

Prospects for Taliban Reconciliation in Afghanistan

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Methodology

D3 Systems, Inc. commissioned five waves of the Afghan Futures survey with fieldwork conducted by its subsidiary, the Afghan Center for Socio-Economic and Opinion Research (ACSOR Surveys).

Fieldwork was conducted:

- Wave 1 – May 2010 (n=2,056)
- Wave 2 – January 2012 (n=2,018)
- Wave 3 – April 2012 (n=2,039)
- Wave 4 – September 2013 (n=3,516)
- Wave 5 – March 2014 (n=2,643)

Each wave of Afghan Futures consisted of at least 2,000 interviews with Afghans 18+ distributed in proportion to population size in each of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, stratified by urban/rural status. Sampling points were randomly distributed to districts and settlements within province. Households are selected by random walk and respondents are selected by kish grid.

Due to cultural considerations, ACSOR uses gender-matched interviewing in Afghanistan. Women were interviewed in all 34 provinces.

All results shown in the paper and presentation are statistically significant at the 95% CI using a chi-squared test.

Ethnicity in Afghanistan

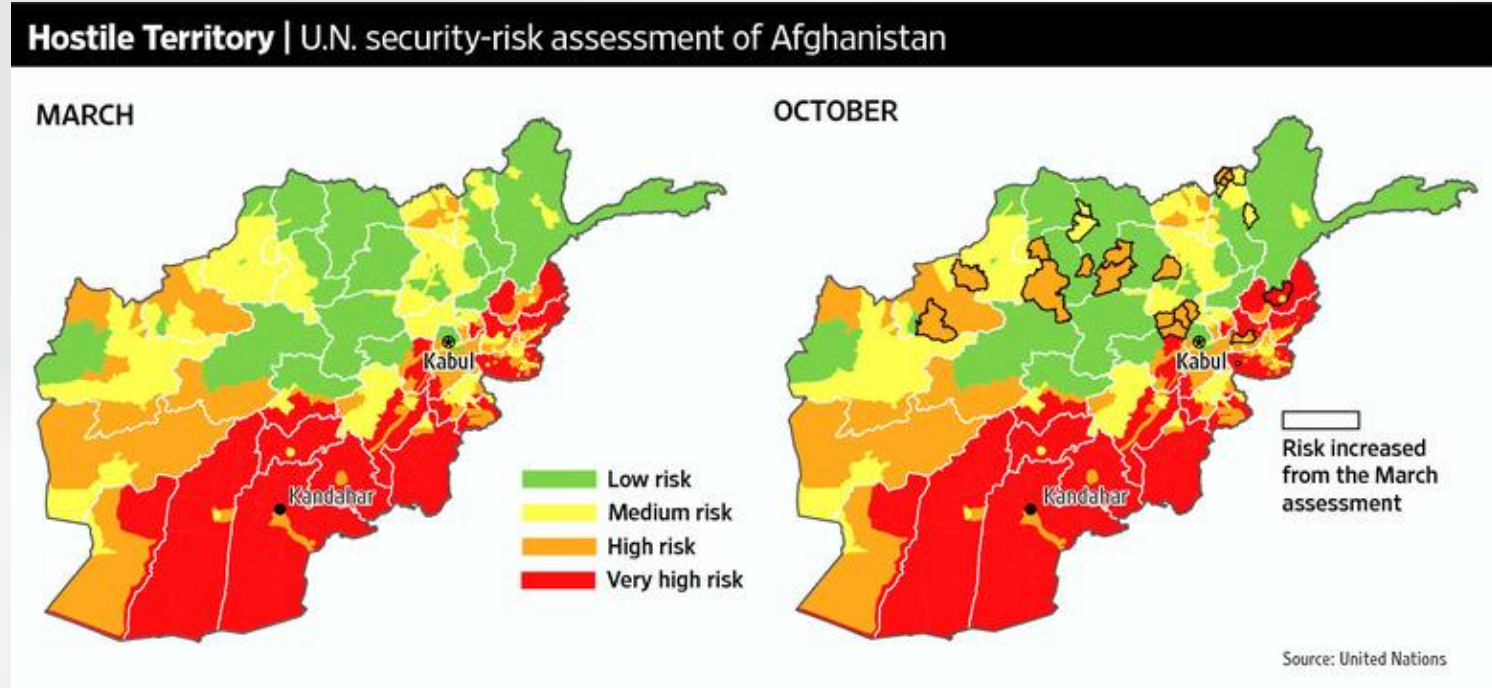


Ethnicity is strongly correlated with geography in Afghanistan.

