



Afghan Media in 2010

Priority District Report Urgun (Paktika)

October 13, 2010

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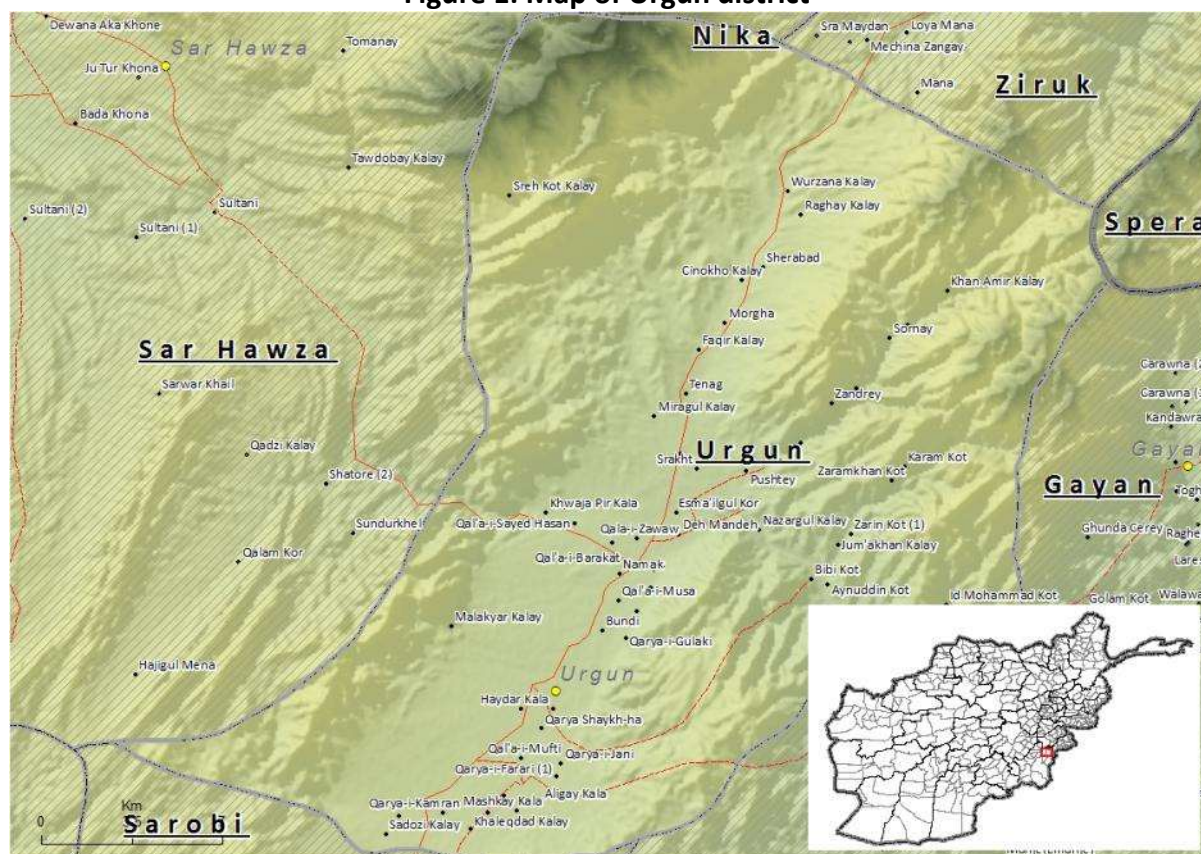
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1 Introduction

1.1 District profile

Urgun district is a forested and mountainous district, located in the northeast of Paktika province, close to the Pakistani border, covering an area of 566km². It borders Nika to the northwest, Ziruk to the north, Gayan to the east, Barmal to the southeast, Sorobi to the south, and Sar Hawza to the west.

Figure 1: Map of Urgun district



The population is estimated at around 88,000 (around 28% urban). Literacy levels are very low. The population is 88% Pashtun, with a Tajik minority living mainly in the district center and controlling a large proportion of the district's economy and service provision. Urgun is a traditional Pashtun tribal society, and today there are still Jadran, Wazir, and Kharotee tribal decision-making structures in place. Kuchis also make up a large proportion of the population.

The economic drivers are agriculture, livestock, cross-border trading, and retail. Pine nuts are a high-value crop and are collected from the mountains, which also support an active timber smuggling trade. The main bazaar in east Paktika is in Urgun, with around 80 shops. This will probably grow in importance when the Sharan–Pakistan road is completed. Urgun is a major livestock trading center, where Kuchis bring their sheep and goats.

Urgun's infrastructure is poor but better than in surrounding districts. A rudimentary hospital is supported by the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), and only one high school

is reported to be functioning, although Education Management Information System (EMIS) data suggest there are four operational high schools.

Urgun has a range of development projects underway. Although these are more numerous than in surrounding districts, the impact on society is fairly minimal. The Forward Operating Base in Urgun (FOB Urgun-East) houses the Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative (ASI), which implements stabilization and development projects in the district. The National Solidarity Program (NSP) is implemented by Building Resources Across Communities (BRAC, formerly the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) and the hospital is supported by International Medical Corps (IMC). The Tribal Liaison Office (TLO) also has a field office in Urgun, but no other major non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are present.

The security situation remains volatile, but things are somewhat under control because FOB Urgun-East is present.

1.2 Methodology

Fieldwork was conducted in April 2010 in the following areas: Shikhano Kali (rural), Urgun Kali (rural), Jani Kali (urban), and Chianaki Kali (urban).

