

## **IRI Pakistan Index**

### **Social Indicators**

Over the past year IRI polling has tracked a number of indicators in order to gauge the overall mood of the population. Recent polling indicates that the Pakistani people remain dissatisfied, with most indicators leveling out at the rate they were in the February poll.

- When asked if they felt that the country was headed in the right or wrong direction, 86 percent responded wrong direction while 12 percent said right direction, roughly the same levels as in IRI's last poll.
- When asked about their personal economic situation over the course of the past year, 12 percent said it improved, 72 percent said it worsened, and 16 percent said that it remained the same. Pakistanis also continue to be pessimistic about their economic future. When asked if they felt that their economic well being would improve or worsen during the upcoming year, 19 percent said improve, 46 percent said worsen, while 21 percent felt that it would remain the same.
- One significant change was in response to personal security; Pakistanis reported an improvement. In the wake of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairperson Benazir Bhutto's assassination, only 12 percent reported being safer this year as opposed to last and 85 percent reported feeling less secure. In IRI's June poll, the number responding that they felt less secure dropped 22 points to 63 percent, while the number saying that they felt more secure increased 20 points to 32 percent.

Despite this change, a very high degree of insecurity remains, and current levels are in line with what they were over the last half of 2007. It is likely that February's numbers were inflated due to Bhutto's assassination and the resulting violence, and that levels of insecurity have now settled back down to levels prior to Bhutto's death.

### **The New Government**

Despite the high degree of pessimism expressed in this poll, there is some good news for the new government. Pakistanis are cautiously optimistic that the situation will improve and the government and its leaders are popular.

- When asked to rate various institutions, 85 percent of respondents said that they had a favorable impression of the government, making it the most popular institution in Pakistan. This is a sharp contrast to the 29 percent rating that the previous government received. Key leaders in the new government are also popular, most notably Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani; 64 percent said that they liked Gilani and only six percent said they disliked him.

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- When asked how the government has performed on issues important to them, 41 percent responded positively and 51 percent responded negatively. Despite the fact that a majority rated the government's performance as poor, this represents a significant drop from the last rating achieved by the old government. In the February poll, 80 percent rated the old government's performance poorly while only 18 percent rated it positively.
- Finally, when asked if they felt that things would get better in Pakistan now that there is a new government, 52 percent replied yes while 20 percent said no. While still a majority, this represents a small window of opportunity for the new government to deliver on its promises to the Pakistani people.

### **Issues: Inflation, the Courts and Musharraf**

When it comes to the issues on which the new government will be judged, the Pakistani people could not be more clear. They want the new government to improve the economy, to restore the former Supreme Court that President Pervez Musharraf removed last fall, and they want Musharraf removed instead.

- When asked to choose their most important issue from a list provided, 71 percent cited inflation, 13 percent chose unemployment, and five percent selected poverty. This represents a total of 89 percent of the population citing an economic concern as their top priority. Further, when asked if they thought that the shortages of petrol, natural gas, wheat, and electricity were serious problems, 92 percent replied yes.
- Pakistanis are also unambiguous when it comes to restoring the old Supreme Court; 83 percent said that they wanted the court reinstated. In addition, when asked how important this issue was to them, 86 percent described it as important.
- Pakistanis were also clear on President Musharraf; 83 percent said that they wanted the new government to remove him from office.

### **The War on Terror**

- The aforementioned increase in economic concerns is contrasted with a decline regarding the issue of terrorism. While a top concern of the international community and often cited and discussed by officials in the new government as well as frequently debated and reported on by the Pakistani press, this attention is disproportional to the lack of importance attached to it by the Pakistani people.

In IRI's last poll, in the wake of both Bhutto's assassination and some suicide bombings, 12 percent selected terrorism as their top issue while six percent selected law and order. In the June poll, however, the issue barely resonated at all; two percent cited suicide bombings and less than one percent chose Al Qaeda as a top concern.