Pashtuns primarily reside in the south and east.

The Insurgency

United Nations 2010 Accessibility Maps

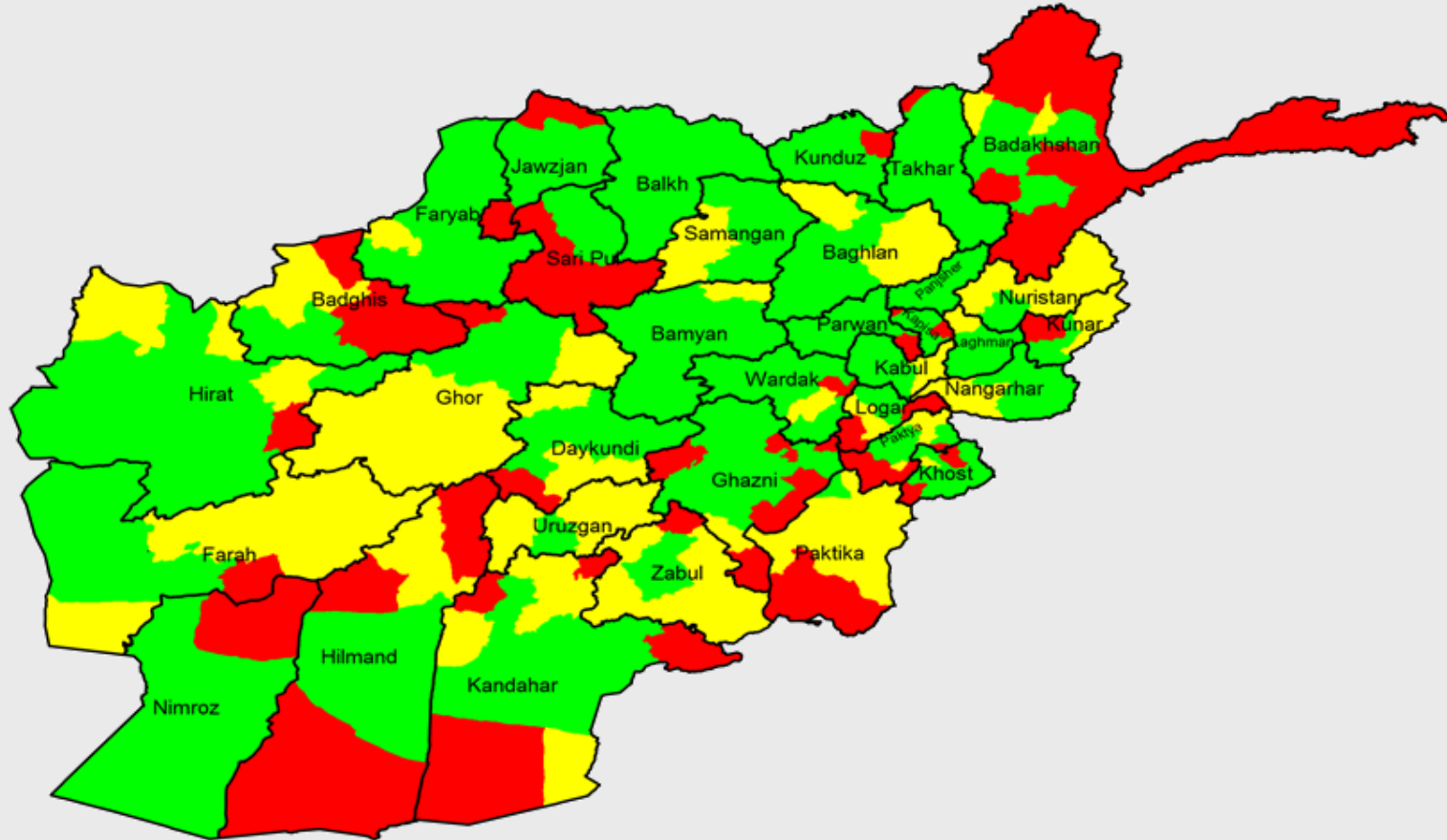


Security conditions in Afghanistan closely linked to geography.

