the NATO forces gradually handing over responsibility for security to the Afghan police and army* – and asked for their opinion. A clear majority of 68% of interviewees support the transition process.

Although this may be attributable to a desire to see foreign forces leave as soon as possible, it may also reflect confidence in the ability of Afghan forces to take responsibility for security.

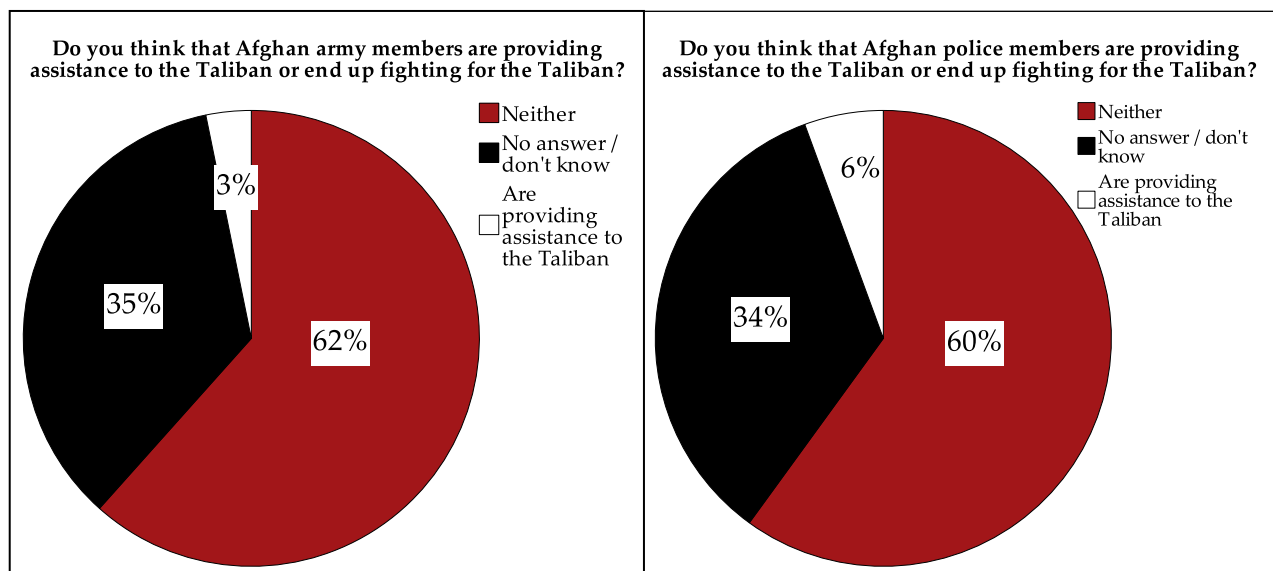


Confidence in Afghan Security Forces

Two-thirds of young men interviewed (69%) believe that the Afghan army is effective and 62% think the same of the police.



Only 3% of interviewees believe that army is assisting the Taliban and only 6% think that police units are assisting the Taliban.

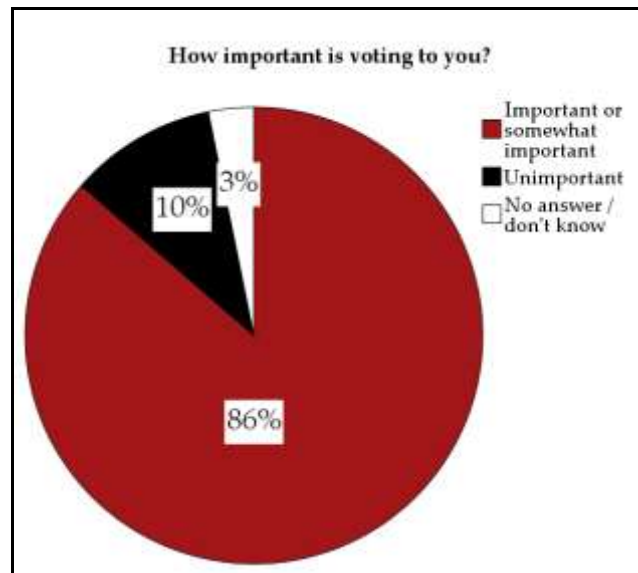


These figures demonstrate that the young Afghan men interviewed are aligned with international security interests showing support for operations against the Taliban, support for transition, and confidence in the ability of Afghan forces to maintain security after the transition.

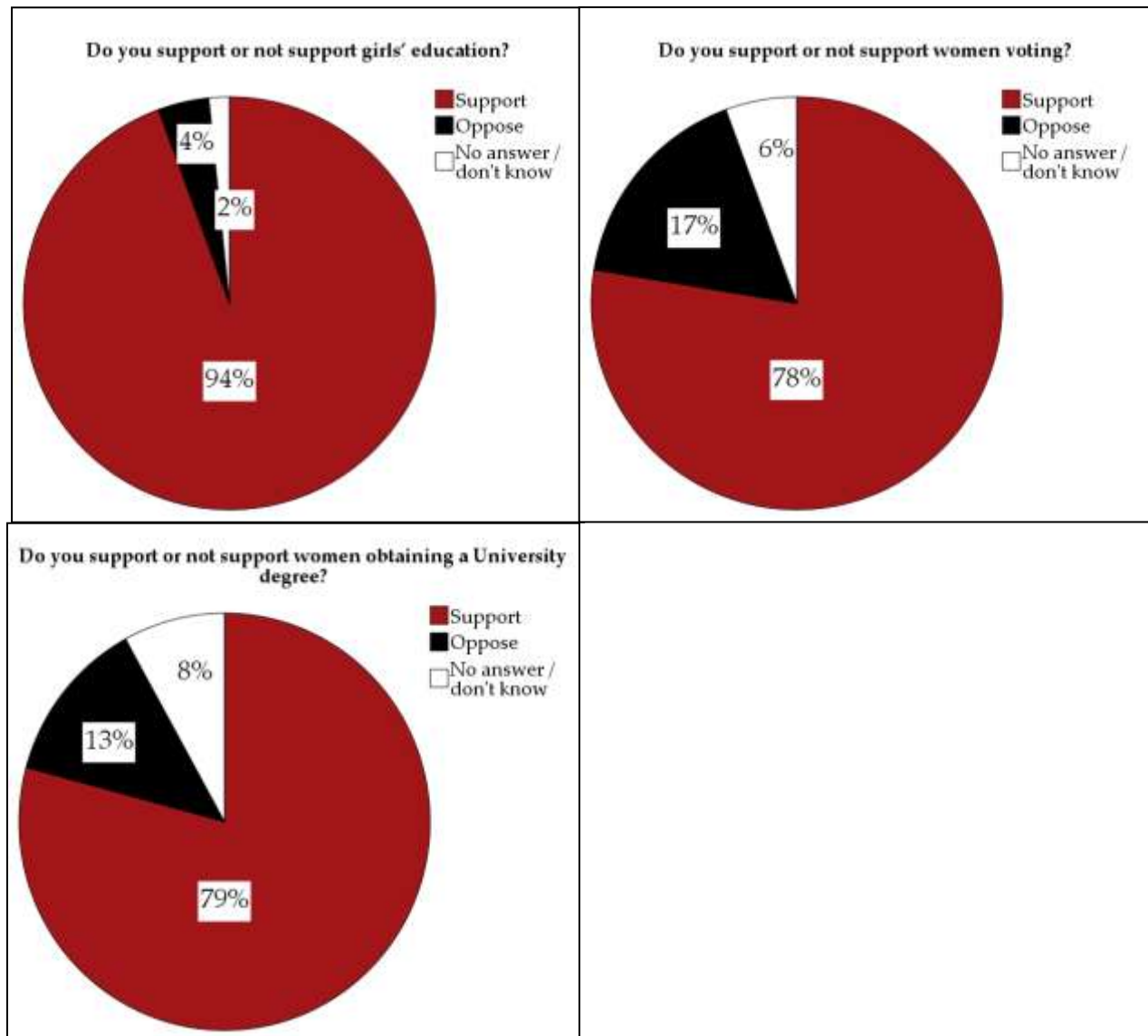
Alignment with International Political Interests

