

IRI Index: Pakistan

Social and Political Indicators

IRI's September poll witnessed a drop in all major indicators of public mood. Pakistanis are feeling more insecure, both physically and economically, with the vast majority saying that the country is headed in the wrong direction.

- **An astonishing number of voters say that the country is headed in the wrong direction.** Continuing the trend witnessed in IRI's June poll, the number of voters saying that the country was headed in the wrong direction rose to 73 percent, while those saying that the country was headed in the right direction decreased to 19 percent.
- **A majority report that their personal economic situation has worsened over the past year.** Over the course of IRI's polling this past year, economic indicators have been relatively stable, with voters nearly evenly split on whether or not their personal economic situation had improved over the past year. For the first time, the number of those saying that their economic condition had worsened jumped to 56 percent, while the number saying that it improved slipped to 24 percent.
- **Voters are somewhat optimistic about their future, although by diminishing levels.** When asked about their personal economic situation over the course of the upcoming year, 27 percent responded that it would improve, while 22 percent said that it would get worse. The gap between these two numbers has been narrowing since IRI's February poll.
- **A majority report that they feel less secure.** When asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement "I feel more secure this year than I did last year," 23 percent said that they agreed (down from 39 percent in June) while 65 percent said that they disagreed (up from 56 percent in June).
- **The government receives low marks for its performance on key issues.** When asked how the government has performed on the issues most important to them, 22 percent gave the government good marks while 75 percent rated its performance poorly.
- **An overwhelming majority state that the ruling coalition does not deserve re-election.** Mirroring the right direction / wrong direction question, 19 percent said that they thought that the ruling coalition did a good enough job to deserve re-election while 73 percent said that it did not.

Issues

Economic issues remain the top concern of Pakistanis, although September's poll saw an increase in those citing law and order as their top concern. Voters are also turning against the Army's role in civilian government and President Pervez Musharraf's holding of dual offices (the office of President and the office of Army Chief of Staff) to an increasing degree.

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- **Economic issues remain the top concern of Pakistani voters.** When asked an open-ended question as to the top issue that will determine their vote, 37 percent said inflation, 20 percent said unemployment, and 11 percent replied poverty. Also of note was the 10 percent who indicated that law and order was their top concern, a sharp increase since the last poll, and likely due to the worsening security situation in the country.
- **Pakistanis feel that extremism is a serious problem:** Voters were also asked a series of questions regarding religious extremism. When asked if they agreed or disagreed that this was a serious problem, 74 percent replied that they agreed, up 10 percent since the June poll. In addition, 57 percent agreed that the Taliban and Al Qaeda operating in Waziristan was a serious concern.
- **Votes are increasingly turning against Musharraf’s dual roles.** When voters were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement that the Army should *not* play a role in civilian government, 62 percent agreed that it should not while 30 percent disagreed; this represents an increase in opposition since the June poll.

When asked if Musharraf should resign as Army Chief of Staff, 76 percent said yes (up from 62 percent in June), and when asked if Musharraf should retain the role in order to promote stability (an argument often used by the government) 76 percent disagreed, indicating that this line of reasoning did not carry any weight with them. Finally, when asked if they would support a constitutional amendment that would allow Musharraf to retain his dual roles past the end of the year, 68 percent were opposed.

- **Voters are opposed to a declaration of an emergency.** When it comes to the oft-mentioned possibility that the government might declare a state of emergency (one step below martial law), voters are overwhelmingly opposed; 83 percent said that they disagreed with this move.
- **Voters mixed on a potential Musharraf / Bhutto deal.** Over the course of the past three IRI polls, voter opinion on a potential deal between President Musharraf and former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has somewhat see-sawed.
 - In the latest poll, 35 percent said they supported the deal and 49 percent opposed. However, the voters of both the Pakistan People’s Party Parliamentarians (PPPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) indicated that they would support such a deal, although by a decreasing margin when compared to the June poll. PPPP voters would support the deal 58 percent to 31 percent while the voters of PML-Q supported the proposition 53 percent to 37 percent.

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- Voters were also somewhat cynical in regards to Bhutto's motives for such a deal. When asked why they thought Bhutto was considering such a deal, 47 percent replied that it was to improve her personal situation while 27 percent felt it was to bring democracy to Pakistan. PPP voters were much more trusting of their leader's motives; 47 percent felt that it was in order to bring democracy to Pakistan while 27 percent felt it was for personal reasons.
- When asked if they would like Bhutto more or less if she made this deal, voters were split, with 38 percent saying that they would like her more and 34 percent saying that they would like her less. Again, PPP voters were much more positive, with 65 percent saying that they would like her more, and 14 percent saying less.
- When asked if they preferred Bhutto make a deal with Musharraf or join the opposition-oriented All-Parties Democratic Movement (APDM), 48 percent said join APDM while 29 percent preferred she make a deal with Musharraf; PPP voters, however, preferred the deal by a slight margin, 47 percent to 41 percent.