The southern and eastern “Pashtun Belt” remain the most insecure regions of the country.

Interviewer Accessibility

ACSOR March 2014 Accessibility Map



Accessibility largely follows security trends with some additional districts inaccessible due to weather, transportation, or other reasons.

The Insurgency



The Afghan insurgency consists of many elements: the Taliban, Hezb-i-Islami, the Haqqani network, foreign fighters, local tribes, and criminal organizations.

The Taliban is primarily active along the “Southern Front” (Helmand, Kandahar, Oruzgan, Zabul, and Paktika).

The Concern

The conventional wisdom maintains that the Taliban are more popular among Pashtuns than other ethnic groups. Some Afghan analysts have warned that pursuing reconciliation with the Taliban may ignite ethnic tensions or divorce the Afghan people from the central government.

“a peace settlement with the Taliban runs the risk of escalating conflict with Tajik, Uzbek, Hazara, and anti-Taliban Pashtuns in Afghanistan...Such a settlement could trigger a military build-up among northern commanders, such as Atta Mohammad Nur, Abdul Rashid Dostum, and Mohammad Fahim, causing the war’s center of gravity to shift north. Indeed, reports indicate that northern commanders are already discussing a military build-up if there is a settlement with the Taliban.” - Seth Jones to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, May 2011.

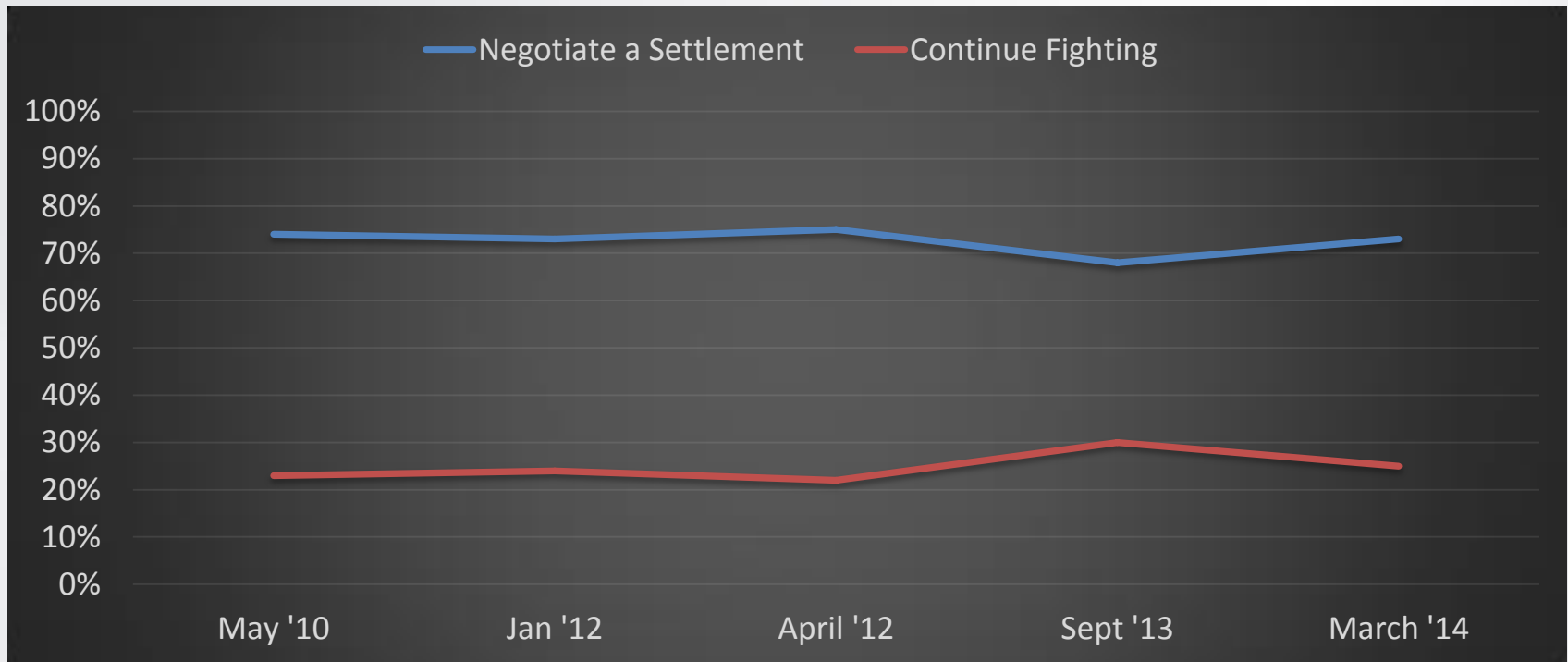
“The Taliban, in other words, are highly unlikely to overthrow the government by force of arms. A much more likely failure mechanism might occur if northern ethnic groups – Uzbeks, Tajiks, Hazaras – should, in frustration at lack of progress, withdraw their support for the Pashtun-dominated Kabul government and take matters into their own hands in fighting the Pashtun Taliban. This would lead to an ethnic civil war...” – David Kilcullen in *The Accidental Guerrilla*

