

Surviving the Crisis: A Socioeconomic Assessment of the Middle Class in Kabul



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study provides an assessment of the socioeconomic status of the urbanite middle class in Kabul and how they coped with radical institutional changes and persistent economic shocks since the Taliban takeover in August 2021. The study is based on a survey of nearly 300 individuals in Kabul city, who are considered to be part of the educated middle class. The survey was implemented between May and July 2023, and was complemented with in-depth semi-structured interviews with 24 participants.

The results show a significant increase in unemployment over the past two years: 43 percent of the participants in our sample were identified as unemployed as of July 2023, while this rate was only 4 percent in July 2021. The growing trend in unemployment since the political collapse of 2021 is true for both males (up by 31 percentage points) and females (up by 8 percentage points). Employment in the private sector increased by 19 percentage points, whereas it dropped by 7 percentage points in the public sector.

Over the course of the two years from July 2021 to July 2023, the share of households earning a monthly income of less than 25,000 AFN (\$287) increased by 60 percentage points, while the shares of those earning higher levels of income have sharply declined. Household debt has also significantly increased. The share of indebted households in our sample increased from 30% in July 2021 to 67% in July 2023, more than doubling over the two years. To make ends meet after losing their sources of income, 15% of sample households were forced to liquidate land, property, and other less valuable assets. The percentage of survey participants finding it ‘frequently’ difficult to meet their monthly expenses have increased by 40 percentage points between 2021 and 2023.

Household average spending on food items has ‘substantially’ decreased over the past two years. Nearly half (47%) of survey participants said that they spent ‘substantially less’ on food items in July 2023 compared to two years ago (July 2021). Non-food spending has also declined. When asked ‘how frequently they went to restaurants or ordered food for delivery’, 74% of households responded ‘substantially less’ compared to in July 2021. Compared to two years ago, households in our sample currently spend ‘relatively more’ on health and medical bills and ‘substantially less’ on education.

The results suggest that increasingly lesser proportion of savings is being deposited in commercial banks. In July 2021, about 45% of households deposited “less than 10% of their savings” in commercial banks. However, this rate increased to 96% as of July 2023, indicating that only a tiny share of household currently deposits more than 10% of their savings in commercial banks.

On health, we observe increasing number of people (35% of the sample) taking sleeping and/or anxiety pills for the first time, a sizeable portion of the sample (20%) say they started or re-started smoking, and there has been a hike in the frequency of visiting a general physician, psychiatrists, or psychologist for the first time in July 2023 compared to two years before. More specifically, we employ Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) intended to yield a measure of stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. We find that according to the K10 criteria, almost half of the sample must be referred for further psychological evaluations and another one-third could benefit from early intervention, indicating widespread signs of early depression and anxiety. We do not discuss the quality of health services in detail in this survey. Anecdotal reports suggest that with increased migration and brain-drain of experienced health care professionals and doctors, the quality of health services has declined.

On basic political freedoms, there is a general decline in trust in the *de facto* authorities and in the rule of law, there is a lack of confidence in being able to retain property rights and keeping ownership, and there

is increased affirmation of inability to express individual identity and values. Moreover, we find that the ability to express views on political and religious issues are further restricted.

A qualitative analysis of the interviews in tandem with the survey questions, reveal further insights. Afghans interviewed for this purpose find themselves with a deep sense of loss and disillusionment even two years on after the collapse. They face harsher societal rules, increasing living costs and changing demographics. They consider Taliban in clear violation of basic human rights and consider them as the group that faced no justice for the atrocities, they caused specifically to Kabul residents between 2001 and 2021.

On migration, vast numbers had to migrate elsewhere (including to neighboring countries as well to the EU and the US) in fear of prosecution and retaliation from the Taliban forces. Those in Kabul surveyed for this study has a strong wish to leave the country too. While this is not unexpected, the reasons vary from lack of safety, to fear of prosecution, uncertainty of daughter's education/future, loss of individual freedoms, racial and language-based discrimination, lack of economic opportunities, and fear of another civil war in the future.

On cooperation, we find that perceived intra-group (within) cooperation has increased while inter-group (across) cooperation has declined along the dimensions of ethnicity, language, sect, income distribution and neighborhood. On social stigma and norms, we find that Kabul residents fear the shifting norms due to the new arrivals. This includes physical appearance as well as etiquettes of living in a city. They describe adjusting to the new norms painful and degrading. The narrative of surviving these changes is dominant in all conversations.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In August of 2021, after only two decades, the republic government of Afghanistan (hence forth the Republic) collapsed like many of its predecessors. Taliban managed to take over the capital without any resistance and established their *de facto* authority. A multitude of factors were at play for the collapse of the Republic. It failed to strengthen its legitimacy, leverage the democratic institutions that were established in the years after 2001, protect itself from corruption or interest groups, and finally failed to negotiate a peace reconciliation with the Taliban. On the other hand, the United States – as its arch patron – had started the unconditional negotiations with the Taliban and withdrawal of their troops out of Afghanistan bypassing the Afghan state.

Under the Republic, the development picture was mixed. The economy had experienced average growth rates of 9.6% between 2003 and 2012 and less than 2% in the years after (Biruni, 2020). The high growth rates and massive amounts of aid (nearly \$160 billion between 2001 and 2020 cumulatively) had also failed to be pro poor and the urban-rural disparity continued to rise (Joya et al, 2020). Conventionally it is believed that carefully planned urbanization would reduce inequality. This failure to achieve self-reliance domestically and externally (e.g., reduce dependency on aid) haunted the Republic beyond 2014 when the Security Transition completed.¹ Poverty estimates prior to the collapse put one in every two Afghan under the national poverty line in 2020 (World Bank, 2021; OCHA, 2023; Brown et al, 2022).

With the takeover of the country by Taliban militants, Afghanistan has shifted away from democratic institutions to autocratic rule, the 2004 constitution is dissolved, millions of people face humanitarian crisis, and many are denied basic human rights including women’s rights to education and work. While active warfare is minimized, personal safety has vanished, the economy has tanked, and uncertainty continues to undermine investments and business confidence.

Two years on since the political collapse, the situation has further deteriorated. The labour market is in disarray, unemployment rates are souring, the banking sector remains weak, and increasing portions of the population need urgent humanitarian assistance. For instance, it was estimated that in the first 10 months of the Taliban take over, the GDP shrunk by \$5 billion, falling from \$20 billion to \$15 billion (UNDP, 2022). In other words, what had taken 10 years to accumulate was wiped out in under a year. The same UNDP report on labour markets showed that over a million jobs vanished overnight in urban areas. The UN Office of Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs estimated that 28 million people needed humanitarian assistance as of early 2023, of which women and children represented two-thirds, and about 6 million of those were at ‘emergency’ levels of food insecurity — one step away from famine (OCHA, 2023).

¹ The years from 2012 to 2014 were inflection points for Afghanistan, which coincided with two political transitions. First, the withdrawal of around 120,000 international coalition troops between 2012 and 2014, led to the transfer of security responsibilities to Afghan national security forces, known as the Security Transition. Second, the 2014 presidential elections ended in a political gridlock, which resulted in the formation of a coalition government due to voter fraud. Both transitions weakened the Republic.

Understanding the features of rural-urban lifestyles in Afghanistan is an important starting point to contextual socioeconomic impacts of the collapse in 2021, and to grasp the findings presented in this survey. Studies on Afghanistan show that urban areas have been historically less resilient in the face of political and security crisis when compared to rural lifestyle. As they lack access to formal and informal insurance mechanisms to protect them during an economic shock (Bowles, et al., 2017). In more advanced economies formal insurance mechanisms such as unemployment benefits, other welfare state stabilisers ensure the safety of the urbanite whose income depends on the wage labour dynamics. This does not exist in Kabul and the rest of Afghanistan for that matter, and at times of crisis face imminent reversal risks (Ravallion, 2010). Informal mechanisms such as access to agriculture land, savings/assets, livestock and localized co-insurance through district-village level trust and reciprocity are abundant in rural areas in Afghanistan making them more adept in dealing with political shocks (Panda et al, 2020).

For instance, Kabul has been the main gravitation centre for migration including IDPs and returned refugees for the last two decades under the Republic, averaging up to 2 million people, which is almost one-third the city's population (ALCS, 2016/17). For instance, intensified conflict post-2014 in Afghanistan created large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) putting additional pressure on the urban milieu (Joya et al, 2020). With that, living in rental dwellings is a widespread practice (roughly composed of 26% of households in the 2016/17 ALCS survey). Absent those formal and informal insurance mechanisms, disruptions to the wage-labour cycle are catastrophic to the livelihood and economic wellbeing of Kabul residents, especially to those with little or no savings (namely the middle class and the poor). Even before the collapse of the Republic, perception surveys indicated worsening prospects in the urban areas; for instance, over 61% of households in Kabul believed that the economic situation had worsened in the years leading to 2019, as compared to only 19% in rural Herat (The Asia Foundation, 2019).

Another key to the understanding of the socioeconomic impact of the 2021 political collapse is the psychological shock, which led to mass migration, profound changes in the economic behaviour and alterations in the levels of cooperation in the society. In fact, crisis often voids societies of talent, creativity, and innovation due to mass emigration and loss of skilled labour force. The impact of a brain-drain in the form of low human capital formation manifests in the long term, often leading to slower economic progress and lower levels of productivity in the form of imperfect substitution between skilled and unskilled labour (Lucas, 1988; Bhagwati and Hamada, 1974; Piketty, 1997).

Whereas cooperation is also a significant psychological factor for social cohesion and sustainable community level peace, which is often jeopardized with changing demographics, attitudes, and feelings of alienation. In the psychology of peace literature, peace is often defined along two dimensions: first, as absence of war and violent armed combat between entities. According to this definition, if war and violence is absent, one can assume peace exists, second, a more comprehensive definition of peace is absence of any hostile interaction aimed at dominance and is defined in terms of 'winners' and 'losers' (Johnson and Johnson, 2010a; Johnson, 2012). This definition of peace is very relevant for the case of Kabul after the collapse, where a new wave of 'winners' entered the scene as the Taliban's grip on power continues to solidify, and this has created discordant attitudes and feelings.

To understand how the fledgling urban middle class in Kabul has coped with the aftermath of this political crisis, we conducted a survey of nearly 300 individuals among Kabul's urbanite middle income, who are educated and were economically active prior to the collapse. The survey was implemented between May and July 2023, and collected data on various socioeconomic indicators such as employment, consumption & saving patterns, coping strategies, mental health status, and perceptions of basic

freedoms. In addition to that, we conducted semi-structured interviews complementing the survey and focusing on participants experience living through the crisis and dealing with the aftermath of it, particularly their perceptions on migration, community level cooperation, and social stigma. The survey was designed to not only assess the current socio-economic status of Kabul's urban and educated middle class but to also compare it against the pre-crisis levels, i.e., a comparison of indicators between July 2021 and July 2023.

We find that unemployment and under-employment (menial or casual jobs) has risen sharply. The number of people looking for jobs significantly increased in July 2023 compared to two years ago. Household debt has almost doubled, on average increasing by \$321 USD per household over the two-year period. To make ends meet after losing their sources of income, households were forced to liquidate land, property, and other less valuable assets. Self-employment and employment in the private sector have increased over the same period, these are likely to be sectoral transfers due to a structural change in the post-2021 economy. Also, this could be a matter of mislabelling, for instance all those who lost their jobs in the post-2021 period, started some type of activity, whether that is profitable or sufficient to recover the loss of income or being able to maintain similar standards of living as in July 2021 should be judged by the rest of the indicators discussed in this study. All of which indicate declining economic activity, falling purchasing power, and losing the financial ability to making ends meet. We do not discuss job satisfaction in this survey. This could be an interesting future avenue to explore.

We observe 'substantial' reductions in the households' monthly spending categories such as food items, non-food items (especially household appliances), outdoor dining, and education. We also observe significant reductions in transport spending, which have consisted in limiting the use of personal cars or taxis and switching to public/shared transport. We also observe modest spending increases on medical bills. In July 2023, investment activities and purchasing real assets (such as property and land) have almost vanished among the sample, trust in the commercial banks have sharply declined, and households are frequently finding it difficult to meet their monthly expenses including purchasing food necessities. Participants are frequently using credit from local shops or borrowing from family and friends among other coping strategies. A downward trend in real estate prices reflect a declining demand for property in Kabul, which corroborates with our findings.

On health, we observe increasing number of people taking sleeping and/or anxiety pills for the first time, a sizeable portion of the sample say they have started or re-started smoking, and there has been a hike in the frequency of visiting a general physician, psychiatrists, or psychologist for the first time in July 2023 compared to two years before. More specifically, we employ a Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) intended to yield a measure of stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. We find that according to the K10 criteria, almost half of the sample must be referred for further psychological evaluations and another one-third could benefit from early intervention, indicating widespread signs of early depression and anxiety. We do not discuss quality of health services in detail in this survey. However, with the increased migration of experienced health care professionals and doctors leaving the country, combined with lower spending budget, anecdotal reports show the quality of health service has also declined.

On basic freedoms, we rely on five indicators, personal safety at home, rule of law, property rights, freedom of expression and individual identity. We use the following proxies to measure each aspect:

We find that 88% of the sample had their houses searched by the Taliban militants between 2 to 4 times since they captured Kabul, and through interviews we find that Kabul residents lack any personal safety.

Taliban militants can show up any time and take them, and there are little or no defined legal procedures or fair trials. On rule of law and property rights, we find that over two-thirds of the sample would avoid using Taliban courts in Kabul to resolve their disputes, and 55% of the sample say they have little confidence to retain ownership of their property. There is increased affirmation of inability to express individual identity and values (over 60% of the sample). Moreover, we find that the ability to express views on political and religious issues are further restricted (over 80%).

Afghans interviewed in this survey state that they find themselves with a deep sense of loss and disillusionment even two years on after the collapse. They face harsher societal rules, increasing living costs and changing demographics. They consider Taliban in clear violation of basic human rights and consider them as the group that faced no justice for the atrocities, they caused specifically to Kabul residents between 2001 and 2021, referring to the suicide attacks, car and roadside bombs, and tactical complex attacks on hotels, offices, residential buildings and so on.

On migration, large numbers had to immigrate elsewhere (including to neighbouring countries as well to the EU and the US) in fear of prosecution and retaliation from the Taliban forces. Majority of those surveyed here also stated their strong wish to leave the country if they get a chance. While this is not unexpected, the reasons vary from lack of safety, fear of prosecution, uncertainty of daughter's education/future, loss of individual freedoms, racial and language-based discrimination, lack of economic opportunities, and fear of another civil war in the future.

On community level cooperation, we find that perceived intra-group (within) cooperation has increased while inter-group (across) cooperation has declined along the dimensions of ethnicity, language, sect, income distribution and neighbourhood. On social stigma and norms, we find that Kabul residents fear the shifting norms due to the new arrivals who are more conservative and in tune with the Taliban ideology. This includes physical appearance as well as more conservative codes of conduct and etiquettes of living in the city. They describe adjusting to the new norms painful and degrading. The narrative of surviving these changes is dominant in all conversations.

To sum these up, the middle class in Kabul are barely surviving in the aftermath of the collapse. The results of this survey raise the question on whether they can still be classified as a 'middle class', in the sense how this term is understood in the contexts of developing countries. While data on other income quantiles was not collected during the survey, the results suggest that the educated middle class in Kabul was exposed to greater negative impacts of the political shock. They lost their sources of income, their professional network and social capital. They are facing economic, health and mental health issues. They are not optimistic about the future, feel isolated and wish to leave the country. This is a disastrous combination for a country's progress and prosperity.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 DATA COLLECTION

The survey is based on a mix of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The target population is the urbanite middle-income class residents of Kabul,² who were economically active prior to the 2021 crisis. The sample size involved 294 participants, who were surveyed with a questionnaire consisting of around one hundred close-ended questions, covering topics such as household characteristics, employment status, consumption patterns, investment decisions, shocks & coping mechanisms, health status, and perceptions of basic freedoms. The questionnaire is included in the Appendix.

Almost half of the questions focus on respondents providing information not only on their current status (i.e., July 2023), but also on their situation prior to the crisis (i.e., July 2021). To address potential biases that may arise due to longer recall periods, we did not ask the participants to respond with ‘point estimates’ about their situation two years ago, instead they were given categorical questions to reduce recalling errors. In some questions, the respondents were asked to assess their status in a ‘comparative’ manner with respect to July 2021. For example, instead of asking how much their household spending on food items were in July of 2021, they were asked how they compared their ‘current’ household spending to that of July 2021. They were then provided five categories of response in terms of quantities: substantially less, relatively less, almost similar, relatively more, and substantially more quantities. Or, for example, instead of asking how frequently they visited a medical doctor in July 2021, they were asked how they compared the frequency of their medical consultations to the same period two years ago. We expect that this type of questioning significantly reduces potential recall errors. In addition to this, we segment questions by themes within the survey which simplifies transition from one topic to another for the participants.

