

Gallup Pakistan History Project - Weekend Read 3 ' Pakistan's anti-establishment tenor in 1980: by Murad Javed (Research Fellow, Gallup Pakistan History Project

When facing adversity, individuals and societies attempt to make sense of the prevailing despair and challenges. One of the most ubiquitous reactions in this search for making sense of adversity is the apportioning of blame. Or more accurately put, the search culminates with the identification of a culprit, human or otherwise, to shift the blame for creating the extant precarious situation. Much of this exercise is so routinely practiced and ingrained in Pakistan that it has almost become second-nature for most Pakistanis to quickly identify one, or multiple, culprits whose actions and designs purportedly explain the origins of our troubles. Pakistan's history is replete with circumstances governed by the country's oscillation back and forth between democracy and military dictatorships, and therefore it is no surprise to see that much of the country's collective challenges have been associated with institutions and individuals. Given that this country has experienced continued adversities in various formats since 1947, it is highly instructive to peek into history to trace, measure, and record the rhythms of blame apportionment in Pakistan.

This unique opportunity is provided by Gallup Pakistan – Pakistan's oldest survey research organization – whose public opinion research since 1980 has recorded the polity's understanding and perceptions of the challenges faced by the country. In a public opinion survey conducted with a nationally representative sample of adults in 1980, Gallup Pakistan posed a simple question for its respondents: who is most responsible for Pakistan's problems?

In responding to this question, the majority of Pakistanis in 1980 – 42%, found bureaucracy as the institution responsible for Pakistan's problems. By 1980, Gen Zia-ul-Haq's military regime had already been in power for three years after having ousted the PPP Government in 1977, and executing its leader, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto through a judicial trial. This period in Pakistan's history was monumental in terms of multiple levels of transformations that took root in the country. In that same year, hundreds and thousands of Afghan refugees had also begun pouring into the country as a consequence of the Soviet invasion. Moreover, the military regime had also begun de-nationalizing major industrial units and services nationalized by the PPP Government in the

1970s. The plethora of problems facing the country at the beginning of the 1980s has to be juxtaposed with the identification of national bureaucracy as the source of these challenges. Under military dictatorships, the bureaucracy becomes the focal point for policymaking and governance, as the political and civil society are fettered, excluded, and marginalized. More specifically, the bureaucracy becomes the mouthpiece and the primary vehicle for delivering the governance agenda for a military regime.

Under Zia's military regime in 1980, the bureaucracy was identified as the primary culprit in national discourse for causing the country's multiple challenges. Two interpretive implications can be drawn from this recorded observation. First, bureaucracies are designed and structured to deliver public goods and services, implement laws and policies, and help orchestrate the direction and tenor of national policies. The fact that most Pakistanis in 1980 saw the bureaucracy as the source of the country's problems shows that the national bureaucracy was failing in its most primary function: to bring effective governance to the people. Second and closely associated with this observation, given that bureaucracy was identified as the root of Pakistan's problems in 1980, this finding is also indicative of a general failure of governance and public service delivery in the country. If and when the institution mandated to provide public goods and services in a country is seen as a source of its problems, one can reasonably interpret this as a signal of the failure of governance in that country.

However, this finding from the 1980 survey must be understood in the context of the next institution seen by Pakistanis as the source of all national problems: the Army. A substantial 35% of all Pakistanis viewed the Army as being responsible for Pakistan's problems. This negative perception of the Pakistan Army illustrates multiple features of military dictatorships in Pakistan. Merely three years after the coup, the Army, under Zia-ul-Haq had already become a symbol of the domestic and international challenges faced by the country. This slip in popularity is a constant experience of the Pakistani military, whenever it has directly ventured in national politics. At the onset of military coups in Pakistan, public support for the Army remains high. However, when the institution is placed front and center of national politics, and more crucially national governance, its functional performance triggers a decline in public support. In 1980, under Zia-ul-Haq's regime, the Army experienced a dramatic collapse in public perceptions, and

was singled out by a third of all Pakistanis as a source of the country's problems. Clearly, the military had failed to impress the polity in its third foray into politics.

What else explains this negativity towards the Army? One probable source could have been the large pockets of entrenched and devoted support for Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and his PPP.

Notwithstanding his political and personal flaws, Bhutto was a deeply popular leader in Pakistan's politics. His ouster, and the subsequent judicial execution, was a source of antipathy and hatred for those who were devoted to Bhutto's personality and his politics. This also tells us that by 1980, Zia-ul-Haq had failed to overwrite and erode the public's support for the PPP – the largest national political party that actively opposed Zia's dictatorship. Alternatively put, the PPP was still a popular and powerful political entity in the country. The negative rating for the Army by a third of all Pakistanis shows that the institution was seen responsible for the myriad domestic and external challenges faced by the country.

Politicians were identified by 14% of all Pakistanis as the source of Pakistan's problems, while only 9% of all Pakistanis asserted that political parties were responsible for national challenges. Compared with the much higher apportioning of the blame for the bureaucracy and the Army, political parties and politicians shouldered less of the blame. This finding could have been reasonably expected and well-understood in 1980. Given that under the Zia regime in 1980, politics was suspended – most politicians and political parties were systematically marginalized from national politics – politicians and political parties were conspicuous by their absence on the national scene.

Another interesting dimension of this finding highlights that peculiar and permanent reality of Pakistani politics: individuals are larger than organizations. Pakistan's political history is dominated by the politics of individuals and families, while political parties have largely played second fiddle to the dominant personalities. Perhaps, this hegemony of political leaders and individual politicians on national politics was the reason why more Pakistanis saw politicians as responsible for national problems, as opposed to political parties.

In 1980, Pakistan stood at an important threshold. Living under yet another military regime, with the Soviet Union amassed on its Western borders, the country faced numerous internal and

external challenges. The strategy and policies that unfolded under the Zia regime from that point onwards in Pakistan have played a pivotal role in shaping Pakistan's evolution.