Taliban reconciliation is often believed to be unfavorable among Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras.

Some analysts warn that pursuing reconciliation with the Taliban could lead to an Afghan civil war.

Afghan Opinion on Reconciliation

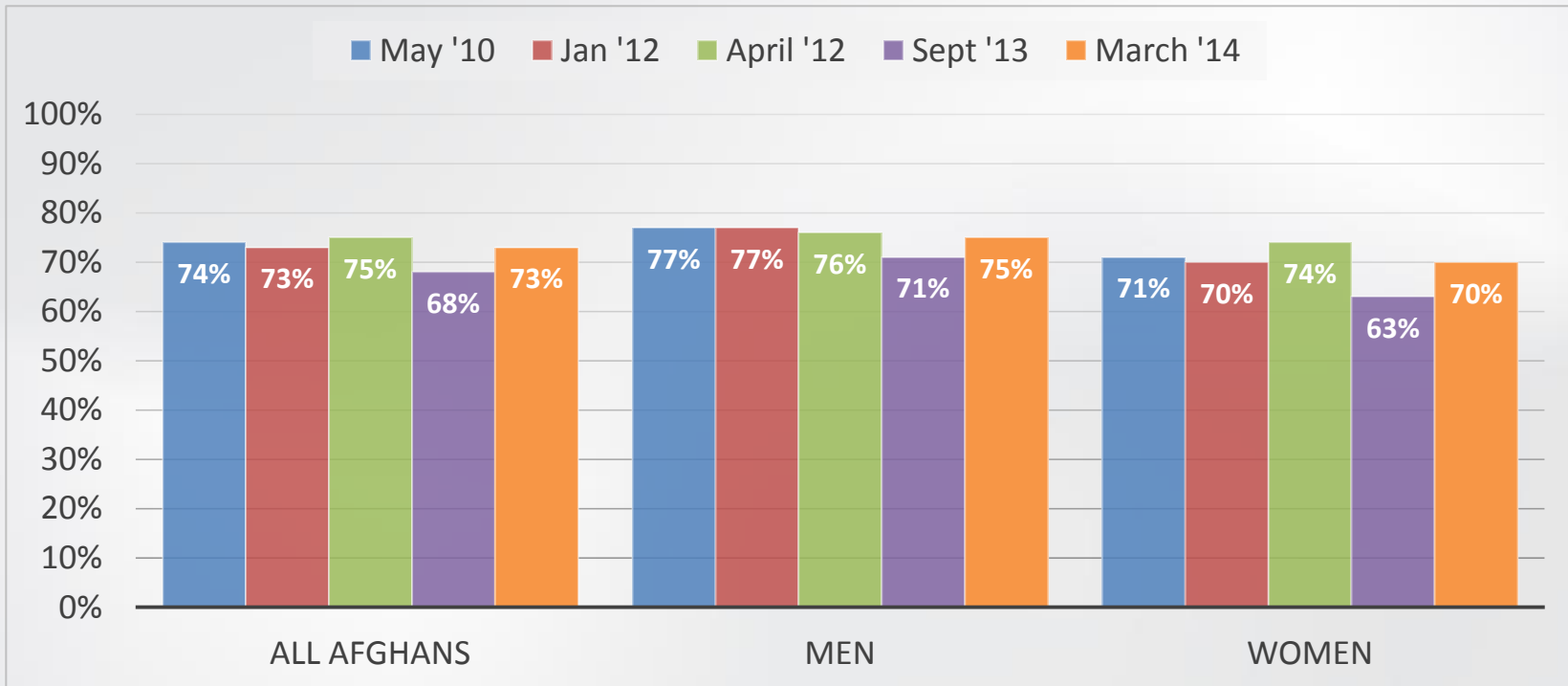
"Do you think the government in Kabul should negotiate a settlement with Afghan Taliban in which they are allowed to hold political offices if they stop fighting, or do you think the government in Kabul should continue to fight the Taliban and not negotiate a settlement?"