Furthermore, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 participants to get a deeper understanding of their experiences, attitudes, and perception on issues such as migration, social stigma, and cooperation. Such semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions allow a deeper conversation and help collect qualitative information.

2.2 SAMPLING CHOICE

The current political situation makes it very difficult to implement a random sample survey, in which individuals or households (or even neighbourhoods) are randomly selected from a known population list or sample frame. Under the Taliban de facto rule, political and security risks of conducting surveys are very high, especially when the surveys aim to assess the socioeconomic challenges in the country, which may have wider political economy implications such as this one. It is even more challenging when surveys are implemented by independent and unbiased individuals or entities not affiliated with the Taliban.

² Based on the latest National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA) which has continued to operate under the Taliban, the urban population of Afghanistan is estimated to be 8.8 million (22.9% of the total population) with a total population of 34.9 million. Kabul province’s population is estimated to be 5.5 million people, of which 4.9 million (89%) is urban dwellers (NSIA, 2023). However, they are not all educated or economically active. The sample size for this survey is relatively representative for Kabul province when you add two more of our inclusion criteria: education and being economically active.

Furthermore, when the target population is narrowly defined, which is the case in our study (i.e., the urban middle-income class in Kabul, who were economically active prior to the 2021 crisis), random sampling becomes difficult to implement if an exhaustive sample frame is not available *a priori*.

Given the above risks and challenges, we opted for a ‘snowball’ sampling method. A snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where existing survey subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances or network. This is a common approach in social sciences and business research, particularly in studies where the target population is hard to reach or when no sampling frame is available. The snowball sampling not only helped us minimize potential political/security risks for our surveyors, but also helped us establish an element of ‘trust’ and ‘connection’ with the participants that are selected for survey. Since our target population have been at risk of political retaliation due to their past employment with the Republic, international NGOs, donor agencies, and even foreign political and military missions in Kabul, they would very likely be reluctant to disclose information about their experience and challenges to a random surveyor whom they do not know or do not trust. However, when the participants are introduced/recommended to the survey by their own trusted friends, they would feel comfortable in responding to the questions. With all that in mind, to retain the element of ‘trust’ and ‘connection’ between the surveyor and the participant, we considered the snowball sampling to be the best feasible approach given the circumstances.

However, a snowball sampling method is subject to a ‘sample bias’ and may not be representative of the total target population. Nevertheless, we tried to minimize these biases by recruiting five surveyors who lived in various parts of Kabul city to allow a widespread capture of the target population. More importantly, we imposed several pre-screening inclusion criteria such as being educated, of working age group and having had professional working experience prior to the Taliban capture. This helped us identify the first set of participants and continued to impose the inclusion criteria on the subsequent selected participants. We caveat the results for not being generalizable to all of Afghanistan and all income distributions such as households in the poorest or richest income quantiles.

2.3 SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Our sample consists of a total of 294 people, of which 78% are male and 22% female (Figure 1). The age profile of our sample indicates that 49% of the participants are aged between 25 and 34 years, 29% falls within the 35-44 years of age and 12% in the 45-54 years category. The working age population in Afghanistan is defined by the labour law to be between 15 and 64 years old. As such, all the participants in our sample fall within the economically active criteria (Figure 2), reaffirming our pre-screening inclusion criteria.

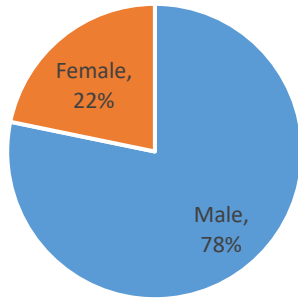


Figure 1: Gender ratio

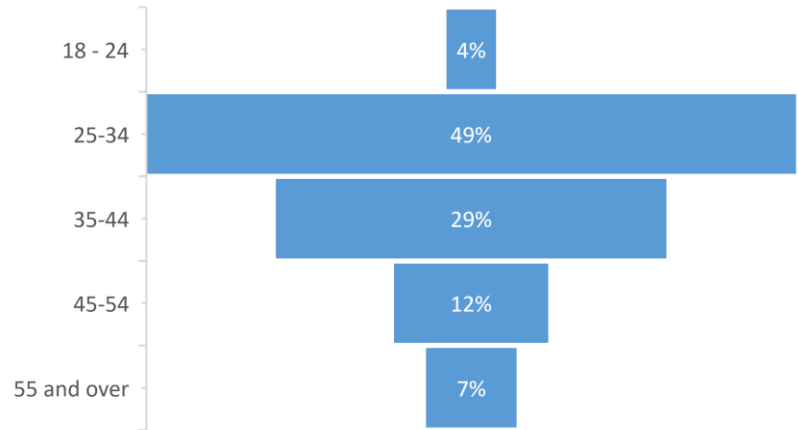


Figure 2: Age profile

The bulk of our sample has a higher education degree, as was imposed in our pre-screening criteria. Figure 3 shows the levels of education in our sample. In a descending order, 7% of the sample have a master’s degrees with 8% male and 5% female. 56% of the respondents have a bachelor’s degree, with an even split between males and females. 17% of the participants have a diploma (semi-higher education) with 31% of them being females, and 12% are graduated from high school. Only 7% of the sample have incomplete education.

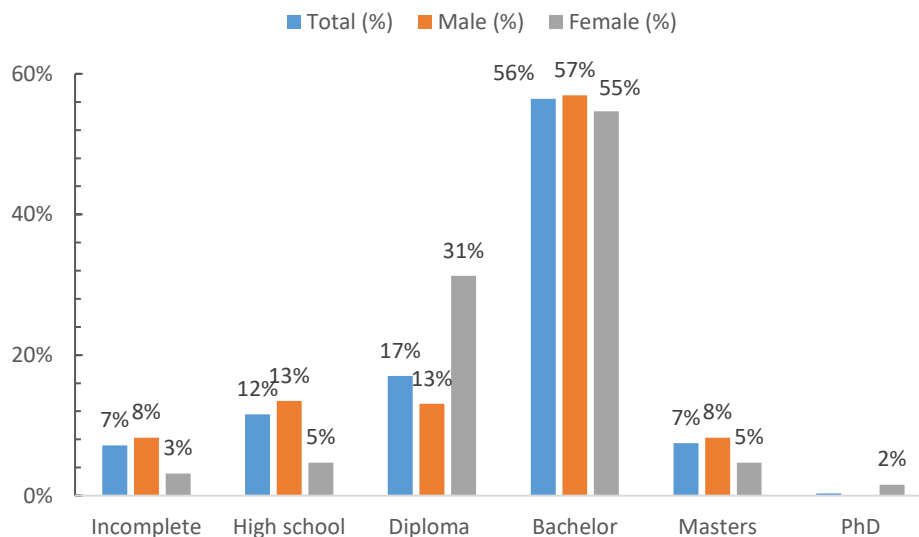


Figure 3: Levels of education

The average number of professional work experience in the sample is 9.7 years. Females in our survey have 5 years of professional experience on average and males have 10 years (Figure 4).

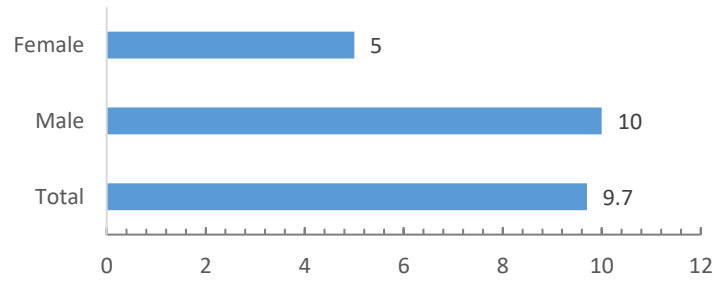


Figure 4: Average years of professional experience

Over 70% of the sample are married and live within a household (Figure 5). In this study, we define a household as all related family members who live within the same house and share the house expenses. For instance, married children with their wives and kids, who live in the same house as their parents are considered a single household, as long as they share the house expenses or one being dependent on the income of another. This definition was adopted for practical reasons, as it was easier for the survey participants to respond to questions on their consumption patterns.

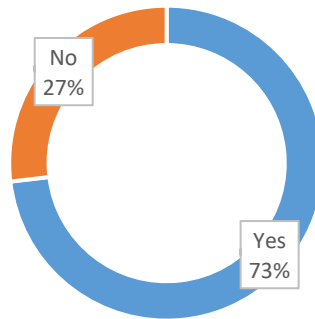


Figure 5: Marital status

The average size of a household is 7.4 members, with on average 3.9 members being female and 3.5 male. Interestingly, these figures mirror the national estimates as reflected in the Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (ALCS, 2016/17)³.

³ ALCS 2016/17 reports household size of 7.3 in urban Afghanistan, 7.8 in rural Afghanistan, resulting to a national average of 7.7.

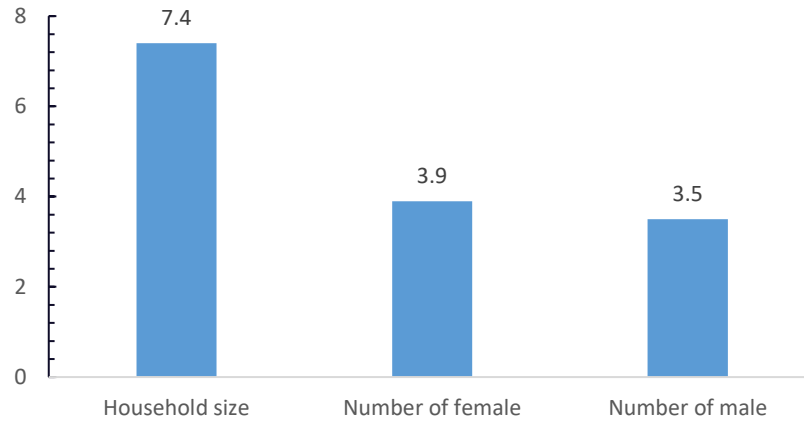


Figure 6: Average household size

We also asked participants if their family had a female member eligible to be in secondary school, high school or higher education who is willing to study. This question is important because it helps us understand whether families with and without school-age girls would tend to assess social and economic outcomes differently, given the Taliban’s ban on girl’s secondary and higher education. Over 60% of households in our sample have an eligible female member who is within the age to attend secondary school or above, while the remainder of about one third does not (Figure 7). This heterogeneity in our sample is also important for the credibility of household’s answers to subjective and perception questions about the socio-economic challenges in the country.

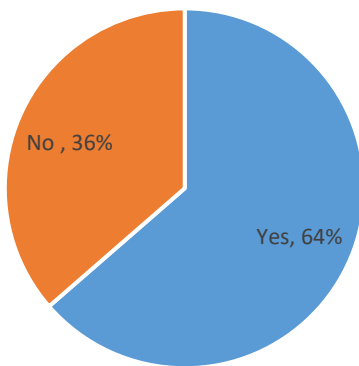


Figure 7: Household with a female family member eligible for secondary education or higher

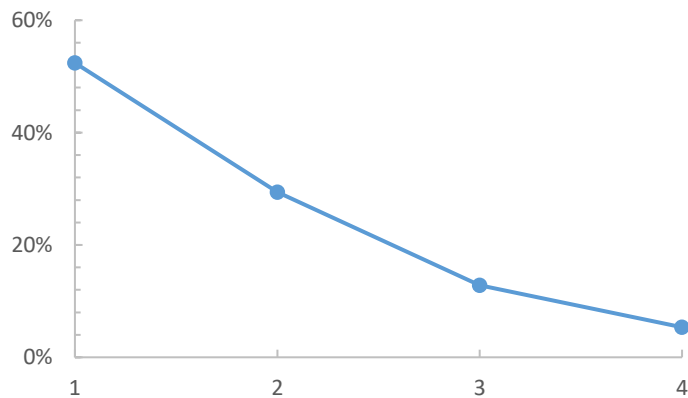


Figure 8: If yes, number of female members

3. MAIN RESULTS

The results of the survey and the interviews are presented thematic-wise in this section.

3.1 ECONOMIC WELLBEING

3.1.1 Employment

In our sample, 43 percent of the participants were identified as unemployed as of July 2023.⁴ This shows a significant increase in the unemployment rate over the past two years: only 4 percent of the participants declared being unemployed two years ago (i.e., in July 2021). As shown in Figure 9, the growing trend in unemployment since the political collapse of 2021 is true for both males (up by 31 percentage points) and females (up by 8 percentage points). Among those without any full-time or part-time employment in July 2023, 90% have been actively looking for a job for the past four weeks (Figure 10). Overall, we observe significant reductions in the employment of both male and female in Kabul since the collapse. **In July 2021, of the total sample, 20% females and 76% of males were in paid employment. Two years later, female employment fell to 12% whereas male employment fell to 45%.**

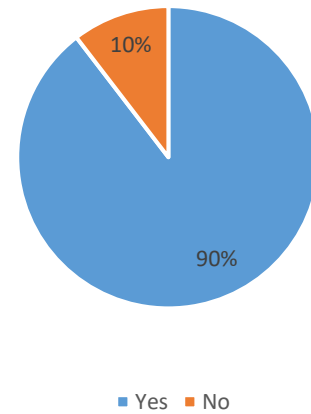
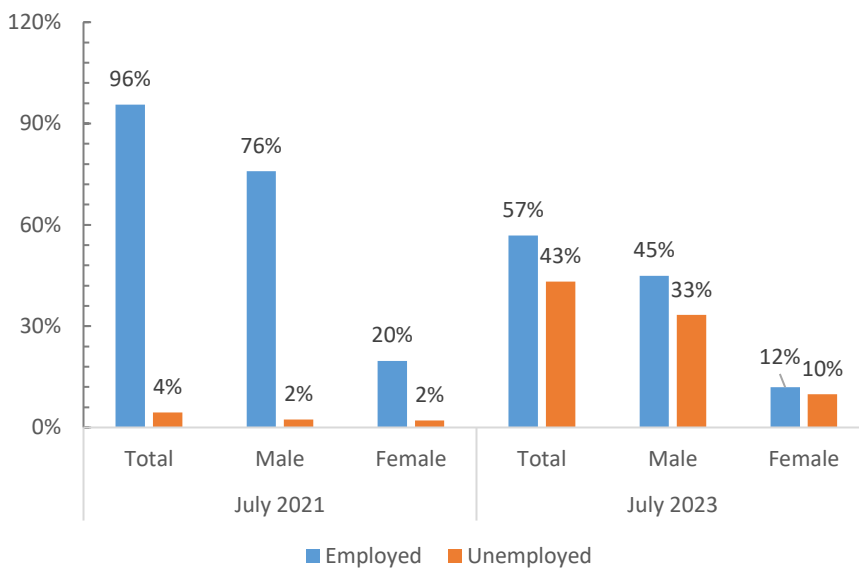


Figure 9: Employment and unemployment, July 2021, and July 2023

Figure 10: Looking for a job in July 2023

The share of participants with a part time or casual temporary job have increased by 9 percentage points between July 2021 and July 2023. The number of people with a full-time job in the survey has also decreased by 9 percentage points (Figure 11). The same trend is true for both males and females. Shares of each gender in full-time jobs have dropped, whereas they have increased for part-time jobs.

⁴ Unemployed is defined in our survey as a working-age individual who does not have a full-time or part-time job, is willing to work and has been actively looking for a job in the past four weeks.

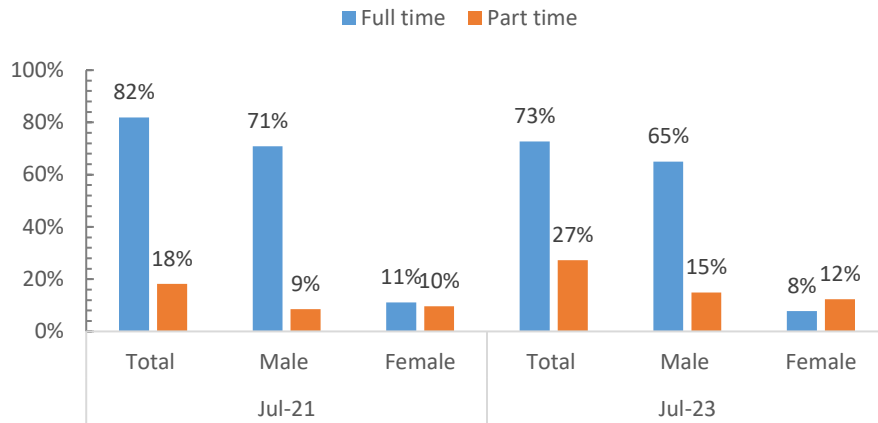


Figure 11: Employment type

Self-employment has increased by 10 percentage points between July 2021 and July 2023. Conversely, there is a 10-percentage point drop in the share of employees, i.e., those in paid employment of other companies/entities in the sample. There is a significant rise in self-employment among males (12%) compared to just 1% for females over the same period (Figure 12).

