



Gallup Pakistan History Project's Weekend Read 41: Economic Development versus Environment Protection: Some Trends from Gallup Pakistan History Project Polls Data by Abdullah Waqar Tajwar, Research Executive at Gallup Pakistan

Abstract: The conclusions presented in this article are predicated on the results of three National Surveys carried out by Gallup Pakistan in the years 2015 and 2014. In the first survey, a nationally representative sample of men and women from across the four provinces was asked: "Some people are of the opinion that environment protection should be given most priority even if at the expense of its cost to the economy. Others are of the opinion that economy should be given preference even if it does not protect the environment. On a scale of 1 to 10, please give your personal opinion where 0 refers to 'Economy should be given preference' and the number 10 refers to 'Environment protection should be given preference'?" In response to this question, 41% rated between 0 and 4 while 45% rated between 6 and 10. 14% on the other hand, were neutral and gave a median rating of 5. In the next survey that Gallup Pakistan conducted for GlobeScan Radar in 2014, a nationally representative sample of adult men and women, from across the four provinces was asked: "Please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the following statements: I am willing to pay more for products produced in a socially and environmentally responsible way?" Responding to this, 22% Pakistanis said they strongly agreed with the statement, 36% said they somewhat agreed with it, 22% said they somewhat disagreed with it and 13% disagreed strongly. 4% respondents replied that it depends and 3% did not answer. In the next question that Gallup Pakistan asked Pakistanis for GlobeScan Radar in 2014, a nationally representative sample of adult men and women, from across the four provinces was asked: "Please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the following statements: I feel guilty about my negative impact on the environment?" Responding to this, 25% Pakistanis said they strongly agreed with the statement, 35% said they somewhat agreed with it, 22% said they somewhat disagreed with it and 15% disagreed strongly. 2% respondents replied that it depends.

Ever since climate change and global warming became a reality, the world has gradually come to the realisation that disregarding climate change may end up having catastrophic consequences for all life on earth. Ever since the onset of the 19th century, average global temperatures have been on the rise. More importantly, it is man himself who has been the primary cause for these rising temperatures.

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Industrialization, deforestation, and pollution have greatly increased atmospheric concentrations of water vapour, carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide, all greenhouse gases that help trap heat near Earth's surface. Levels of greenhouse gases have gone up and down over the Earth's history, but they have been fairly constant for the past few thousand years. Global average temperatures have stayed fairly constant over that time as well, until recently. Through the burning of fossil fuels and other Greenhouse Gas emissions, humans are enhancing the greenhouse effect and warming Earth. And how is this global warming going to affect us? The rapid rise in greenhouse gases is a problem because it is changing the climate faster than some living things may be able to adapt. Also, a new and more unpredictable climate poses unique challenges to all life. This change in climate has been felt the most by Earth's polar zones (the Arctic, Greenland, parts of Canada and Russia) since average temperatures in these regions have risen at nearly twice the global average.¹ Thus, the world's ice-sheets have already begun to melt, that too at a dangerously rapid pace. The extra water that is being produced as a result of this melting could significantly raise sea levels which in turn would put many parts of the earth at risk of flooding. To put this threat into perspective, rises of just 4 inches, or 10 centimetres, could flood many South Seas islands and swamp large parts of Southeast Asia. Furthermore, since much of the world's population lives in vulnerable coastal cities, we are potentially looking at a displacement of hundreds of millions of people if things stay the way they are. In addition to rising sea levels, weather patterns are also expected to become more extreme. This means more intense major storms, more rain followed by longer and drier droughts, changes in the ranges in which plants and animals can live, and loss of water supplies that have historically come from glaciers. Glaciers in many countries have already begun to recede to levels that were unimaginable a few decades ago. An example is Montana's Glacier National Park in the US, which now has only 27 glaciers versus 150 glaciers in the year 1910. This information is particularly troubling for those regions and countries, including Pakistan, that rely on glaciers for a continuous supply of freshwater. Therefore, even if there are some countries that aren't contributing as extensively to climate change as some others, the effects will still be felt by all.

