

Afghanistan: Public Opinion Trends and Strategic Implications

Craig Charney

**Briefing
Center for National Policy
Washington, DC
April 3, 2008**



www.CharneyResearch.com

1133 Broadway • Suite 1321 • New York, NY 10010 • 212.929.6933 (tel) • 212.929.8995 (fax)

Sources

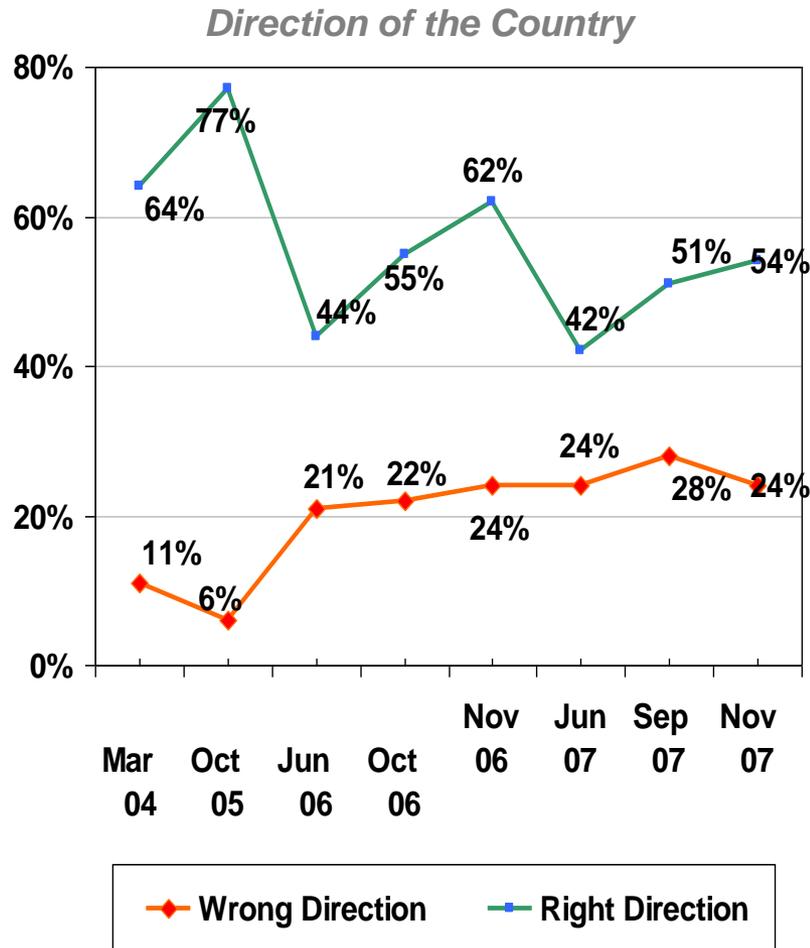
National Opinion Polls

This presentation is based on scientific, national, randomly-sampled opinion surveys taken by trained, professional Afghan interviewers and Afghan polling groups.

- **Charney Research Polls:**
 - Nov 2007 – 1377 respondents – ABC News survey
 - May 2007 – 2432 respondents – Charney Research survey
 - Nov 2006 – 2097 respondents – Charney Research survey
 - Oct 2006 – 1039 respondents – ABC News survey
 - Oct 2005 – 1036 respondents – ABC News survey
 - Mar 2004 – 800 respondents – Asia Foundation survey
- **Other Polls:**
 - Sep 2007 – 1578 respondents -- CBC/La Presse/ Globe and Mail
 - Jun 2007 – 6236 respondents -- Asia Foundation
 - Nov 2006 – 2000 respondents -- PIPA/ U Md
 - Jun 2006 – 6000 respondents -- Asia Foundation
 - Nov 2005 – 2000 respondents -- PIPA/ U Md

All by Afghan Center for Social and Opinion Research except Charney 2004 (Afghan Media Resource Center)

Optimism is down substantially from 2005, but has recovered a bit from the Springtime lows.