Ratings

Musharraf continued his decline in September's poll. However, the poll saw a change in that former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif surged in terms of popularity while Benazir Bhutto slipped into second.

- **Musharraf's decline continues.** As the national mood continues to sour, President Musharraf continues to bear the brunt of this voter dissatisfaction. Continuing the trend witnessed in IRI's polling since February 2007, Musharraf's approval rating has dropped to an all-time low of 21 percent, down from a high of 63 percent in September 2006.

In addition to declining approval ratings, Musharraf's numbers fell in several other categories as well. The percentage of voters saying that Musharraf should resign increased by seven points to 70 percent and his favorability rating dropped 13 points to 22 percent. Further, when asked to name the best leader for Pakistan, Musharraf dropped to third, behind both Bhutto and Sharif.

One bright spot for Musharraf in the June 2007 poll has faded. In June 2007, despite his general unpopularity, Musharraf still received decent marks on specific issues. When asked how they rated his performance on each of the points in his Seven Point Agenda, which outlined the areas he was going to focus on during his presidency, including restoring national morale and rebuilding the economy, voters gave Musharraf relatively high marks given his 34 percent job approval rating in that poll. In the most recent poll, however, Musharraf's rating on each of the points dropped to roughly the same level as his overall approval rating; devolution of power to the grassroots (46 percent), economic performance (41 percent), and rebuilding national confidence (33 percent) were the only exceptions to this trend.

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- **Nawaz Sharif surges.** During the month of August, amidst talk of a potential deal between Bhutto and Musharraf, Nawaz Sharif cemented his image as the head of the opposition and coalesced the (APDM) around his leadership. His image was also helped by the unfolding drama of his return to Pakistan after years of exile. His favorability rating remains at 53 percent, up three points from June, and he surged 15 points in the “Best Leader for Pakistan” category, besting both Bhutto and Musharraf, with 36 percent of voters selecting him. His “Best Leader” number was especially high in the province of Punjab, where he was the choice of 55 percent of those surveyed.
- **Bhutto slips to second.** Bhutto’s positioning as a sometime opponent of Musharraf as well as a potential partner in a power-sharing deal has created ambiguity in the minds of voters. Those selecting her as the best leader for Pakistan declined slightly to 28 percent (down four points). However, Bhutto still led the field in Sindh and Balochistan, although she came in third in Punjab and the North West Frontier Province (NWFP). More dramatic than her leadership support was a drop in her personal image, with her favorability rating dropping 18 points, putting her behind Nawaz Sharif with 36 percent.
- **Army slips into third.** Over the past year, the Army has been the most highly regarded institution in Pakistan, according to IRI polls. In September’s poll, however, the Army slipped into third place. Although still rated very highly (70 percent saying that they rated the institution favorably), this represents a 10 point drop from the June poll. Meanwhile, the media maintained its first place position (80 percent favorable rating) while the courts jumped 15 points to 77 percent and second place.

Elections

Support for Musharraf’s re-election as president continues to decline, while support for the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) increased.

- **Musharraf re-election continues to lose support.** In IRI’s February 2007 poll, Musharraf’s re-election, which occurred on October 6, was supported by a margin of 50 percent to 40 percent. Since then, his support has seen a consistent drop. In IRI’s latest poll, support for his re-election dropped to 23 percent, while 74 percent were opposed. Likewise, support for his re-election before the current assemblies has also dropped, with only 20 percent supporting such an occurrence.

The poll tested three different election scenarios. When asked if they would support the re-election of Musharraf if he stood for re-election before the current assemblies and did not resign from the Army beforehand, 20 percent supported this scenario while 78 percent were opposed. These numbers improved only slightly when voters were asked if they would

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support Musharraf's re-election if he stood before the current assemblies but resigned from the Army first; 23 percent supported this scenario while 72 percent were opposed. An increase in support was seen when voters were asked if they would support his re-election if he resigned from the Army first and was elected in front of new assemblies; 39 percent supported this scenario while 50 percent were against (This poll was taken prior to the October 6, 2007 presidential election.)

- **PML-N moves into first, PPPP slips into second, PML-Q drops into third.** Voters' party preference for the upcoming parliamentary elections witnessed some drastic changes between IRI's June and September polls. Mirroring the changes in leader preference and popularity, PML-N moved 17 points into first place with 36 percent, while PPPP slipped into second with 28 percent. PML-Q, which previously had remained relatively steady, found its support giving out due to political turmoil, slipping seven points into third place at 16 percent.

When voters were asked if they supported the formation of the APDM, 55 percent responded in the affirmative. Likewise, when voters were asked who they would support in a hypothetical election match-up where the choices were a coalition of PPPP and PML-Q or APDM, voters were split 40 percent for APDM to 39 percent for PPPP/PML-Q.

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