Findings suggest that many of the young men interviewed are aligned with international political interests in Afghanistan. Although the focus of international efforts is now on transition and ensuring basic security after the NATO-ISAF withdrawal, stability will also be served by an Afghan state which is peaceful, democratic and provides equal rights to all its citizens.

Over 85% of respondents believe that voting is important or somewhat important, suggesting a strong commitment to the principles of democracy.



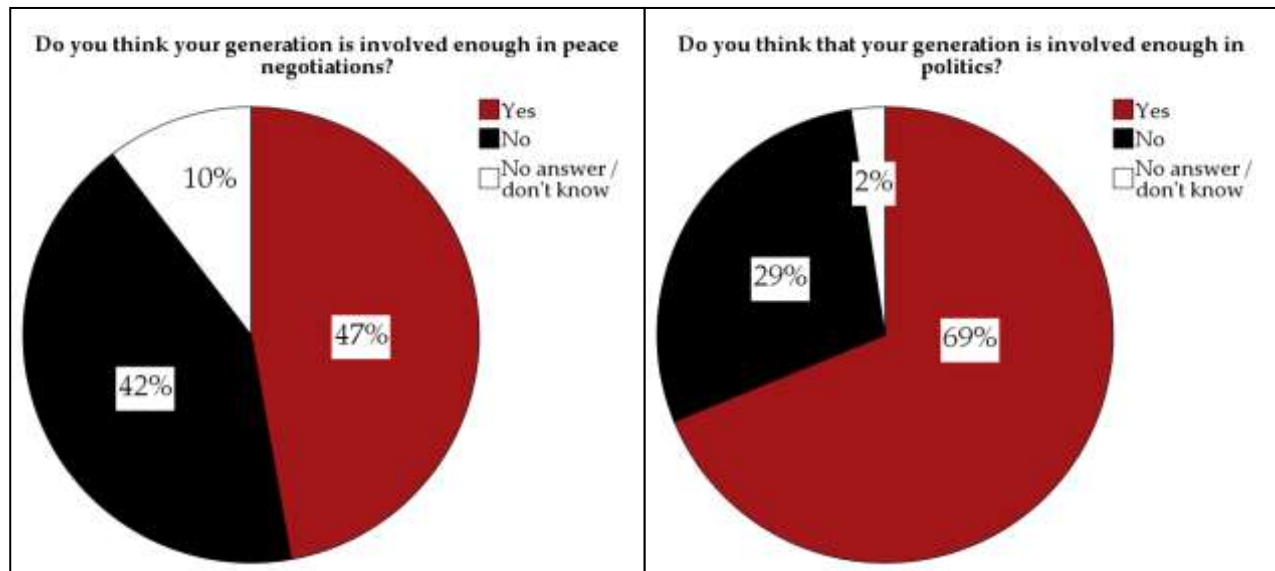
Ninety-four percent of the young men interviewed support girls' education; 78% support women voting; and 79% approve of women gaining a degree. These figures were higher than in previous phases of field research elsewhere in the country¹².



¹² In October 2010, ICOS found that 89% of respondents in Panjshir and Parwan, and 45% of respondents in Helmand and Kandahar, supported women voting.

Sense of Generational Involvement in Political Process and Peace Negotiations

Just over two-thirds (69%) of Kabul University students interviewed believe that their generation is sufficiently involved in politics; only just under half believe that they are sufficiently involved in peace negotiations.



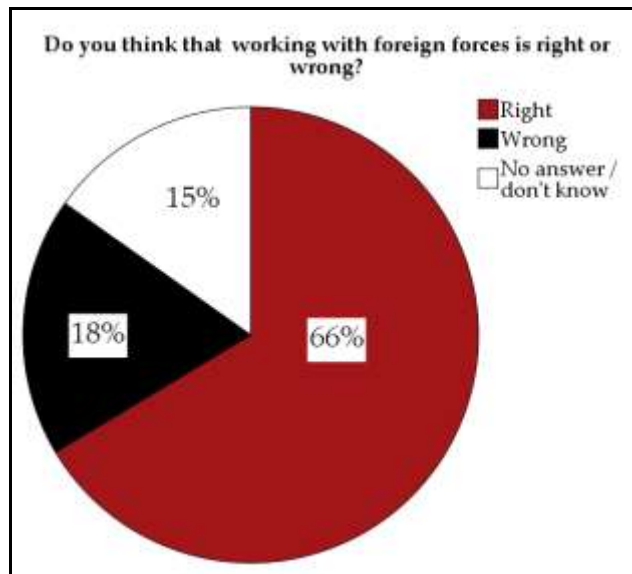
"In Afghanistan the government does not allow people to participate in debate and give their opinions. Just a few people are making the decisions, while in the period of President Sardar Mohammad Daoud Khan [1973-1978], people were allowed to express their political views about the friends and enemies of our country."