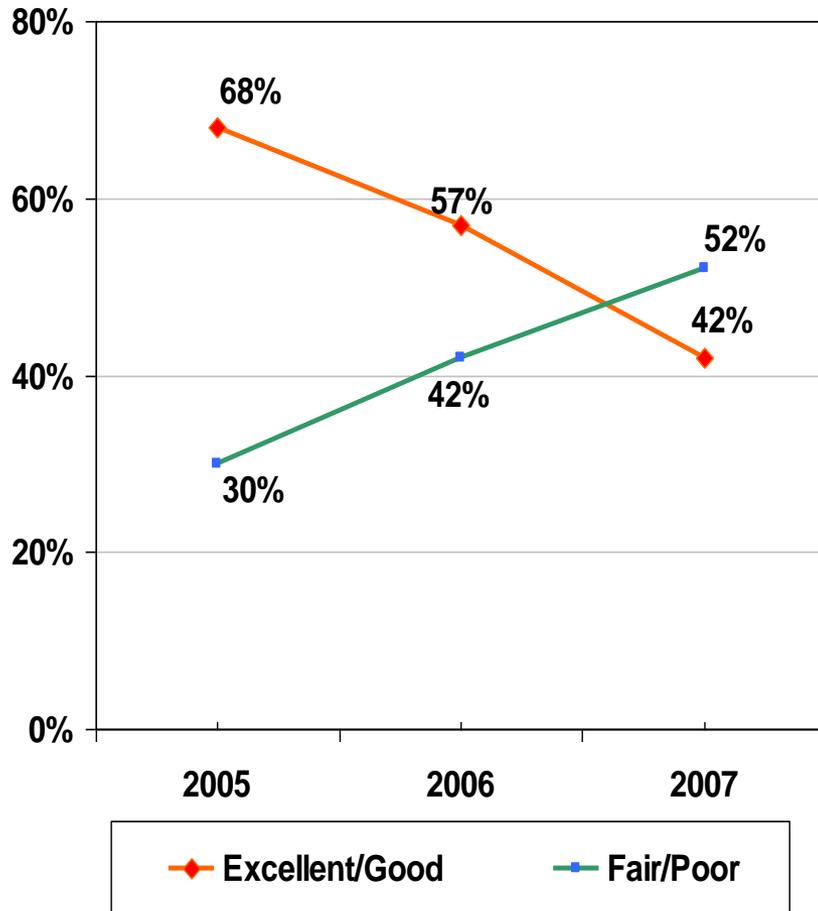


Biggest 05-07 drops among those worried about security, economy

- **Regions:** Kabul, -28; Ctr-E, -31; SE -38
- **Gender:** Urban men 35+, -36
- **Occupation:** Skilled/Professional/Mgmt, -29; Univ, -38
- **Attitudes:** Security Bad, -30; Economy Bad, -30

Although most Afghans still see America positively, a majority now disapprove of America's work in Afghanistan.

How would you rate the work of the US in Afghanistan?



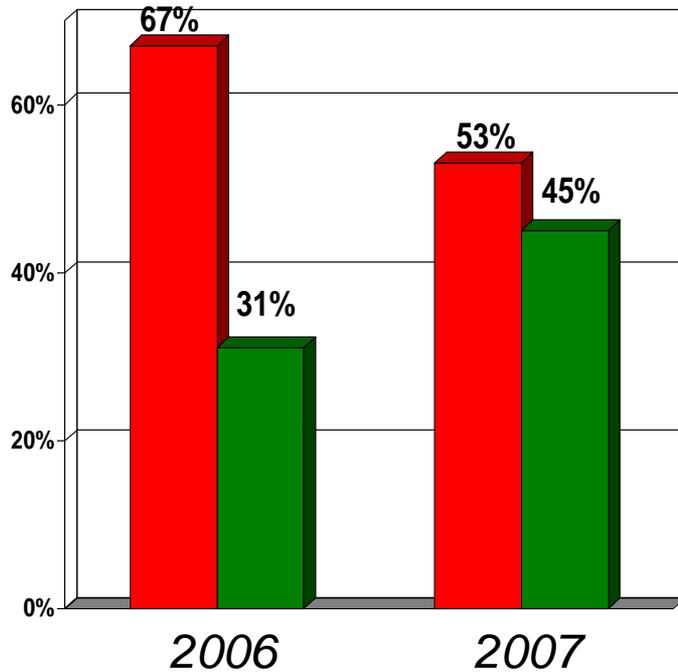
Biggest changes in zones of conflict

- **Regions:** Kabul, -38; E, -37; SE, -38; SW, -31
- **Gender:** Urban women, -33
- **Occupation:** Farm/Farm laborer, -32
Post-Primary women, -32
- **Ethnic:** Pashtun, -30, Uzbek, -41; Turkmen, -41
- **Attitudes:** Security bad, -38

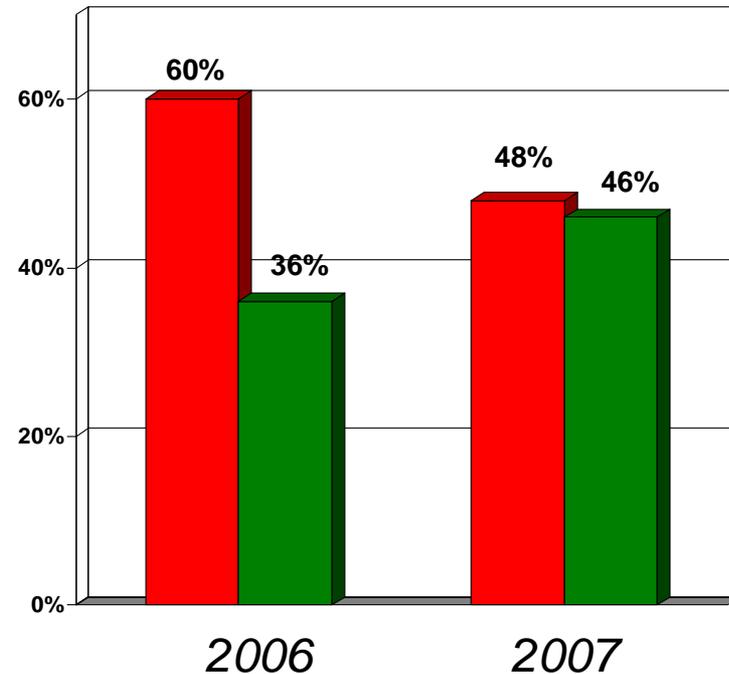
US favorability: still 65% (-28 since 05)

Confidence in US/NATO forces has dropped and they now risk wearing out their welcome.

How confident are you the ability of US, NATO, or ISAF Forces to provide security?