However, climate change is still an issue that continues to have its sceptics in many countries, ranging from the developed to the underdeveloped. One of the main arguments used by the sceptics is that there are more pertinent issues, such as poverty eradication and socio-economic development that need to be prioritized over the environment. This argument of prioritizing the economy over the environment has mostly become associated with the developing countries of the world. A part of the argument, in its rough form, is targeted against the developed nations of the world. It is thought that the industrialised world's emphasis on green issues holds back developing countries. Furthermore, some countries see it as interference in their internal affairs. It also contributes to a greater divide between

¹ Multinational Arctic Climate Impact Assessment Report between the years 2000-2004

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the First and Third worlds. By limiting the development of profitable but polluting industries like steel or oil refineries developing nations may remain economically backward. Furthermore, economic development is vital for meeting the basic needs of populations. Thus, if these countries focus strictly on the environment and climate, they would themselves end up creating barriers to economic progress, thus paving the way for political instability. Hence, for developing countries, it is seen as vital that they attain a certain degree of development and financial strength as only then would they be able to afford more concern for the environment. However, the other side of the argument addresses these concerns of developing countries by advocating sustainable development that combines environmental care, social justice and economic growth. Sustainability in the context of climate change essentially means a responsible management of natural resources, including water, fossil fuel and forests so that the effects of global warming can be mitigated and these precious sources, water being one of them, are able to sustain future generations. Apart from sustainable development, another argument rightly suggests that Climate change will affect the whole planet, not just the developed world. In fact it is likely to have particularly terrible effects on developing countries as sea levels rise, deserts advance, and natural disasters become more common. It is no use for one part of the world trying to cut its emissions into the atmosphere if unchecked growth in developing countries like China and India leads to much greater overall pollution. Furthermore, nations are losing more from pollution than they are gaining from industrialisation. China is a perfect example. Twenty years of uncontrolled economic development have created serious, chronic air and water pollution. This has increased health problems and resulted in annual losses to farmers of crops worth billions of dollars. So uncontrolled growth is not only bad for the environment, it is also seems to counteract the economic principle of rationality.

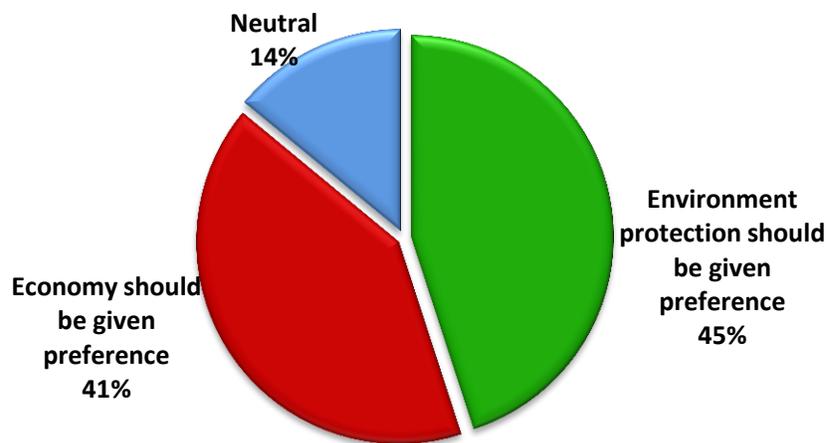
Upon applying this debate to Pakistan's context, one would think most people would probably say that Pakistan has enough problems to begin with. They may not be incorrect. Pakistan, in the year 2016, is still facing an energy crisis that continues to have crippling effects on society as well as the economy. Not only that, Pakistan also faces a dire security threat from terrorism. Add to these problems of corruption, institutional mismanagement, poverty, food insecurity, lawlessness and unemployment, and a seemingly strong case can be made to justify Pakistan not prioritizing the environment as much as it should. However, in order to test this hypothesis against empirical proof, Gallup Pakistan conducted a nationwide survey to determine just that.

A nationally representative sample of men and women from across the four provinces was asked: "Some people are of the opinion that environment protection should be given most priority even if at the expense of its cost to the economy. Others are of the opinion that economy should be given preference even if it does not protect the environment. On a scale of 1 to 10, please give your personal opinion where 0 refers to 'Economy should be given preference' and the number 10 refers to 'Environment

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protection should be given preference’?” The responses generated for this question may pleasantly surprise the environmentalists. 41% rated between 0 and 4 while 45% rated between 6 and 10. 14% on the other hand, were neutral and gave a median rating of 5. Thus, give or take a couple of percentage points, public opinion in Pakistan is fairly evenly divided between the environment and the economy. The proportion of neutrals, those who would ideally like to strike a balance between economic development and environment protection, in short, the ones supporting sustainable development, is rather low. However, despite the myriad of problems that plague Pakistan, it is still encouraging to see that there is still a significant proportion of people in the Country who at least are of the opinion that environment protection should still take precedence.