Amongst all Afghans, the percentage favoring negotiations has stayed roughly the same over time.

Afghan Opinion on Reconciliation

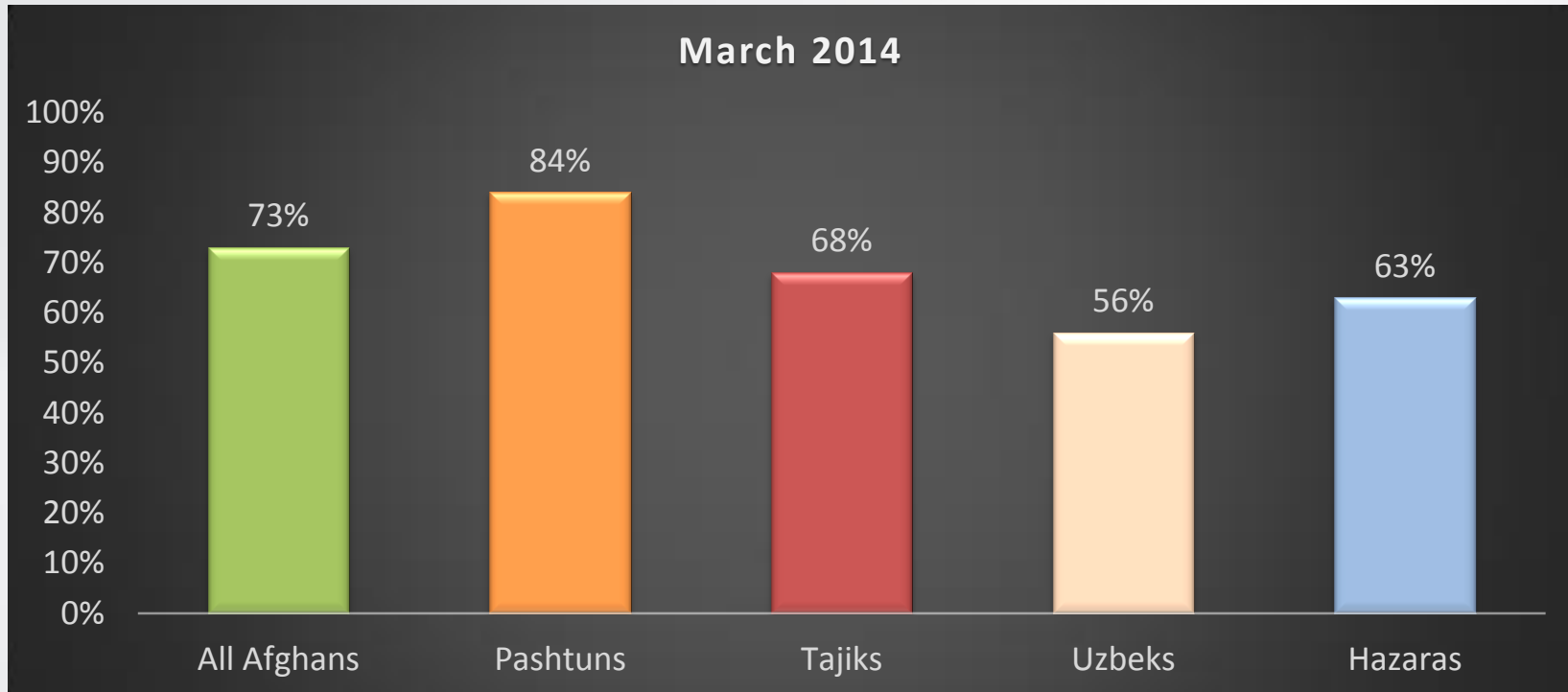
"Do you think the government in Kabul should negotiate a settlement with Afghan Taliban in which they are allowed to hold political offices if they stop fighting, or do you think the government in Kabul should continue to fight the Taliban and not negotiate a settlement?"