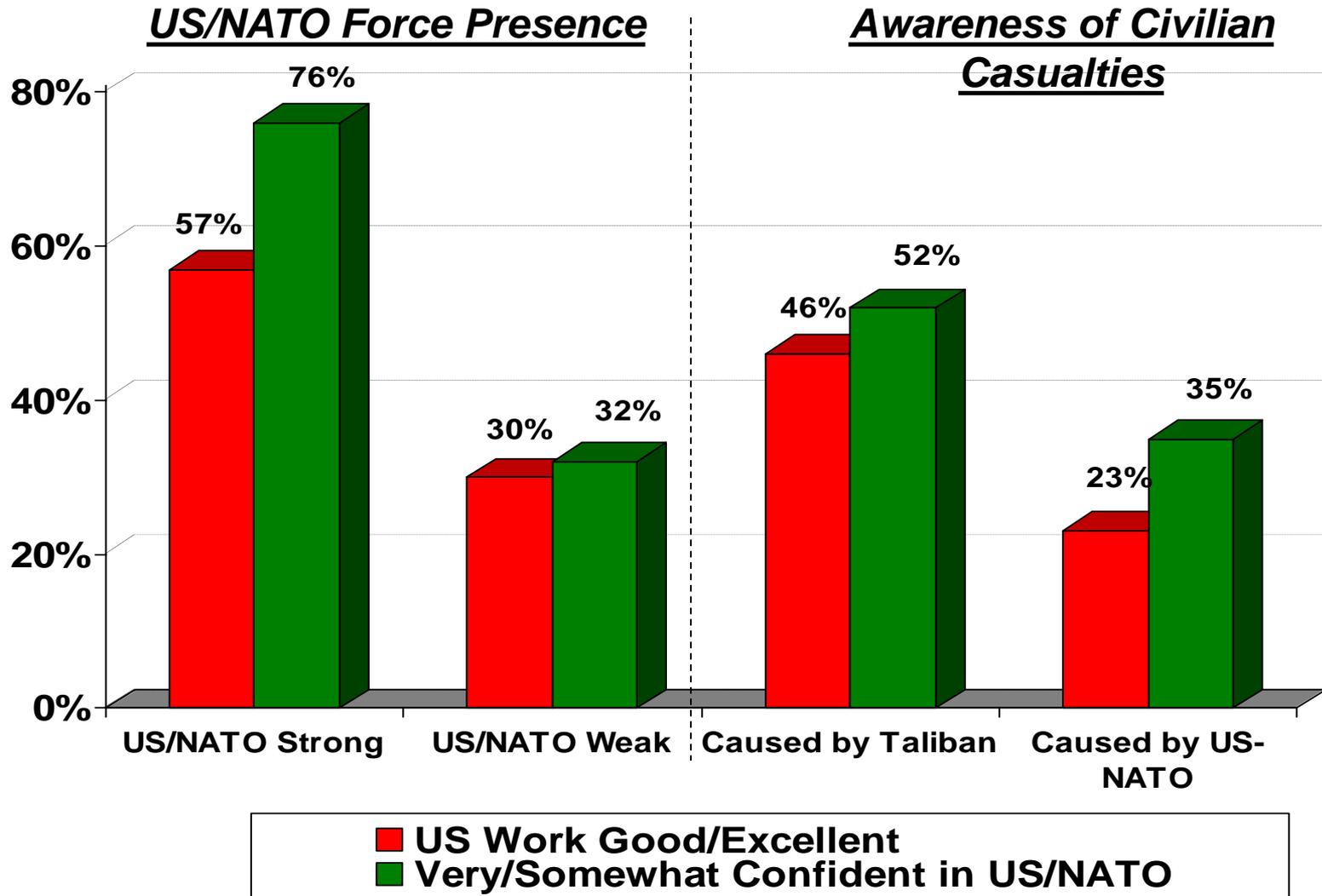


When do you think US military forces should withdraw from Afghanistan?