Environment Protection vs Economic Development



Source: Gallup Pakistan National Survey (covering 4 provinces and Urban/Rural areas)

Thus, based on this survey, a significant proportion of Pakistanis clearly do not trivialise the protection of their environment as was previously conjectured. This bodes well for Pakistan and the world as a whole. However, for Pakistan, actions, or inactions, as far as conservation and environment protection is concerned, seem to suggest that the public and state clearly seem to have divergent opinions on the protection of Pakistan’s environment. The all too recent lifting of a ban by the Supreme Court of Pakistan on the hunting of Houbara Bustard, an endangered bird species, goes some way in showing the seriousness of the Pakistani government towards conservation efforts. The Houbara Bustard is prized by

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the rich Arab princes and sheikhs since its meat is considered an aphrodisiac. Thus, the Pakistani government annually issues special permits to the Arabs, enabling them to come to Pakistan to hunt these birds despite their dwindling numbers. However, the ban was lifted after the federal government argued that hunting the Houbara was a crucial cog in Pakistan's foreign relations with the Arab states. It really sounds strange, for lack of a better word, when a sovereign Country's foreign policy is shaped by a critically endangered bird. Unfortunately, actions of such a nature are not uncommon in Pakistan. This is especially true for Pakistan's forests. However, before delving into the lack of conservation of Pakistan's forests, it would be worthwhile to briefly explain the importance of trees in protecting the environment and in combatting global warming. Trees and all green plants act as earth's natural air purifiers, removing atmospheric carbon dioxide through photosynthesis, a greenhouse gas causing global warming, and replacing it with oxygen. Furthermore, trees also increase atmospheric moisture and prevent soil erosion through their roots. Trees also play a crucial role in raising the water table of an area by preventing water runoff and enabling rainwater to seep into the earth instead of emptying straight into larger water bodies. Trees are therefore one of nature's most potent tools in maintaining ecological balance and protecting the earth from climate change. However, in Pakistan, an already dwindling forest cover is only growing thinner. Most of the trees are being felled for their industrial uses and the value added products that can be made from them. Since protecting the environment is clearly not the government's priority, Pakistan's environment and conservation related state departments as well as the Pakistan Environment Protection Agency hardly have any real power and are easily bypassed by the government, politicians and private entities. Furthermore, an ever growing population has also strained Pakistan's already stretched natural resources. Also, with Pakistan's emphasis on a horizontal expansion of cities over vertical expansion has resulted in an exponential growth of housing societies all over the Country in recent years in order to cater for the needs of a growing population. That has also resulted in deforestation as well as causing more environmental damage. However, climate change coupled with Pakistan's rapid population growth has perhaps wreaked the most havoc with the most precious resource of all, water. In reports published by various international agencies such as the IMF and the World Resources Institute, Pakistan is already one of the most water stressed countries in the world. Based on the existing situation, this water scarcity will only worsen with time. The effects of climate change have already started to cause Pakistan's glaciers to recede. As population grows, water consumption will only rise. Even now, Pakistan has one of the world's highest rates of water use. And yet there is hardly enough being done to conserve water in the Country. There are no drastic measures being taken at any level, let alone at the government level, to save Pakistan's rapidly depleting water resources.

Thus, a case of misplaced priorities with regards to protecting and preserving the environment is all too evident in Pakistan's case. Every day one gets to hear news of how trees have been recklessly cut at the

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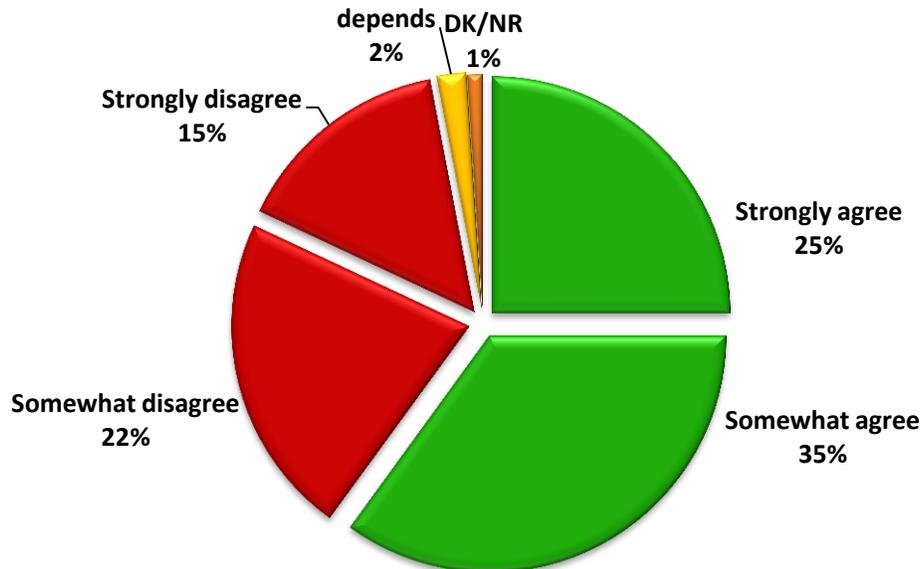