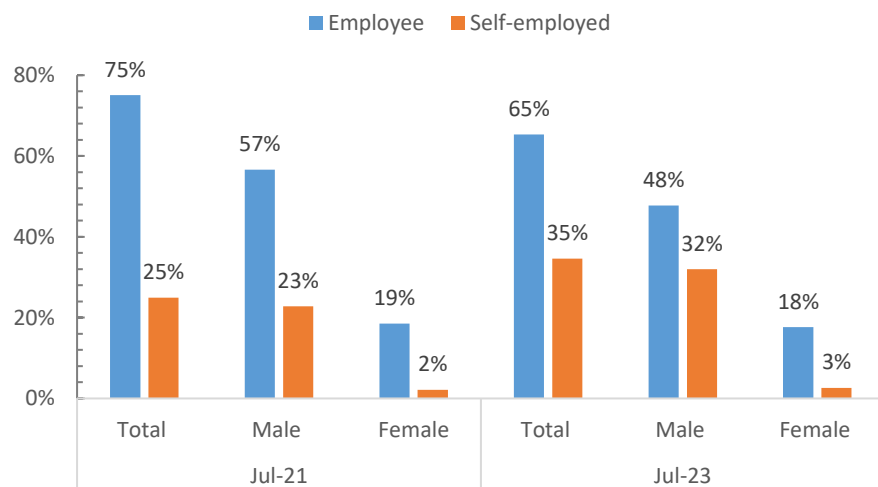


Figure 12: Employment by status

Employment in the private sector increased by 19 percentage points, whereas it dropped by 7 percentage points in the public sector. We observe only a marginal increase in employment in local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and a marginal decline in employment in international NGOs (see Figure 13). In the aftermath of the collapse of the Republic, many INGOs closed their offices in Afghanistan whereas local NGOs tried to get into the delivery space. Nonetheless, they constitute a small fraction of the labour market. Employment in the security sector, including in military positions in the government as well as with private security companies and foreign military missions, which made 9 percent of total jobs in our sample in July 2021, completely vanished in July 2023. In the questionnaire, in order to minimize security risks and to provide the respondents with some reassurance, we labelled military/security jobs as “other” on the paper but advised the enumerators to verbally define this category to the respondents during the survey.

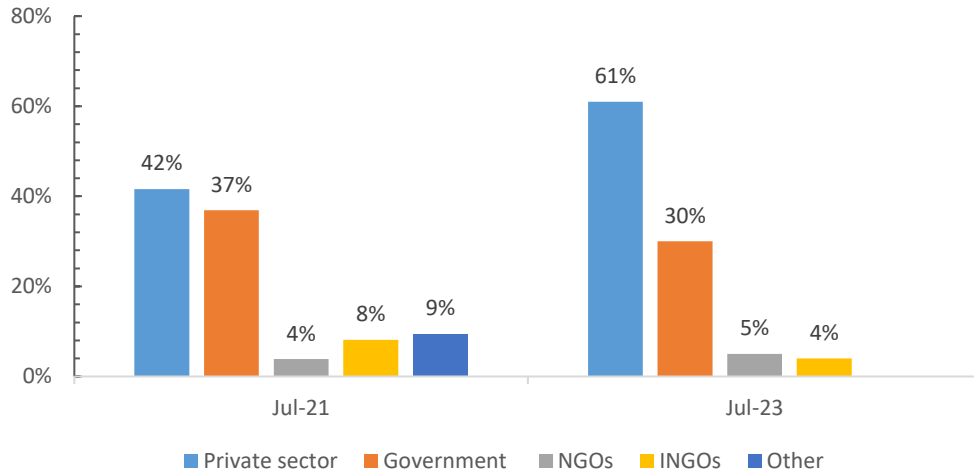


Figure 13: Employment by organization

Employment in the sectors of education and mining have increased whereas employment in sectors such as public administration has significantly reduced. Increased employment in the education sector is likely due to growing private sector services which have emerged following Taliban’s restrictions on girl’s secondary and high school education. Private institutes in Kabul, which often operate informally, offer alternative education such as language and specialized courses to male and female students. As shown in Figure 14, other sectoral changes in employment are also observable, for instance in July 2023 there are marginal increases in the number of people working in the sectors such as health, banking, and finance (including informal Hawala services), and manufacturing. There has also been a sizeable reduction in trade and repair of vehicles between July 2021 and July 2023.

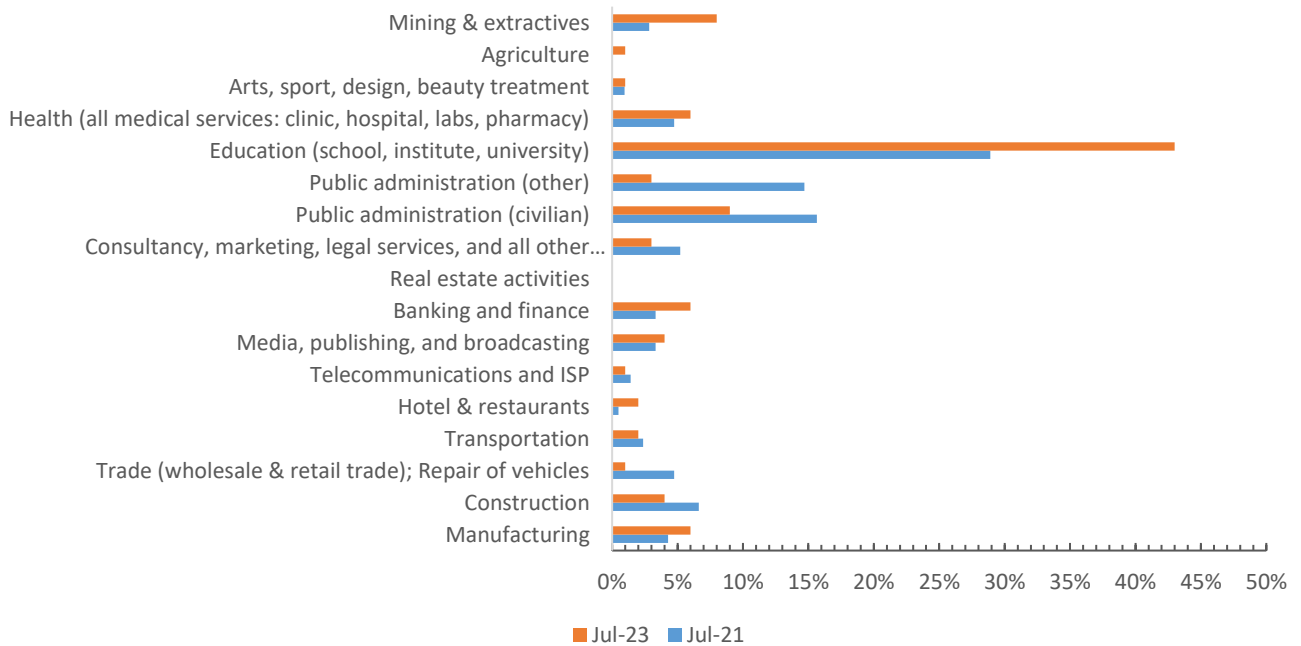


Figure 14: Employment by sector

Employment by categories of labour skill has declined by one percentage point for senior managers, 2 percent point for mid-level managers. At the same time, there is a modest increase in elementary and administrative type of jobs (Figure 15). These changes are modest, however the indication being erosion of higher skilled jobs after the collapse.

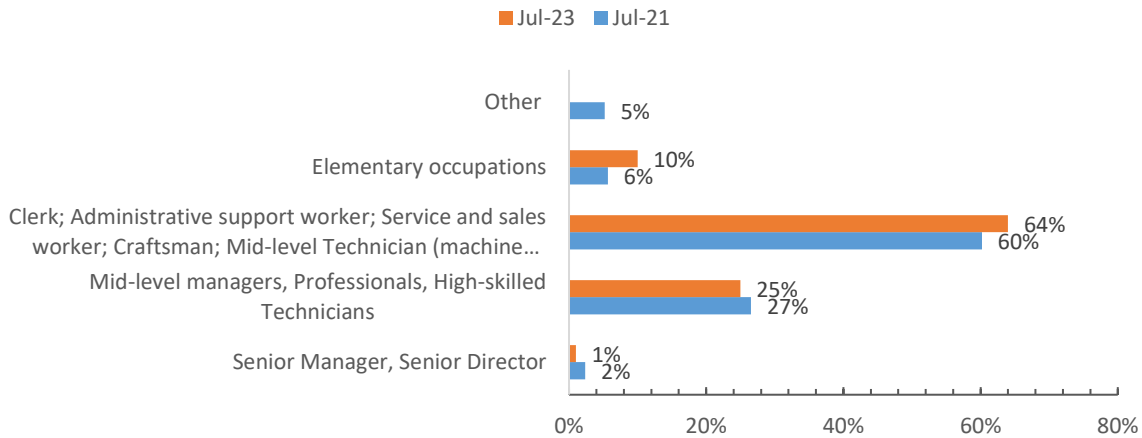


Figure 15: Employment by categories of labour skill

3.1.2 Income and household debt

The share of households with a monthly income of less than 25,000 AFN (\$287)⁵ have increased by 60 percentage points, while the shares of other income categories have sharply declined. As shown in Figure 16, only 24% of households in our sample earned a monthly income of less than 25,000 AFN in July 2021, while this rate increased to 84% by July 2023. Conversely, the share of households with incomes between 25,000 to 50,000 AFN (\$287 - \$575) have declined by 37 percentage points, and those with incomes between 50,001 to 100,000 AFN (\$575 - \$1,149) have declined by 20 percentage points (Figure 16).

⁵ At the time of the survey the exchange rate between Afghani and USD is \$1 = 87 AFN. We will adhere to this exchange rate throughout the report.

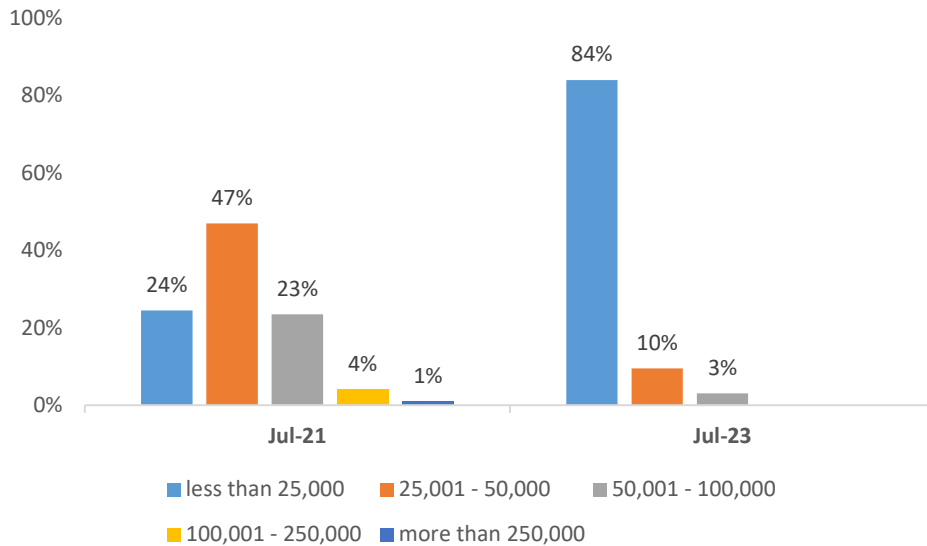


Figure 16: Household income

The percentage of households with ‘no member in paid employment’ has increased by 23% in July 2023 compared to the same period two years ago. The downward trend is true for all other categories except **households with one member in employment, which has increased by 17 percentage points (Figure 17)**. The percentage of households with two or more members in employment has significantly reduced between the two periods. In the post-2021 Kabul, this shows high levels of unemployment and high levels of dependency ratio i.e., more and more families are relying on a single breadwinner.

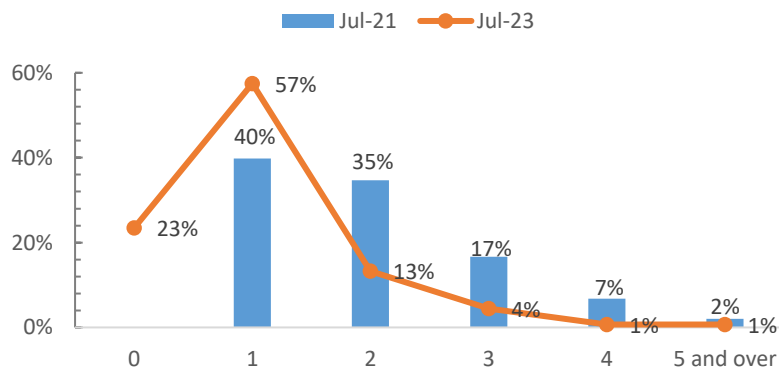


Figure 17: Member of households in paid employment

Household debt over the two-year period has doubled. The share of indebted households in our sample increased from 30% in July 2021 to 67% in July 2023 (Figure 18), indicating increasing levels of borrowing among families living in Kabul.

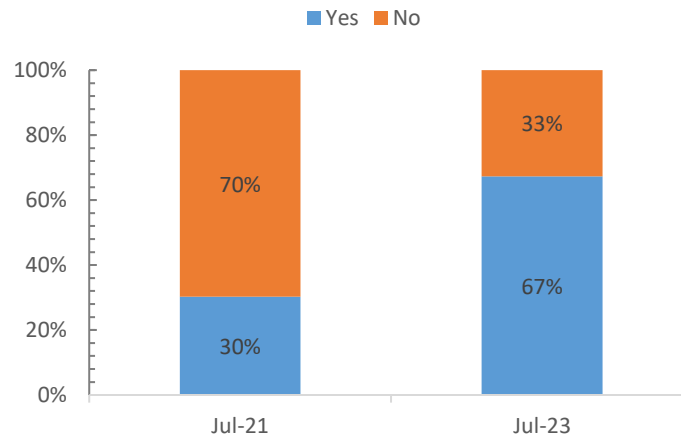


Figure 18: Household debt

Average amount of debt per household has increased by \$321. The average value masks however the spread of the debt among households. As shown in the table below, the standard deviation (which is a measure of dispersion) is higher in July 2023 than in July 2021, indicating that debt levels further spread out in the sample. Kurtosis, an alternative measure of dispersion, also shows more data in the tails, therefore indicating higher number of households with debts in July 2023.

Table 1: Household debt: Descriptive statistics

	Jul-21	Jul-23
Mean	\$ 3,595	\$ 3,916
Std. dev.	\$ 7,517	\$ 12,894
Kurtosis	\$ 45	\$ 77

Since August 2021, 15% of participants in our sample had to sell their property or land to make ends meet. Although only less than a fifth of sample households in Kabul seem to have resorted to such strategy, selling of property does indicate worsening economic prospects. As of July 2023, 58% of our sample households owned a property/land in Kabul, and 49% owned land/property outside Kabul (Figure 19).

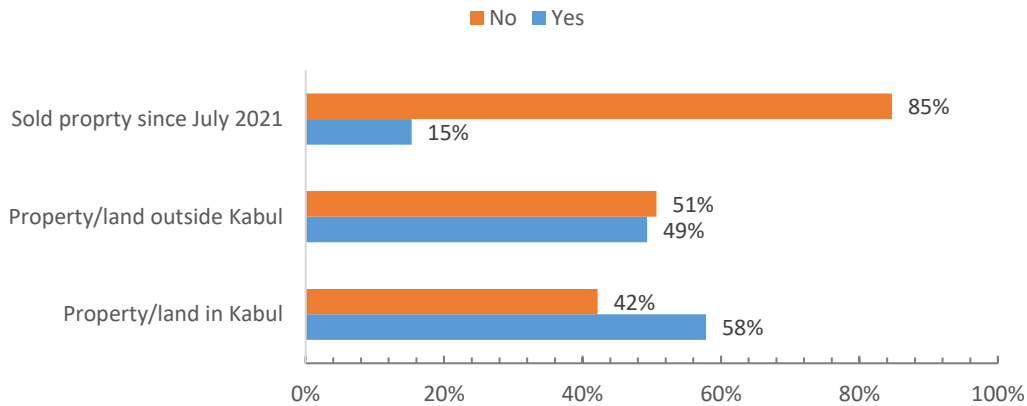


Figure 19: Owning and selling property

Slightly more than half of sample households (53%) reported having a family member living abroad (Figure 20) and, of those, 48% left Afghanistan after the collapse (Figure 21). Remittance plays a huge role in Kabul resident’s lives and economy of Afghanistan as a whole, which may warrant a study of its own.

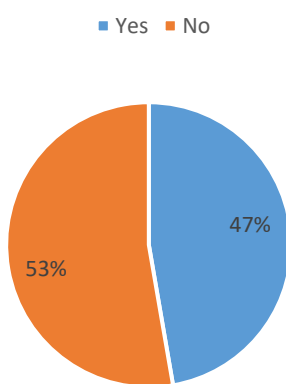


Figure 20: Family member overseas

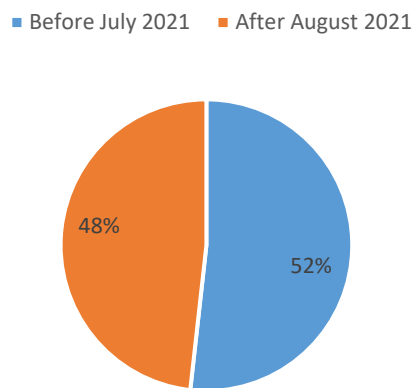


Figure 21: When did they leave Afghanistan?

