

IRI Index: Pakistan

State of Emergency

On November 3, 2007, Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf, who was then Army Chief of Staff, declared a state of emergency and suspended the constitution. IRI's most recent poll found that voters overwhelmingly opposed this measure. Moreover, this opposition set the tone for the entire poll.

Musharraf's move polarized the country, and this polarization carries through the other attitudes and opinions of the Pakistani electorate. This line of polarization splits the electorate into two parts, at roughly the two-third and one-third divide. Throughout the poll, 25 to 33 percent remained supportive of President Musharraf and were positive about the condition of the country. Seventy-five to 66 percent expressed anger at the current state of affairs, desired change and were anti-Musharraf.

- When asked if they supported or opposed the declaration of emergency, 26 percent said they supported it while 70 percent said they opposed; 57 percent said that they strongly opposed the measure.
- Pakistanis also do not accept Musharraf's stated rationale for the state of emergency declaration. When given a choice between two options, 25 percent said that they thought Musharraf declared the emergency in order to better fight terrorists, while 66 percent said that it was to prevent the Supreme Court from overturning his re-election to another term as president.
- Voters were also opposed to the various measures that accompanied the state of emergency declaration.
 - 71 percent opposed the suspension of the constitution;
 - 77 percent opposed the detainment of the former Supreme Court justices;
 - 76 percent opposed the closure of TV news channels;
 - 73 percent opposed the swearing in of new Supreme Court justices;
 - 70 percent opposed the ban on political rallies; and
 - 76 percent opposed the crackdown on lawyers and civil society, and the house arrest of opposition leaders.
- Pakistanis also expressed support for the ongoing protests against the state of emergency, with 62 percent saying that they supported the protests and 35 percent saying they were opposed.
- When respondents were asked if they would consider elections held under a state of emergency to be free and fair, 24 percent said yes and 66 percent responded no.

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- When asked if they would support a boycott of the elections by the opposition parties if the elections were held under the emergency, 62 percent said they would support the boycott and 37 percent said they would be opposed. A potential boycott also had strong support from the opposition parties; 74 percent of Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), the party of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, voters said they would support the boycott, as did the same percentage of Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) voters, the party of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

Social Indicators

Pakistanis are not positive about the current state of affairs. This negative feeling also shows-up in political and social indicators.

- When asked about the direction that the country was heading in, 26 percent said it was headed in the right direction and 70 percent said in the wrong direction.
- When asked if their personal economic situation improved or worsened in the past year, 25 percent said improved, 51 percent said worsened and 23 percent said that it stayed the same.
- When asked if they thought that their personal economic situation would improve or worsen over the course of the next year, 23 percent said improve, 33 percent said worsen, and 26 percent said stay the same. This is the first time in IRI’s polling that the number of economic pessimists so greatly exceeded the number of economic optimists.
- Respondents also indicated that they are feeling more insecure; when asked if they felt more secure this year than they did last year, 27 percent said yes and 66 percent said no.
- The government also receives low marks. When asked how the government performed on issues most important to them, 31 percent approved and 68 percent did not. When asked if the ruling coalition had done a good enough job to deserve re-election, 24 percent said yes and 70 percent said no.

Ratings

Overall, Musharraf’s numbers remain low, with solid majorities opposing him. Again, the same polarization is evident in regards to the state of emergency.

- When asked if they supported the recent re-election of Musharraf to another term as president, voters were overwhelmingly opposed; 26 percent said they supported his re-election and 72 percent said that they did not; 61 percent said that they strongly opposed Musharraf’s re-election.

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- A majority of Pakistanis want Musharraf to resign from office, with 67 percent wanting his resignation and 25 percent opposed.
- This same polarization is seen in Musarraf's job approval rating as well, with 30 percent saying they approved of the job he was doing, while 60 percent said they disapproved; 41 percent were in the most intense category, saying that they strongly disapproved of his job performance.
- One of the effects that the declaration of an emergency had was to shore up Musharraf's base of support in areas traditionally loyal to him and the Pakistan Muslim League-Q (PML-Q). Support for Musharraf improved in rural Punjab and urban Sindh, both considered to be Musharraf strongholds. However, Musharraf's approval numbers remained stagnant or declined in most demographics.
- Musharraf also remains an unpopular partner when it comes to reconciliation; 60 percent opposed a deal between Musharraf and Bhutto while only 32 percent supported it, the highest level of opposition since IRI began testing this question in its poll released in April 2007.
- During the conduct of this poll, there was much speculation that Musharraf would resign as Army Chief of Staff, that he would lift the state of emergency and that elections would be held as scheduled. While the poll was in the field, Musharraf was trending upwards, and filed interviewers report that these potential events were often cited.
- In head-to-head match-ups, Bhutto topped the list with Sharif coming in second and Musharraf in third. However, over the course of the poll being taken, Bhutto's numbers were trending down, indicating that they had been higher.
- Sharif, on the other hand, trended upwards over the course of the fieldwork. IRI's last poll (August 29-September 13, 2007) was taken in the days leading-up to his first return and subsequent deportation, and Nawaz's numbers were very high. However, after he was deported, his numbers deflated, as is reflected in this most recent poll. IRI's fieldwork for this poll was largely completed before Sharif's most recent return and it does not capture the extent to which his popularity increased as a result. However, his numbers did tick up slightly in the portion of the fieldwork conducted after his return, indicating that he is now trending upwards.
- Also worth noting is Imran Khan's increased strength, likely due to his unrelenting anti-Musharraf stance.
- When asked who they thought was the best leader to handle the problems facing Pakistan, 31 percent chose Bhutto, 25 percent cited Sharif, and 23 percent said Musharraf.