A total of 11 key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted among the following community leaders: *maliks* (village chiefs) in Shikhano Kali (two), Urgun Kali (two), Jani Kali (one), and Chianaki Kali (one); *shura* (council) members in Urgun Kali (three) and Shikhano Kali (one); and one civil servant at the district governor's office in Urgun Kali. No interviews were conducted with outlet managers or journalists.

Besides KIIs, 150 interviews were held and fed into the audience analysis.

2 Media landscape

The media landscape in Urgun is unique. The district features very limited terrestrial TV coverage, but this does not translate into limited TV viewership. The local population makes up for the terrestrial TV absence by relying extensively on satellite dishes. Furthermore, despite the presence of only one local outlet – a recently established military radio station, which in itself is not unusual – the local population seems to be exposed to a range of radio stations, with a relatively high number of provincial and national stations accessible compared with other districts analyzed in this study, including neighboring Sorubi district (also in Paktika province).

There is no electricity supply in Urgun district. Most villages rely on solar panels and generators (a few have community generators, which are usually located in the bazaar). Wealthy families generally own private generators, but this applies to a relatively small segment of the population. In 2009, the provincial governor requested the building of a hydropower dam, but so far this plan has not been implemented, for financial and security reasons. There are three video shops, two public spaces showing TV/videos, and three bookstores that sell and rent books. Satellite dishes can be spotted on roof tops. There are three Public Call Offices (PCOs), one computer shop, and, as of yet, no internet café. Cell phone networks are provided by AWCC (although with poor connection), Roshan, and MTN.

2.1 Media outlets

Urgun district has access to only one (national) terrestrial TV channel and 11 radio stations, one of which is local. No newspapers or magazines are distributed in the district.

2.1.1 Television

Besides satellite channels, there is only one TV channel available in the district through a terrestrial signal. There are no cable networks.

Name	Scope	Ownership	Antenna location	Broadcast radius
Ariana	National	Private	Sharan	35-75km

Ariana

Ariana is a private TV channel that was established in 2005 by Mr. Bayat (who also owns AWCC and started the Bayat Foundation). It has extensive coverage, with a total of 295 districts reportedly under its coverage. Broadcast languages include Dari (45%), Pashto (35%), Uzbek (15%), and English (5%). See the Kabul report for further details.

2.1.2 Radio

Besides the shortwave and AM radio stations that are available throughout Afghanistan, 11 radio stations are available in the district.

Name	Scope	Ownership	Frequency	Antenna location	Broadcast radius
Urgun Ghag	Local	Military	90 FM	PRT base (Urgun)	-
Paktin Ghag	Provincial	Military	1386 AM	Shikin (Barmal district)	-
Pashtoon Ghag	Provincial	Private	89.4 FM	Sharan	100km
Patman	Provincial	Military	92.5FM	Sharan	10-15km
Khost RTA	Regional	Government	89.5 FM 1458 AM	Khost	150-300km
Mashaal	Regional	Public (US)	100.5 FM	Khost	-
Deewa	Regional	Public (US)	100.5 FM	Khost	-
BBC	National	Public (UK)	87.9 FM	Paktia	30km
Arman FM	National	Private	98.1 FM		50km
Killid	National	Private	88 FM	Nangarhar	45-50km
Nawa	National	Private	103.1 FM		60km

Urgun Ghag

Urgun Ghag (“Voice of Urgun”) is a military radio station. It is the only local radio station in Urgun. It was established in 2008, with an antenna located on the military base. The radio station broadcasts 10 hours a day, irregularly, in three batches (7am-12pm, 2-4pm, and 7-10pm). The outlet employs five people. Content is prepared exclusively by local staff, which includes two journalists originally from Jalalabad and Khost. Daily programming includes religion, agriculture, health, and constitutional law; local news is covered extensively, with speakers interviewing the sub-governorate at least once a week. Music and interactive programming, such as *Sandarghalow Seyali* (“Singer’s Competition”) and *Nalai Ajayeb* (“Amazing Things”) are also part of the daily schedule. On Friday nights, *Lawango Amil* broadcasts poems, letters, and song requests.

Paktin Ghag

Paktin Ghag, another military radio station, was established in 2005. The antenna is located at the military compound in Shikin, Barmal district, on Paktika’s border with Pakistan. It broadcasts 7am-10pm every day. Programming encompasses music (mostly Afghan), news, and religion, with interactive programming also playing a significant role. It occasionally broadcasts warnings somewhat relevant to the district, but the information is not always precise, since there is no local feed from Urgun.

Pashtoon Ghag

Pashtoon Ghag is a private outlet that started in 2008 and is run by Mr Mohammad Nabi Hamdard. Its 40m antenna is located in the Matakhas area in Sharan. Its 300kW transmitter allows for a 100km broadcast radius and the station broadcasts 13 hours a day (5-12pm and 4-10pm). Content is largely musical, cultural, and satirical. There are specific programs on rule of law/elections, agriculture, and children. Additionally, every day around lunchtime, the radio broadcasts *Khowala* (“Food”), an interactive program on which people are invited to share their opinions on a range of topics. The outlet employs 21 people, including the manager, 5 presenters, and 2 technicians.

Patman

Patman is a military radio station established in 2007 (92.5 FM). It broadcasts through a 30m antenna located in Sharan (Paktika) and a transmitter with a broadcast radius of 10-15km.