There has been minimal difference in opinion on negotiations by gender.

Afghan Opinion on Reconciliation

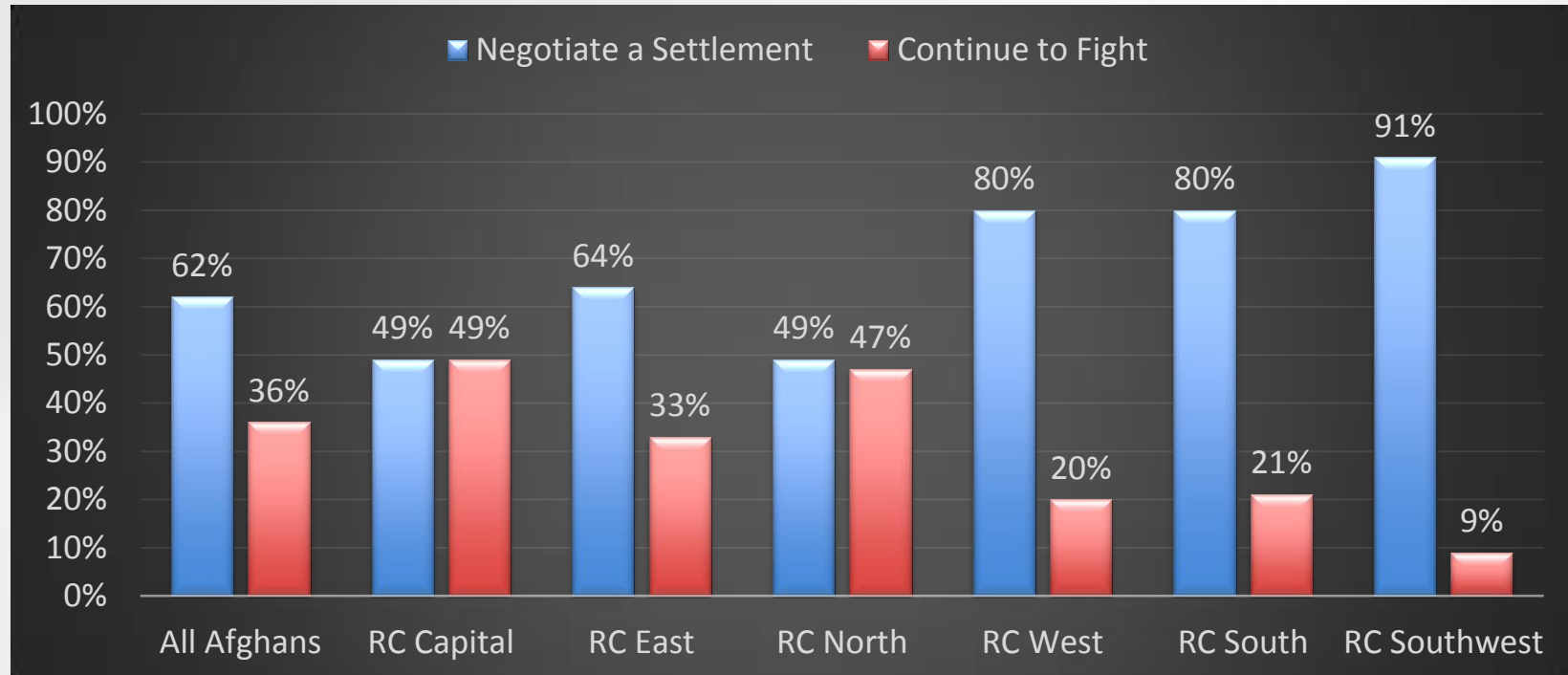
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Support for negotiations is highest amongst Pashtuns, but the majority of every major ethnicity favors reconciliation.