IT student, 21

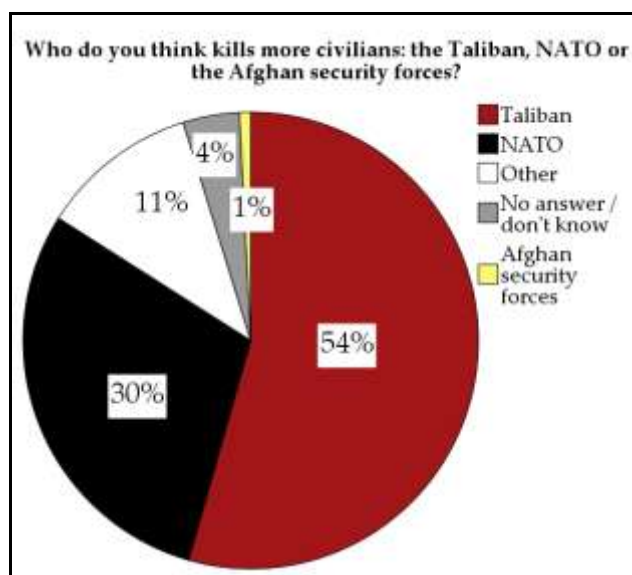
The Least Worst Option: Hostility Towards Taliban Outweighs Criticisms of the International Community

Although interviewees are ambivalent or negative towards the international community, their criticisms are strongly outweighed by their hostility towards the Taliban. On almost every indicator, students interviewed are opposed to the Taliban's ideology and actions.

Support among those interviewed for the international military and civilian effort is mixed but present. For instance, 66% of Kabul University interviewees believe that working with foreign military forces is right, while just 18% think it is wrong.



Fifty-four percent believe that the Taliban kills more civilians than NATO-ISAF. This is in line with independent UN reports, which assess that the insurgents were responsible for 75% of civilian deaths in Afghanistan during 2010, up from 28% in 2009¹³. However, the Taliban's responsibility is often not fully understood by interviewees in some areas of Afghanistan¹⁴.

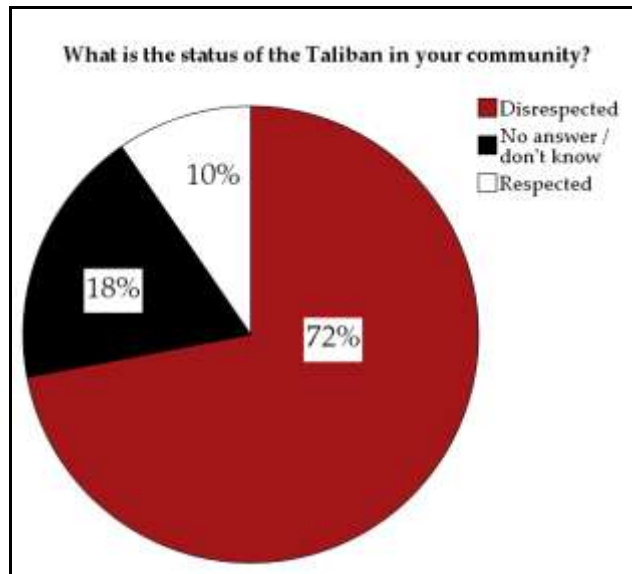


¹³ United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (2011) *Afghanistan Annual Report 2010: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*. Available at:

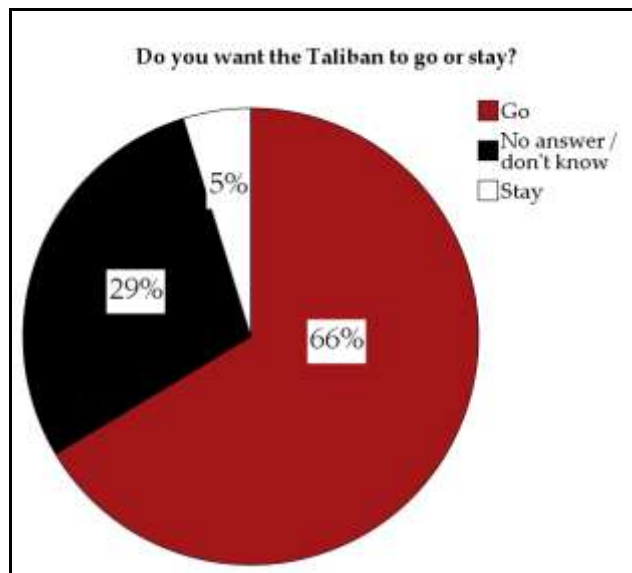
<http://unama.unmissions.org/Portals/UNAMA/human%20rights/March%20PoC%20Annual%20Report%20Final.pdf>

¹⁴ In ICOS's October 2010 phase of field research, 64% of respondents believed that international military forces were responsible for the majority of civilian deaths.

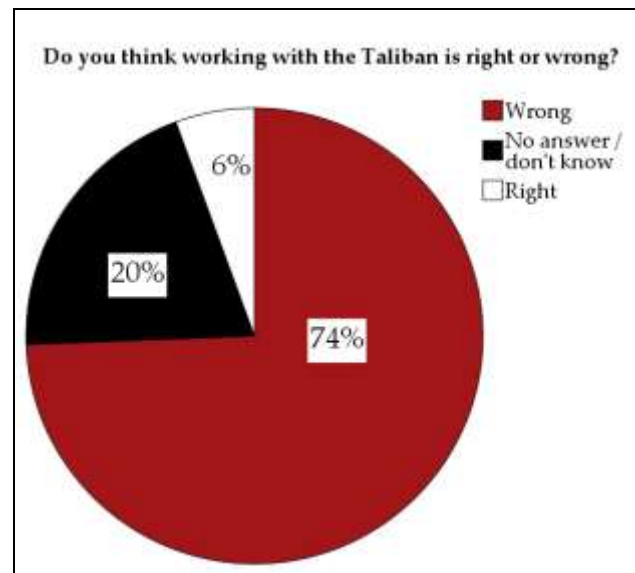
Only 10% of respondents said that the Taliban were respected in their community, and 72% said that they were not respected.