Khost RTA

The state-run radio station Khost Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA) was established in 1982. The radio has two antennas, an FM transmitter of 1kW and an AM transmitter of 500W, with a broadcast radius of 150-300km. Currently, Khost RTA is based on the US military compound in Khost and is managed by Mr. Ghafur Mahidi. Programming is 100% Pashto, runs 18 hours a day (starting at 5am), and includes music (50 hours a week) and locally produced content (45 hours a week).

Mashaal/Deewa

Mashaal and Deewa are two radio stations that share the same frequency. Mashaal is administered by Radio Free Europe (RFE) and shares the same headquarters as Azadi. Deewa is administered by Voice of America (VOA)/Ashna and shares its headquarters in Washington, DC. These US congress-funded radio stations were established in 2009 to cover the Pashtun belt areas. They broadcast through three antennas in Khost (200kW transmitter), Kunar, and Gardez. The content is tailored to a Pakistani listenership.

National radio stations

Besides the AM and shortwave stations that are available throughout Afghanistan, the following national radio stations are received: the BBC, Arman FM, Killid, and Nawa.

2.1.3 Newspapers

There are no formal distribution channels in Urgan. No local newspapers or magazines were observed in the district. Occasionally, people bring magazines from Sharan city (center of Paktika province), although accessing the district with printed press is made more difficult by possible interference and obstruction by insurgents.

2.2 New media

2.2.1 Mobile media

There are reportedly three video shops and one computer shop in Urgan district. It is common for young individuals in Urgan to exchange songs, verses of the Quran, ringtones, and especially videos of insurgent fighting through mobile phones.

2.2.2 Internet

There is a dearth of public places offering internet access, with reportedly no internet café in the district. As explained below, internet is accessed mainly at work or at home. Some businesspeople have reportedly tried bringing this service to the area through a dish antenna (through VSAT), but the initiative has been unsuccessful.

2.3 Media and information actors

2.3.1 Government

There is a small governor's office but there are no representatives of the Ministry of Information and Culture (MoIC) or Bakhtar News Agency (BNA). There is no public library.

The Paktika state-run RTA TV and radio stations are no longer active, and the only government outlet the local population is exposed to is an extra-provincial one, Khost RTA.

2.3.2 Outlet managers and journalists

There are only two journalists based in Urgun. They have worked for Urgun Ghag since early 2010, when they replaced two other journalists from Urgun. It was reported that travelling around the district and the general unease people feel when working with the US military (owing to the exposure it entails) led the previous journalists to leave their jobs. (They are currently employed by an NGO.) The current Urgun Ghag journalists never leave the PRT base for security reasons, thus limited movement and the shortage of journalists represent major constraints to journalism quality in the district.

No journalist or outlet manager was interviewed in Urgun, so it is hard to assess pressure or censorship. There is a general perception that censorship is generally accepted.

Urgun Ghag is generally not perceived as supporting the US or the foreign military: with its limited range of programming (mainly music), there is no specific content to be perceived as propaganda. However, listeners tend to be cautious when the station reports on the number of insurgents killed by the Afghan National Army (ANA) or international forces.

2.3.3 Other content providers

With a shortage of local outlets in the district, no content provider linked to the local media was reported.

2.3.4 Media NGOs

There are reportedly no media NGOs in Urgun.

2.3.5 Traditional information sources

As in most districts across the country, *shura* members, *maliks*, *mullahs*, and general word of mouth at the bazaar and the mosque represent major traditional information sources. Two or three times a month, elders give speeches on Urgun Ghag radio, generally tackling religion and politics. The most recent speech was given by a *shura* member, who encouraged the local population to trust the *shura* and get in touch with its members in case of problems.

2.3.6 Insurgents

No insurgent radio seems to be present in Urgun. Insurgent-related media in the district entail occasional *shabnama* (“night letters”), face-to-face meetings, and videos of insurgents shared on mobiles by youth. Insurgent communication is trusted, insofar as it intimidates the local population, but is generally seen to contain only threats as opposed to proper information.

2.3.7 Military

Three military radio stations are reported to be received in the district, the local radio station Urgun Ghag and the provincial Paktin Ghag and Patman. Paktika is reportedly one of

a number of provinces (including Khost, Logar, Paktia, Ghazni, and Wardak) where the US military has set up a total of 28 radio stations.

These radios-in-a-box (RIABs), all located in the PRT or FOB or in district administrative offices, have 250-300W transmitters, with approximately three employees per radio station, and are US army funded. RIABs are not under the Sada-e-Azadi brand (88.5 FM). The Combined Joint PSYOPS Taskforce (CJPOTF) has no control over their content, which is totally localized and decentralized, although the relationship between CJPOTF and the RIABs depends on who runs them. The presence of these RIABs on multiple bases across the province (five FOBs) allows for coverage across a significant part of Urgan district.

2.3.8 Others

No other interest group related to media was reported.

3 Audience

The following is a description of the audience in Urgun, based on 150 interviews.