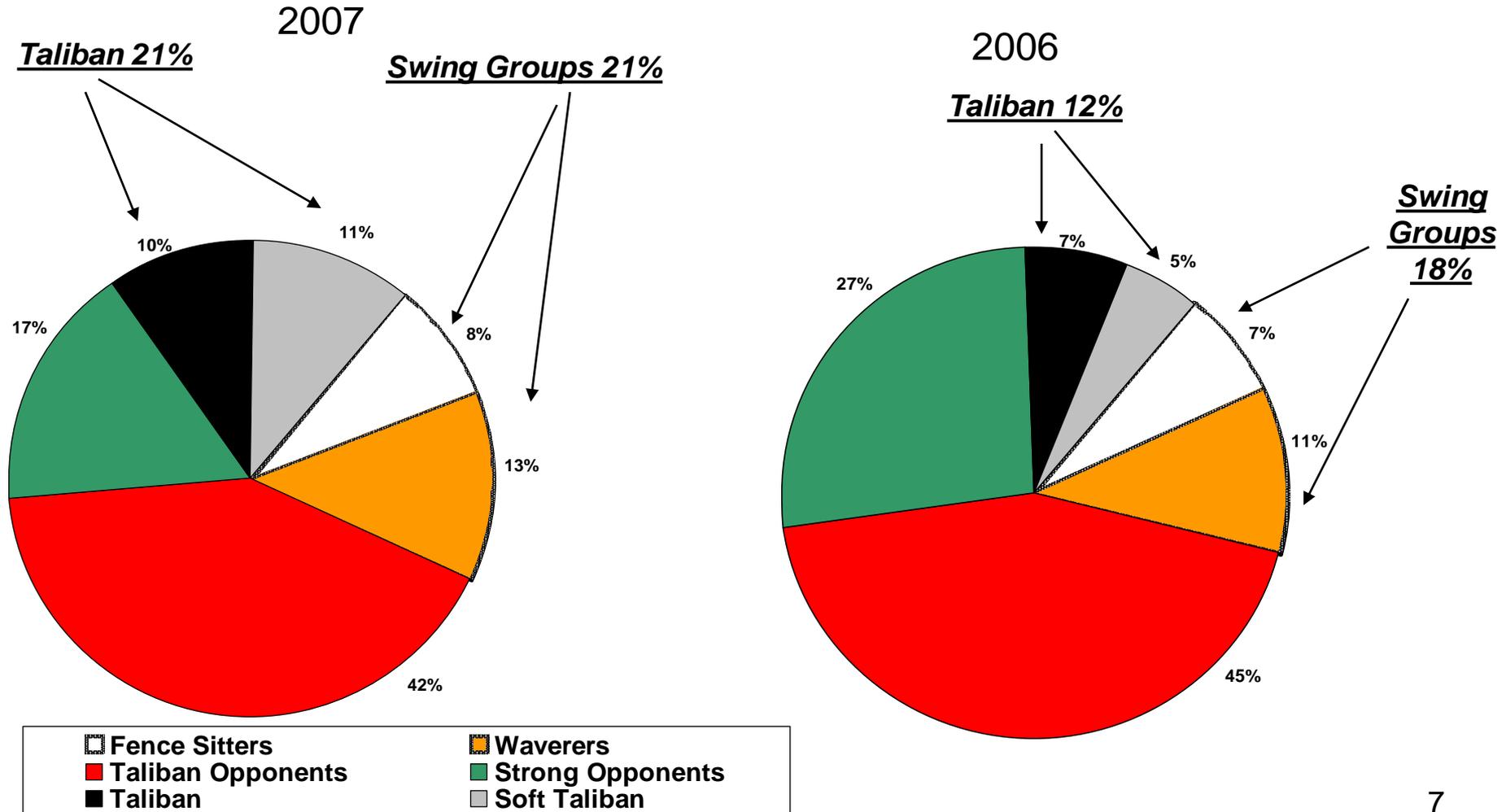
Charney Research

Two key factors explain confidence in the US and NATO: presence and civilian casualties.



Many of last year's "swing voters" have swung to the Taliban.

Taliban Index Results



The sources of Taliban support are religion and security amid trouble

What do you think is the main reason people in your area help or support the Taliban? (Reasons mentioned by 5% or more.)

Tactics	2006	2007
As a religious duty	23%	24%
They think it can improve security	30%	14%
They agree with its goals	14%	8%
They are threatened or forced	12%	7%
Better than the others	6%	5%
To protect the opium trade	5%	1%
Don't know / no response	6%	39%

Afghans are repelled by Taliban tactics.

Do you think the following things can be justified or not?

Tactics	Justified	Not Justified
Attacks against government officials	2%	94%
Attacks against the police	6%	91%
Attacks against teachers or schools*	4%	95%
Attacks against civilians*	5%	94%
Suicide bombings	8%	89%
Attacks against US Military Forces	17%	75%