3.1.3 Consumption/spending

Household average spending on food items has ‘substantially’ decreased over the past two years. Nearly half (47%) of survey participants said that they spent ‘substantially less’ on food items in July 2023 compared to two years ago (July 2021), whereas nearly 40% reported having spent ‘relatively less’. About 11% of sample households stated that their food spending had not changed between the two periods. Only 3% of households in our sample stated they spent ‘relatively more’ on food items in July 2023 compared to the same period two years ago (Figure 22).

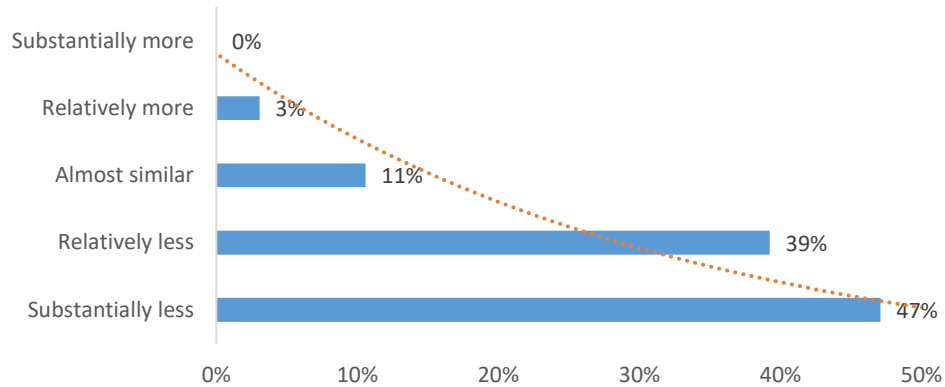


Figure 22: Current spending on food items (1-month average) compared to July 2021

Household monthly spending on non-food items has also ‘substantially’ declined in July 2023 compared to two years ago. Spending on household appliances has witnessed the sharpest decline compared to clothing and communication. Over 10% of participants say their household spending increased on communication (Figure 23), which could indicate staying in touch with family members virtually, including those living abroad.

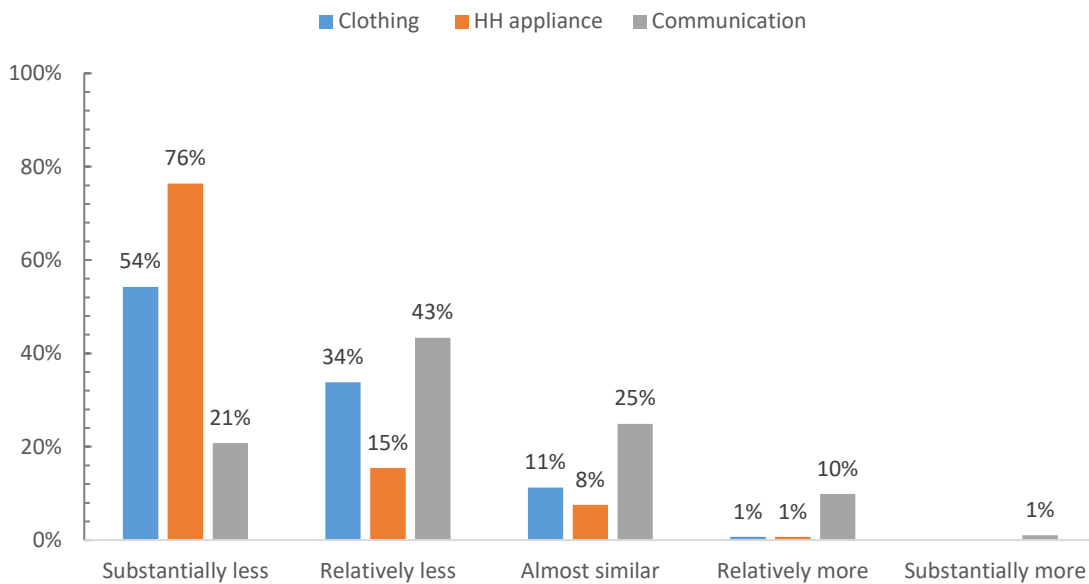


Figure 23: Spending on non-food items (1-month average) compared to July 2021

Household average weekly spending on taxis and personal cars have significantly declined, whereas the use public transport has modest increases. About one-third of the sample say that, within an average week, their use of personal cars has remained the same compared to two years ago, whereas over half of the sample report using less frequently personal cars compared to two years ago (Figure 24).

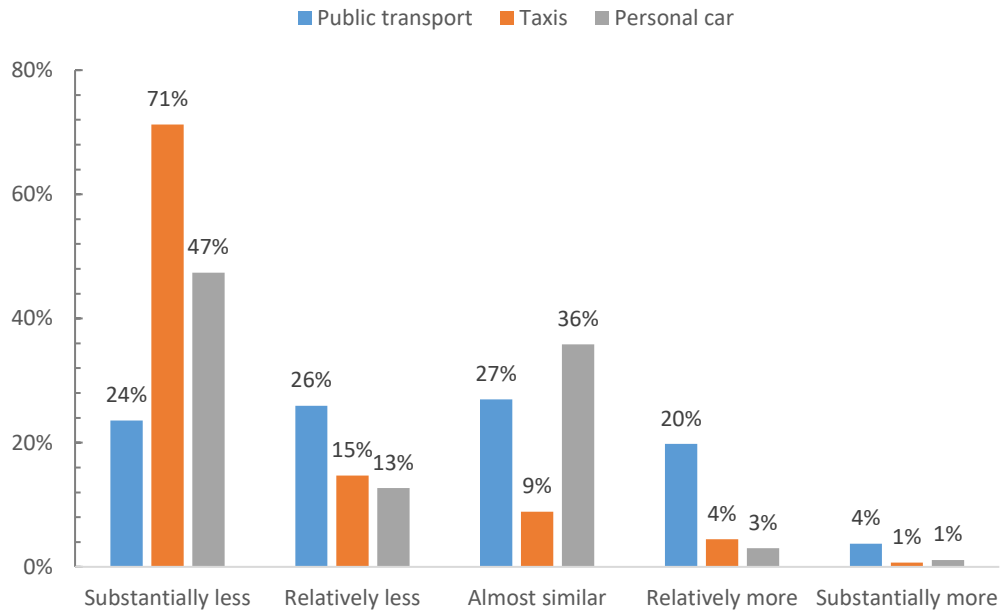


Figure 24: Average weekly spending on transport in July 2023 compared to July 2021

When asked ‘how frequently they went to restaurants or ordered food for delivery’, 74% of households responded ‘substantially less’ compared to in July 2021. The pattern is broadly similar for male and female respondents (see Figure 25). This indicator can proxy for growing pressure on households’ income, which has led them to eat less frequently outside to reduce their expenditures.

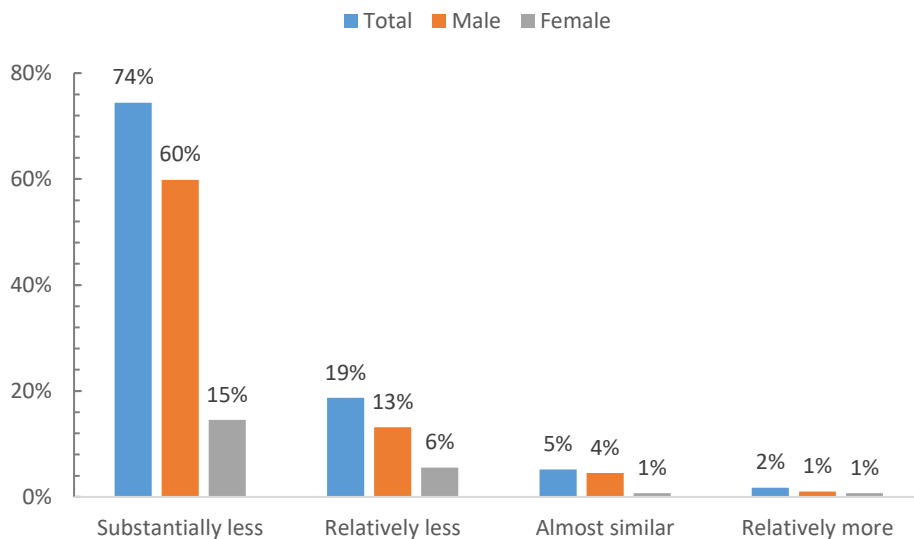


Figure 25: Frequency of eating out compared to July 2021

Households in our sample spend ‘relatively more’ on medical bills and ‘substantially less’ on education compared to two years ago. About 42% of households report spending either relatively more or substantially more on health and medical expenses. This indicates deteriorating health conditions in the past two years, but also difficult choices perhaps on how to allocate disposable income. Conversely, about 82% of households report spending either substantially less or relatively less on education compared to two years ago. This may reflect increased restrictions on education that have been imposed by the Taliban, particularly on women.

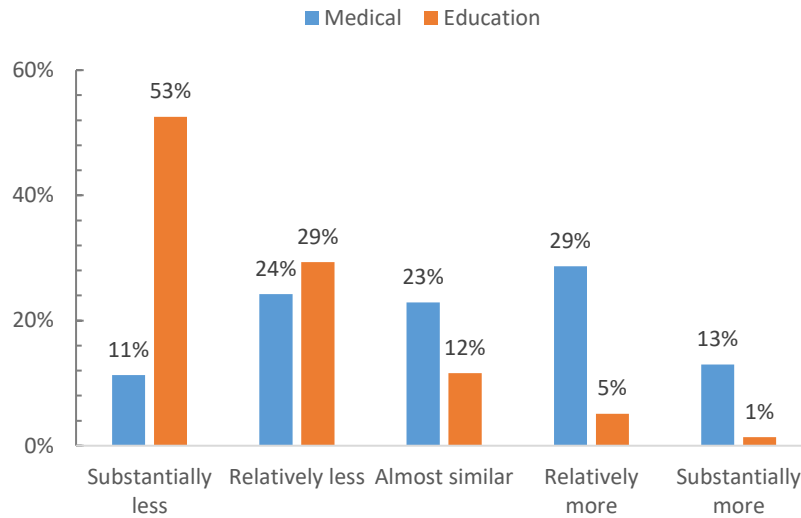


Figure 26: Spending on health and education (1-month average) compared to July 2021

3.1.4 Investments, shocks, and coping strategies

The overwhelming majority of respondents (97%) say they have not purchased any real assets since August of 2021. These include immovable property, such as land, house, apartment, or shops. Similarly, 90% of respondents state that in the same period, they made no investments in businesses as shareholder or as an entrepreneur (Figure 27).

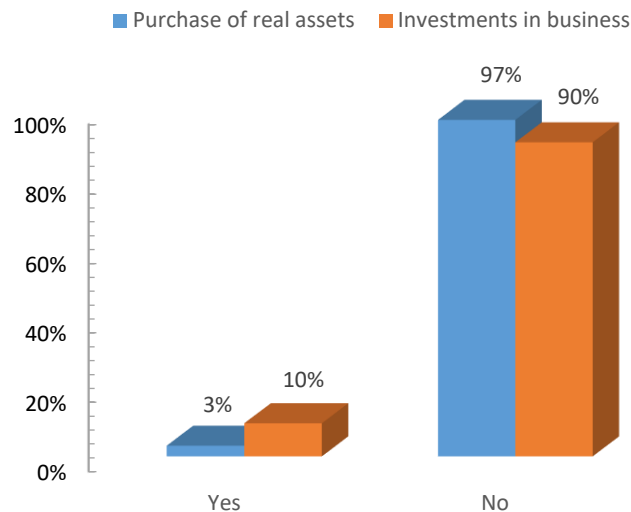


Figure 27: Investment activity since 2021

Increasingly lesser proportion of savings is being deposited in commercial banks in July 2023.

Proportion of households saving only less than 10% of their income in the commercial banks has increased from 45% in July 2021 to 96% in July 2023, indicating an increase of 51 percentage points over the period. Conversely, the share of those who deposited higher shares of their income in commercial banks in 2021 (i.e., the remainder 55% of households) have now shrunk to merely 4% of total households. This indicates a substantial loss of confidence in the banking sector as a result of the banking crisis that erupted following the August 2021 political collapse.

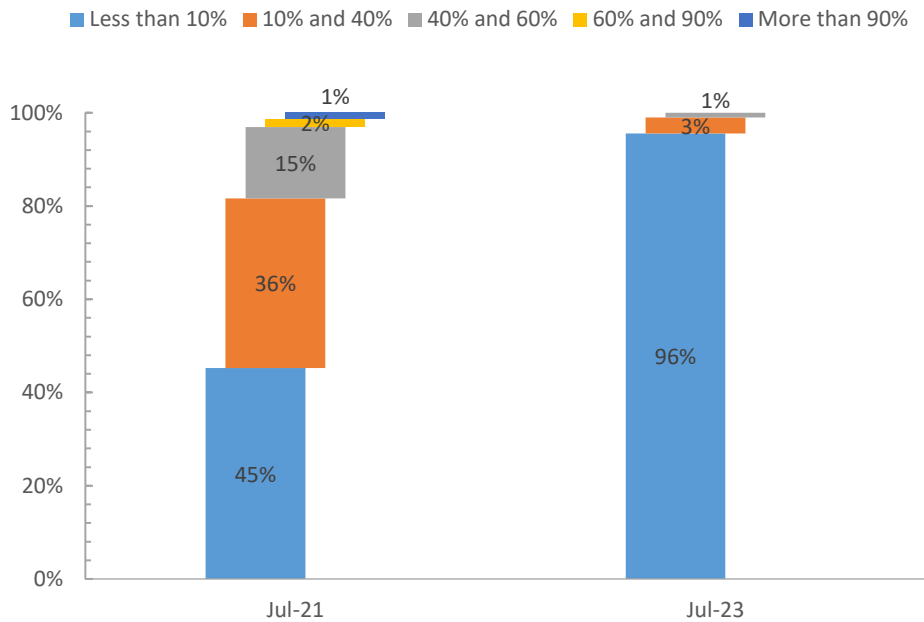


Figure 28: Share of households depositing various proportion of their savings in commercial banks

Participants are frequently finding it more difficult to meet expenses or purchase food necessities in July 2023 compared to July of 2021. The percentage of participants finding it ‘frequently’ difficult to meet their monthly expenses have increased by 40 percentage points (Figure 29). A similar pattern exists in other categories: over two-thirds of the sample stated they ‘never’ had a problem in July 2021, whereas two years later, this number has dropped to 18%, indicating more families facing difficulty. In July 2021, only 14% of the families said they faced difficulties only ‘few times’, while this figure has increased to 37% of the families two years later in July 2023 (Figure 29).

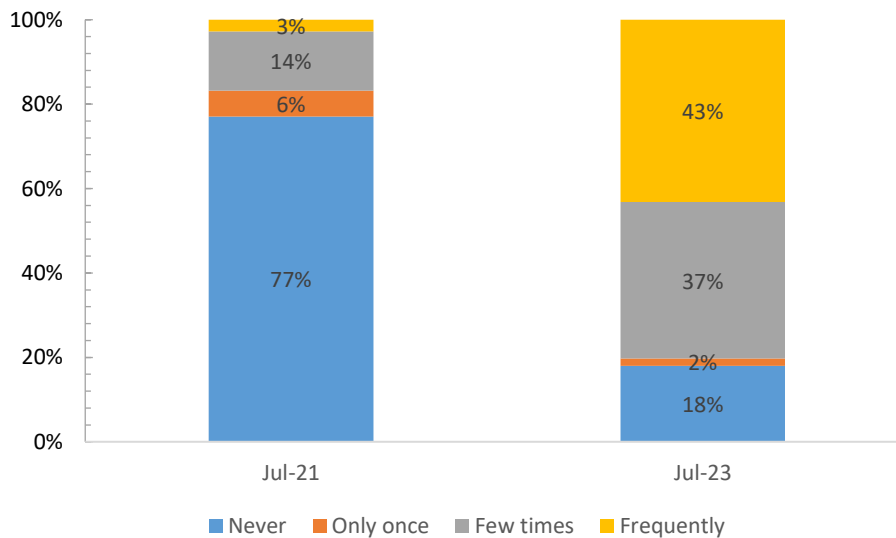


Figure 29: Difficulty meeting household expenses (monthly)

Most participants use credit from local shops or borrow from family and friends as a coping mechanism. In the survey, almost 60% of the participants said they would use trusted shopkeepers or borrow from family and friends in July 2021. However, this number has increased to 76% by July 2023 (Figure 30). There is an increase in the use of all other coping strategies such as taking more casual unskilled jobs, seasonal or temporary jobs. The number of participants stating that they had to sell less-valuable assets such as TV, fridge or books have doubled from 6% to 12% in the period of the study. Similarly, participants resorting to selling more valuable assets such as car, house, land, jewellery have increased by 12 percentage points. It is important to note that, if a participant stated they ‘never’ had a difficulty meeting their monthly household expenses, they were excluded from this question, as we want to understand how those with financial difficulty cope. Furthermore, respondents did not have the option to choose remittance, we believe this comprises a big part of the financing / coping strategies for Kabul residents after the collapse which may require a closer examination of its own.