Only 5% of respondents would like the Taliban to stay; 66% would like them to leave.



Just 6% of young men interviewed think that working with the Taliban is right, while 74% believe that it is wrong.



Absence of Ethnic Tensions

The university is a multi-ethnic institution: according to informal estimates by current students, around 40% of the students are Pashtun; 30% are Tajik; 15% are Hazara; 10% are Uzbek; and 5% belong to other ethnic groups such as the Turkmen and Nuristanis.

The potential for ethnic conflict in Afghanistan certainly exists: for instance, the Taliban draw their strength from the Pashtun communities, predominantly in the south, while the Afghan security forces are dominated by ethnic Tajiks, mainly from the north¹⁵. This division of the conflict along ethnic lines echoes the civil war of the 1990s, when the original, Pashtun-based Taliban fought the Tajik-dominated Northern Alliance.

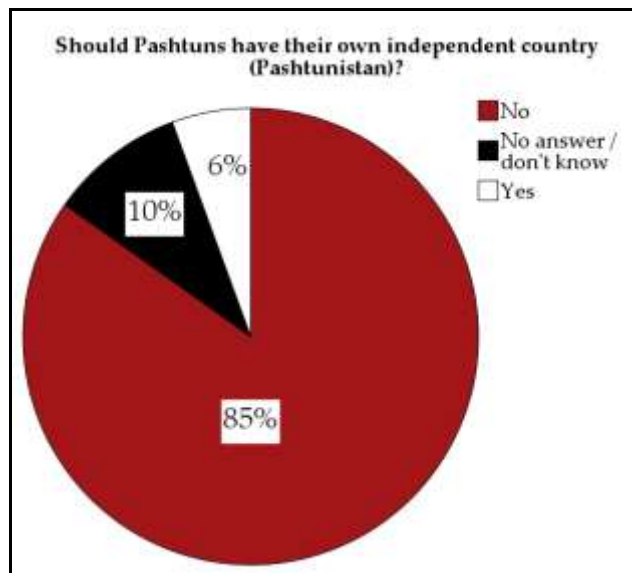
Despite this undercurrent of ethnic competition at the national level, findings reveal that few of the students interviewed at Kabul University consider it a serious issue.

“All the tribes of Afghanistan can come together and should forget about their past differences, start to build peace together and jointly work towards the development of Afghanistan.”

Veterinary medicine student, 25

¹⁵ Dorronsoro, G (2009) ‘Rising Tensions in Afghanistan: Dispatch from Kandahar’ *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* August 18 2009. Available at: <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/?fa=view&id=23608>

When asked whether Pashtuns should have their own independent country, Pashtunistan (usually conceived as a state which would comprise Pashtun-dominated areas in both Afghanistan and Pakistan), 85% of interviewees said no. This compares favourably with results of the same question asked in Helmand and Kandahar provinces 2010, when 54% of respondents were in support of an independent Pashtunistan.



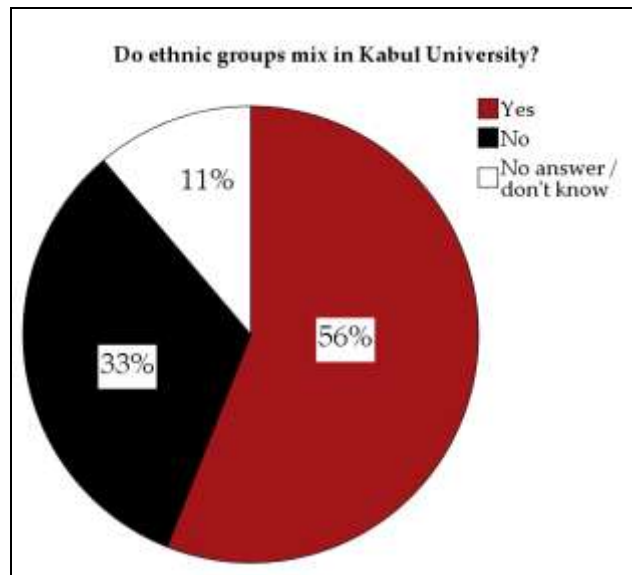
When broken down by ethnicity, this question revealed that the Pashtuns interviewed, who might be thought more likely to support an independence movement, were actually the least likely to back the creation of Pashtunistan. Just one Pashtun interviewee out of 48 supported the creation of an independent Pashtun state, lower than the number of Tajik interviewees supporting this (3 of 33).

The interviews also indicated that different ethnic groups do fraternise within the university, despite assessments that the student body is ethnically fragmented¹⁶. More than half of interviewees (56%) believe that ethnic groups do mix on campus. However 33% of respondents believe that they do not mix, suggesting that there is still work to be done to encourage inter-ethnic cooperation in the university.

"I want to have equal representation of the ethnic groups in the government."

Literature student, 22

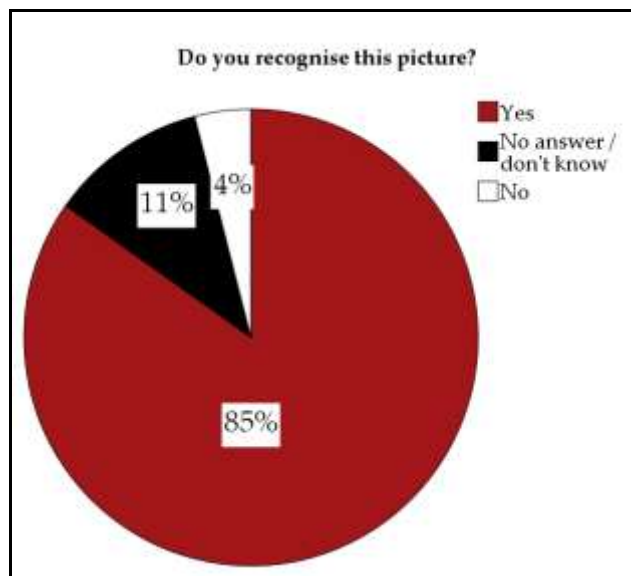
¹⁶ ¹⁶ Giustozzi, A (2010) *Between Patronage and Rebellion: Student Politics in Afghanistan*