*2006 data

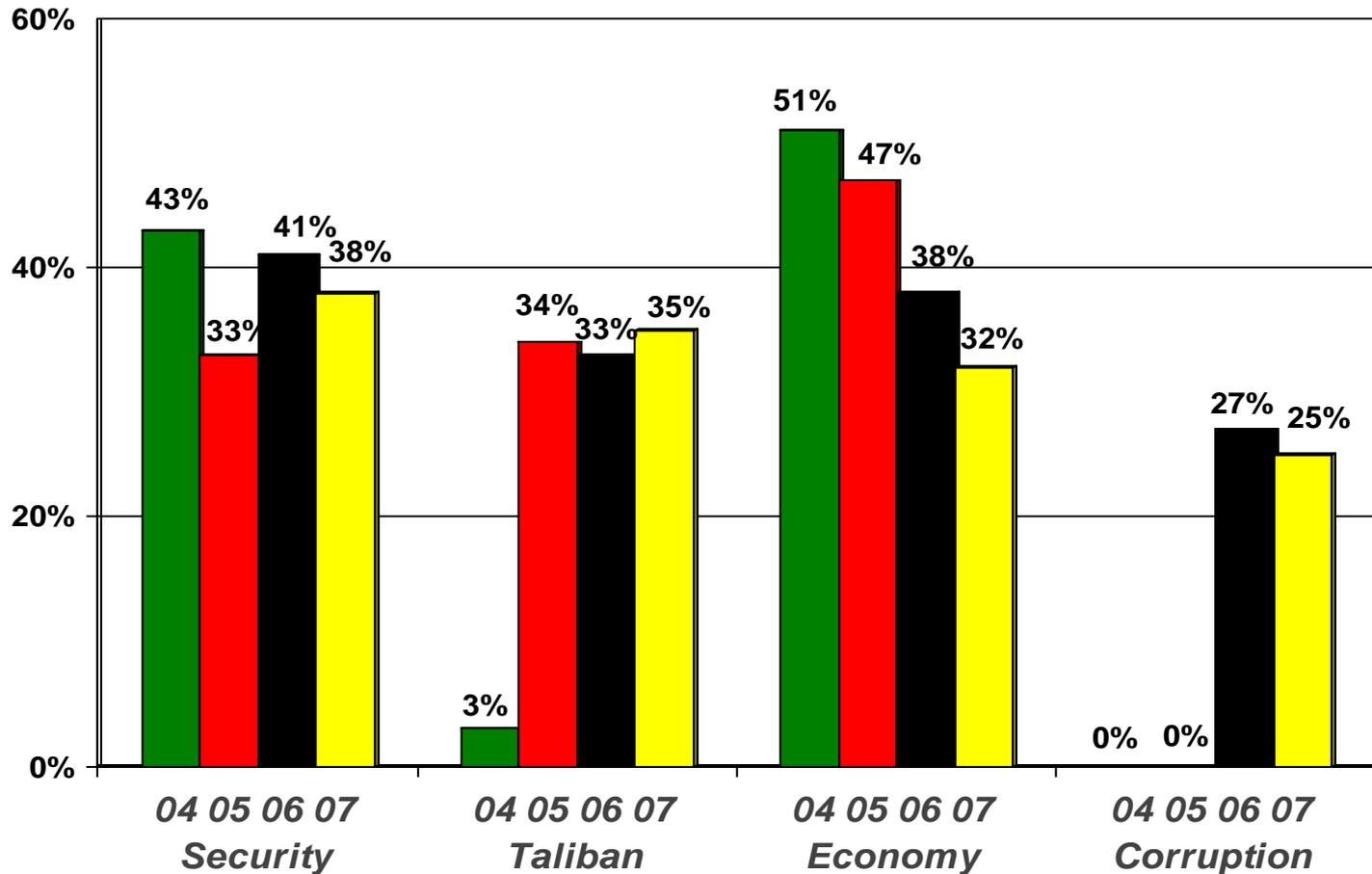
Charney Research

The Taliban and corruption have joined security and the economy among the top national concerns.

In your view, what is the biggest problem facing Afghanistan as a whole?

What is the next biggest problem?

Problems mentioned by 15% or more in 2007

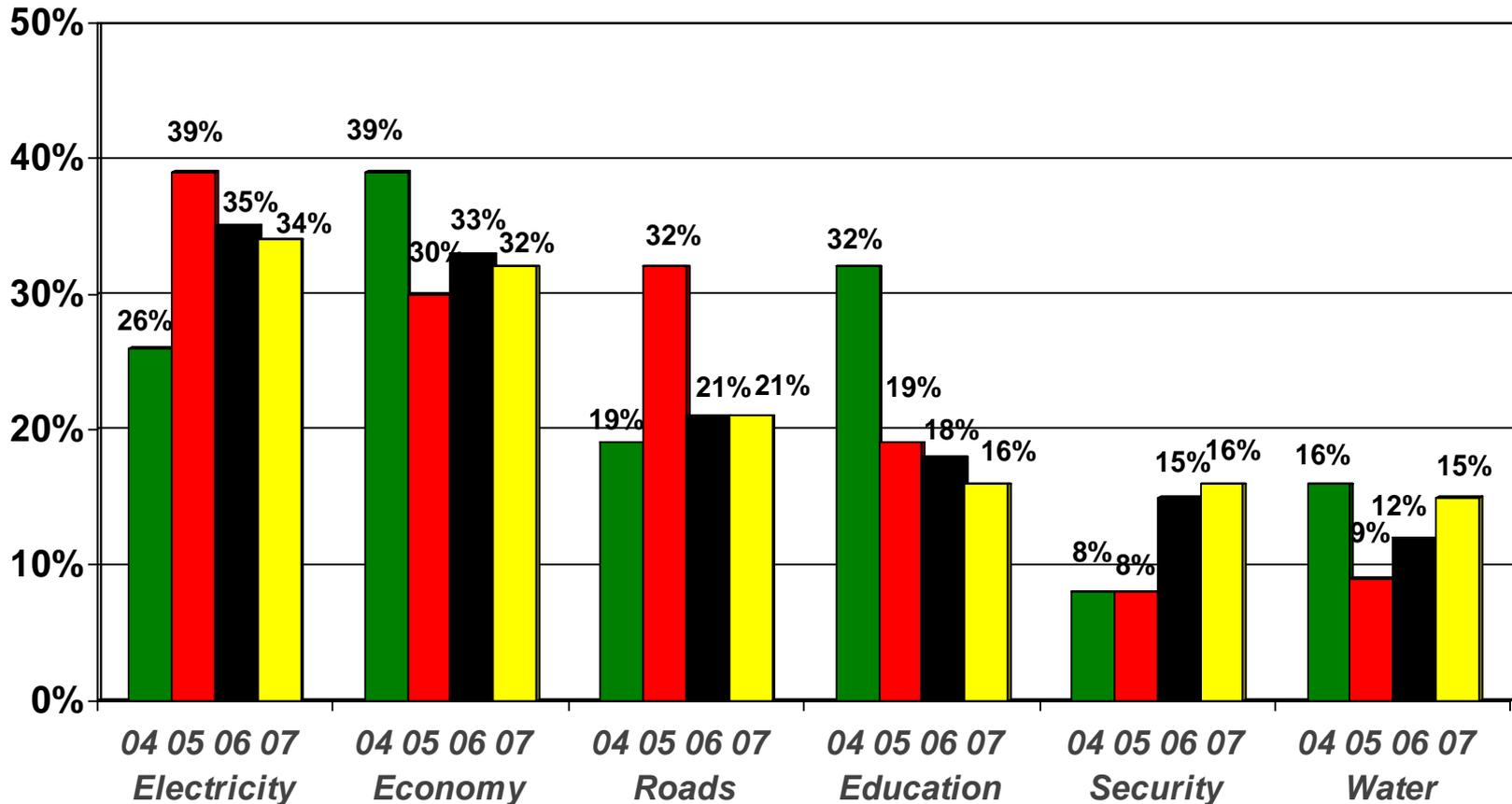


Locally, infrastructure and the economy remain top issues, though concerns with security and water have risen.