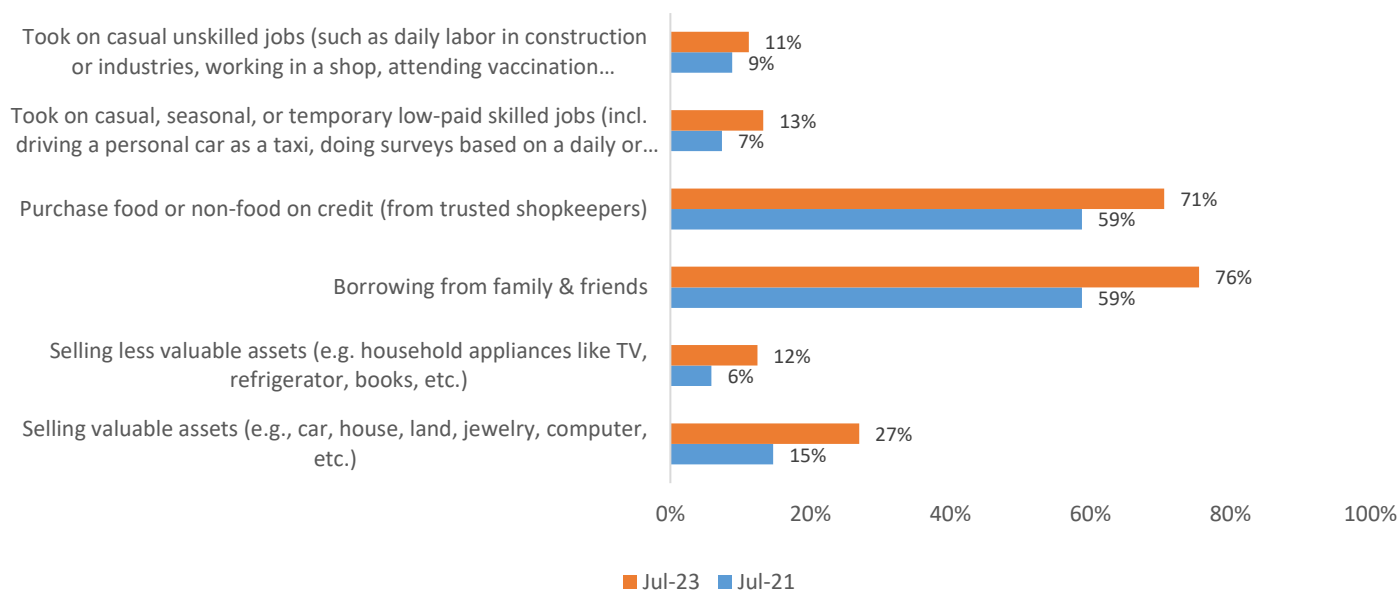


Figure 30: Coping strategies

We asked participants how often they had to resort to the above coping strategies before and after the collapse. Figure 31 shows that the frequencies steadily increased in an ascending order, meaning that the number of participants in the ‘Frequently’ category have increased by a significant 33 percentage points in July 2023 compared to two years ago. Given that all individuals answering this question had stated earlier that they resorted to one of the strategies in Figure 30, therefore we have zero for ‘never’ and the other two categories are shrinking in size when compared between the two periods.

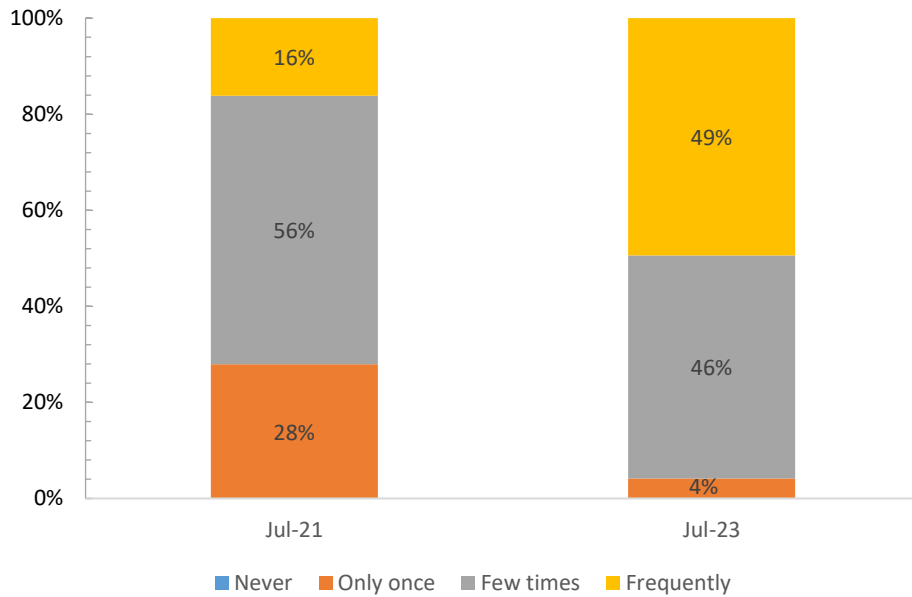


Figure 31: Frequency of coping strategies

3.2 HEALTH

3.2.1 General health

Thirty-five percent of the sample say they have developed a new anxiety or have started taking sleeping pills since August 2021. This is an alarming rate in a sample size of this study, indicating how widespread stress related health issues have become. Of those, 29% are males and 5% are females (Figure 32).

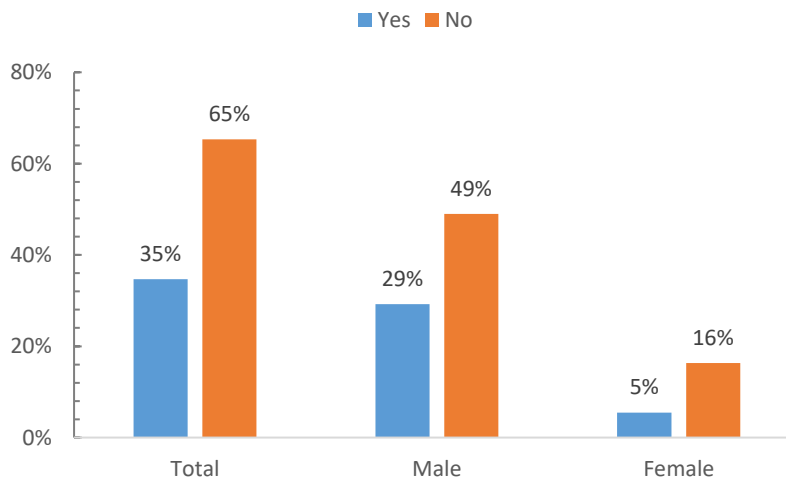


Figure 32: New anxiety or sleeping pills

Over 20% of the sample say they started smoking or re-started smoking by July 2023. Of this, only 2% were females and 21% were males. Smoking is considered the gateway drug into further addictions and more serious chronic illnesses including cancer and other pulmonary diseases (Figure 33).

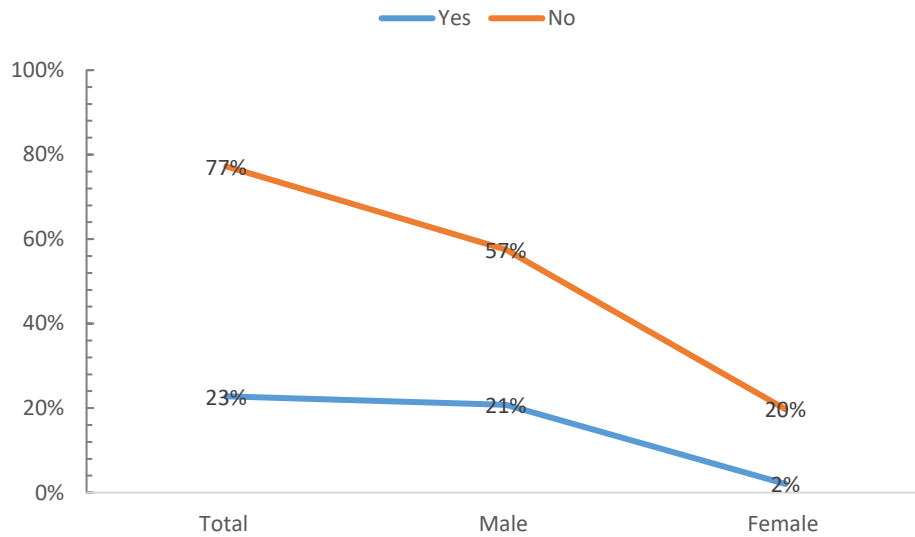


Figure 33: Started or re-started smoking

On other health related issues, **27% of the respondents say they visited a psychiatrist for the first time** since August 2021, whereas 23% were diagnosed with some type of chronic illness such as high blood pressure or diabetes for the first time. In countries like Afghanistan visiting a psychiatrist is not culturally widespread phenomenon, therefore the 27% of participants stating they visited one for the first time is an alarming figure. The number of respondents with new chronic illnesses such as high blood pressure has also substantially increased over the two-year period.

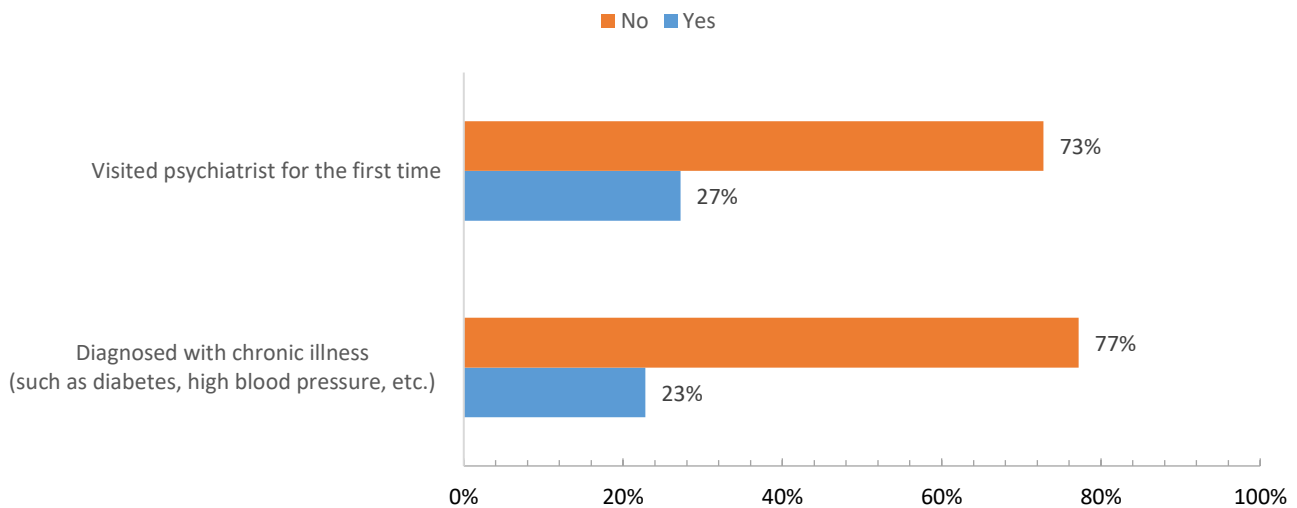


Figure 34: General health after August 2021

Forty percent of the sample visited a doctor ‘more often’ compared to two years ago. 34% say their frequency of visiting doctors have remained almost the same in July 2023 vs July 2021, whereas 25% say they visit less often (Figure 35). An increased frequency of seeking medical services does not necessarily indicate that the quality of health services has improved or remained the same. Rather, anecdotal evidence suggests that health quality might have deteriorated. There is a variety of reasons for these, with reduced levels of spending on medical bills (Figure 26), this might mean for less severe health issues

people might just wait it out instead of seeking medical help, whereas for more serious health issues, they have no choice but to visit a doctor.

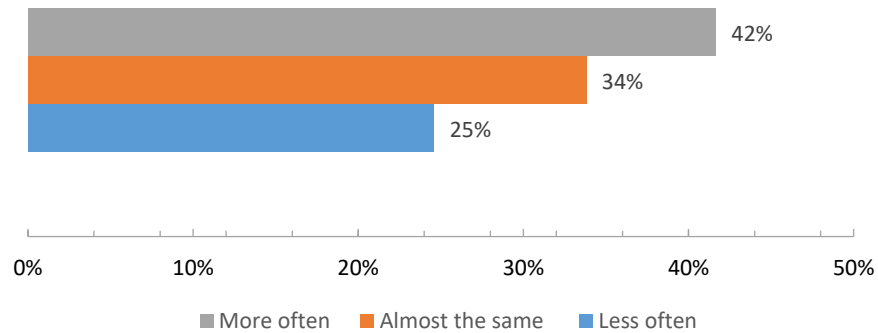


Figure 35: Frequency of visiting the doctor (before and after August 2021)

3.2.2 Mental health

We also investigate mental health issues. We employ the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) which is a self-reported 10-item questionnaire intended to yield a global measure of distress based on anxiety and depressive symptoms. This method gives a more detailed breakdown of how a participant feels. For instance, a participant is asked ‘how often do you feel nervous’ in the past four weeks. The answers are based on a scale of 1 to 5 but non-numerical such as ‘none of the time’, ‘a little of the time’, ‘some of the time’, ‘most of the time’, and ‘all of the time’. These results are reported in Figure 36.

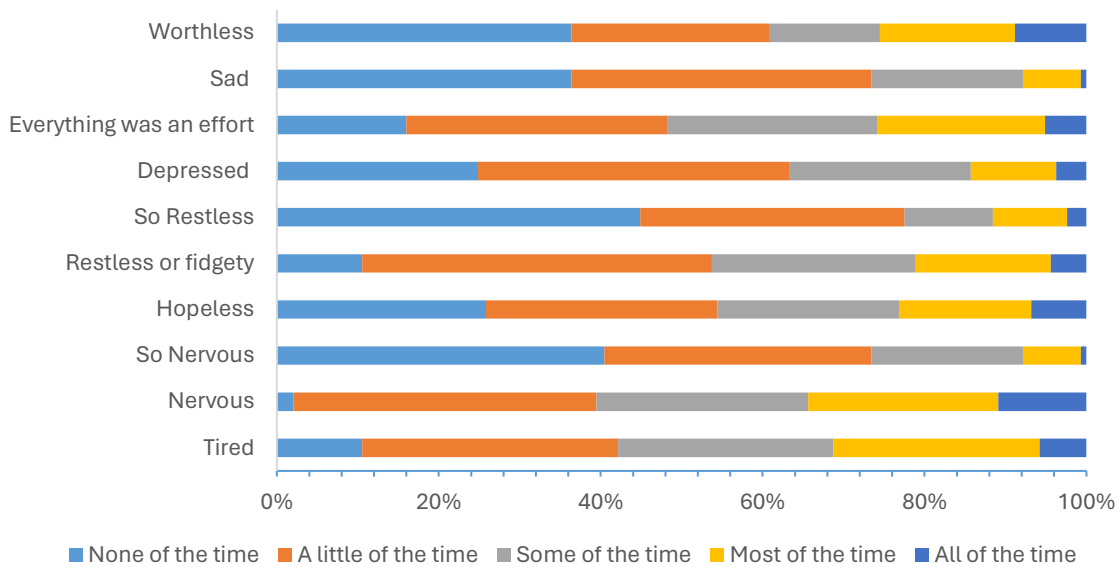


Figure 36: Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10)

The clinical interpretation of the results is more informative. Out of the 10 questions, if a participants score ‘some of the time’, ‘most of the time’ or ‘all of the time’, they ‘must be referred’ for more detailed assessments, however if a participant scores ‘a little of the time’, they could benefit from an ‘early

intervention'. Finally, if the participant mostly scores 'none of the time', there is no need for referral. It is important to note that K10 tests depressive symptoms and anxiety levels only.

We report the results for the clinical interpretations in Figure 37. We do this for ease of understanding the K10 results. **It shows 41% of respondents 'must be referred' to further psychological evaluations and another 34% could 'benefit from early intervention'.** Only 25% of respondents need no referral.