4. Bad News: Ambivalence and Misunderstanding towards Foreigners

Little Understanding of 9/11

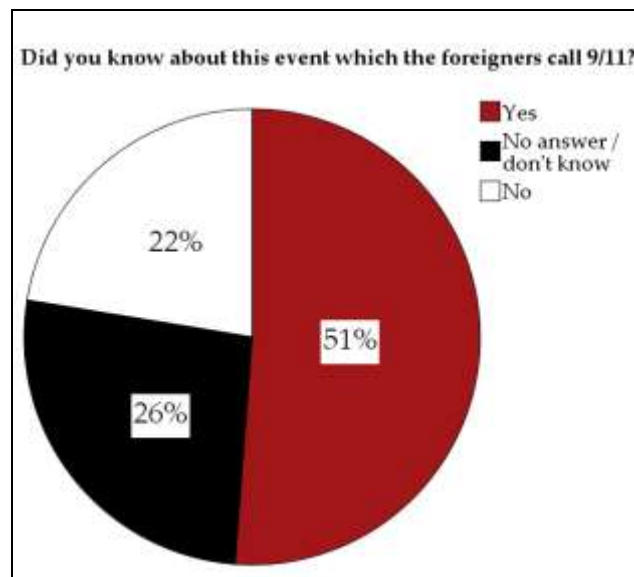
When shown a picture of the 9/11 attacks, 85% of interviewees said that they recognised it.



However, when provided with a description of the event (below), 48% of interviewees either said they did not know about it or did not answer, suggesting they are unaware of the reasons behind the international presence in Afghanistan, even if they have already encountered the images of 9/11.

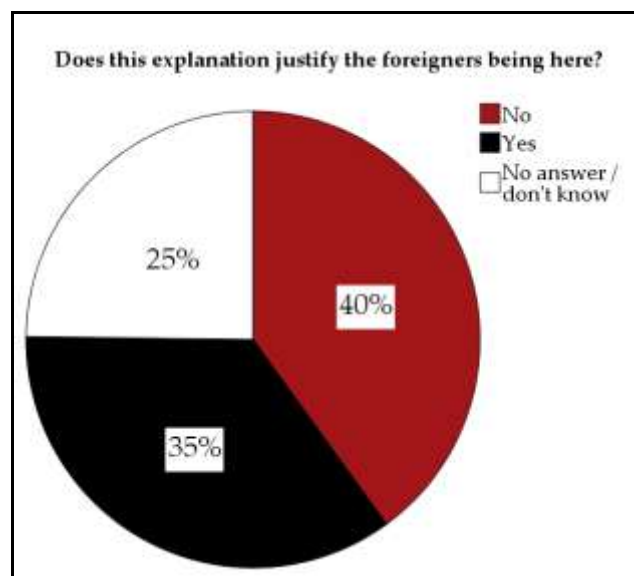
On September 11 2001, al Qaeda attackers hijacked planes in the United States which were full of ordinary passengers, including women and children. They flew these planes, full of people, into two tall buildings in the city of New York. They destroyed both buildings, which were full of ordinary people.

The attacks killed 3,000 innocent citizens, including Muslims. They were organised and directed by al Qaeda, led by Osama bin Laden, who was then living in Afghanistan protected by the Taliban government. The American government asked the Taliban to hand over Osama bin Laden. They refused, so the Americans and their allies NATO attacked the Taliban, and came into Afghanistan to look for Osama bin Laden and overthrew the Taliban.



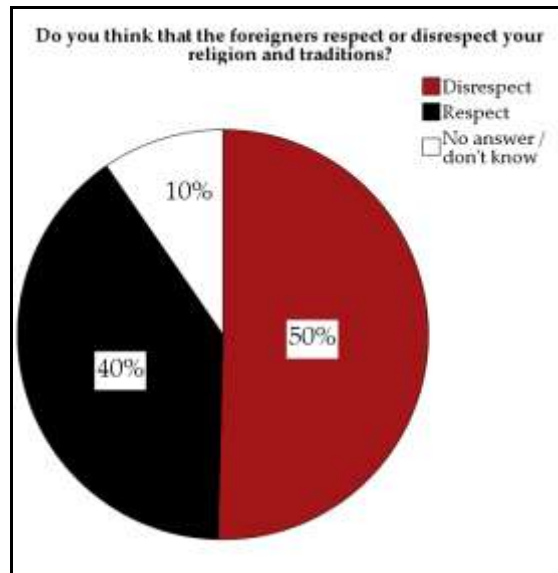
These interviewees had an average age of 23. They have grown up in the post-Taliban era, with foreigners and foreign military forces an everyday sight on the streets of Kabul. Yet many of them do not know why these foreigners are in their city and their country.

Forty percent of interviewees said that this explanation did not justify the foreign presence.



Criticisms of International Conduct

Many young men interviewed at Kabul University express strong reservations about the conduct of foreigners in their country, particularly foreign military forces. For example, 50% of respondents think that foreigners disrespect Afghan religion and tradition.



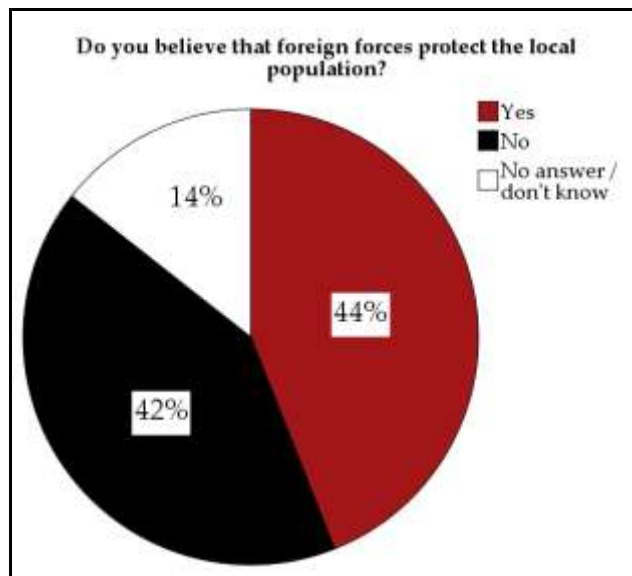
"The lust of the foreigners (girls dancing, etc.) is increasing day by day, and their women do not observe the rule to wear a burqa."