Extreme Concessions

“What if an agreement to stop the fighting ceded control over certain provinces to the Taliban - do you think the government in Kabul should continue to fight the Taliban and not negotiate a settlement?”

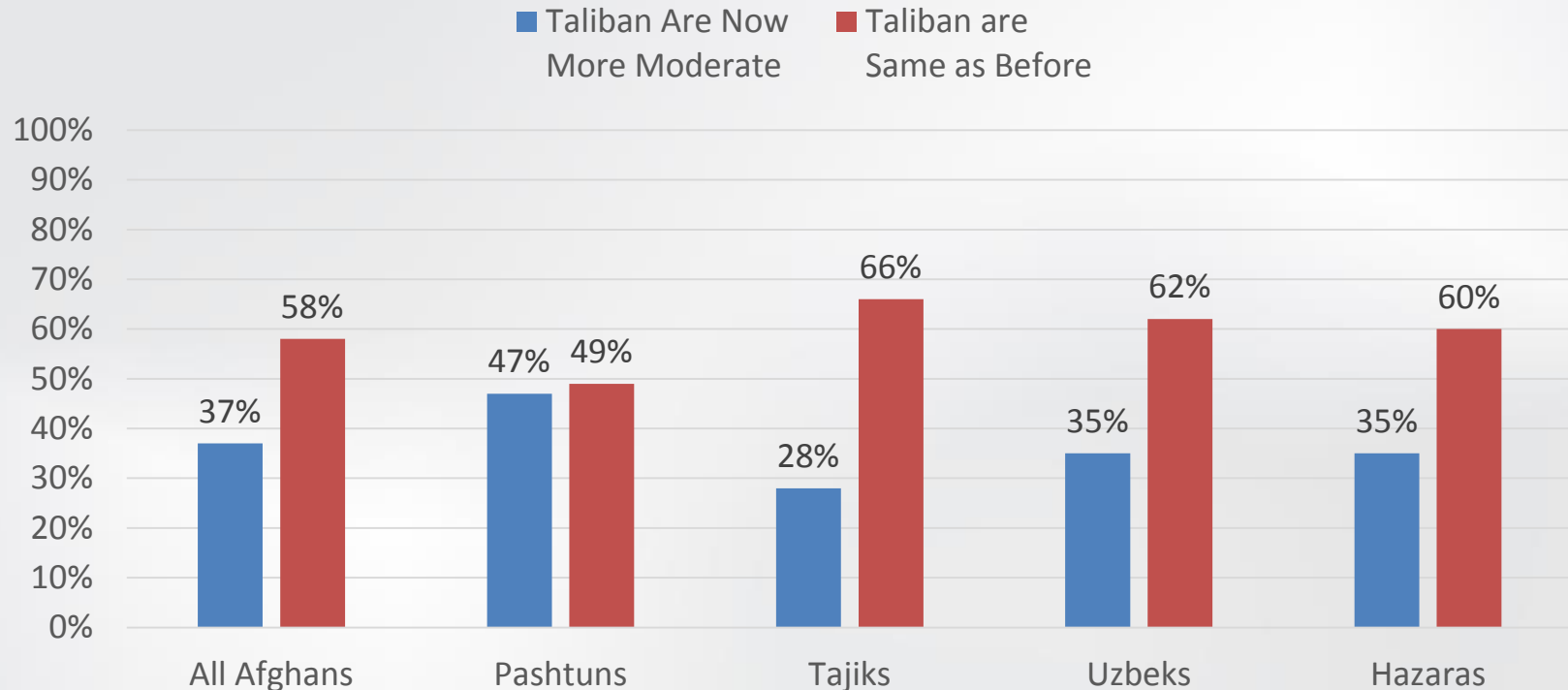


- The majority of Afghans (62%) would be willing to cede control of some provinces to the Taliban rather than continuing to fight.