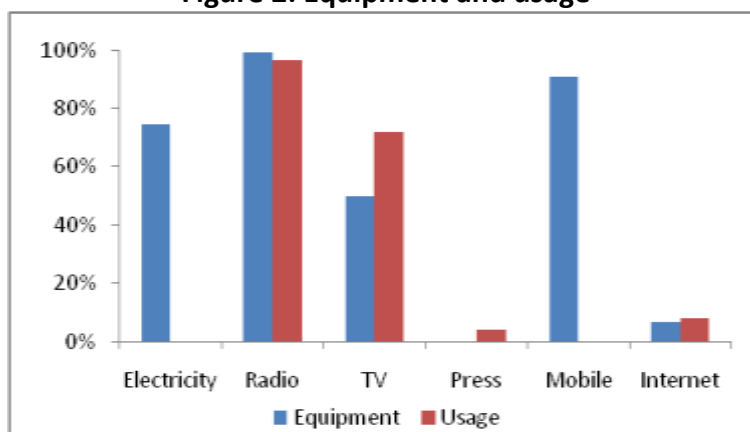
3.1 Equipment and usage

3.1.1 Household equipment and media usage

Compared with other districts, Urgun respondents are relatively well equipped with TVs and have equally high access to radio and mobile phones. Printed press readership is extremely low, at 4%.

A total of 7% of interviewees claimed they had access to the internet at home, and 8% declared using the internet. This seems unlikely in such a rural, isolated district as Urgun. However, most interviewees seemed able to answer correctly all the follow-up questions on their internet connection (consumption frequency, price and quality of the connection, etc.). Nothing in the socio-demographic variables points to an evident sampling bias.

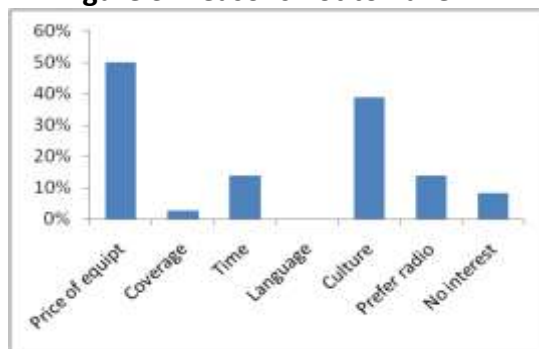
Figure 2: Equipment and usage



Relatively good equipment may be related to high access to electricity through generators or solar panels. Massive community-level generators are located in many villages (usually in bazaars), and the majority of villages are equipped with solar panels. In addition, wealthy families possess their own generators (1% of the total population). Electricity access was not mentioned as preventing possession of a TV set.

Price and cultural issues were noted as the two main factors preventing TV purchase (50% and 39%, respectively). These two factors are nuanced, since Urgun is neither particularly poor (mean household income is above average, albeit with very high standard deviation) nor particularly conservative (all respondents are happy with children watching TV without supervision and 66% would allow women to do so – this is the highest figure across all districts).

Figure 3: Reasons not to have TV



Penetration of mobile phones is one of the highest among all districts, reaching saturation point (note that the sample includes only male respondents).

As in all rural districts visited, the large majority of respondents are radio users (97%). There are far more TV users than TV owners. Respondents watch TV at home when they have a set, otherwise at relatives’ (14%) or friends’ (7%) houses.

3.1.2 Sources of information

Except for on religion, for which the *mullah* is the primary source of information for 68% of interviewees, broadcast media (radio or TV) are the main source of information on all topics.

Table 1: What is the most used source of information?

	<i>Mullah, mosque</i>	Newspapers	Radio	TV	<i>Shura</i>	<i>Khan, malik, commander</i>	Book	#
Politics	1%	1%	49%	32%	17%	0%	0%	138
Religion	68%	1%	18%	12%	0%	0%	1%	150
Local news	1%	1%	82%	17%	0%	0%	0%	150
National news	1%	1%	65%	33%	0%	0%	0%	129
International news	1%	1%	50%	49%	0%	0%	0%	149
Development projects	1%	1%	38%	35%	4%	22%	0%	106
Movies and songs	1%	1%	39%	60%	0%	0%	0%	129

Over 65% of respondents prefer radio for both local and national news. International news is taken either from the radio or from the TV. TV is preferred for more entertaining issues like music and movies. Information on development projects is sought from radio, TV, and traditional sources (e.g. the local *khan, malik, or commander*) in that order. On political issues, radio is the primary source (49% of responses), followed by TV and the *shura* (32% and 17%, respectively).

Traditional sources of information and broadcast media meet when *shura* members or elders give speeches on Urgun Ghag.

3.1.3 Usage patterns

Evenings are highly preferred as far as media usage is concerned. In the case of TV, there is almost no usage until early evening, and 74% of respondents prefer to watch TV between 7pm and 11pm. This is also peak time for radio listeners, although listenership preferences are spread more equally over the day.

Figure 4: Preferred times to listen to radio

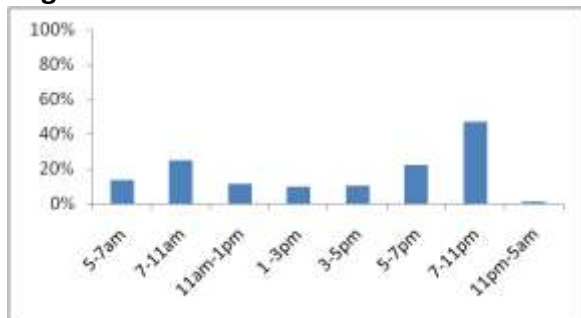
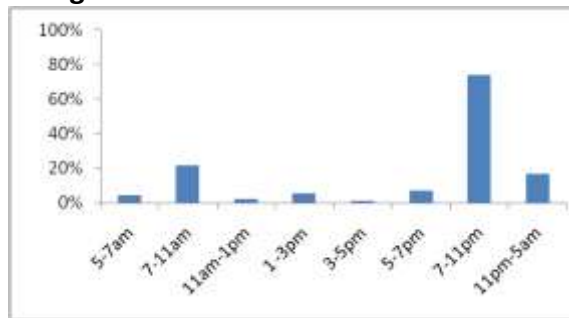


Figure 5: Preferred times to watch TV



Eight out of ten interviewees listen to the radio at least several times a week, if not every day. Similarly, TV users are quite intensive consumers: 55% of the sample watches TV at least several times a week.

