

IRI Pakistan Index

Social Indicators

Over the course of its polling program, the International Republican Institute (IRI) has tracked a number of indicators in order to gauge the overall mood of the population. Recent polling indicates an improvement in public sentiment since IRI's October 2008 poll, though the Pakistani people remain negative about the situation in their country.

- When asked if they felt that the country was headed in the right or wrong direction, 81 percent responded wrong direction while 18 percent said right direction. These ratings are a slight improvement from the October 2008 poll.
- When asked about their personal economic situation over the course of the past year, 18 percent said it improved, 63 percent said it worsened, and 18 percent said that it remained the same. This represents increased optimism.
- More significant, however, was the large drop in the pessimism towards respondents' personal economic future. When asked if they felt that their economic well being would improve or worsen during the upcoming year, the number saying that they thought it would improve increased 15 points to 29 percent, while the number saying that they thought their economic situation would worsen dropped 23 points to 36 percent, as compared to the October 2008 poll. Although the majority of Pakistanis' still felt pessimistic about their economic future, this gap has closed considerably.
- Overall the sense of security in Pakistan has improved dramatically since the October 2008 poll. The number of people saying that they felt less secure fell from 78 percent to 60 percent in the March 2009 poll, while the number saying that they felt more secure rose from 19 to 38 percent. Again, while more people still feel less secure than not, this represents a significant change over the results of the last poll.
- 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, 77 percent selected the democratic option while 20 percent opted for the dictatorship.

Top Issues

- *Economy*
 - As seen over the course of IRI's polling, economic issues remain the top concern of Pakistanis. When asked what the most important issue facing the country was, 46 percent cited inflation, 22 percent chose unemployment, and nine percent selected poverty. This represents a total of 77 percent of the population citing an economic issue as their top priority, which is consistent with previous polls. There has been a shift away from

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inflation to unemployment with the number citing unemployment rising nine points and inflation dropping 13 percent since the October 2008 poll. However, this shift could be due to recent economic news that the country's inflation rate has decreased.

- *Terrorism*

- Although only 10 percent of respondents cited terrorism as the most important issue, the March 2009 poll registered rising concern over terrorism in general. When asked if they felt that religious extremism was a serious problem in Pakistan, 74 percent replied yes, the highest percentage since September 2007. The highest percentage yet, 69 percent, agreed that the Taliban and Al-Qaeda operating in Pakistan was a serious problem, while 45 percent said that they supported the Pakistani Army fighting the extremists in the North West Frontier Province and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, another all-time high.
- The March 2009 poll saw an increase in the willingness of Pakistanis to cooperate with the United States against extremism, with the number supporting such cooperation climbing to 37 percent. There was also an increase in the number saying that they would support American military incursions in the tribal areas, nearly doubling to 24 percent.
- IRI's March 2009 poll explored attitudes regarding the Mumbai terror attacks. When asked if they believed it to be true that the attacks were carried out by Lashkar-e-Taiba, only seven percent replied yes, another seven percent replied maybe, and 78 percent said no. In response to an open-ended question as to who they thought was responsible for the attacks, the top three replies were India (42 percent), I don't know (33 percent), and America (20 percent).
- Further, when asked what should happen to those involved in the attack if it was proven that it was carried out by Lashkar-e-Taiba, five percent said that they should be turned over to India, while 82 percent said that they should be tried and punished in Pakistan; seven percent replied nothing. Pakistanis were opposed, however, to Lashkar-e-Taiba, Al-Qaeda and other terrorists using Pakistan as a base of operations to launch attacks against India, with 79 percent saying that it would be a serious problem and 17 percent saying that it would not be.
- Respondents were also asked their opinion of Lashkar-e-Taiba, with 43 percent saying that they had a favorable opinion and 46 percent saying that they had an unfavorable opinion of the organization. These numbers were in the same range of those regarding

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the image of India, with 45 percent having a favorable opinion of the country and 52 percent having an unfavorable perception.

- The March 2009 poll also revealed strong support for the recent Swat peace deal between the Pakistani government and local elements of the Taliban. Previous IRI polling has shown that Pakistanis favor negotiation, with majorities saying that they would support a peace deal with the extremists. In the March 2009 poll, the number supporting a generic peace deal rose from 54 percent in October 2008 to 72 percent, an increase of 18 points. In regards to the specific deal recently passed, 80 percent said that they supported the pact with the Taliban in which Sharia Law would be enforced in Swat, and 82 percent said that President Asif Zardari should sign it. A strong majority, 74 percent, felt that it would bring peace to the region, and 56 percent said they would support similar deals with the Taliban in areas such as Karachi, Multan, Quetta or Lahore.

Leadership Ratings

The timeframe in which the poll fieldwork was conducted coincided with the climax of events revolving around the Supreme Court's decision against former Prime Minister and leader of the Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) Nawaz Sharif and his brother Shabaz Sharif. The impact of these events is reflected in the poll, resulting in a spike of support for Nawaz Sharif and his party.