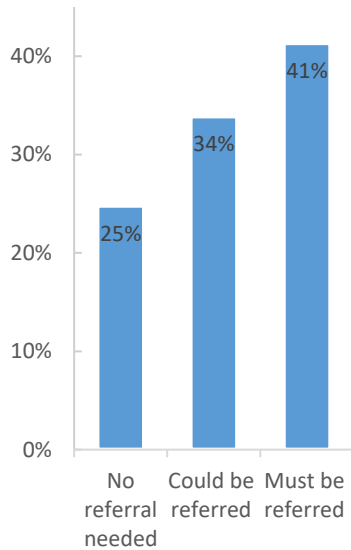


Figure 37: Psychological referral

For the purpose of retaining the full information, Figure 38 provides the fuller picture of how respondents perform on each of the K10 original questions. Participants perform/score very low on three of the symptoms, these are 'nervous', 'tired' and 'restless/fidgety'.

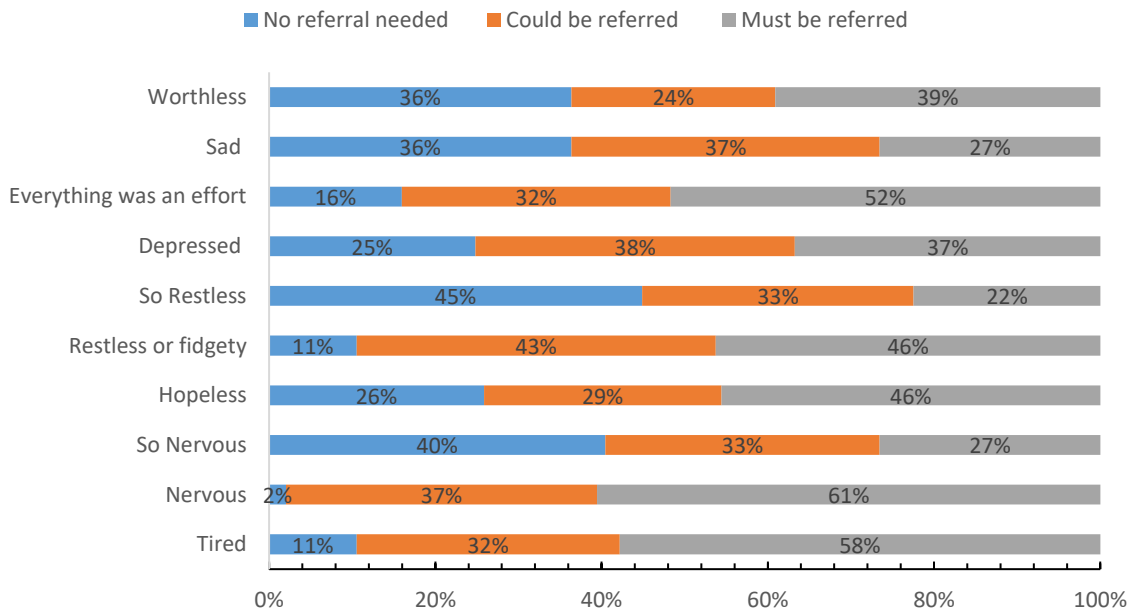


Figure 38: Clinical interpretation of K10

3.3 BASIC FREEDOMS

While there can be a debate on what constitutes basic freedoms for individuals, for the society and how they may remain at odds with one another at times, we had to make a few simplification assumptions to capture the political and economic realities of living in Kabul. We focused the questions on individual’s safety at home, rule of law, freedom of expression, individual identity, and property rights.

Over two-thirds of participants in the survey say their house was searched by the Taliban between 2 to 4 times since August 2021. Only 2% stated more than 5 times whereas 9% stated that their house was never searched (Figure 39).

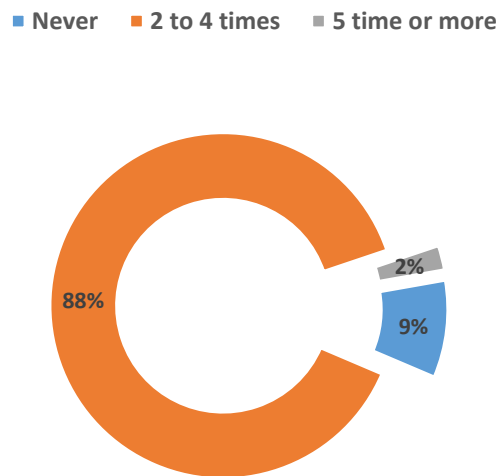


Figure 39: House searched by authorities after the collapse

Over 70% of the respondents would not use the courts or go to the state courts to resolve disputes. We use this question as a proxy for trust in de facto institutions; we ask participants to rank how likely or unlikely it is for them to use the courts if they ran into a dispute. Only about 10% say ‘yes’ and the rest is either unwilling or in doubt (Figure 40).

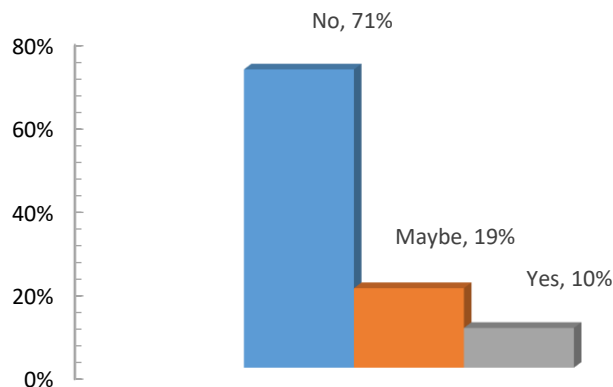


Figure 40: Rule of law

A majority of 85% say they cannot express their views freely on both political and religious matters. Similarly, respondents were asked to rank their ability to express views on religious or political matters, only 4% say ‘yes’ (Figure 41).

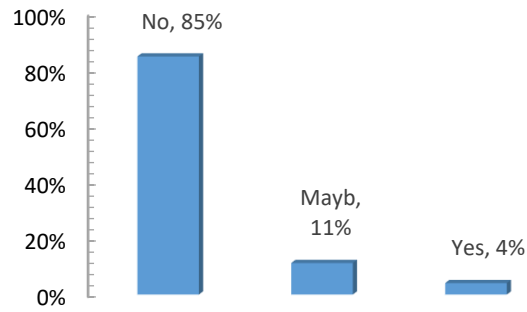


Figure 41: Freedom of expression

Over half of the sample are not confident if they can retain ownership of their current property in the future. Participants had exceptionally low confidence in retaining ownership of their property, assets, and cars which they currently possessed or may possess in the future. A small fraction of the sample said, they did have the confidence, 14% (Figure 42).

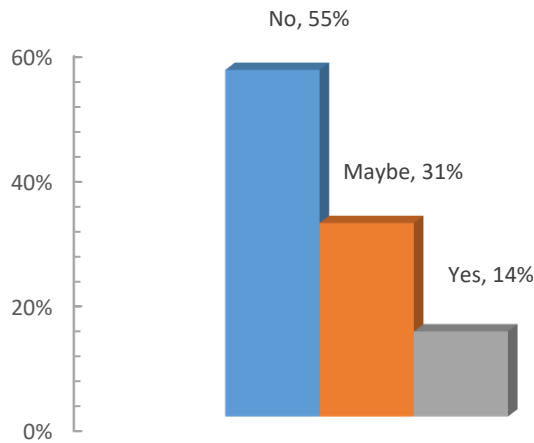


Figure 42: Property rights

Over 60% of participants say they cannot express their individual identity and individual values. We use this as a measure of individual identity: 13% say they can express themselves freely and 27% say 'maybe'.

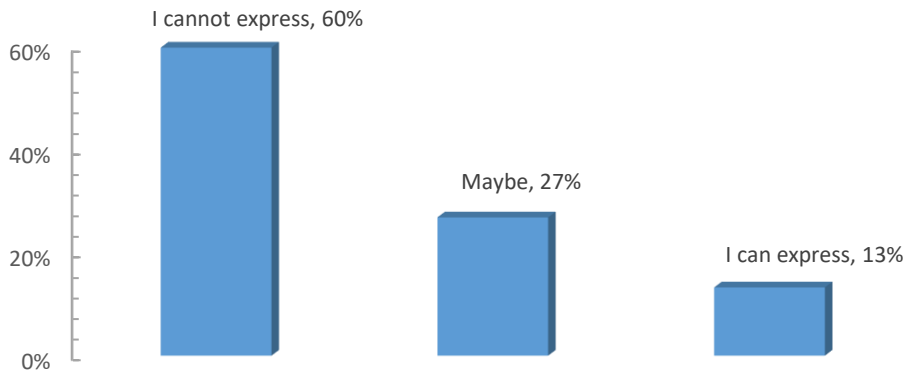


Figure 43: Individual identity

3.4 POST COLLAPSE EXPERIENCES

Over 80% of participants are not optimistic about the economic and political situation for the next 2 years. This can indicate higher levels of pessimism among households, lower levels of economic and personal activity now and in the future, prolonging the periods of crisis (Figure 44).

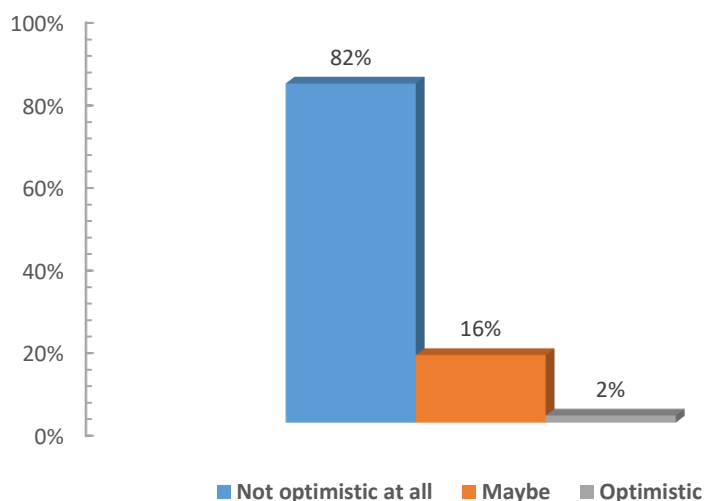


Figure 44: Economic and political optimism

The rest of the analysis comes from interviews. Afghans interviewed for this study shared their experience of living under the Taliban militancy for two years. We summarize these in five themes below:

Society

There is a consensus that the Taliban imposed stricter and harsher social rules compared to the Republic, particularly on women. Upon their return, the Taliban Islamic *fatwas*, rules, and regulations over the two-year period have consistently curtailed and undermined women’s right to work, right to education, and their public presence.

“Personally, this is the darkest and unhappiest period of my life as a female in Kabul, sadly this is not only me, but there are also hundreds like me, it is imposed on the whole society. I see my friends who are qualified, young, and full energy to innovate, to produce and to contribute but ended up hopeless, and jobless.”

There was an initial optimism in the first months and year of the takeover that within Taliban more moderate elements will emerge and understand the realities of living in the 21st century and of cooperating with the rest of the world, however after 2 years of their power grab, hardliners have become more powerful, Kandahar faction has prevailed, there is not a single voice of reform. On the contrary, reformist and slightly more moderate members have been marginalized and even disciplined.

“...words such as modernity, democracy, secularism and the like are on par with blasphemy, and these concepts/institutions are considered anti-Islam and anti-Afghan.”

In addition to that, many Afghans interviewed felt there is a ‘shift in enforcing a specific attire’ for men as well, for instance, not having the right ‘haircut’, the right ‘beard’ or wearing ‘too western styles’ of clothing will end you in ‘public harassment’ and ‘abuse’ by the virtue police. However, some respondents who had

experienced living under the Taliban rule back in 1994-2001, state that Taliban forces are not as strict on social rules as they did back in the 90s.

“Last time Taliban ruler Mullah Omar had an eleven articles fatwa that included things like females were not allowed to go outside without their mahram, females had to wear burqa, no one was allowed to cut their beard, students in schools and universities had to wear a turban and all media was banned. TV was not allowed at all, and music was completely banned. There was one radio station that run Taliban propaganda 24/7.”

Some participants observe a decline in Taliban forces moral conduct over the past two years, such that ‘they have become more corrupt’. They describe this as a ‘d  j   vu’ as in how much it resembles the first years of the Republic in 2001, the initial years of the Republic had a whiff of ‘great transformation’ and ‘progress’ which slowly and quickly faded into ‘corruption’, ‘nepotism’ and ‘political in-fighting’.

Economy

When the Taliban militants took over Kabul, it disrupted the natural progression of businesses activities, employment opportunities, and banks had to shut down and restrict cash withdrawals. There was uncertainty as the collapse was so sudden with the Republic president at the time fleeing Kabul without telling anyone.

“All of a sudden, the police, the army, the president’s office, and the central command disappeared. I reckon most ministries did not know about this; the public definitely didn’t know anything. Until things started to look bad when prisoners started breaking out and this plunged the city into chaos. I do not think Taliban had prepared to take Kabul so quickly either.”

Two years on, many of these uncertainties continues for the past two years. Taliban have not managed to grip of the economy, challenges at the household level are numerous and this is expected to ‘persist and further deteriorate’ as Afghanistan GDP is undergoing rapid regression. Those interviewed for the purpose of this study, feel the ‘strong negative impact’ this is having on their ‘livelihoods and ability to meet their monthly expenses’.

“This is leading to widespread poverty, food insecurity and closure of numerous businesses, I know personally over 80% of construction business have shut down from my friends and family.”

Another issue discussed frequently among participants is high levels of unemployment under the Taliban compared to the Republic which is unsurprising given the closure of INGOs/NGOs, government and local governments and foreign agencies in Kabul after 2021. For the middle class in Kabul after losing their sources of income and employment, remittance from family members outside of Afghanistan and local coping strategies (e.g., buying on credit) becomes a major source of livelihood.

“Having a family member abroad is like a lifeline. I simply do not know how families with no one spending them money survive in these conditions in Kabul. You have no income, no demand for street vendors, menial jobs do not earn as much to feed a family of three, let alone a family of 7.”

Security

There are several dimensions of security that respondents discuss. Many state that the insecurity in Kabul was imposed by the Taliban, especially the last 10 years of the Republic. Now that they oversee the city, they terrorize and prosecute dissent directly. Afghans interviewed for this study say their ‘children grew up

under siege' and Kabul residents were 'mere collateral damage' for the Taliban, during the previous 21 years.

"They are no longer carrying out roadside bombings, suicide and other complex attacks which involved suicide attackers storming buildings killing everyone in their path, continuing to fight the then police until they were killed themselves."

Other criminal activity such as car theft, pick pocketing, stabbings, breaking into people houses remain a big challenge in Kabul city. In this regard, security has not changed from the times of the Republic.

"It is all the same as before [under the Republic], you couldn't go stay out late in Kabul back then, without fear of getting mugged, stabbed or even killed, you can't stay out now [under the Taliban] either."

And another individual recalls:

"You are always afraid of getting in a Taxi when it gets dark, the taxi driver is afraid of you, and you are afraid of the taxi driver. Taliban have not managed to tackle this!"

This is referring to gang related crimes who pose as taxi drivers. In the best-case scenario, they would take your 'phone', 'money' but in the worst-case scenario if you show resistance, they will beat you to 'death'.

Another aspect that is frequently raised during our interviews was lack of personal safety.

"Walking around the city feels strange and feels like I have no personal security and a member of the Taliban forces can walk up and slap me in the face and walk away without any consequence. This is really worrying. I try to keep away from them as much as possible."

Another participant says:

"Even worse a Taliban spy units could pick you up, imprison you, torture you without informing your family. It would be days before anyone can find out where you are being held. I have several friends who are being held without the right to a lawyer, to a proper trial, nothing. Some of them were released and some of them are still in prison."

Hopeless and deep sense of loss

Talking to many participants, soon reveals a deep sense of confusion and hopelessness. This is more and more apparent among women and ethnic minorities.

"It is simply exhausting, living like a prisoner in your own city."

After the Taliban forces took over, Kabul residents talk about the daily 'discriminations' they endure especially upon visiting public institutions. A vast majority talk about losing hope for the 'future' and the 'future of their children' in Afghanistan. The discontinuity in many areas such as being connected the rest of the world and the level of attention Kabul used to receive under the Republic, has resulted in widespread 'dismay' and sudden 'despair'. This has dampened all other activities including the 'art of living', many stated that they are still trying to figure out 'what happened overnight that August'.

Another individual sums this up like this:

"This has left me and many other individuals feeling disconnected and deprived of basic rights and opportunities, it is even more painful when it happens in one's own city."

Human rights violations

A clear majority believe that the Taliban have committed atrocities and human rights violations and continue to do so without any repercussions. Participants recall the horrors they endured over the past 21 years under the Republic from kidnapping, killings, abductions, and threats terrorizing their lives.

“It is so disheartening to see those who sent suicide bombers and killed thousands of innocent people in Kabul, in charge in the very same city. If this is not human rights violation, then I don’t know what is!”

After the collapse, respondents say a different type of terror is unleashed. Taliban forces rule with absolute terror, you, your friends, and family members can get abducted, beheaded, harassed or their house searched ‘without a single explanation or reason’. The Taliban spy network is so vast and terrorizing, ‘you cannot trust your neighbour’

Many conclude that violence in Afghanistan has not ended and contrary to the ‘dominant news headlines’ security has not improved, active fighting may have ended but ‘state violence and suppression of rights has tripled’. Many participants portray the current state of Afghanistan as one of ‘extreme suffering’, ‘constant state of fear’, ‘disillusionment’ and ‘daily struggle under an oppressive regime’.