Shariah Law student, 20

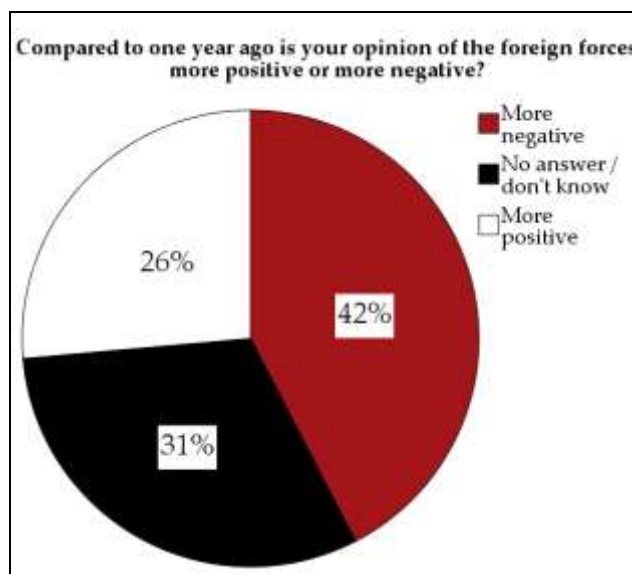
These figures are positive compared to field research in other parts of the country. For instance, in October 2010 72% of interviewees in Helmand and Kandahar stated that foreigners disrespect Afghan religion and tradition.

Protecting the population?

Forty-four percent of young men interviewed said they believe that NATO-ISAF forces protect the local population, and 42% believe that they do not.



Twenty-six percent of respondents said that their opinion of foreign forces had become more positive than a year ago, while 42% said it had become more negative.



Little Understanding of Reasons for Foreign Presence

When asked, many Kabul University students interviewed lack a clear understanding of why foreigners are in Afghanistan. As shown by the table below, a wide range of responses was given by interviewees.

Twenty percent of respondents believe that foreigners are in Afghanistan to bring peace and security to the country and 12% believe that the removal of the Taliban and al Qaeda is the reason. However, many other responses were either ambivalent or negative. The largest category of interviewees (32%) think that foreigners are in Afghanistan ‘for their own reasons’. implying self-interest rather than any concern for the Afghan people.

Why do you think the foreigners are here?			
For their own reasons	32%	To bring peace and security	20%
To occupy Afghanistan or the region	13%	To remove the Taliban and al Qaeda	12%
For destruction and violence	6%	To support the Afghan forces	6%
For material benefit	2%		
To destroy Islam	2%	No answer / don't know	7%

“The foreign forces that came to Afghanistan use al Qaeda as an excuse to achieve their own objectives.”

Literature student, 24

The third-largest group of young men interviewed believed that foreign forces were in Afghanistan to occupy the country or the region. A small group of interviewees also cited the exploitation of Afghanistan’s mineral resources as a reason for the international presence.

A small proportion of interviewees (8%) also ascribed purely negative motives to the international presence – to destroy Afghanistan or to destroy Islam.

Widespread Knowledge of Negative News Stories

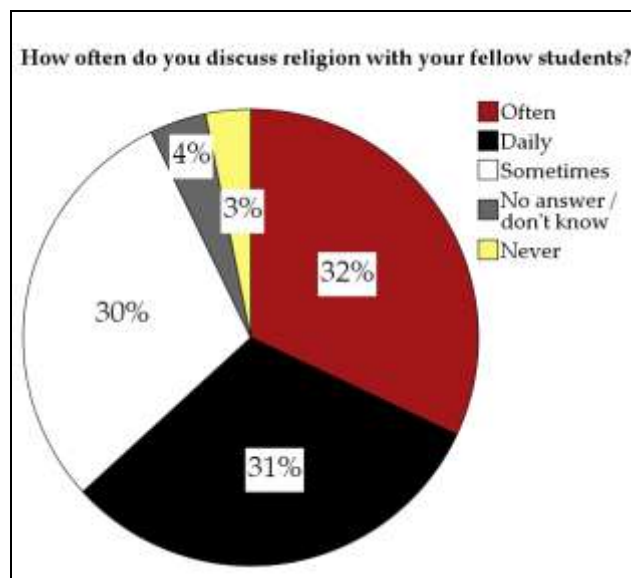
Among Kabul University interviewees there was widespread knowledge of negative news stories, particularly concerned with the insecurity facing Afghanistan. Substantial numbers of young men questioned had also heard about the Arab Spring.

What is the most important news story you have heard over the past two months?	
Specific attacks in Afghanistan	30%
General insecurity	21%
The Arab Spring	16%
No answer / don't know	12%
Other	11%
Quran burning and subsequent protests	10%

5. Interesting News

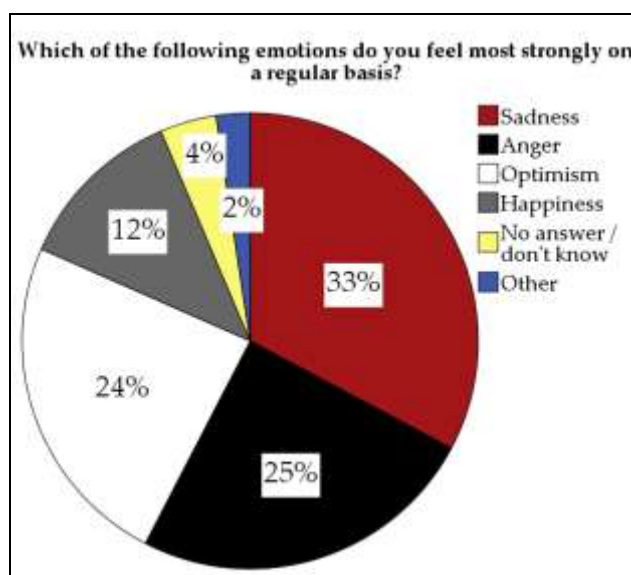
Religious Awareness

There is also a strong sense of religious discourse among interviewees at Kabul University. Almost two-thirds (63%) of respondents discuss religion 'daily' or 'often' with their fellow students; only 3% never discuss it.



Emotions of the interviewees

Among the young men interviewed high proportions feel either angry or sad most strongly on a regular basis.



Unemployment and Insecurity Viewed as Main Problems

In their own view, the most serious problem in the lives of young Afghan interviewees is unemployment. More than half (54%) of respondents said that a poor economy and a lack of jobs was their biggest problem.

