

IRI Pakistan Index

Indicators

Over the course of its polling program in Pakistan, the International Republican Institute (IRI) has tracked a number of indicators in order to gauge the overall mood of the population. This poll was conducted from July 15 – August 7, 2009, and indicates that the majority of the Pakistani people remain pessimistic about the economic and security situation in their country, with inflation (40 percent) and unemployment (20 percent) cited as the most important issue facing Pakistan.

The Pakistani people also displayed an increasing shift in opinion on the country's security situation. As Taliban influence continued to spread beyond the tribal areas, the Pakistan government's anti-Taliban offensive in the Swat valley was welcomed by the population. This survey indicates that an increasing majority of respondents acknowledge extremism as a serious problem (90 percent) and support the Pakistan Army fighting extremists (69 percent). As a result of these efforts, favorability ratings for the army and government have made positive gains since IRI's [March 2009 survey](#).

- When asked if they felt that the country was headed in the right or wrong direction, 84 percent responded wrong direction, while 15 percent said the right direction. This wrong direction rating represents a three percent increase from the March 2009 poll.
- When asked about their personal economic situation over the course of the past year, 72 percent said it worsened, while 13 percent said it improved, and 14 percent said that it remained the same. This represents a five percent decrease in the number of respondents who believe their personal economic situation has improved since the March 2009 poll, resuming the downward trend in economic optimism observed in IRI polls since February 2007.
- More significant, however, was the drop in optimism concerning a respondents' personal economic future. When asked if they felt their economic well being would improve or worsen during the coming year, the number saying they thought it would improve dropped 18 points to 11 percent, while the number saying they thought their economic situation would worsen increased to 58 percent from 36 percent. This shift represents a 22 point increase compared to the March 2009 poll.
- Overall, Pakistanis feel less secure this year than one year ago. The number of people saying they felt less secure increased to 69 percent from 60 percent in the March 2009 poll, while the number saying they felt more secure declined to 28 percent from 38 percent.
- When asked to choose between a stable and prosperous Pakistan that was run by a military dictatorship or a democratic government that led to an unstable and insecure country, 75 percent selected the democratic option while 23 percent opted for the military.

(more)

IRI Pakistan Index – Page Two

Top Issues

- *Economy*
 - As seen over the course of IRI's polling, economic issues remain a major concern. When asked what is the most important issue facing the country, 40 percent cited inflation, 20 percent chose unemployment, and eight percent selected poverty. This represents 68 percent of the population citing economic issues as their top priority. Inflation, while still the top issue at 40 percent, has continued a downward trend since reaching a high of 71 percent in June 2008. Lack of water and electricity saw the largest increase, rising from three to 11 percent.

- *Terrorism*
 - Although only 13 percent of respondents cited terrorism as the most important issue facing Pakistan, the July 2009 poll registered a rising concern about the security situation. Concern about extremists continued to increase in the wake of the Taliban breaking its agreement with the government over the Swat division. When asked if they felt that religious extremism was a serious problem in Pakistan, 90 percent agreed, a 16 percent increase over the [March 2009 poll](#).
 - A majority of respondents, 86 percent, agreed the Taliban and Al-Qaeda operating in Pakistan was a serious problem. This represents the highest percentage of Pakistanis citing extremists operating within their country as a serious problem since IRI first asked the question in [September 2007](#).
 - IRI polls have shown an upswing in support for the army's military campaign against extremists in the North West Frontier Province and Federally Administered Tribal Areas since [June 2008](#). When specifically asked if you support the Army fighting extremists in Malakand division, 69 percent were in favor of the effort and 28 percent were opposed. The poll was conducted at the time of the military's offensive in Malakand division.
 - Despite this support, the July 2009 poll indicated a decrease in the willingness of Pakistanis to cooperate with the United States against extremism, with the number supporting such cooperation dropping to 18 percent.
 - When asked if they were in support of a peace deal with extremists, an overwhelming 72 percent of respondents said they were in support of such reconciliation in March 2009. Attitudes towards a peace deal with extremists took a sharp turn in the July 2009 poll, dropping 26 points to 46 percent in favor and 50 percent opposed.