3.5 MIGRATION

Our survey shows that 85% of respondents are decisive to ‘definitely leave’ the country if opportunity arises. This is a crucial measure of being unsatisfied with the state and society.

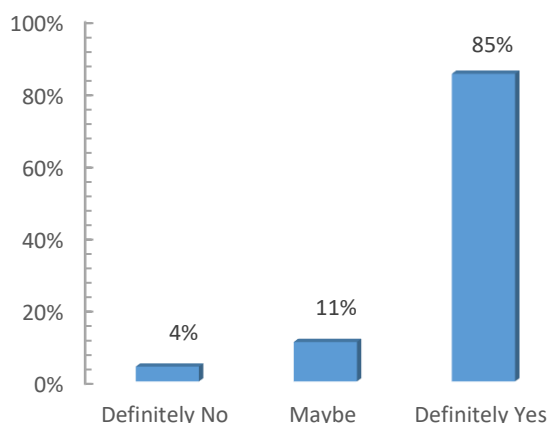


Figure 45: Leaving the country

The rest of the analysis comes from interviews.

Similar to survey results in Figure 45, interviews corroborate the growing desire to ‘leave Afghanistan’ given the opportunity. One participant said:

“If you ask from A to Z [meaning everyone], people say they want to leave. Personally, I never had a 1% intention to leave my country, but now I must, because of the inconducive environment after the collapse, I have lost hope here.”

On the contrary, a small minority of respondents in the interview expressed that despite personal, social, and economic challenges they would like to remain in Afghanistan. The reasons often cited for this are, ‘religion’, ‘familial ties’ and ‘Afghan culture’.

Another interesting observation from the interviews is while many reflect their faith gave them sustenance during these challenging times, when challenged that Taliban are an Islamic authority, majority of the participants do not associate the two closely and do not accept Taliban as an Islamic authority.

“Taliban discriminate against others [ethnic minorities], they are closer to Wahabis, they spread extremism, violence, they massacred Shias, they killed so many civilians and innocent people in Panjshir recently without any repercussions.”

Among the majority wishing to leave Afghanistan, most are aware of the legal and illegal routes, costs, risks, and challenges associated to that decision. The biggest concern on the illegal routes to migrate is ‘separating from family’ and ‘leaving their children behind on a journey that they may never see them again’.

The most frequent cited reasons for those wishing to leave is lack of personal safety, daughter’s future, lack of economic opportunities, and fear of another civil war. We expand on some of these below:

Lack of personal safety

Most of those interviewed for this study consider personal safety as an essential ingredient to be able to ‘live’ and ‘prosper’ in any society. One individual said

“Anyone of them [i.e., the Taliban] can come and take you the next morning and no one is able to ask why. This is absence of rule of law at its peak and it is scary. I miss sleeping without stress of having to wake up the next morning.”

The Taliban members consider themselves victorious and ‘above the law’ and such attitude has rendered sense of personal safety away from those left in Kabul.

Uncertainty of daughter’s future

Some said they want to be able to ‘envision a more stable and a brighter’ future for their children. This can only be fulfilled by leaving Afghanistan and reaching the shores of Europe or America. They want their daughters to ‘study’, to ‘work’, to ‘participate’ in the society, and generally want them to be able to have a better prospect in life. This dream seems possible and projected by those who had the courage to leave and are now in Europe or America. One resident summed the situation like this:

“I do not know if the grass is greener on the other side, but I know there is no grass on my side at the moment.”

Racial and language-based discrimination

The Taliban takeover had a profound impact on ‘enhancing racial and linguistic discriminations’ within the public sector and government offices. One interviewee said:

“Upon visiting government offices, I was not wearing the right clothes, they started mocking and harassing me instead of looking my issue.”

Many pointed out that Afghanistan has always struggled with racial and linguistic based tensions and this is a continuation of similar problems from the Republic period. Many acknowledged that Afghanistan has an unresolved racial and ethnic conflict which is often fuelled by identity politics played by the political elite.

Lack of economic opportunities

Another reason that was frequently raised during our interviews was lack of availability of work, limited opportunities in the current climate and the wish to ‘secure a stable future’. Afghans say this new climate does not ‘reward talent’ nor ‘promote meritocracy’. There is ‘no recognition’ of talents or initiatives to create a prosperous society. The focus is on ‘politics’ and ‘consolidating power’ rather than helping the poor or other social causes. Some say, it feels like Taliban do not see this as a function of their government.

Restricted freedoms and individual identity

Taliban are missing the basic understanding of ‘modern rights’, there is a ‘widening gap of ignorance’, and ‘growing influence of tribalism’ within Kabul city. This is the opposite of what younger interviewees are used to growing up, whereas older participants say this reminds them of a ‘brutal past’. In addition to that, there is a demographic change in Kabul which has also made participants uneasy.

“This transition and influx of new arrivals in Kabul city feels like Kabul is not the same anymore, and I feel like a stranger in my own neighbourhood, let alone all of Kabul city.”

Potential civil war in the future

Conversations reveal a deep sense of fear among the interviewees, especially those who are old enough to remember the 1990s, they feel like there is another civil war coming up soon. They say it is better to leave the country before the catastrophe hits. They say events have a ‘whiff’ of the past when Taliban were in power back in the 1990s.

3.6 COOPERATION

Cooperation is the elementary social process where communities support one another by sharing information and resources. Cooperation is the key to ultimate goals such as peace and prosperity. There is theoretical evidence that crisis affect the nature of cooperation within societies, often such that intra-group (within) cooperation rises and inter-group (across) cooperation declines (North et al, 2009; Solnit, 2010; Hilhorst, 2013).

Talking to participants highlighted the fact that perceived intra-group (within) cooperation has increased after the collapse. We were interested in understanding how a ‘group’ was defined and what participants perceived of it. Broadly speaking cooperation increased along the lines of speaking the same language, similar socioeconomic background, ethnicity, and social status. It is difficult to rank these in order of importance in a qualitative study.

On the other hand, many pointed out that inter-community (other communities) cooperation has deteriorated since the collapse in Kabul. There is a trust deficit among Kabul residents about the new arrivals, and those working in Taliban administrations. However, it is worth noting that the story is not as straightforward on the dividing lines. For instance, similar economic backgrounds transcend ethnic differences and in other instances the opposite is true.

The support received from friends and relatives during challenging economic periods has been described ‘significant’, underscoring the value of communal assistance in navigating difficult times. There is an increase in communication predominantly occurring through digital platforms and social media rather in person due to security fears. Others say they are all going through similar trials and tribulations which has brought them together, another interviewee noted:

“Perhaps we are all unemployed and have more time to talk to each other now.”

Some have observed a decline in social interactions among their network of friends since the Taliban takeover. They speculate several reasons, some say it is probably the economic constraints taking priority, others say individuals perceived lack of support during times of financial hardship, is leading them to a realization questioning the nature of friendships.

Some argue that it is the nature of urban life under the Republic, having a 9 to 5 job and some with more than one job, kept them so busy that they had forgotten to keep up with the traditional family units.

“If you don’t attend someone’s funeral once and twice, if you don’t go to people’s house on Eid and don’t take the time to invest on this a bit more, these family ties break apart. This is what happened to us in Kabul. Now is the time to re-kindle those ties.”

Living in Kabul for the past 20 years, for urbanites has either broken or weakened the traditional support mechanisms that are still present in rural Afghanistan. Especially the generation that reached adulthood in the first and second decade of the Republic, they have had a faster progression toward the atomic lifestyle prevalent in the modern world. Now that lifestyle is a thing of the ‘past’, they have been forced to ‘re-discover’ those principles and this has been challenging.

On the other hand, increased economic and social challenges changes expectations from friends and family, which can damage cooperation at a local level. Participants discuss, there is often a mismatch of expectations, which has strained relationships and families too, encouraging isolationist behaviour.

“A family member or a close friend living outside of Afghanistan in Europe or America, those inside Afghanistan anticipate help without any regard to their personal circumstance.”

Some participants say they had to isolate themselves and even quit their jobs because of the ‘change of dynamics’ in the workplace and the change in personal relationships with their colleagues after the collapse. They felt an ‘altered perception’ and ‘decreased respect’ from colleagues who quickly adopted the new norms under the Taliban.

3.7 SOCIAL STIGMA

The analysis in this section comes from interviews.

Two major changes Kabul residents note are loss of their jobs and influx of new families arriving from the Taliban heartlands.

Many Kabul residents lost their jobs, there was an influx of new families moving into Kabul in the wake of the collapse. In practice this means living with people they don’t know; the social norms and etiquette differ, and many individuals have taken up menial jobs they consider beneath themselves. All this can create different manifestations of social stigma. This is an important factor to understand not only as an indicator of happiness but also the stress it puts on individual and/or their families.

Notably societal stigma was experienced along dimensions such as economic status, language, clothes, and appearance.

Participants observe a shift in ‘social norms’ and the ‘city cultural’ in the post-collapse Kabul, they feel their communities and neighbourhoods have become ‘less tolerant’ and more ‘patriarchal’. They also note a significant change in demographics of Kabul which experienced an influx of new families from Taliban ‘heartlands’. This is particularly worse in the case of women,

“...For instance, women are banned from Band-e-Qargha, and they cannot enter this park which is in outskirts of Kabul and one of the only places city residents could go for a few hours to enjoy nature.”

There is a perceived notion among participants that the outside environment is not welcoming anymore, you cannot enjoy going to the restaurants due to these altered social norms accompanied with imposition of strict codes of conduct and propagation of racial and religious biases. They say it is ‘just not the same’.

Participants associated their feelings of ‘low self-esteem’, ‘isolation’ and ‘lack of socializing’ to these societal shifts. They prefer to keep to themselves to minimize facing these challenges. These feelings are heightened in neighbourhoods that are more heterogeneous along the dimensions mentioned above.

The shift in social norms is accompanied with altered perceptions among individuals too, particularly against those families who are labelled as more ‘liberal’ or ‘open-minded’. There is a significant level of perceived decline in respect from friends and colleagues for these families. Many participants have either witnessed first-hand or second-hand ‘verbal’ and/or ‘physical’ ‘assault’ in Kabul. This is not necessarily from the Taliban military or paramilitary forces but from ‘newly arrived’ individuals in Kabul city. The victims of these assaults consider Taliban as the perpetrators as well as ‘enablers’ of discriminatory policies leading to an environment of ‘fear’ and ‘oppression’.

Among those we spoke to, say when they lost their employment and they were forced to engage in menial labour or non-professional work, it felt ‘degrading’ or their ‘personal and professional dignity started to erode’. It directly impacted their mental health, and it is as though they were losing their ‘sense of self-worth’ each day. These individuals continue to battle with these ‘internal feelings’ while taking up low skilled jobs as ‘providing’ and ‘surviving’ for themselves, and their families is important.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This is not the first time that the state has failed in Afghanistan, and it will not be the last time. In fact, state failure is a recurrent feature of the country’s contemporary history. Since 1970s, Afghanistan experienced a series of coups and change of regime: Daud Khan, presidential system ending monarchy in Afghanistan (1973), the Communist Revolutions of (1978 and 1979), the Soviet-Afghan wars (1979-1989), the Islamic government of Afghanistan (1992-1994), the Taliban’s first Islamic Emirate (1994-2001), the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (2001-2021) and now the Second Islamic Emirates of Taliban (2021-).

During the 20 years of the Republic, Kabul was the centre of economic and political activity, the city’s population grew exponentially beyond its capacity which accompanied social and environmental challenges. As the capital, Kabul housed all of the central government administrative apparatus. This was accompanied with embassies, international organizations, for instance, 11 different UN agencies operated in Kabul, non-government organizations (both international and domestic) and many more private sector firms. All the private sector and public sector banks headquartered in Kabul. With that came employment opportunities, wage-labour dynamism, and an over-populated city. It also created a new middle class who were educated, skilled and economically active.

The collapse of the Republic in August 2021 primarily affected Kabul residents. The security apparatus of the Republic disintegrated overnight, so did the supply chain that provided logistical support to it. The embassies closed shops, international organizations either relocated or ceased operating in Afghanistan. Private sector had to cut jobs due to falling profits and loose labour market conditions. This study examines the socioeconomic challenges of Kabul middle class as result of those changes. We highlight economic,

political, and psychological challenges that Kabul middle class faced and continue to face as the Taliban de facto rule continues.

The study finds that performance across all dimensions have worsened in July 2023. After two years of Taliban rule, unemployment rate has increased, purchasing power has fallen, and investment activities such as buying property/land has halted. There is a general increase in stress and anxieties levels, with dependency on sleeping pills on the rise. Moreover, people's individual and civil liberties have been restricted, political opinions suppressed, and property rights waning. In addition to that these experiences are compounded with arrests, detentions and house searches without prior notice or legal procedures.

We find cooperation within homogeneous groups often defined by shared language, similar socioeconomic background and/or ethnicity has increased whereas cooperation across groups has declined, particularly in neighbourhoods with heterogeneous demographics. Many wish to leave Afghanistan given the opportunity, the reasons include but not limited to personal safety, limited economic opportunities, uncertainty about female's education, rise of racial and language-based discrimination, restricted freedoms, lack of economic opportunities, and a potential future civil war. The general post-collapse experience for Kabul middle class urbanites can be summed into a deep sense of loss, facing immense economic and social challenges. This combined with the new Taliban paradigm and discourse on the rise, has marginalized Kabul educated and middle class with no or little hope for a brighter future.

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APPENDIX

URBAN MIDDLE CLASS IN KABUL POST-2021 SURVEY

Dear Interviewee,

Your name, address, phone number, and other identifying information are NOT recorded in this form.

Questionnaire Number	<table border="1" style="display: inline-table;"> <tr> <td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;"></td> <td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;"></td> <td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;"></td> <td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;"></td> </tr> </table>					

I. Survey		
A	Surveyor (anonymized code)	
B	Date of interview	___ / ___ / 2023
C	Selected for additional in-depth interview	1. Yes 2. No

II. Interviewee Personal Profile				
1.	Interviewee (anonymized code)			
2.	Age	_____ years old		
3.	Gender	1. Male 2. Female		
4.	Ethnicity	<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 65%; vertical-align: top;"> DO NOT PROMPT: SINGLE ANSWER 1. Pashtun 2. Tajik (incl. Aimaq, Qizilbash, Sadat) 3. Hazara 4. Uzbek or Turkmen 5. Pashai/Nooristani </td> <td style="width: 35%; vertical-align: top;"> 6. Baluch 7. Other, specify: _____ </td> </tr> </table>	DO NOT PROMPT: SINGLE ANSWER 1. Pashtun 2. Tajik (incl. Aimaq, Qizilbash, Sadat) 3. Hazara 4. Uzbek or Turkmen 5. Pashai/Nooristani	6. Baluch 7. Other, specify: _____
DO NOT PROMPT: SINGLE ANSWER 1. Pashtun 2. Tajik (incl. Aimaq, Qizilbash, Sadat) 3. Hazara 4. Uzbek or Turkmen 5. Pashai/Nooristani	6. Baluch 7. Other, specify: _____			
5.	Married	1. Yes 2. No		
6.	Level of education	DO NOT PROMPT: SINGLE ANSWER 1. Incomplete SKIP TO QUESTION 8 2. High School (Baccalaureate) SKIP TO QUESTION 8 3. Higher education diploma (Bac+2) 4. Bachelor (Bac+3 or Bac+4) or Medical Doctor 5. Master (Bac+5 or Bac+6) 6. PhD		

7.	Place of study	DO NOT PROMPT				
			Diploma	Bachelors	Master	PhD
		Afghanistan				
	Abroad, name the country					

III. Household Background	
8.	How many members are currently in your family? Total: _____ Male: _____ Female: _____
9.	Do you have a female family member who is in the age for secondary school, high school, or higher education, and willing to study? 1. Yes, how many? _____ 2. No
10.	Did any of your female family members lose their work as a result of the August 2021 collapse? 1. Yes, how many? _____ 2. No

IV. Professional Situation BEFORE August 2021	
11.	How many years of professional work experience did you have until August 2021? _____ years
12.	Did you have a job or occupation on August 1, 2021? 1. Yes 2. No SKIP TO QUESTION 18
13.	Was it a full-time or part-time occupation? 1. Full-time 2. Part-time (casual, temporary)
14.	What was your employment status? PROMPT FOR ANSWER: SINGLE ANSWER 1. Employee 2. Self-employed SKIP TO QUESTION 16
15.	What type of organization were you employed in? PROMPT FOR ANSWER: SINGLE ANSWER 1. Private sector 2. Government (civilian, including donor-funded project-staff working in ministries) 3. NGOs (local or international), CSOs, non-profit organizations 4. International institutions (UN, Embassies, USAID, DFID, WB, ADB, the EU,...) 5. Other