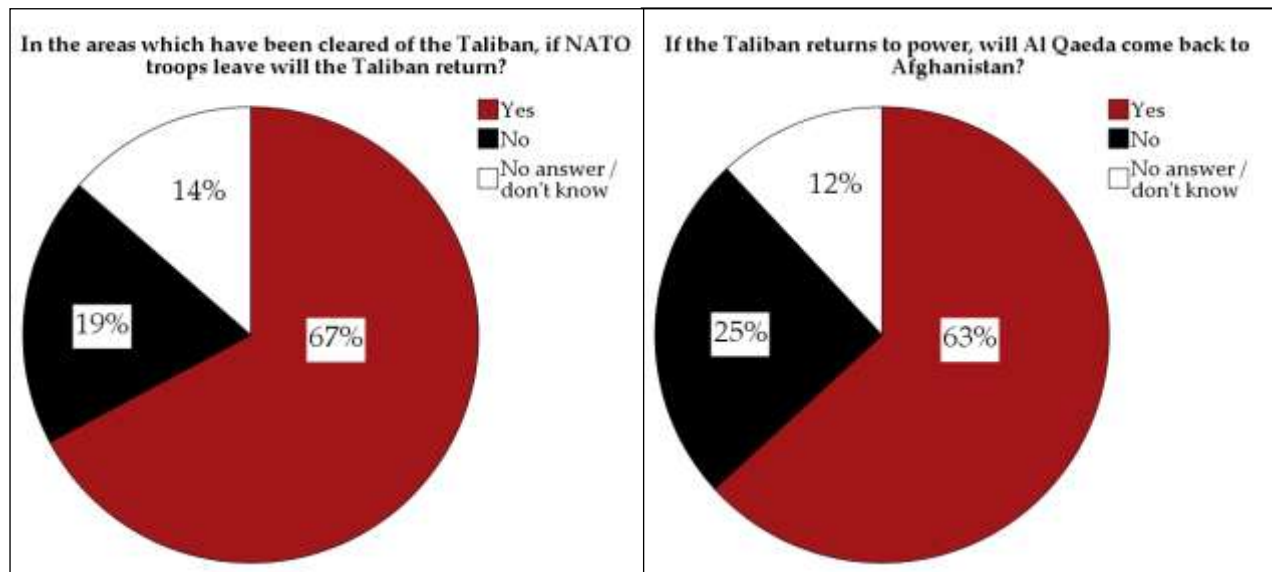
What is the biggest problem in your life?	
Poor economy and lack of jobs	54%
Insecurity	27%
Poor education system	4%
There is no problem	4%
Other	4%
Corruption	3%
Environmental concerns	3%

Security is also considered one of the biggest concerns of respondents. Twenty-seven percent of interviewees cite it as the biggest problem in their everyday life.

"I need to continue my education in a quiet place without fighting."

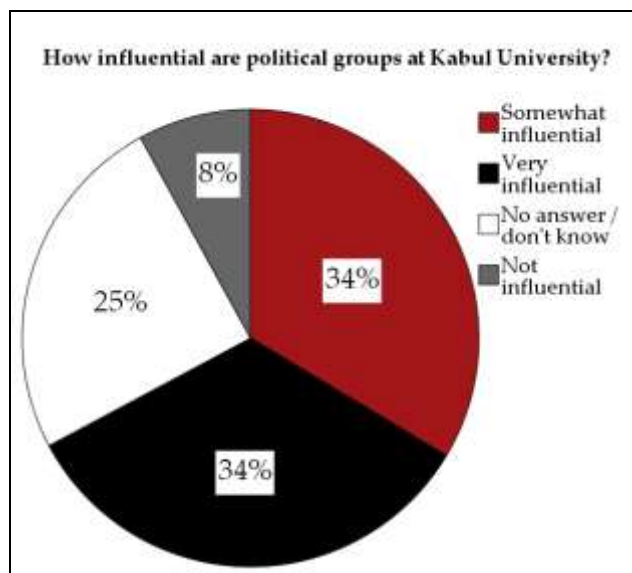
Journalism student, 20

Sixty-seven percent of respondents believe that if international forces withdraw, the Taliban will return; and 63% think that a Taliban return would mean the return of al Qaeda.



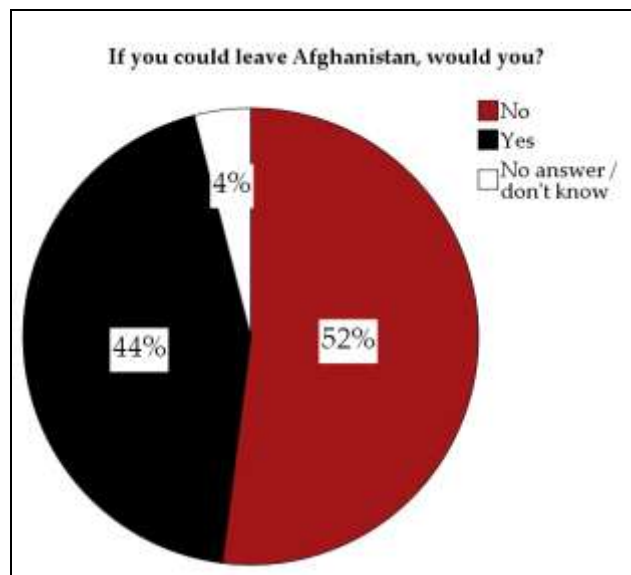
Political Consciousness and Commitment to Afghanistan's Future

Some of the students interviewed also believe that political groups exercise influence at Kabul University. Fully two-thirds think that political groups are either very or somewhat influential, whilst only 8% think they are not influential.



The problem of 'brain drain' is common in conflict zones such as Afghanistan. Individuals with skills and professional abilities, who usually possess sufficient money and connections, often flee the country in search of better social and economic opportunities abroad¹⁷. These educated professionals are key to developing successful states, as they have the technocratic skills and experience to build functioning institutions such as ministries.

Forty-four percent of Kabul University student interviewees would like to leave Afghanistan, 52% would not.