(more)

IRI Pakistan Index – Page Three

Foreign Policy

- When asked if they have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the nation of India, 41 percent said they have a favorable opinion and 54 percent said they have an unfavorable opinion, reflecting a four percent decline in favorability since March 2009.
- However, when asked if they think it is a serious problem if extremists, such as Al-Qaeda and other terrorists groups use Pakistan as a base of operations to launch attacks against India and Afghanistan, an overwhelming 89 percent said it was a serious problem.

Leadership Ratings

Although making small gains since March 2009, political discontent remains prevalent and can be reflected in the favorability of political personalities. Respondents continued to rate the majority of political personalities unfavorably, with only three of the personalities polled receiving a favorability rating of more than 50 percent.

- *President Asif Zardari*
 - Over the course of the last two surveys conducted in [October 2008](#) and March 2009, President Zardari saw little change in his favorability rating; however, in the July 2009 survey there was an increase in his popularity. Respondents gave President Zardari an approval rating of 25 percent, an increase of six points from IRI's last poll. Nonetheless, Pakistanis continue to hold onto the opinion that conditions in the country are problematic and President Zardari is perceived as being responsible.
- *Nawaz Sharif*
 - Nawaz Sharif is the most popular political personality in the July 2009 poll. Even though the number of people viewing him favorably decreased to 67 percent from 75 percent in the March poll, the poll placed him well ahead of the rest of the field. Three factors contribute to Sharif's popularity: the center-right coalesced around him after the defeat of former President Pervez Musharraf and Pakistan Muslim League - Quaid (PML-Q), the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) led government is held responsible for the problems of the country as Sharif has positioned himself as the opposition, and the recent events surrounding the Supreme Court's decision banning him from running for political office, pulling people out of the undecided categories and into his camp.
 - When asked in an open-ended question who they felt was the best person to solve the problems of Pakistan, 51 percent named Sharif, down from four percent since the last poll.
 - When asked who they would prefer as president, Sharif was favored by 58 percent, down 13 points from 71 percent since March 2009, while 17 percent selected President Zardari.

(more)

IRI Pakistan Index – Page Four

- *Other Personalities*
 - While all other PPP figures saw their popularity decrease, Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani countered this trend, with the number of people viewing him favorably increasing from 33 to 38 percent, a gain of five points.

Political Party Ratings

The same dynamic in the leadership ratings can be seen in political party ratings. Since it is the majority party and controls the government, PPP is being held responsible for problems besetting the country. This results in low levels of support for PPP; however, the government's offensive against the Taliban coupled by the high rating received by the government in response to care of refugees, has narrowed the gap between the two parties.

- As has been the case since PML-Q's support collapsed after the February 2008 elections, Pakistan now has two dominant parties. When asked who they would vote for if the elections were held next week, 57 percent, down five points from 62 percent, cited the Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) and 22 percent said PPP, while six percent supported Pakistan Tahreek-e-Insaf, and three percent Muttahida Quami Movement. Additionally, three percent selected PML-Q and one percent chose Awami National Party.
- When asked for which party would you vote if national elections were to be held next week, PPP increased its percentage to 22 percent from the 17 percent it received in the March 2009 poll, PML-N's support declined five points since the March 2009 survey. This decline corresponded with a drop in the number of respondents saying they were undecided or that they would not cast a vote.
- PPP's support is tied to its performance as a government. When asked about the one thing PPP could do to convince respondents to vote for the party, 36 percent said reduce inflation, 19 percent responded abolish unemployment and 13 percent said control rolling electricity blackouts.

Institutional Ratings

- When asked how Prime Minister Gilani's government has performed on issues important to them 62 percent responded positively and 34 percent responded negatively.
- When asked to rate various institutions, the army received an 89 percent favorability rating, followed by the courts at 69 percent and the National Assembly with 68 percent. The present government received a 50 percent favorability rating, which is up from the March 2009 poll.
- Although IRI polling has shown that the Pakistani people have long been opposed to military involvement in running civilian government, this number has dropped, 62 percent, down 11 points from 73 percent, agreed that the army should not play a role in the civilian government.

(more)

IRI Pakistan Index – Page Five

- However, when asked under what circumstances the army should be able to take over the government from civilian leaders, six percent said whenever it wants, 75 percent said only in an emergency and 16 percent said never. This represents a 10 percent increase in the number of respondents stating that the military can only take over from civilian leaders in an emergency.
- When asked how much control the civilian government should have over the military, 44 percent said total control, 40 percent said some and 10 percent replied no control at all.

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