16.	In which sector did you work?	<p>PROMPT FOR ANSWER: SINGLE ANSWER</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Manufacturing 2. Construction 3. Trade (wholesale & retail trade); Repair of vehicles 4. Transportation 5. Hotel & restaurants 6. Telecommunications and ISP 7. Media, publishing, and broadcasting 8. Banking and finance 9. Real estate activities 10. Consultancy, marketing, legal services, and all other professional activities 11. Public administration (civilian) 12. Public administration (other) 13. Education (school, institute, university) 14. Health (all medical services: clinic, hospital, labs, pharmacy) 15. Arts, sport, design, beauty treatment 16. Agriculture 17. Mining & extractives
17.	In terms of the level of skills, or the level of your responsibilities, how do you classify your employment (on August 1, 2021)?	<p>PROMPT FOR ANSWER: SINGLE ANSWER</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Senior Manager, Senior Director 2. Mid-level managers, Professionals, High-skilled Technicians 3. Clerk; Administrative support worker; Service and sales worker; Craftsman; Mid-level Technician (machine operators & assemblers) 4. Elementary occupations 5. Other
18.	Which of the following brackets, describes your gross monthly income level on July 1, 2021, in AFN?	<p>PROMPT FOR ANSWER: SINGLE ANSWER</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. less than 25,000 2. 25,001 - 50,000 3. 50,001 - 100,000 4. 100,001 - 250,000 5. more than 250,000
19.	How many members of your households were in paid employment on July 1, 2021?	Number: _____
20.	Did you have any debts accumulated up to August 2021 (in AFN)?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes, how much: _____ 2. No

V. Professional Situation AFTER August 2021

21.	Do you still hold the same job or occupation that you held on August 1, 2021?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes SKIP TO QUESTION 29 2. No
22.	Do you currently have a job or occupation?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes SKIP TO QUESTION 24 2. No
23.	Do you wish to work? Or, have you been looking for a job in the past 4 weeks?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes SKIP TO QUESTION 29 2. No SKIP TO QUESTION 29
24.	Is your current job full-time or part-time?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Full-time 2 Part-time
25.	Employment status?	PROMPT FOR ANSWER: SINGLE ANSWER <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Employee 2. Self-employed SKIP TO QUESTION 27
26.	What type of organization are you employed in?	PROMPT FOR ANSWER: SINGLE ANSWER <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Private sector 2. Government (civilian, including donor-funded project-staff working in ministries) 3. NGOs (local or international), CSOs, non-profit organizations 4. International institutions (UN, Embassies, USAID, DFID, WB, ADB, EU,...) 5. Other
27.	In which sector do you work?	PROMPT FOR ANSWER: SINGLE ANSWER <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Manufacturing 2. Construction 3. Trade (wholesale & retail trade); Repair of vehicles 4. Transportation 5. Hotel & restaurants 6. Telecommunications and ISP 7. Media, publishing, and broadcasting 8. Banking and finance 9. Real estate activities 10. Consultancy, marketing, legal services, and all other professional activities 11. Public administration (civilian) 12. Public administration (other) 13. Education (school, institute, university) 14. Health (all medical services: clinic, hospital, labs, pharmacy) 15. Arts, sport, design, beauty treatment 16. Agriculture 17. Mining & extractives

28.	In terms of the level of skills, or the level of your responsibilities, how do you classify your current employment?	PROMPT FOR ANSWER: SINGLE ANSWER <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Senior Manager, Senior Director 2. Mid-level managers, Professionals, High-skilled Technicians 3. Clerk; Administrative support worker; Service and sales worker; Craftsman; Mid-level Technician (machine operators & assemblers) 4. Elementary occupations 5. Other
29.	Which of the following brackets, describes your current gross monthly income, in AFN?	PROMPT FOR ANSWER: SINGLE ANSWER <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. less than 25,000 2. 25,001 - 50,000 3. 50,001 - 100,000 4. 100,001 - 250,000 5. more than 250,000
30.	How many of your household members are currently in paid employment?	Number: _____
31.	Have you incurred new debts since August 2021 (in AFN)?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes, how much: _____ 2. No
32.	Do you own a property/ land in Kabul?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes 2. No
33.	Do you own any other property/land outside of Kabul?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes 2. No
34.	Have you sold a property/land since August 2021?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes 2. No
35.	Do you have a family member living outside of Afghanistan? Family members: spouse, children, parents, siblings.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes 2. No SKIP TO QUESTION 37
36.	Did they leave Afghanistan after August 2021?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes 2. No

VI. Subjective Questions on Consumption		
37.	How do you compare your household spending on food items now (in terms of quantities or volume) compared to the months before August 2021?	PROMPT FOR ANSWER: SINGLE ANSWER <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Substantially less quantities

	<p>Do not compare the monetary values of your consumption, which may have increased due to higher prices and higher exchange rate depreciation.</p> <p>You may think of an average <u>1-month</u> period.</p> <p>Food may include: bread & wheat flour, meat, milk & dairy products, cooking oil, vegetables, sugar, fresh fruits, dry fruits, drink & beverages, etc.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Relatively less quantities 3. Almost similar quantities 4. Relatively more quantities 5. Substantially more quantities 								
38.	<p>How do you compare your household spending on non-food items now (in terms of quantities or volume) compared to the months before August 2021?</p> <p>Do not compare the monetary values of your consumption, which may have increased due to higher prices and higher exchange rate depreciation.</p> <p>You may think of an average <u>1-month</u> period.</p>	<p>PROMPT FOR ANSWER: SINGLE ANSWER</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="751 632 1409 1045"> <tr> <td data-bbox="751 632 1024 793"></td> <td data-bbox="1024 632 1409 793"> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Substantially less quantities 2. Relatively less quantities 3. Almost similar quantities 4. Relatively more quantities 5. Substantially more quantities </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="751 793 1024 846">A. Clothing</td> <td data-bbox="1024 793 1409 846"></td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="751 846 1024 961">B. Furnishing and household goods & appliances</td> <td data-bbox="1024 846 1409 961"></td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="751 961 1024 1045">C. Communication (phone and internet)</td> <td data-bbox="1024 961 1409 1045"></td> </tr> </table>		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Substantially less quantities 2. Relatively less quantities 3. Almost similar quantities 4. Relatively more quantities 5. Substantially more quantities 	A. Clothing		B. Furnishing and household goods & appliances		C. Communication (phone and internet)	
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A. Clothing										
B. Furnishing and household goods & appliances										
C. Communication (phone and internet)										
39.	<p>How frequently do you use the following transportation means (within a course of an average week) compared to the weeks before August 2021?</p> <p>You may think of an average <u>1-week</u> period.</p>	<p>PROMPT FOR ANSWER: SINGLE ANSWER</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="751 1094 1393 1472"> <tr> <td data-bbox="751 1094 963 1255"></td> <td data-bbox="963 1094 1393 1255"> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Substantially less frequent 2. Relatively less frequent 3. Almost similar 4. Relatively more frequent 5. Substantially more frequent </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="751 1255 963 1339">A. Public transport</td> <td data-bbox="963 1255 1393 1339"></td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="751 1339 963 1392">B. Taxi</td> <td data-bbox="963 1339 1393 1392"></td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="751 1392 963 1472">C. Personal car, self-driving</td> <td data-bbox="963 1392 1393 1472"></td> </tr> </table>		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Substantially less frequent 2. Relatively less frequent 3. Almost similar 4. Relatively more frequent 5. Substantially more frequent 	A. Public transport		B. Taxi		C. Personal car, self-driving	
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A. Public transport										
B. Taxi										
C. Personal car, self-driving										
40.	<p>How frequently do you eat outside (in restaurants, coffee shops, etc.) or order food for delivery at home compared to the months before August 2021?</p> <p>You may think of an average <u>1-month</u> period.</p>	<p>PROMPT FOR ANSWER: SINGLE ANSWER</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Substantially less frequent 2. Relatively less frequent 3. Almost similar 4. Relatively more frequent 5. Substantially more frequent 								
41.	<p>How do you define your household's current spending/consumption on health and education compared to the period before August 2021?</p> <p>You may think of an average <u>1-month</u> period.</p>	<p>PROMPT FOR ANSWER: SINGLE ANSWER</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="751 1782 1409 1944"> <tr> <td data-bbox="751 1782 1024 1944"></td> <td data-bbox="1024 1782 1409 1944"> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Substantially less amount 2. Relatively less amount 3. Almost similar amount 4. Relatively more amount 5. Substantially more amount </td> </tr> </table>		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Substantially less amount 2. Relatively less amount 3. Almost similar amount 4. Relatively more amount 5. Substantially more amount 						
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		A. Medical expenses (treatment, hospitalization, pharmaceutical products, lab tests, etc.)	
		B. Education (school fees for children, admission fees at university, purchase of books, etc.)	

VII. Questions on Investment Activities		
42.	Since August 2021, have you purchased any real assets (immovable properties, such as land, house, apartment, or shop)?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes 2. No
43.	Since August 2021, have you made investments in a business (as a shareholder, or as an entrepreneur)?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes 2. No
44.	Prior to August 2021, what portion of your savings had you deposited in commercial banks?	<p>PROMPT FOR ANSWER: SINGLE ANSWER</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Less than 10% 2. Between 10% and 40% 3. Between 40% and 60% 4. Between 60% and 90% 5. More than 90%
45.	Currently, what portion of your savings have you deposited in commercial banks?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Less than 10% 2. Between 10% and 40% 3. Between 40% and 60% 4. Between 60% and 90% 5. More than 90%

VIII. Questions on Shocks & Coping Strategies PRIOR to August 2021		
46.	How often did <u>your household</u> have difficulty in meeting your monthly expenses and/or purchasing food necessities in the year before August 2021?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Never SKIP TO QUESTION 49 2. Only once 3. Few times 4. Frequently (everyone or another month)

47.	Did <u>your household</u> have to resort to the following strategies to cope with economic problems in the year before August 2021?	<p>PROMPT FOR ANSWER: MULTIPLE ANSWERS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Selling valuable assets (e.g., car, house, land, jewellery, computer, etc.) 2. Selling less valuable assets (e.g. household appliances like TV, refrigerator, books, etc.) 3. Borrowing from family & friends 4. Purchase food or non-food on credit (from trusted shopkeepers) 5. Took on casual, seasonal, or temporary <u>low-paid skilled jobs</u> (incl. driving a personal car as a taxi, doing surveys based on a daily or piece rate, doing translations at low rates, etc.) 6. Took on casual <u>unskilled jobs</u> (such as daily labour in construction or industries, working in a shop, attending vaccination campaigns, etc.)
48.	How often did you have to resort to the above strategies in the year before August 2021?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Never 2. Only once 3. Few times 4. Frequently (everyone or another month)

IX. Questions on Shocks & Coping Strategies AFTER August 2021:		
49.	Since August 2021, how often have <u>your household</u> run into situations where you had difficulty in meeting your household's monthly expenses and/or purchasing food necessities?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Never SKIP TO QUESTION 52 2. Only once 3. Few times 4. Frequently (everyone or another month)
50.	Since August 2021, have <u>your household</u> had to resort to the following strategies to cope with economic problems?	<p>PROMPT FOR ANSWER: MULTIPLE ANSWERS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Selling valuable assets (e.g., car, house, land, jewellery, computer, etc.) 2 Selling less valuable assets (e.g., household appliances like TV, refrigerator, books, etc.) 3 Borrowing from family & friends 4 Purchase food or non-food on credit (from trusted shopkeepers) 5 Took on casual, seasonal, or temporary <u>low-paid skilled jobs</u> (incl. driving a personal car as a taxi, doing surveys based on a daily or piece rate, doing translations at low rates, etc.) 6 Took on casual <u>unskilled jobs</u> (such as daily labour in construction or industries, working in a shop, attending vaccination campaigns, etc.)

51.	Since August 2021, how often did you have to resort to the above strategies?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Never2. Only once3. Few times4. Frequently (every one or another month)
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X. Questions on Decision-making																															
	In economics, it is common to carry out decision-making experiments. Now we will do an experiment. You will be given an amount of money, and then you will be asked whether or not you wish to invest the money in a risky asset. If you invest, you will have a 50% chance to lose your investments, and you will 50% chance of earning 2.5 times the invested amount.																														
52.	<p>You have been given 100 AFN. You must decide which part of this amount (between 0 and 100) you wish to allocate to the following investment: You have a 1/2 (50%) chance to lose the amount you allocate and a 1/2 (50%) chance to win 2.5 times the amount you allocate. To determine the outcome, we will throw an unbiased six-sided dice, if the numbers 1 to 3 (inclusive) are shown, you will lose the amount you allocated. If numbers 4 to 6 (inclusive) are shown on the dice, you will win 2.5 times the amount you allocated.</p> <p>Your final earnings will be the result of the investment plus any unallocated amount from the initial 100 AFN.</p>																														
	<p>HAND THE INTERVIEWEE THE PROMISED AMOUNT</p> <p>How much will you allocate (B)?</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>A</th> <th>B</th> <th>C = A - B</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Afs. 100</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>THROW THE DICE IN FRONT OF THE RESPONDER</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>1</th> <th>2</th> <th>3</th> <th>4</th> <th>5</th> <th>6</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td colspan="3">Lose</td> <td colspan="3">Win (x2.5)</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3">Winnings = 0 + C</td> <td colspan="3">Winnings = (B x 2.5) + C</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3">Winnings = _____</td> <td colspan="3">Winnings = _____</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>TAKE OR GIVE MONEY TO THE RESPONDENT!</p>	A	B	C = A - B	Afs. 100			1	2	3	4	5	6	Lose			Win (x2.5)			Winnings = 0 + C			Winnings = (B x 2.5) + C			Winnings = _____			Winnings = _____		
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Winnings = _____			Winnings = _____																												

XI. General Health		
53.	Have you started (or re-started) smoking cigarettes since August 2021?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Yes No
54.	In the past year, how frequently did you visit a doctor compared to 2 years ago?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> More often Almost the same Less often
55.	Have you been diagnosed with a new chronic illness (such as diabetes, high blood pressure, etc.) since August 2021?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Yes No
56.	Have you been injured in a security-related incident in the past two decades?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Yes No
57.	Have you ever lost a family member or a very close friend to any security incident in the past two decades?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Yes No

58.	Since August 2021, how many times has your house been searched?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Never 2. Two to 4 times 3. Five or more than 5 times
59.	Since August 2021, have you visited a psychiatrist <u>for the first time</u> in your life?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes 2. No
60.	Since August 2021, have you started taking sleeping or anxiety pills <u>for the first time</u> ?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes 2. No

XII. Mental Health						
	In the past 4 weeks: (Choose by selecting the relevant box)	None of the time	A little of the time	Some of the time	Most of the time	All of the time
61.	How often did you feel tired out for no good reason?					
62.	How often did you feel nervous?					
63.	How often did you feel so nervous that nothing could calm you down?					
64.	How often did you feel hopeless?					
65.	How often did you feel restless or fidgety?					
66.	How often did you feel so restless you could not sit still?					
67.	How often did you feel depressed?					
68.	How often did you feel that everything was difficult to do?					
69.	How often did you feel so sad that nothing could cheer you up?					
70.	How often did you feel worthless?					

XIII. Basic freedom after August 2021 (rank from 1 to 9, with 1 being very unlikely and 9 being very likely)

71.	The rule of law: Would you go to court if you run into a dispute?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
72.	Freedom of expression / civil liberty: How openly can you express your views in political and religious matters?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
73.	Property rights: How confident are you in retaining ownership of your property, assets, and car which you currently possess or may possess in the future?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
74.	Individual identity and relationships: How confident are you in expressing your individual identity and values?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
75.	Willingness to leave the country: If you see an opportunity, will you and your household leave the country?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
76.	How optimistic are you about economic & political stability in Afghanistan in the next 2 years?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

XIV. Personality traits: Choose by circling on a scale of 1 to 9 which sentence most represents you			
77.	Someone who is talkative, outgoing, is comfortable around people but could be noisy and attention seeking	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	Someone who is a reserved, private person, doesn't like to draw attention to themselves, and can be shy around strangers
78.	Someone who is forthright tends to be critical and find fault with others and doesn't suffer fools gladly	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	Someone who is generally trusting and forgoing, is interested in people, but can be taken for granted and finds it difficult to say no
79.	Someone who is sensitive and excitable, and can be tense	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	Someone who is relaxed, unemotional, rarely gets irritated, and seldom feels blue
80.	Someone who likes to plan things, to tidy up, and pays attention to details, but can be rigid or inflexible	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	Someone who doesn't necessarily work to a schedule, tends to be flexible, but disorganized and often forgets to put things back in their proper place
81.	Someone who is a practical person who is not interested in abstract ideas prefers work that is routine and has few artistic interests	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	Someone who spends time reflecting on things, has an active imagination, and likes to think up new ways of doing things but may lack pragmatism
82.	Are you generally a person who is fully prepared to take risks	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	Someone who tries to avoid taking risks