What is the biggest problem in your local area?

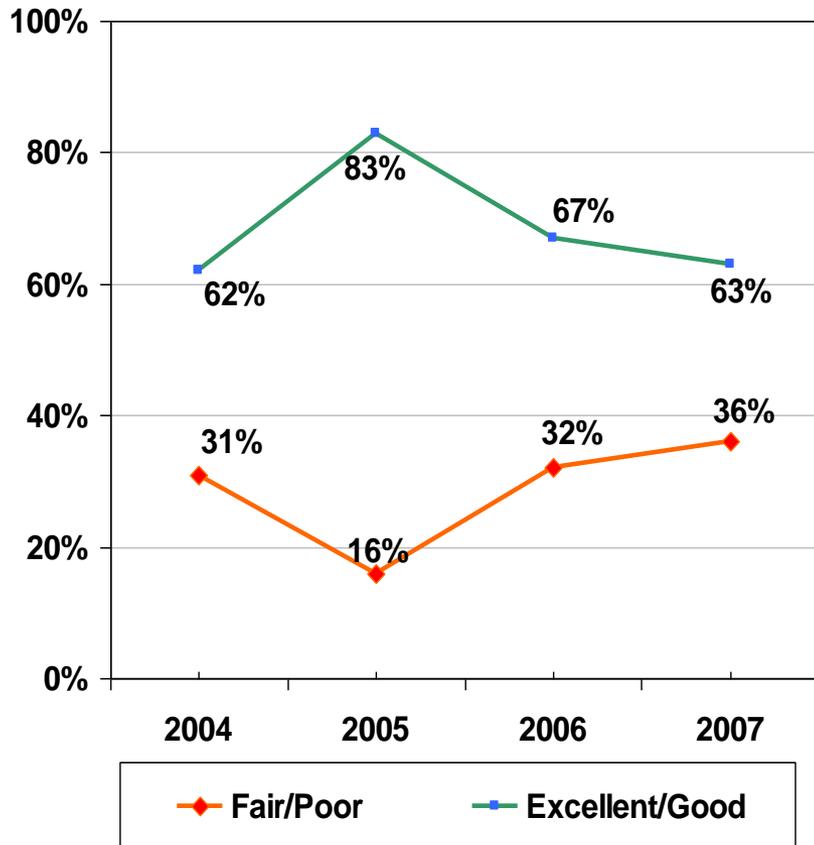
What is the next biggest problem?

Problems mentioned by 15% or more in 2007



One point of light is that support for Karzai remains fairly strong despite the worsening security situation.

How would you rate the work of Hamid Karzai as president of Afghanistan?



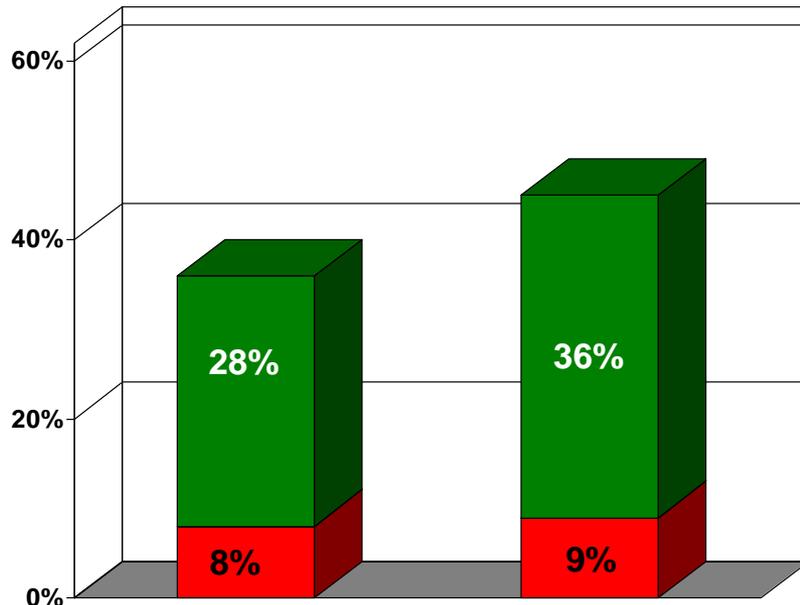
Biggest changes among those saying security bad

- **Regions:** SE, -46; Kabul, -36; SW, -27; Ctr-E, -31
- **Gender:** Men under 35, -26
- **Area Types:** Urban, -27
- **Occupations:** Laborer/Informal, -30; Students, -28; Post-Primary Women, -26
- **Ethnic:** Uzbek, -34
- **Attitudes:** Security bad, -33

Over one-third of Afghans accept opium cultivation, and few favor aerial spraying to eradicate opium.

What is your opinion of the cultivation of poppies for opium?