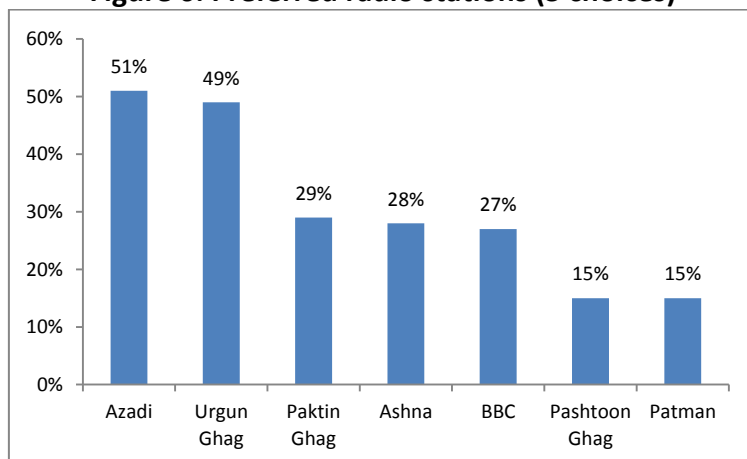
3.2 Preferences

3.2.1 Outlets

Radio

National Azadi is the most mentioned among preferred stations (51% of respondents) and its “sister” Ashna/VOA (they share the same frequency) comes in fourth with 28%. They are separated by local Urgun Ghag (49%) and Paktin Ghag (29%). The fifth favorite radio station is the national BBC, with 27% of responses.

Figure 6: Preferred radio stations (3 choices)

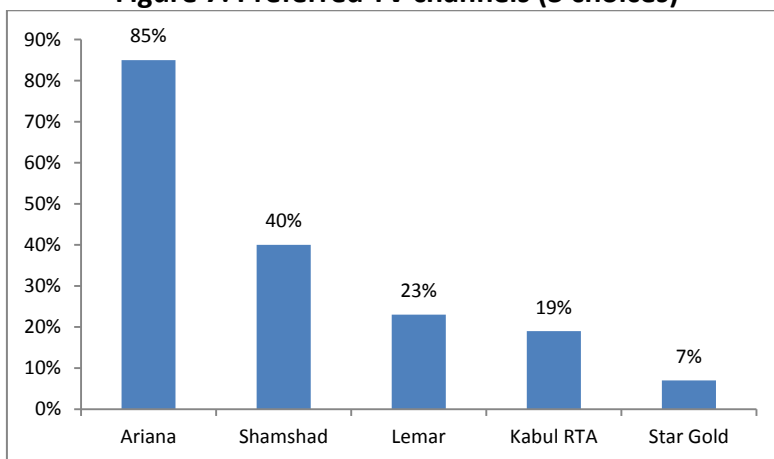


Television

Ariana dominates viewers’ preferences, with 85% of respondents highlighting this station as one of their three favorites. This is explained by the fact that Ariana is the only channel available through an over-the-air signal. Other stations are received through satellite only.

The other most preferred channels are Shamshad (40%), Lemar (23%), and Kabul RTA (with almost 20%).

Figure 7: Preferred TV channels (3 choices)



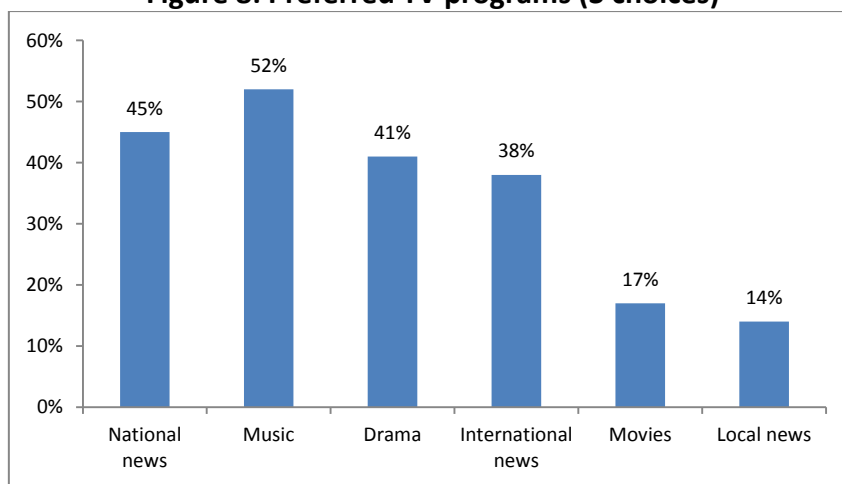
Printed press

Press readership cannot be commented on owing to the low size of the sample (four).

