



Does Exposure to Corruption Increase Sympathy for Armed Opposition Groups in Afghanistan?

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Afghanistan's National Unity Government (NUG) leaders declared their intention to curb corruption during their presidential campaigns, and since the election, have emphasized that combating with the corruption is one of their [top priorities](#).

As the first step in the fight against corruption, in November 2014, President Ashraf Ghani reopened an inquiry into [embezzlement at Kabul bank](#). Later in June 2016, an [Anti-Corruption Criminal Justice Center](#) (ACCJC) was established to prosecute government officials who are accused of corruption, and to prevent corruption in government contracts, the National Procurement Authority (NPA) was set-up to promote transparency. These examples are illustrative of the practical steps of NUG to fight corruption and bring reforms among government entities.

Despite the NUG's efforts to fight corruption, corruption continues to be an extremely serious and widespread problem in the country. Ranked 169 out of 176 countries in 2016, [Transparency International](#) has named Afghanistan amongst the most corrupt countries. Data from The Asia Foundation's [Survey of the Afghan People](#) shows that corruption is seen by Afghans as one of the biggest problems which Afghanistan is facing. Since 2006, the Survey has asked about corruption, and annually, over 90% of Afghans see it as a problem overall, and over 70% (89.21% in 2016) see it as a problem in their daily life. In 2016, 19.52% of respondents cited corruption as a reason for their pessimism about the future of Afghanistan.

[Failure to address corruption](#) over time can contribute to state fragility and increases the likelihood of conflict. There is ample evidence on the [deleterious impact of corruption](#) on economic growth and equitable wealth distribution, and can deeply undermine the effectiveness and legitimacy of government institutions and increases support for the [insurgency](#).

Although it may seem that having sympathy towards armed opposition groups and experiencing corruption in government institutions would be very different in nature, they are in fact intimately connected. This study aim is to assess the relationship between the two.

The analysis below uses quantitative research methods based on primary data provided by The Asia Foundation's annual [Survey of The Afghan People](#). The 2016's survey includes a national sample of 12658 Afghan men (52.7%) and women (47.3%) across all 34 provinces,

respondents are all above 18 years old including 75% rural respondents and 25% urban respondents, corresponding with the fact that majority of Afghans live in rural areas¹.

Survey respondents have been asked how often they had to give money, a gift, or do a favor for various institutions or authorities during past year [see Figure 1].

Despite the overall decrease in corruption rate, this year judiciary courts (59.5%) and officials in municipality/district offices (58.9%) are widely seen as the most corrupt institutions.

While comparing corruption rate amongst ANP and ANA, we observe a higher corruption rate amongst ANP as compared to ANA. Of respondents who had contacts with ANP during past year, 47.6% reported an experience of corruption, with ANA much lower (only 38.5%). It is noteworthy that corruption rates decreased for both the ANP and the ANA since last year, in 2015, 53% of respondents who have contacted with ANP and 43% of those who have contacted with ANA reported an experience of corruption, while this year it has decreased to 48% and 38%, respectively.