whims of a land developer, the existence of a timber mafia that is stripping Pakistan bare of its woods, recurring episodes of state inertia towards doing anything substantial to counter the very real threat of climate change to Pakistan, garbage and industrial waste being dumped into the rivers, a lack of laws prohibiting factories from producing harmful waste including greenhouse gases; the list can go on and on. However, it would be interesting to empirically validate whether Pakistan's seeming lack of concern for the environment causes some form of an outcry or at least a reflection among the public. To that end, Gallup Pakistan conducted a nationwide survey for GlobeScan Radar 2014 in which a nationally representative sample of adult men and women, from across the four provinces was asked the following question: "Please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the following statements: I feel guilty about my negative impact on the environment?" Responding to this, 25% Pakistanis said they strongly agreed with the statement, 35% said they somewhat agreed with it, 22% said they somewhat disagreed with it and 15% disagreed strongly. 2% respondents replied that it depends and 1% did not answer.

This study by GlobeScan was conducted in 24 countries across the world. When the same question was asked in other countries, China had the highest number of respondents who agreed with the statement (71%), followed closely by Greece (69%) and India (68%). China and India also had the lowest number of respondents who disagreed with the statement. Only 23% people in India and 28% in China did not feel guilty about their impact on the environment. Germany and Russia had the lowest number of respondents agreeing with the statement at 29% each, and the highest number of respondents who disagreed at 66% and 63% respectively.

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Percentage of Pakistanis who feel guilty about their negative impact on the environment



Source: GlobeScan Radar 2014. National Survey conducted by Gallup Pakistan

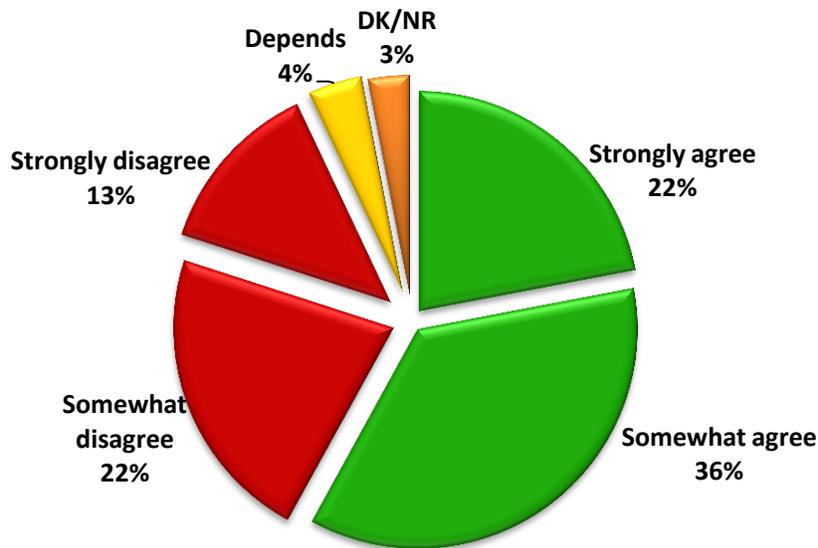
Before delving into an analysis of this empirical breakdown, it would be worthwhile to look at the results of another question posed in the same GlobeScan study. A nationally representative sample of adult men and women, from across the four provinces was asked: “Please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the following statements: I am willing to pay more for products produced in a socially and environmentally responsible way?” Responding to this, 22% Pakistanis said they strongly agreed with the statement, 36% said they somewhat agreed with it, 22% said they somewhat disagreed with it and 13% disagreed strongly. 4% respondents replied that it depends and 3% did not answer.