3.2.2 Programs

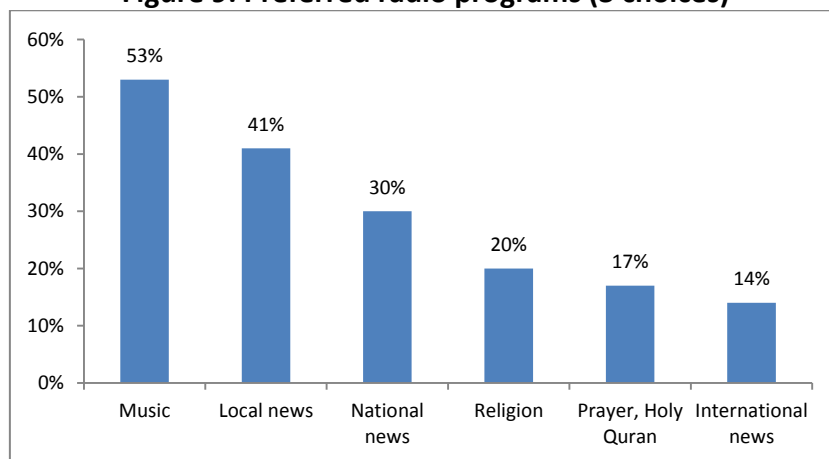
News programs are the key programs attracting TV viewers, with 45% of respondents citing national news as one of their three preferred programs (international news is at 38% and local news 14%). Entertainment programs are second most preferred, with both music and drama mentioned in 41-42% of answers.

Figure 8: Preferred TV programs (3 choices)



On the radio, music comes first, preferred by 53% of respondents. A significant number of interviewees (33%) also mentioned music as the least appealing type of radio program. News is the second most preferred: national news was mentioned by 30% of respondents, local news by 41%, and international news by 14%. Religion is the fourth most popular type of content (mentioned by 20% of respondents).

Figure 9: Preferred radio programs (3 choices)



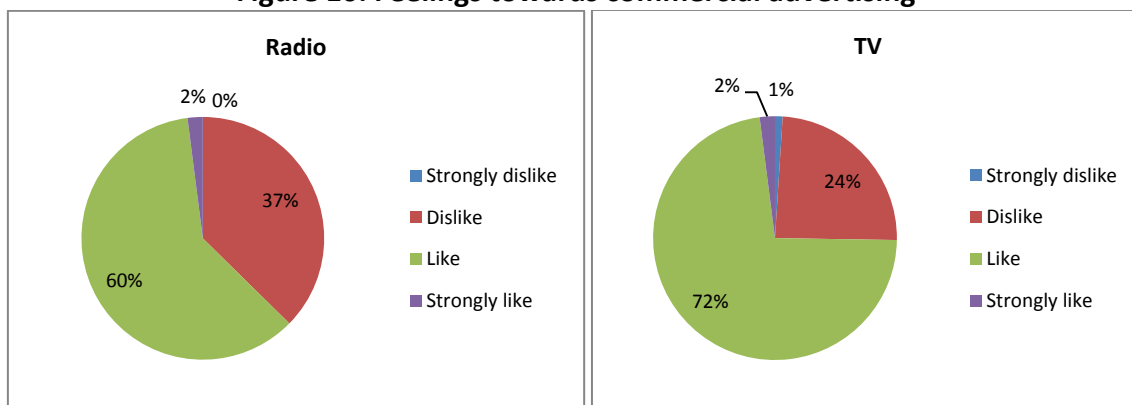
Qualitative interviews revealed that the most popular programs are *Lawango Amil* on Urgun Ghag radio and the Indian dramas *Dolhan* on Ariana TV and *Kasuti Zindagi* (“Life Exam”) on Tolo TV.

Foreign programming is appreciated in the form of Indian dramas. International news from the BBC is also very popular, as is Al Jazeera. The latter generates comprehension issues, though, because of the language barrier.

3.2.3 Advertising

The majority of respondents do not mind commercial advertising on radio and TV, or think of it positively.

Figure 10: Feelings towards commercial advertising



Over 60% of respondents considered advertising to be useful.

Unlike in other districts, adverts for food, banks, and consumer goods are the most noticed, with 13%, 10%, and 9% of respondents, respectively, who have memorized them from the radio; on TV, it was mobile operators (22%) as well as banks and airlines (both 13%).

3.2.4 Personalities

President Hamid Karzai was mentioned by over 30% of respondents in Urgun district as someone they like to hear or see on the media. Chief of Wolesi Jirga Yonos Qanooni and

presidential candidate Dr. Abdullah Abdullah were the second and third most mentioned personalities (12% and 7%, respectively).

3.3 Perception and impact

3.3.1 Comprehension

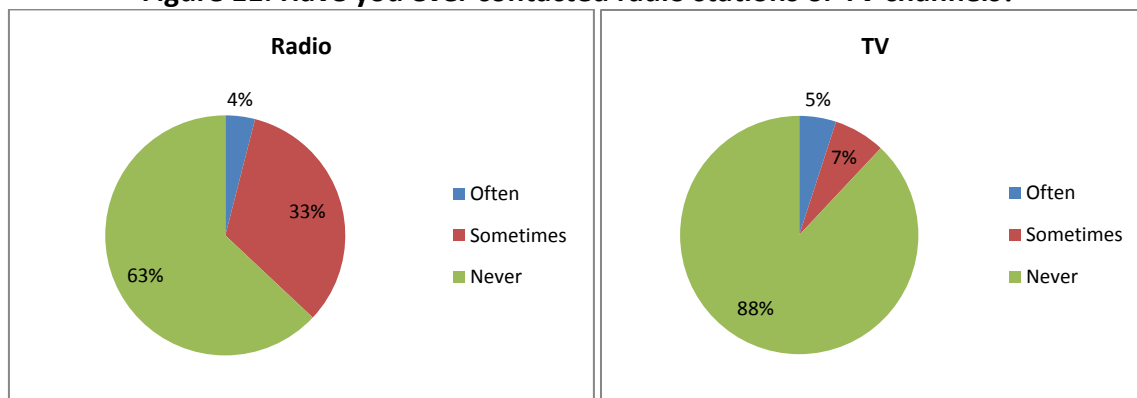
Radio programs are easier to understand than TV programs: 87% of radio listeners have no difficulties understanding programs but this is the case for only 75% of TV viewers. The challenges are different for the two media. Major difficulties in understanding radio programs come from the terminology used (94%), whereas pronunciation is a major issue for TV viewers, probably because certain Pashto accents are used in some programs.