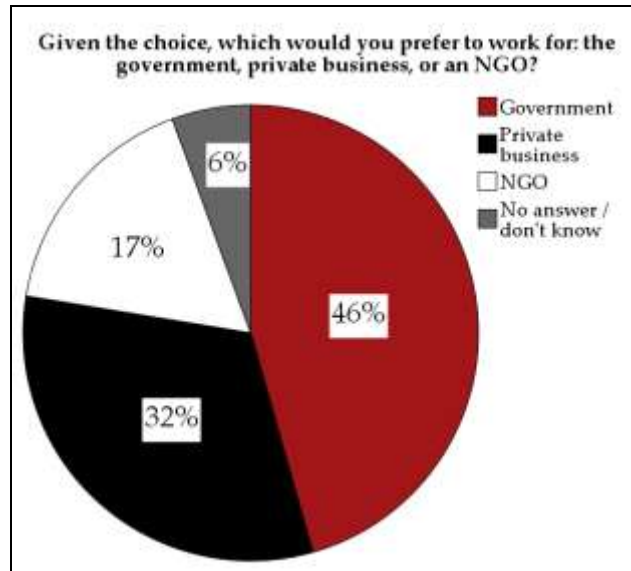
"I love my homeland and my countrymen. I want to work hard to remove those people that make Afghanistan insecure."

Science student, 28

Even if educated individuals do not leave their country, their choice of occupation can weaken the human capital of the government.

¹⁷ Saber, S (2011) 'Young Afghans Leaving In Doves' *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* January 7 2011. Available at: <http://iwpr.net/report-news/young-afghans-leaving-doves>

Forty-six percent of respondents at the university would like to work for the government after graduating; 32% would like to work for a private business (an encouraging indication of potential for growth in the private sector); 17% would work for an NGO.



Conclusions and Recommendations

Currently the voices of educated Afghans youths are not sufficiently heard. Many of the young men interviewed are aligned with the international political and security agenda, with strong support for key principles such as democracy and women's rights. This generation can play a key role in a successful transition process.

The youth of Afghanistan, particularly in important centres of education like Kabul University, must be supported in their aspirations through, for example, support for civil society forums and youth groups.

At present the international mission in Afghanistan has won the minds of many of the Kabul University students who were interviewed, but is in danger of losing their hearts: many support our ideas, such as women's rights and democracy, but not us. Although many young men interviewed disapprove of the conduct of foreign forces and are ambivalent towards cooperating with them, they are deeply opposed to the Taliban and do not support their ideology or their presence. Foreigners are considered the 'least worst option'.

Widespread ignorance among interviewees of the 9/11 attacks and a lack of understanding for the reasons behind the foreign presence in the country indicates a serious failure in communication on the part of the international community. Young Afghans must be made aware that the foreign intervention was intended to drive out al Qaeda and prevent Afghanistan from being a terrorist base again.

The aspirations of young Afghans should be supported by the international community. The commitment of many of the young men interviewed to stay in and work for their country demonstrates that young Afghans can be a vital asset in the international community's aim to bring long-term stability to Afghanistan. Empowering and supporting the new generation will bring dividends as they stay to develop the country's human capital.

Appendix: ICOS Cultural Analysis Methodology

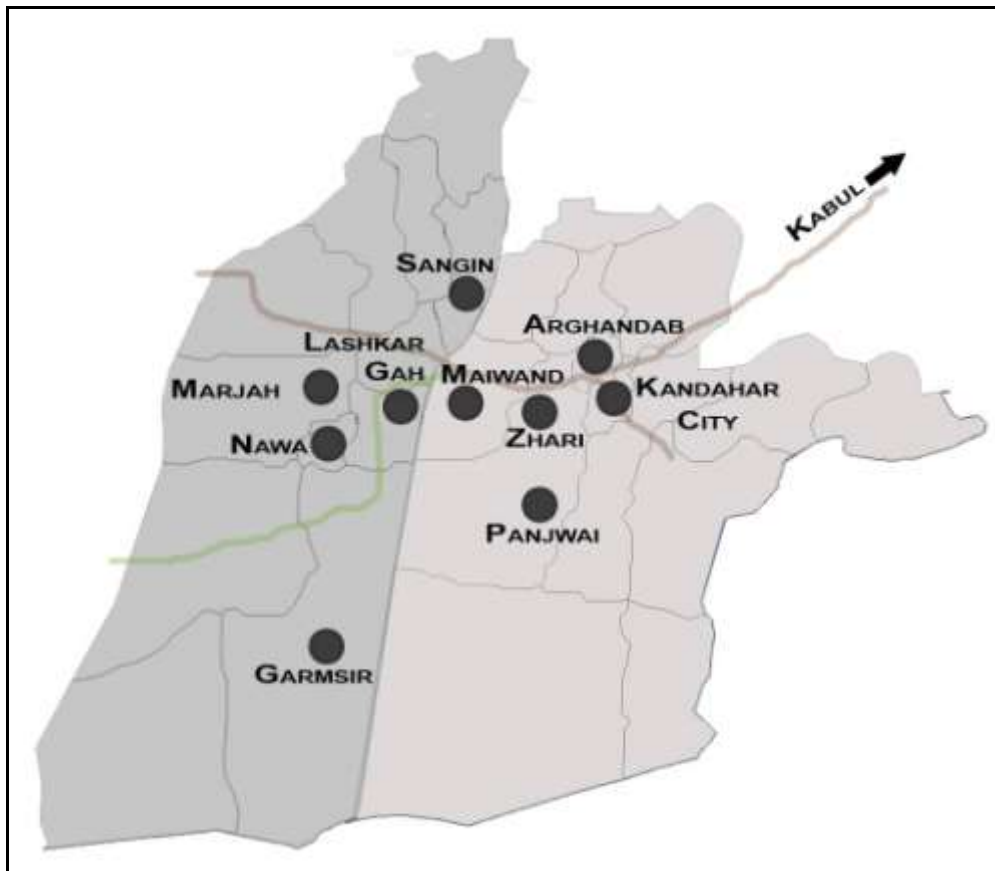
Research was carried out in April and May 2011 on Afghan military-aged males (numbers and districts below) to determine their opinions on key issues and to provide a longitudinal assessment to evaluate the effects of NATO-ISAF military operations on their perceptions. This was achieved by conducting 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.

Field Research Areas of Study – Main Questionnaire			
District	Number of interviews	Estimated male 15-30 cohort	Interviews as a percentage of male 15-30 cohort
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



Helmand and Kandahar



Research areas across Afghanistan

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 2nd with logistical planning and the development of the questionnaire. Research teams began work on Wednesday May 4th and finished on Friday May 6th. Data analysis work began on Thursday May 3rd and was finalised on Saturday May 7th.

Field Research Areas of Study – Osama Bin Laden Questions			
District	Number of interviews	Estimated male 15-30 cohort	Interviews as a percentage of male 15-30 cohort
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:

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