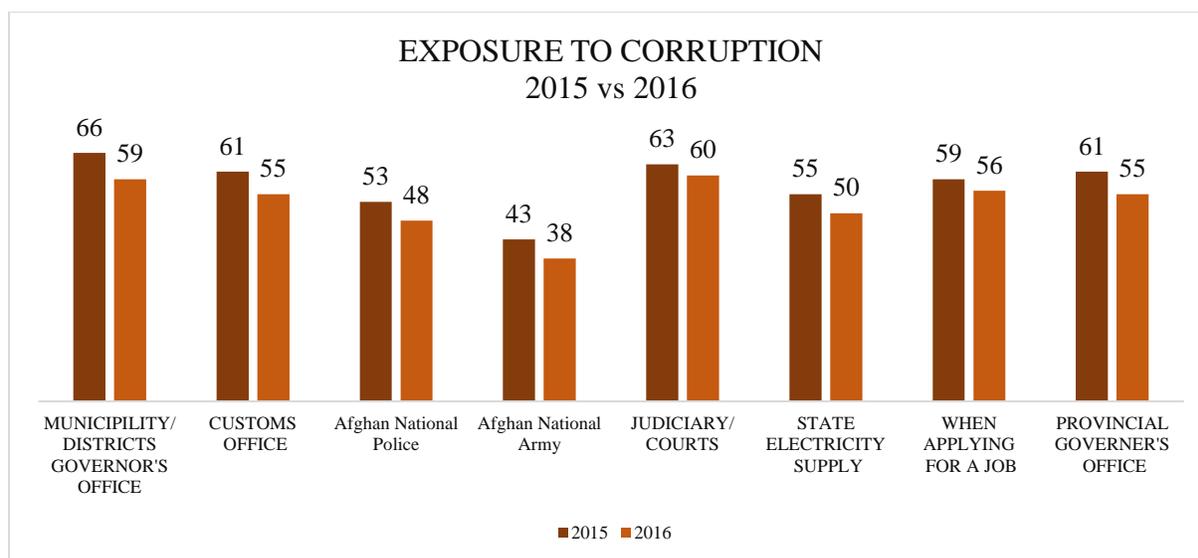


Figure.1: Below several different organizations or situations in which people have said they experienced corruption in the past have been listed. Thinking back to your interactions in the past 12 months, please tell how often you had to give money or a gift, or perform a favor for these organizations or in these situations. Was it in all cases, in most cases, in some cases, or in no cases? If you had no contact with the organization, please tell me so. (1) Municipality/district governor’s office; (2) Provincial governor’s office; (3) Customs office; (4) Afghan National Police; (5) Afghan National Army; (6) Judiciary/courts; (7) Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (national power company); (8) When applying for a job. (Percentage of respondents who say they experienced corruption “some,” “most,” or “all of the time,” among those who say they had contact with each institution or situation.)

¹ Sampling Points in the survey are determined using random selection technique. However, in case where a sampling point is not accessible to enumerators, an alternative method called “an intercept interview” is sometimes used. All statistics reported here represent the main randomly selected respondents.

While dealing with ANA and ANP, experience of corruption is more prominent among rural Afghans (52.94%) compared to urban Afghans (41.85%), and is highest amongst Afghans who live in the South-West region (68.33%).

Respondents also have been asked about their level of sympathy for armed opposition groups. While respondents who express a lot of sympathy for armed opposition groups remains almost at the same level as last year (6%), those who report having “a little” sympathy shrank by 11%. (From 21.85% in 2015 to 11.20% in 2016)

Despite the overall decrease in sympathy for armed opposition groups amongst Afghans (16.69% in 2016), the sympathy rate varies among provinces – ranging from 58.2% in Zabul and 50% in Uruzgan to 1.8% in Bamyan and 3.5% in Panjshir [see Figure 2].