Radio listeners reported having difficulties understanding political debates (92% of respondents) and government announcements (69%).

3.3.2 Participation

Urgun respondents are not as eager to interact with the media as those in other districts. This is explained by their relatively high preference for TV – less likely to generate interaction – and by some of the stations they listen to the most (Azadi, Ashna/VOA, and the BBC are not local stations they can relate to). Still, 37% of respondents contact radio outlets, essentially to request songs, by phone.

Figure 11: Have you ever contacted radio stations or TV channels?



The stations most contacted are the local ones: Urgun Ghag (49%) and Paktin Ghag (26%).

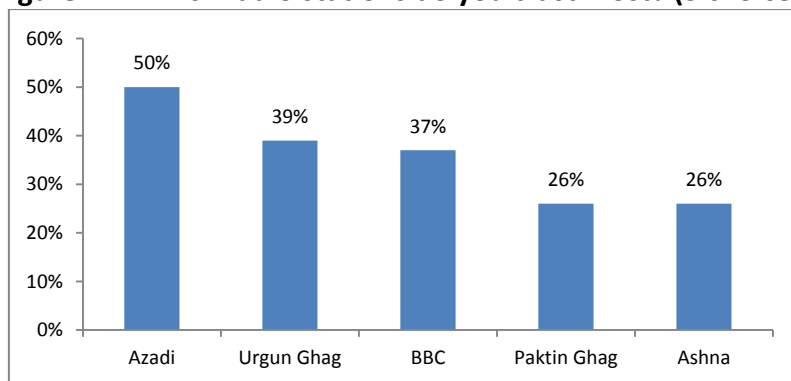
Call-in shows on Urgun Ghag, including song requests and poetry reading, are highly appreciated, especially among the younger generations. Participation takes place by calling in and sending letters.

As the figures show, most of the interaction has to do with entertainment. There is a general sense of powerlessness when it comes to believing in media bringing change. *“People do not believe that making themselves heard on the radio will bring any result.”*

3.3.3 Trust

The preferred radio station, Azadi, is also the most trusted (50% of respondents mentioned it among the three stations they trust the most), followed by local Urgun Ghag (39%), the BBC (37%), local Paktin Ghag, and the national station Ashna/VOA (both 26%).

Figure 12: Which radio stations do you trust most? (3 choices)

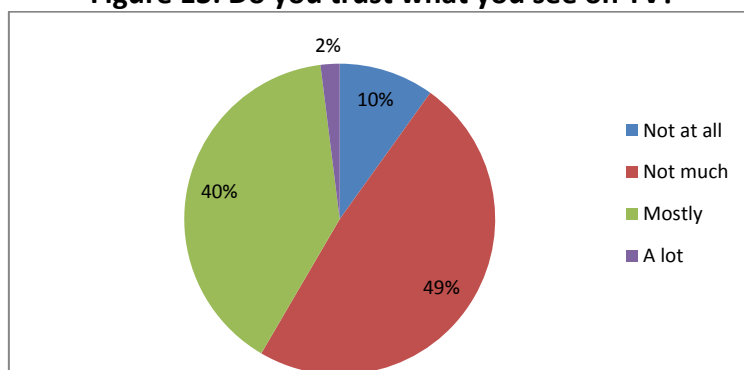


Over half (59%) of the respondents do not trust what they see on TV much or at all.

The most trusted source for national and local news is clearly radio (over 70% of respondents); for international news, TV is the most trusted.

Trust – according to the qualitative interviews – seems to go hand in hand with age, hence elders’ speeches are generally the most trusted source of information.

Figure 13: Do you trust what you see on TV?



3.3.4 Perception of local media

When asked what *local* station they listen to the most, interviewees mentioned first Urgun Ghag, then Patman, and then (a smaller number) Paktin Ghag and Pashtoon Ghag. The quality of their preferred local station was judged overall as satisfactory. A minority of users expressed some concerns about the quality of Patman and Urgun Ghag.

Table 2: What is the quality of the local radio station you listen to the most?

	Not very good	Could be better	Good	Very good	N
Urgun Ghag	9%	15%	55%	21%	47
Patman	17%	26%	30%	26%	23
Paktin Ghag	9%	0%	91%	0%	11
Pashtoon Ghag	13%	0%	38%	50%	8

Having access to a local radio station benefits the community. Many respondents (57%) said that access means more services (including public announcements). Even more important (61%) are the benefits from access to local news.

There is widespread feeling among the local population that Urgun Ghag is a military radio station and therefore cannot be truly independent.