- Considering the unfavorable opinion held of the Taliban by most Afghans, this likely reflects their desire to avoid continued fighting more than a preference for Taliban governance.

A Moderate Taliban?

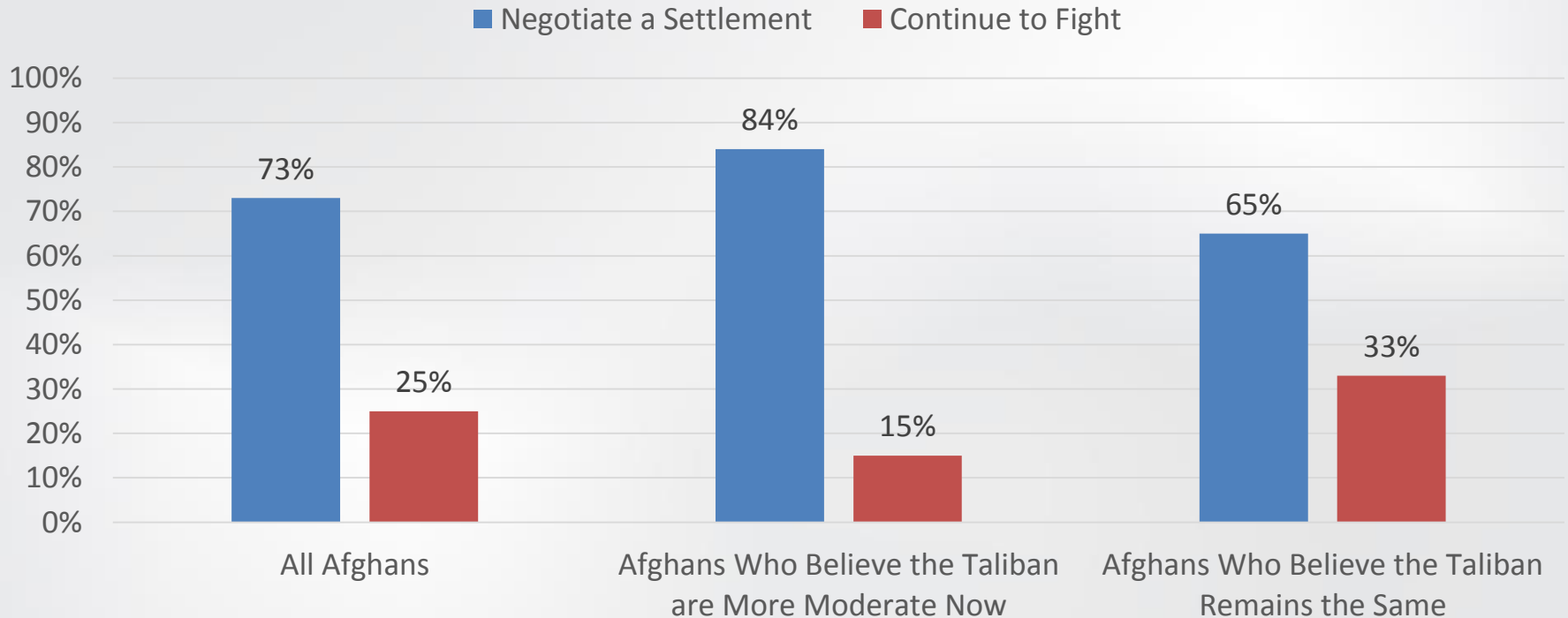
“Is it your impression that the Taliban have changed and become more moderate, or do you think they remain the same as they were when they ruled Afghanistan before?”



Pashtuns are the most likely to believe that the Taliban has become more moderate. A clear majority of all other major ethnicities believe the Taliban remains the same as before.

Taliban Moderation's Impact on Reconciliation

“Do you think the government in Kabul should negotiate a settlement with Afghan Taliban in which they are allowed to hold political offices if they stop fighting, or do you think the government in Kabul should continue to fight the Taliban and not negotiate a settlement?”



Afghans who believe the Taliban are more moderate now than when they ruled Afghanistan are 19% more likely to favor negotiations than those who believe the Taliban have not moderated.

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For More Information

For More Information
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