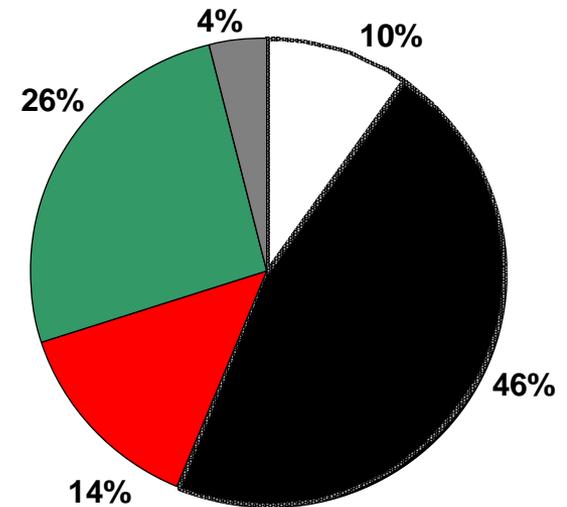
Acceptable



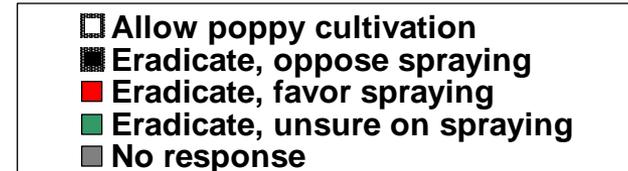
All: 36% Farmers: 45%



Do you think the government should ...



All Farmers

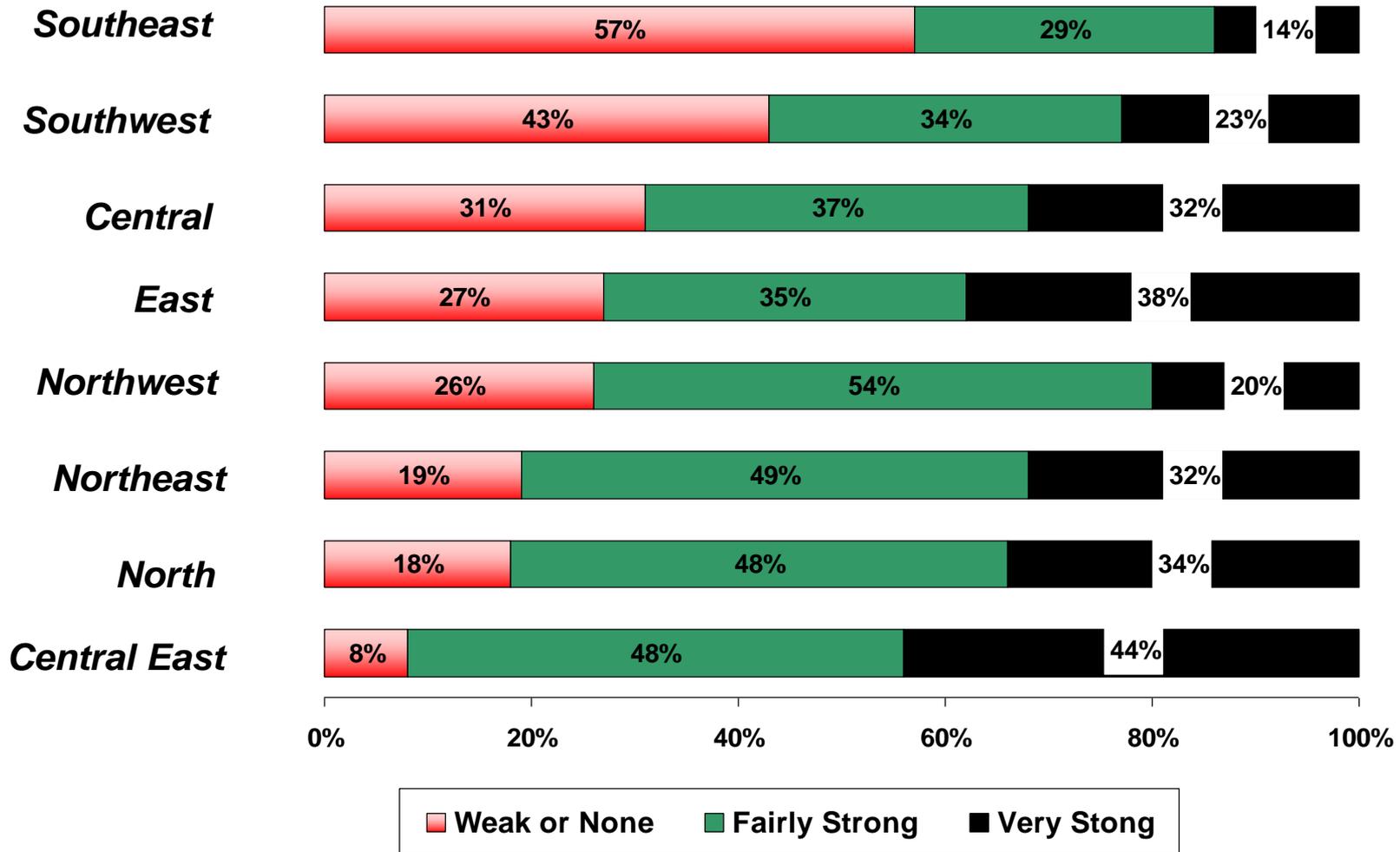


The most effective ways to reduce opium crops involve financial incentives, not forced eradication.