3.3.5 Circulation and impact

The media appears to have a strong impact on the community in Urgun. A total of 79% of respondents think the local radio station they listen to the most (see previous section) has changed the lives of their community members. According to 92% of respondents, radio in general brings new ideas, which is good for 99% of respondents.

TV also contributes to changing people’s opinions for 75% of respondents.

Figure 14: Does local radio have an impact on your community?

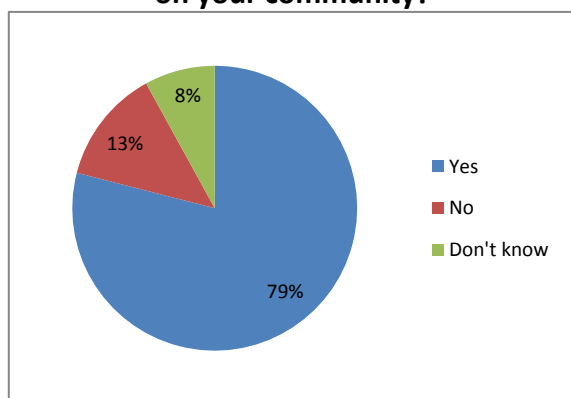
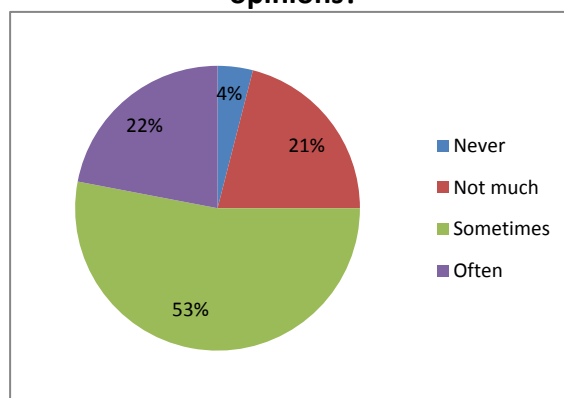


Figure 15: Can TV make you change your opinions?



3.3.6 Development project communication and educational campaigns

No major campaign on broadcast media was recalled, with the exception of announcements made by the elders of the district on the importance of enrolling children in school (at the beginning of the school year).

3.3.7 Insurgents

A total of 27% of respondents receive information from insurgents.

Shabnama are the most common form of communication (24% of the respondents reported *shabnama* in the district), although insurgents do not avoid face-to-face meetings (12% of respondents reported these). Other forms of communication were also reported, such as calls on mobile phones (18%).

4 Conclusions and areas of opportunity

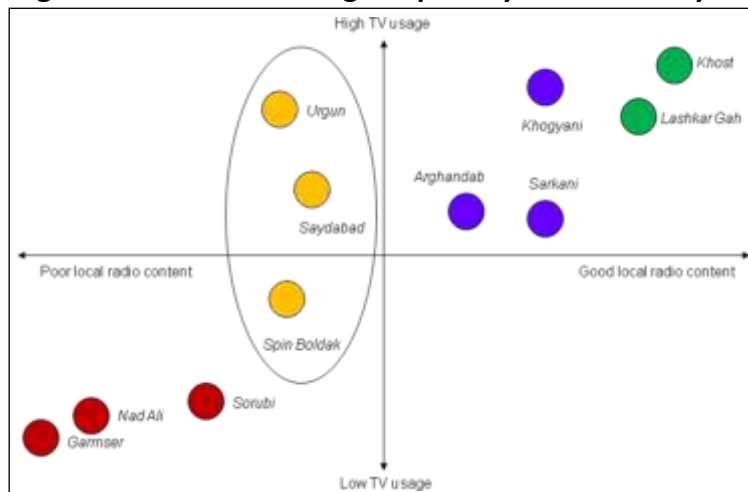
Urgun’s mountainous terrain acts as a barrier to media coverage and quality reception. The district receives only one terrestrial TV channel (Ariana), with a good quality signal. Families that can afford satellite TV are evidently in a privileged position, as they can view a wider range of channels. Lack of reception of Paktika RTA, which was not active at the time of fieldwork, may be incentivizing people to use satellite dishes to watch TV.

Quality of radio reception varies, with a poor signal for a number of stations, including Arman FM, Killid, Watandar, and Nawa. Urgun has surprisingly different coverage and quality of reception to that in Sorubi district, its neighbor in the same province. The population of Sorubi district reported good reception of Nangarhar RTA and only very limited reception of Khost RTA, whereas there is reportedly no reception of Nangarhar RTA in Urgun and good reception of Khost RTA.

Although the TV landscape is extremely bare in Urgun, equipment and usage rates are high and tastes are more diverse than elsewhere. Urgun is also one of the very few districts where the military radio station ranks well in terms of popularity and trust. It seems to have achieved some buy-in by the local community.

Figure 16, which classifies the districts analyzed into four groups on the basis of TV usage and quality of local radio content, illustrates Urgun’s positioning in relation to the others.

Figure 16: Contextualizing the priority districts analyzed



In this context, improving coverage and reception quality of TV and radio in Urgun is a priority. Sarhawaza Mountain is a good location for installing new/additional antennas.

The reported success of the local military radio station should be taken as an example for other, less popular, military stations. The content broadcast by the latter could be improved and diversified if they worked as a network instead of being entirely isolated from one another.

In general, any media strategy for Urgun must take into account the unusual characteristics of this district, which is varied in terms of ethnicity and language.