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- This trend is further evidenced by a series of questions IRI has been tracking over the past year. While 61 percent said they felt that religious extremism was a serious problem in the country (down 12 percent), only 45 percent said that Al Qaeda and the Taliban were a serious concern, a 20 point drop since February and an all-time low since IRI started asking the question last September. Further, the number supporting the Army fighting in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas dropped six points to 27 percent.
- IRI's poll also probed the image of some of the notorious personalities and organizations in the War on Terror. When asked if they liked or disliked a list of personalities, Osama Bin Laden was liked and disliked by an equal number (24 percent), while the extremist Baitullah Mehsud was liked by nine percent and disliked by 32 percent. When asked if they had a favorable opinion of various institutions, the Taliban was rated favorably by 23 percent while Al Qaeda received 18 percent.
- When it comes to solutions for combating extremism and terrorism, IRI's poll reveals that the Pakistani people are unambiguous, preferring negotiation and development to military options. When asked if they supported political dialogue with the extremists, 71 percent responded yes, while 65 percent said that they supported a peace deal. When asked what they thought was the most effective way to deal with terrorism, 61 percent said economic development and education, nine percent said military force, and 24 percent said both.
- When asked if they thought that Pakistan should cooperate with the United States on the War on Terror, 15 percent replied yes while 71 percent were opposed, a slight improvement from the last poll.
- There was one significant finding in June's poll that ran contrary to the abovementioned attitudes regarding terrorism. IRI tested a recent statement on the subject made by Prime Minister Gilani (see slide 31). The statement outlined the new government's policy to combat terrorism. In contrast to the low level of support previous War on Terror questions elicited, IRI's poll found that an overwhelming majority of 81 percent said they support the new policy.

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### **Nawaz Sharif and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)**

As PML-Q has declined, PML-N has been the main beneficiary. In addition, with the decline of Musharraf and the death of Benazir Bhutto, PML-N Chairman Nawaz Sharif has emerged to fill the vacuum, becoming the most dominant political personality in the current poll.

- Nawaz Sharif is now the most popular leader in the country, with 82 percent saying that they like him and only six percent saying that they do not. This is up from 36 percent in June 2006, when he trailed both Musharraf and Benazir Bhutto. Likewise, Sharif easily dominated the best leader for Pakistan category, being the choice of 38 percent and far outdistancing the competition.
- PML-Q's voters have left that party to support PML-N, which is now the most popular party in the country. When asked who they would support in a future parliamentary election, PML-N was the choice of 36 percent; PPP came in second with 32 percent. With the complete collapse of support for PML-Q, PML-N and PPP are now the only two national parties on the scene and are vying with each other for dominance.
- In addition to benefiting from PML-Q's collapse, Sharif and his party have also gained an edge on PPP by outlining a clear position for the restoration of the court and against President Musharraf. When asked how PML-N's insistence on the restoration of the court affected their opinion, 80 percent of respondents said that they had a higher opinion of the party.

### **Pakistan Peoples Party**

Just as PML-N has benefited from the hard-line it struck on Musharraf and the court, there is evidence that PPP has been hurt by its ambivalence. However, IRI's poll finds that the party is still in good shape.

- IRI's poll found that PPP's leaders remain popular. When asked if they liked or disliked a list of personalities, Prime Minister Gilani saw a large increase in his popularity due to his tenure in office to date, with 64 percent saying they liked him, up from 23 percent in the last poll. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari also saw an increase in his popularity to 61 percent, up from 55 percent. Likewise, PPP Co-Chair Asif Zardari also saw his popularity rise from 37 percent to 45 percent. And while Makdoom Amin Fahim saw his popularity drop from a high of 67 percent in the wake of Bhutto's assassination, he remained popular with a rating of 49 percent.
- As mentioned above, the June poll shows PPP second to PML-N with 32 percent of the vote; no other party breaks into double digits. PPP bests PML-N in Sindh (57 percent to 8 percent) and Balochistan (39 percent to 17 percent), while PML-N trumps PPP in Punjab 51 percent to 24 percent and the NWFP 31 percent to 21 percent.

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- Just as PML-N is helped by its position on the court, PPP could be hurt if it does not restore the former court deposed by Musharraf last fall. When asked how their opinion of PPP would be affected if they do not restore the court, 74 percent said that they would have a lower opinion of the party.

When looking at the responses of only PPP voters, the poll reveals that 82 percent of PPP voters have a higher opinion of PML-N due to its position on the restoration of the court, while even PPP's own voters state that they would have a lower opinion of their own party if the court is not restored (79 percent said lower opinion).

- There is some evidence that PPP is already being affected by its straddling of these key issues. IRI's poll asked voters who they voted for in last February's parliamentary election; 38 percent said they voted for PPP (as opposed to the 32 percent who said that they now support the party) and 29 percent said they voted for PML-N (compared to the 36 percent who said that they now support PML-N).