- *President Asif Zardari*
 - Over the course of the October 2008 and March 2009 polls, President Zardari saw little change in his image. Pakistanis are of an overall opinion that conditions in the country remain poor, and as president of the country Zardari is viewed as responsible.
 - Respondents gave President Zardari an approval rating of 19 percent, unchanged since the last poll. Support for the Office of the President is directly tied to the conditions in the country and, since the June 2007 poll, the Office of the Presidents approval rating and the number saying that the country was headed in the right direction have tracked together.
- *Nawaz Sharif*
 - Nawaz Sharif emerged in the June 2008 poll as the most popular personality on the Pakistani political landscape. With the defeat of former President Pervez Musharraf and Pakistan Muslim League - Quaid (PML-Q), the center-right coalesced around Nawaz Sharif, boosting his support. In addition, with the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP)-led government being held responsible for the problems of the country, Sharif received an additional boost as he positioned himself in the opposition. These two factors broaden his support, and the recent flurry of events surrounding the Supreme Court's decision pushed his numbers even higher, pulling people out of the undecided categories and into his camp.

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- As mentioned, Sharif is the most popular personality tested in the March 2009 poll. The number of people viewing him favorably increased 15 points to 75 percent, placing him well ahead of the rest of the field.
- When asked in an open-ended question who they felt was the best person to solve the problems of Pakistan, 55 percent named Nawaz Sharif, up from 31 percent in the last poll.
- When asked who they would prefer as president, 71 percent supported Nawaz Sharif while 16 percent selected President Zardari.
- The March 2009 poll also showed strong support for the Sharifs in regards to the court's decision against them. When told of the court's ruling – that the Sharifs were ineligible to hold office – and the subsequent removal of Shabaz Sharif from his post as Chief Minister of Punjab, 20 percent supported the decision while 76 percent opposed; 62 percent said they support the public protests against these actions while 34 percent did not.
- *Other Personalities*
 - Just as Nawaz Sharif has seen a favorable increase in his image due to events surrounding the court decision, other individuals involved in these events likewise saw a boost in their ratings. Shabaz Sharif was up 26 points to 66 percent; Supreme Court Chief Justice Iftikhar M. Chaudhry saw his popularity increase from 24 percent to 54 percent; Imran Khan was up eight points to 38 percent; and Aitzaz Ahsan's favorability rating jumped 25 points to 33 percent, compared to the October 2008 poll.
 - While all other PPP figures saw their popularity decrease, Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani ran counter to this trend, with the number viewing him favorably increasing from 19 percent to 33 percent, a gain of 14 points. The Prime Minister is the most popular of the PPP figures tested in the poll, and was the fifth most popular leader overall.

Political Party Ratings

The same dynamic seen in the leadership ratings can be seen in the political party ratings as well. Since they are the leaders of the government, PPP is being held responsible for problems besetting the country. This results in low levels of support and, coupled with the center-right coalescing behind PML-N, has widened the gap between the two parties. Further, with the Nawaz Sharif/Supreme Court battle reaching a frenzied pitch during the time the poll was being conducted, PML-N's numbers were pushed higher still.

- 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, 62 percent cited PML-N and 17 percent said PPP, while three

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percent supported Pakistan Tahreek-e-Insaf and Muttahida Quami Movement, respectively, two percent selected Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal/Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Faction, and one percent each chose Awami National Party, Pakistan Peoples Party – Shaheed Bhutto, and PML-Q.

- While PPP's 17 percent is roughly equal to the 19 percent they received in the October 2008 poll, PML-N's support jumped 27 points in the March 2009 survey. This rise corresponded with a drop in the number saying they were undecided or that they would not cast a vote, indicating that PML-N's rise was fueled by current events.
- Again, indicating that 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, 30 percent said reduce inflation, 14 percent responded abolish unemployment, and 11 percent said control terrorism.

Institutional Ratings

- When asked how the government has performed on issues important to them in the March 2009 poll, 19 percent responded positively and 79 percent responded negatively.
- When asked to rate various institutions, the media topped the list with 86 percent saying they had a favorable opinion of the media, the Army was second with 80 percent, followed by the National Assembly (72 percent) and the courts (68 percent). The present government was rated favorably by 29 percent, roughly equal to where it stood in the October 2008 poll, but still down sharply from the 85 percent it achieved shortly after taking power.
- As mentioned above, the Army achieved a rating of 80 percent, up 12 points from the 68 percent it received in the October 2008 poll and equal to its all-time high in June 2007. The Army had seen its image decline over 2007 due to the turmoil surrounding Musharraf's attempt to sack the Chief Justice and its close association with the then-President and Army Chief of Staff. As Musharraf grew more unpopular, the Army's image suffered.
- Army Chief of Staff General Ashfaq Pervez Kiyani also saw an improvement in his image, with 30 percent rating him favorably, up four points since the last poll.
- Although IRI polling has showed that the Pakistani people have long been opposed to military involvement in the running of civilian government, these numbers dipped in the last poll. They have since rebounded, with 73 percent saying the Army should not play a role in the civilian government. When asked under what circumstances the Army should be able to take over the running of the government from civilian leaders, five percent said whenever it wants, 65 percent said only in an emergency, and 25 percent said never. When asked how much control the civilian government should have over the military, 19 percent said total control, 53 percent said some, and 21 percent replied no control at all.

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