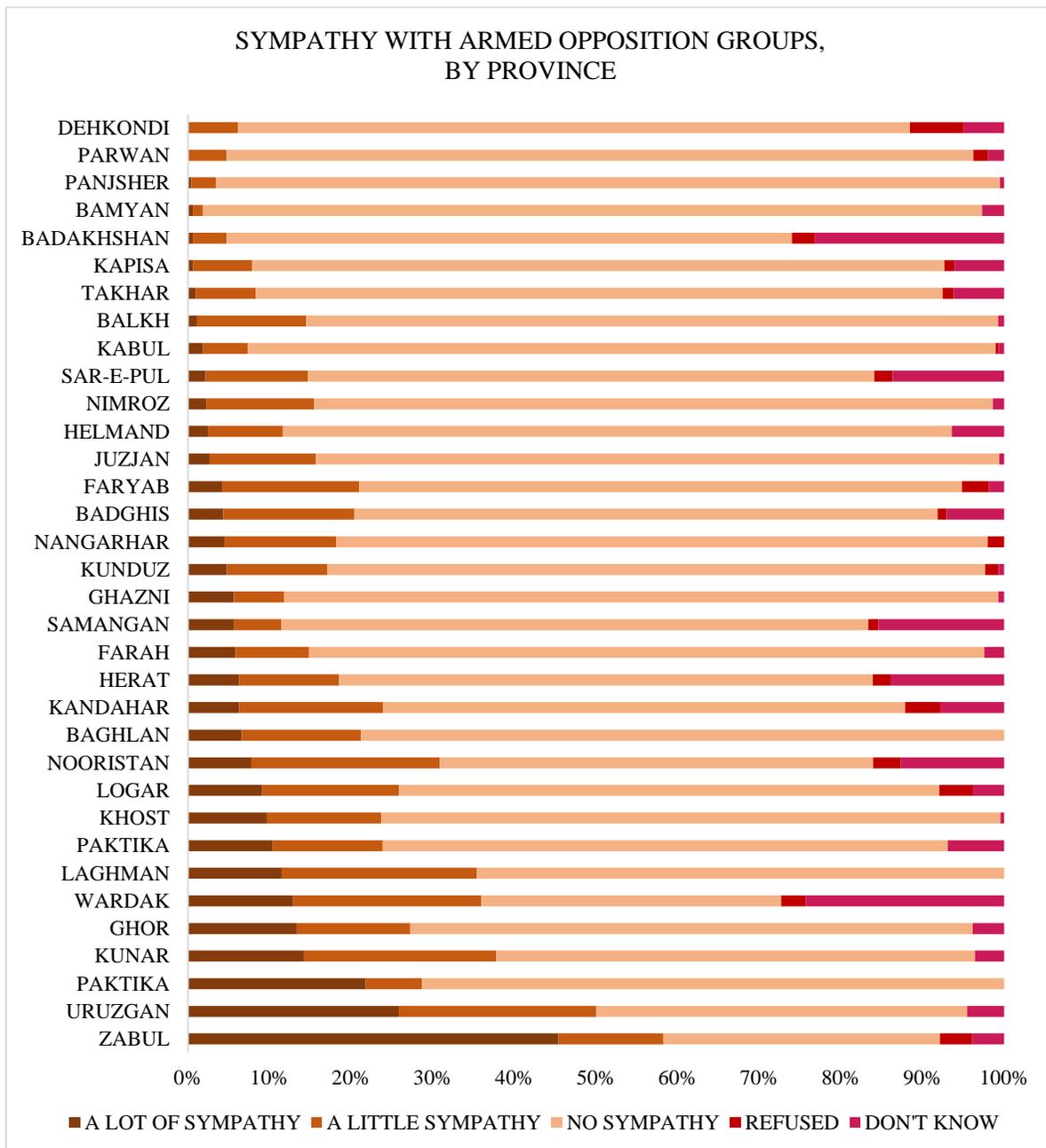


Figure.2: Thinking about the reasons why armed opposition groups have been fighting during the past year, in general, would you say that you have a lot of sympathy, a little sympathy or no sympathy at all for armed opposition groups?

Given the fact that corruption generates a feeling of [injustice](#) amongst citizens and deprives access to justice, a logical assumption is that as corruption increases, support for violent anti-government groups also increases and vice-versa.

Multivariate analysis was used to find out which variables appear to co-vary with sympathy for armed opposition groups. The result confirms the positive correlation between exposure to corruption² and having sympathy for armed opposition groups in Afghanistan (AOGs). Other influential factors in explaining changes sympathy for armed opposition groups are perceptions about ANA³ and ANP⁴ (whether they are honest and fair with the Afghan people, whether they are getting better at providing security, and whether they are efficient at arresting criminals or not) and fear of participating in socio-political activities.⁵ For example:

- Those who have more confidence on Afghans National Police and Afghan National Army are less likely to report having sympathy with armed opposition groups compare to those who have less confidence on Afghan National Police and Afghan National Army.
- Those who feel safe while participating in socio-political activities are also less likely to have sympathy for armed opposition groups compare to those don't feel safe while participating socio-political activities.

Considering the facts above it is clear that corruption, especially amongst the ANA and ANP, can undermine effectiveness of Afghan security forces. It also may weaken the bond of trust between citizens and the state, and create a void in providing public services which could in

² Exposure to corruption is scale which has Cronbach's alpha of 0.903 (strong reliability). Items are below questions: Q- Below several different organizations or situations in which people have said they experienced corruption in the past have been listed. Thinking back to your interactions in the past 12 months, please tell how often you had to give money or a gift, or perform a favor for these organizations or in these situations. a) officials in the municipality/district offices; b) Provincial governor's office; c) Custom office; d) Afghan National Police; e) Afghan National Army; f) Judiciary/Courts; g) DABS state electricity supply; h) Hospital/Clinics; i) When applying for a job; j) Admission to school/university.

³ ANA is a scale which has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83 (Strong reliability). Items are Q- Here are some statements about the Afghan National Army (ANA). Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each statement? 1) ANA is honest and fair with the Afghan people; 2) The ANA helps improve security in Afghanistan; 3) The ANA protects civilians.

⁴ ANP is a scale which has a Cronbach's alpha of .815 (strong reliability). Items are Q- Here are some statements about the Afghan National Police (ANA). Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each statement? 1) ANP is honest and fair with the Afghan people; 2) The ANP helps improve security in Afghanistan; 3) ANP is efficient at arresting those who have committed crimes.

⁵ Socio-political activities is a scale which has Cronbach's alpha of 0.7 (moderate reliability). Item are Q- Please, tell me, how you would respond to the following activities or groups. Would you respond with no fear, some fear or a lot of fear? 1) Voting in a national / provincial election; 2) Participating in a peaceful demonstration; c) Running for public office; d) Encountering ANP; e) Encountering ANA; f) Traveling from one part of Afghanistan to another part of the country; g) Encountering international forces; h) Encountering the Taliban; i) Encountering ISIS/Daesh.

turn fuel insurgency in the country. For the Afghan government to have a long-term stability it is necessary to tackle corruption in the country as efficiently as possible.

Fahim Ahmad Yousufzai is a data analyst. The views and opinions expressed here are those of the author and not those of the Porsesh Research & Studies Organization.