Since only seven percent said that they voted for PML-Q, and given that PML-Q, clearly received more votes than this, voters are obviously engaging in some degree of historical revisionism, abandoning PML-Q and claiming to have voted for PML-N.

However, these numbers are still instructive in that it shows some of the voters who said they voted for PPP in February are now voting for someone else, dropping PPP's support by six percent.

Further, more people are now voting for PML-N than those who said they voted for the party in the last election, resulting in an increase in PML-N's vote by seven percent. Looking at just those voters who left PPP, roughly half are now supporting PML-N and roughly half are now undecided. PML-N's increase comes mostly at the expense of PPP and PML-Q, but they also draw some voters away from other center-right parties as well.

- When looking at the opinions of just those voters who have left PPP, 90 percent of them want Musharraf removed and the court restored; 93 percent say that their opinion of PML-N has improved due to its stance on the judiciary, and 87 percent say they have a lower opinion of PPP given its lack of action on the court issue. These results indicate that PPP could suffer a further loss of support if it does not act on these issues.
- When asked who they were going to vote for in a future parliamentary election, 13 percent were undecided, up from six percent in the last poll and the highest number of undecided voters since the February 2007 poll. When looking at the opinion of undecided voters on these same issues, the poll indicates that these issues are important to them; for example, 76 percent of undecided voters want Musharraf removed from office. These voters are up for grabs at the moment, and a lack of action on the part of PPP could swing them into PML-N's column.

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- Despite these issues, PPP is still in a good position. However, its fate depends upon how the new government addresses the economic concerns of the Pakistani people, how it handles the court issue and the removal of Musharraf, and to a lesser extent its ability to communicate an effective message in the War on Terror.

### **Musharraf and Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q)**

As mentioned before, Pakistanis overwhelmingly voiced support for the removal of President Musharraf from office. IRI's poll also found further evidence of what has been a remarkable decline in Musharraf's popularity over the past year.

- Musharraf's job approval rating has dropped to only 11 percent saying they approved of his job performance while an all-time high of 75 percent said that they did not.
- Musharraf's overall popularity has also dropped. In IRI's June 2006 poll, Musharraf was the most popular leader in the country, with 52 percent saying that they liked him. In the June 2008 poll only nine percent said they liked Musharraf. This low likeability number was coupled with 73 percent saying that they disliked him, the highest dislike number in the poll, making him the most unpopular person tested in our poll.
- When Pakistanis were asked which one leader was the best person to handle the country's problems, Musharraf was the choice of only three percent. This is down from a high of 32 percent in February 2007.
- When asked if they thought that Musharraf should resign from office, an all-time high of 85 percent said yes, up 10 points from February's poll. In addition, 79 percent said that they would feel better about the future of the country if Musharraf was out of office.
- Likewise, Musharraf's allies also find themselves in an unpopular position. Only eight percent of respondents said that they liked PML-Q leaders Pervez Elahi and Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, respectively.
- Finally, PML-Q as a party is suffering the same fate as its leader. When asked who they would vote for in a future parliamentary election, only four percent said PML-Q, down from a high of 27 percent in September 2006.

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### Other Findings

- Pakistanis consider February's election to have been mostly fair; only 21 percent said that they felt that the elections had been rigged.
- The Army had long been the most respected institution in Pakistan. Previous polling revealed a slide in the Army's image, from a high of 82 percent to a low of 55 percent. The Army rebounded somewhat in February's poll, with 65 percent rating the institution favorably.

In June's poll, however, the Army has slipped five points to a rating of 60 percent. The reason for the Army's slide has to do with its association with President Musharraf; 53 percent said that Musharraf's performance had lowered their opinion of the Army. Army Chief of Staff Ashfaq Kiyani, however, saw a great improvement in his image. In February 2008 his like/dislike rating was 25 percent to 57 percent; in June 2008 those numbers improved to 37 percent saying they liked him and only 11 percent saying they did not.

- 58 percent said that they very strongly wanted the Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentary (PPPP) Bloc / PML-N ruling coalition to stay together; 53 percent said they were opposed to PPPP forming a coalition with PML-Q instead. PPP voters opposed it two-to-one, with 26 percent supporting it and 53 percent not supporting it.
- When asked if they preferred PML-Q form a coalition with PPPP or PML-N, 29 percent of PML-Q voters said PPPP while 34 percent said PML-N.

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