



Media Use in Afghanistan

The Afghan media scene has experienced tremendous growth in the post-Taliban period, buoyed by international involvement and the passage of a series of laws lending some protection to journalists. Though Reporters Without Borders listed Afghanistan's media environment 128 out of 179 countries in 2014, 80.1% of Afghan adults overall say that they are satisfied with information provided by the media, including 34.0% who say they are "very satisfied."

Two in three Afghans access news at least daily; four in five do so weekly or more

Despite lacking much of the communications infrastructure of high-information societies, Afghans remain relatively well-connected to news. Two in three Afghan adults (64.5%) say they access news daily or more often, while roughly four in five (78.0%) access news at least every week. Urban residents are more likely to access news on both a daily (76.3% vs. 60.8%) and weekly (90.9% vs. 74.0%) basis than their rural counterparts while nearly all Kabulites say they access news at least once a week (96.2%).

News consumption also trends higher with educational attainment. Just over half of Afghans lacking a formal education access news daily (55.4%), compared with 73.5% among those with up to a secondary education and 86.7% among those with an education beyond secondary school.

One in three Afghans share news at least weekly

Overall, one in three (33.8%) Afghan adults report discussing or sharing news with family or friends weekly or more often, while slightly fewer (27.5%) say they never do so. Like news consumption, news sharing rises with increased education. Nearly half of Afghan adults with at least some vocational training or university education report having shared news with friends or family in the past week (46.1%), significantly more than the 29.8% of Afghans who lack a formal education and the 36.9% with up to a secondary education.

Most Afghans "very interested" in media coverage of religion, health and education

Among a variety of topics that may be covered in the media, Afghans are most likely by far to say they are "very interested" in religion (82.1%) — a common finding among predominantly Muslim populations in which religious expression is a significant part of daily life. Smaller majorities of Afghans are very interested in coverage of two other topics that have direct relevance to their lives: health/healthcare (58.2%) and education (55.4%). Younger Afghans are particular likely to be interested in these two topics.

When asked about news from different geographic areas, Afghans are much more likely to be interested in domestic news than international news. Three in four adults overall (74.2%) say they are "very interested" in news about Afghanistan, while another one-third (33.3%) are "very interested" in international perspectives of their country. Afghans are progressively less likely to show interest in news the further it is from home, with roughly half very interested in news about the region (52.1%) and 19.7% "very interested" in news about other parts of the world. Even fewer say they are "very interested" in news specifically about Europe (16.9%) and the U.S. (16.7%).

Ownership and Use of Media Platforms

About seven in 10 Afghans (72.1%) have access to a working radio in their household, only slightly more than those with household access to a television (64.0%). While household access to computers remains steady at 23.0% from 20.3% in 2013, overall Internet access has risen from 5.8% to 12.3% over the same period, likely as a result of increased Internet capabilities on mobile phones.

Television

Although slightly more Afghans have household access to radios than televisions (72.1% vs. 64.0%), TV is now the most commonly used media platform in Afghanistan; 64.0% of Afghans say they have watched TV within the past week, compared with 56.4% who have listened to the radio. Reflecting the higher prevalence of household TV ownership in urban areas, city dwellers are more likely than rural residents to watch weekly (92.0% vs. 55.1%). Nearly nine in 10 Afghans (87.5%) with post-secondary education report having watched television in the past week.

Most TV owners (68.0%) use a terrestrial antenna to receive their signal, but a significant number use a satellite dish, of either individual (35.5%) or shared (2.1%) ownership. Antennas are more common in urban homes (91.0%) than rural ones (55.1%), but satellite dishes are more common in rural households. In 2014, rural TV owners are nearly four times more likely to receive their signal from an individually owned satellite than their urban counterparts (48.6% vs. 12.0%). Relatively few Afghan TV owners get their signal from cable (5.9%).

Radio

One in three (33.0%) Afghans listen to the radio on a daily basis, while over half listen weekly (56.4%). The country's rural residents are heavier users of radio with 59.6% tuning in every week, compared with 46.5% in urban areas. Radio use rises with Afghan education levels, though less dramatically than television use; 51.5% of those with no formal education listen at least weekly, versus 63.0% with up to a secondary education and 63.1% of those with a post-secondary education.

Most weekly radio listeners in Afghanistan (80.4%) tune in via the FM band at least weekly; the AM (35.4%) and shortwave (21.9%) bands are less commonly used. Although most weekly listeners (79.2%) still use a conventional radio set, three in 10 (29.5%) say they have listened on their mobile phones in the past week and 17.0% using their car radio. All other means of radio listening asked about remain rare; 1.6% listen using a satellite receiver and 0.8% say they listen to the radio via the Internet.

Internet

Internet access has begun to expand more rapidly in recent years. While household access to the Internet rose from 5.8% in 2013 to 12.3% in 2014, 8.6% of Afghans also now say they have used the Internet in the past week. That figure stands at one in five (20.8%) in urban areas and nearly four in 10 (38.3%) among those with greater than a secondary education. Young people are also significantly more likely to use the Internet, as 12.7% of young adults aged 15 to 24 have accessed the Internet in the past week.

Weekly Internet users are as likely to say they access the Internet via mobile phone (62.2%) as they are to say they access the Internet by laptop (61.5%). Fewer say they have used a desktop (20.2%).

Likely owing in part to slow download speeds, Internet usage in Afghanistan remains largely confined to basic purposes such as email (71.1%) and accessing news (44.9%). Fewer past-week Internet users say that they use the Web for activities that require higher levels of

bandwidth, such as watching online videos (37.2%) or listening to audio (31.0%).

Mobile phones

Four in five Afghan adults (81.1%) now say they have access to a mobile phone. While roughly six in 10 (62.2%) say they personally have a mobile phone, another 18.9% say they have access to a mobile phone through someone personally close to them. This is a remarkable achievement when considered that the entire country had only 60,000 active phone lines in 2002.

Since the early 2000s, competition in Afghanistan's telecommunications market has expanded nearly as quickly as mobile use. In 2012, the country's first 3G licenses were issued, and mobile networks are now estimated to have the ability to potentially reach as much as 90% of the population. These developments exemplify the great potential for increased Internet access via mobiles in the country. Nonetheless, smartphones account for a relatively low share of the market thus far; only 14.0% of mobile phone owners say their phones allow them to access the Internet or download apps.

Men, urbanites and the country's best educated are among the most likely to say they have a mobile phone. Reflecting the country's deep conservatism, women are nearly 36 percentage points less likely than men to personally have a mobile phone (43.8% vs. 79.5%). Afghans living in urban areas are significantly more likely than their rural peers (75.9% vs. 57.9%) to say they have a phone. Mobile ownership is also heavily linked to education, as those with an education beyond secondary school are twice as likely as those with no formal education to say that they personally have a phone (96.9% vs. 48.4%).

Methodology

This data contains results from a nationally representative, face-to-face survey of Afghan residents aged 15 and older. The national sample consists of 2,000 interviews, with an additional 500 interviews conducted in urban areas in order to boost the sample in Kabul to 500, and the samples in Herat, Jalalabad, Mazar-i-Sharif and Kandahar to at least 100. The national sample is representative of approximately 15,606,000 Afghan adults. Interviewing was conducted June 2-23, 2014.

Contact

For any questions or further information on this data, please contact the Broadcasting Board of Governors at publicaffairs@bbg.gov or 202-203-4400. Follow us on twitter at @BBGgov