Please tell me how likely each idea is to make or convince farmers in this province to choose not to grow opium (OPIUM PRODUCING PROVINCES ONLY)

% saying idea would make farmers “much more likely” not to grow opium among ...	All residents	Farmers only
Cash for work to build roads and other useful jobs	40%	42%
Loans and cash advances on better terms and lower interest	42%	41%
Payment from govt not to grow opium	48%	40%
Providing seeds for other crops	40%	37%
Building schools and clinics if they don't grow opium	35%	37%
Improving irrigation and water supply	38%	33%
Building / improving roads	32%	31%
Eliminating illegal checkpoints/taxes on roads to markets	22%	21%
Providing more compost and fertilizer	23%	19%
Eradication of opium crops with no compensation	21%	13%

State presence varies widely between regions, weakest in SE, SW, Center, and East



The swing groups and Taliban are where the state is weakest, along the Pakistan frontier and towards Kabul.

	Swing Groups: 21%	Taliban Sympathizers: 21%
Geography		
Region	E (33%), Ctr (25%)	SE (40%), SW (44%)
Province	Helmand (40%), Nangarhar (30%)	Helmand (31%), Kandahar (47%)
Control	Nobody (29%)	Taliban (49%), Nobody (43%), Warlords (34%)
Conflict		Top 5 conflict provinces (39%)
Occupation		
	Retired (26%) Farmer/farm laborer (25%)	Retired (32%) Laborer / informal business (27%)
Ethnicity		
	Urban Pashtun (28%)	Rural Pashtun (37%) Ghilzai (38%)

The swing groups are positive on the country, Karzai and the economy, but unsure of the future.

	Swing Groups:	Taliban Sympathizers:
Country Direction	Positive: 55% right direction	Negative: 28% right direction
Karzai Job Performance	Favorable 69% Positive, 31% Negative	Hostile 54% Negative, 43% Positive
Living Standards Vs 2004	Improving 63% better, 32% worse	Worsening 40% better, 48% worse
Expectations Year from now	Divided 48% better	Pessimistic 28% better

Swing Afghans favor democracy and women in parliament.

	Swing Groups:	Taliban Sympathizers:
Democracy and Islam (2006)	Islam can be democratic Fence-Sitters 59% to 28%, Waverers 72% to 14%	Democracy challenges Islam 50% to 40%
Parliament Works for the People (2007)	Confident, 53% to 43%	Not confident, 55% to 40%
Women in Parliament (2006)	Yes, 74% to 25%	No, 52% to 45%

Swing Afghans are fairly cool to the U.S.

	Swing Groups:	Taliban Sympathizers:
US Work in Afghanistan	<p>Waverers: 41% positive, 54% negative</p> <p>Fence-Sitters: 28% positive, 68% negative</p>	76% negative, 16% positive
US Favorability	<p>Waverers: 60% favorable, 36% unfavorable</p> <p>Fence-Sitters: 42% favorable, 55% unfavorable (Few very favorable)</p>	69% unfavorable, 25% favorable
US Military Presence	1/3 oppose US presence; few strong supporters	69% oppose

Swing Afghans are ambivalent on fighting the Taliban and America's military presence and actions.

	Swing Groups:	Taliban Sympathizers:
Taliban Overthrow	Ambivalent: 27% say bad, few say "very good"	63% say bad
Negotiating with Taliban	63% favor	72% favor
Complaints About Foreign Military	38% civilian casualties 17% intrusive searches 16% poorly behaved / disciplined 8% too weak / lose gains	40% civilian casualties 12% poorly behaved/disciplined 11% intrusive searches
Confidence US/NATO can provide security	55% not confident	82% not confident
Attacks on US Forces	Almost ½ fence-sitters, 1/3 waverers don't oppose	63% don't oppose
US Withdrawal	Half want US out within 2 years	81% want US out in 2 years, 40% out now

Morality, Democracy, Development, Girls' Education, are Potential Wedge Issues

- **Several wedge issues can divide swing groups from Taliban sympathizers.**
- **Morality: brutal Taliban tactics shock even Taliban sympathizers**
- **Democracy: Swing groups like it, Taliban says it's un-Islamic**
- **Girls' schools: Almost half of swing groups have daughters in school**
- **Karzai Government: Swing groups are not anti-Karzai.**
- **Development: We build what people need, Taliban destroys**

Strategic Keys to Winning the Swing Groups

- **Geographic Areas: E, Center, SE, SW**
- **The keys to support for US/NATO forces are presence and effectiveness on security while avoiding civilian casualties.**
- **Avoiding collateral damage and insensitivity is imperative. Apologize and compensate when these occur; investigate and prosecute when justified.**
- **We need more boots on the ground and fewer bombs there. Increase NATO/US forces and especially build the ANA faster.**
- **Need to find tactics that reduce risks of casualties and increase security for civilians, even if it reduces force protection for our forces.**
- **U.S. must support national reconciliation to justify fighting Taliban. They are responsible for war, not us.**
- **Don't alienate swing Afghans through aerial opium spraying -- provide the economic alternatives farmers want.**
- **The priorities in swing areas are the same as country-wide: work on jobs, power, and security in swing areas.**
- **And communicate: let people know about it.**
 - Get more PRTs in action. We need to get up close and personal. Consider District Reconstruction Teams in key provinces.**
 - Radio is important too – distribute more.**
 - Use texting over cellphones where appropriate.**