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- In a province-by-province match-up, Bhutto led the field in Sindh (with 51 percent, followed by 17 percent for Musharraf and six percent for Sharif) and in Balochistan (with 43 percent, followed by 15 percent for Musharraf and 14 percent for Fazal-ur-Rehman). Also surprising was Ghinwa Bhutto's sudden emergence in Sindh with five percent. Ghinwa is the sister-in-law and vocal critic of Benazir Bhutto.
- In a province-by-province match-up, Sharif led in Punjab (with 35 percent, followed by Musharraf with 31 percent and Bhutto with 23 percent) and in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) (with 26 percent, followed by Imran Khan with 20 percent and Bhutto with 18 percent).
- In terms of overall popularity, Bhutto and Sharif were tied, with each garnering 38 percent of the electorate saying that they had a favorable impression; Musharraf lagged behind with 28 percent. It is worth noting that the former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Iftikhar M. Chaudhry has a 33 percent favorability rating and Imran Khan 20 percent.

Elections

The results of a hypothetical election match-up largely mirrored the positions of their respective party leaders. There is also evidence that one of the effects of holding the elections under the state of emergency would be a decrease in voter turnout.

- In a party vote election test, PPP topped the field, garnering 30 percent in the national sample. PML-N was second with 25 percent and PML-Q came in third with 23 percent.
- In province match-ups, PML-N came in first in Punjab with 36 percent (followed by PML-Q with 30 percent and PPP with 24 percent), and in NWFP with 27 percent (followed by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) with 18 percent and PPP with 16 percent).
- In province match-ups, PPP topped the field in Sindh with 50 percent (followed by PML-Q with 16 percent and PML-N, Muttahida Majlis-e Amal (MMA) and Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) all tied at six percent) and in Balochistan with 40 percent (followed by PML-Q with 16 percent and MMA with 15 percent).
- When a hypothetical election coalition test was proposed, a Grand Opposition Alliance, of PPP, PML-N and other opposition parties, garnered 58 percent of the vote, easily beating the ruling coalition of PML-Q and MQM, which received 22 percent. MMA received three percent of the vote.
- Finally, when asked if they were planning on voting, 89 percent of respondents said that they were either very or somewhat likely, while just 10 percent said that they would not vote.

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- However, when asked if they would vote if the elections were held under the state of emergency, 71 percent said that they would vote while 25 percent said that they would not. Voters of the opposition parties would be less likely to vote under a state of emergency, while PML-Q voters would still be inclined to vote.

The Army

The Pakistan Army has long been the most respected institution in the country; in IRI's first few polls its favorability rating was consistently at the 80 percent level. In the last poll, however, the Army's rating dropped 10 points to 70 percent and slipped to third behind the media and the courts. In this poll, the Army dropped 15 percentage points to a rating of 55 percent. The media remained on top with 78 percent.

The drop in the Army's prestige is likely due to the unpopularity of Musharraf. When Pakistanis were asked if the performance of Musharraf affected their opinion of the Army, 31 percent said that they now had a higher opinion due to his actions and 20 percent said that their opinion had not changed, while a plurality of 41 percent said that Musharraf's performance caused them to now have a lower opinion of the Army.

Other Issues

Regardless of the attention focused on the unfolding political drama, bread and butter issues remain the top concern in the minds of Pakistani voters. When presented with a number of issues and asked to select which was the most important in determining which party they would vote for, 77 percent chose an economy related issue. Inflation was the top issue by far, having been selected by 53 percent of the respondents.

Voters also expressed concern regarding rising Islamic fundamentalism; 66 percent agreed that religious extremism was a serious problem in Pakistan. Further, 63 percent said that the Taliban and Al Qaida operating in the country was also a serious concern. However, only 40 percent of Pakistanis supported the Army operations in NWFP and Tribal Areas and just 15 percent felt that Pakistan should cooperate with the United States in its War on Terror.

Finally, respondents expressed a desire for the separation of military and state; 56 percent agreed that the Army should not play a role in civilian government and 74 percent said that Musharraf should resign as Army Chief of Staff.

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