When the same question was asked in other countries, Australia had the highest number of respondents who agreed with the statement (85%), followed by Greece (80%). 67% respondents in India agreed with the statement. Australia, along with Greece, also had low numbers of respondents who disagreed with

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the statement at only 13% and 17% respectively, ahead of only Turkey at 12%. Respondents in Mexico were split almost evenly with 47% agreeing and 48% disagreeing.

Percentage of respondents willing to pay more for products produced in a socially and environmentally responsible way



Source: GlobeScan Radar 2014. National Survey conducted by Gallup Pakistan

Once again, based on the empirical results of Pakistan, seen both in isolation as well as in relation to other countries, Pakistan performs fairly well. Majority respondents in Pakistan do feel guilty about their negative impact on the environment and would also be willing to pay more for products produced in a socially and environmentally responsible way. Although Pakistan’s contribution to global warming may not be as significant as compared to those of some other developing and developed countries when viewed globally, (according to data on global Carbon Dioxide emissions published by the PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, China, USA, the European Union and India alone were

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contributing 61% of the global Carbon Dioxide emissions by 2014²) it is still heartening to see that a substantial proportion of Pakistanis still feel responsible for harming the environment. This growing conscience among Pakistanis may prove crucial in the coming years to counter the effects of global warming which become more evident with each passing day. However, for Pakistan, this relatively positive attitude among the masses regarding the environment still remains shy of being translated into meaningful action for environmental protection. Despite the many inadequacies of the Pakistani state in combatting global warming, it seems, despite these empirical figures, that the Pakistani masses are also not overly concerned about doing their bit for the environment. The alarming levels of garbage and pollution that can be witnessed in almost all the cities of the Country serve as the primary example of an apparent apathy for the environment. Although it can also be claimed that rising levels of garbage and pollution are down to a lack of proper waste disposal management on part of the state, one cannot help but feel that the masses also have to claim a measure of responsibility in this. A lack of focus of the state/government on cleanliness can also be reasonably attributed to an indifference regarding it among the people.

This indifference can also be gauged by the fact that in Pakistan, the concept of recycling seems next to non-existent. Where the rest of the world is actively turning towards sustainability by reusing resources, Pakistanis seem to be indifferent to that idea. A crude but pertinent example of this is with respect to plastic bags. A relatively modern invention, plastic bags have nevertheless become widespread throughout the world because of their inexpensiveness. However, plastic bags are not easily biodegradable and thus pose an environmental problem. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), between 500 billion to a trillion plastic bags are used worldwide each year. The bags find their way into landfills, oceans, rivers, and parks, thus causing pollution as well as threatening marine life. Some sea mammals get caught in the bags and aren't able to come to the surface to breathe and subsequently drown. In other instances animals, birds, or fish ingest pieces of a plastic bag that block their digestive system and cause them to die. There are numerous ways that these bags pose a threat to animals. Whether they end up in a landfill, a park, or the ocean, the bags will be around for centuries. When they finally begin to break down minute toxic substances will seep into the ground and be washed into lakes, rivers, and the oceans. Therefore, in lieu of the environmental risks posed by plastic bags, the world has already moved towards recycling these bags. It does not even take a lot of energy to recycle plastic bags. In many places across the globe, stores and city administrations have placed recycling bins next to normal ones. Although this trend has only recently begun, it is still a step in the right direction

² Olivier JGJ et al. (2015), Trends in global CO2 emissions; 2015 Report, The Hague: PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency; Ispra: European Commission, Joint Research Centre.

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and is not even too difficult to implement for developing or underdeveloped countries. However, in Pakistan, this concept still seems to be non-existent.

Thus, the point still remains; words have to be backed by actions but in Pakistan's case, the actions seem to be lacking, both on the part of the state and the public. Climate change is unfortunately a reality and all countries, regardless of their levels of socio-economic development, need to devote their resources to counter its effects which could be catastrophic at the very least. Pakistan, by virtue of its geography, is one of those countries that will be a casualty of global warming. Pakistan's glaciers, which are the main source of freshwater for the entire Country, are already receding. The immediate aftermath of this is already being felt by the yearly cycle of flooding in Pakistan which tends to worsen with each passing year. Furthermore, being a predominantly agricultural economy, water insecurity or scarcity as well as changing temperatures may also result in low yields, thus worsening Pakistan's food supply. Additionally, water, air and land pollution is also causing a myriad of health problems, in addition to environmental degradation. Pakistan, like the rest of the world, needs to wake up to this reality and start implementing measures to counter this phenomenon or else risk putting future generations in peril.

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