

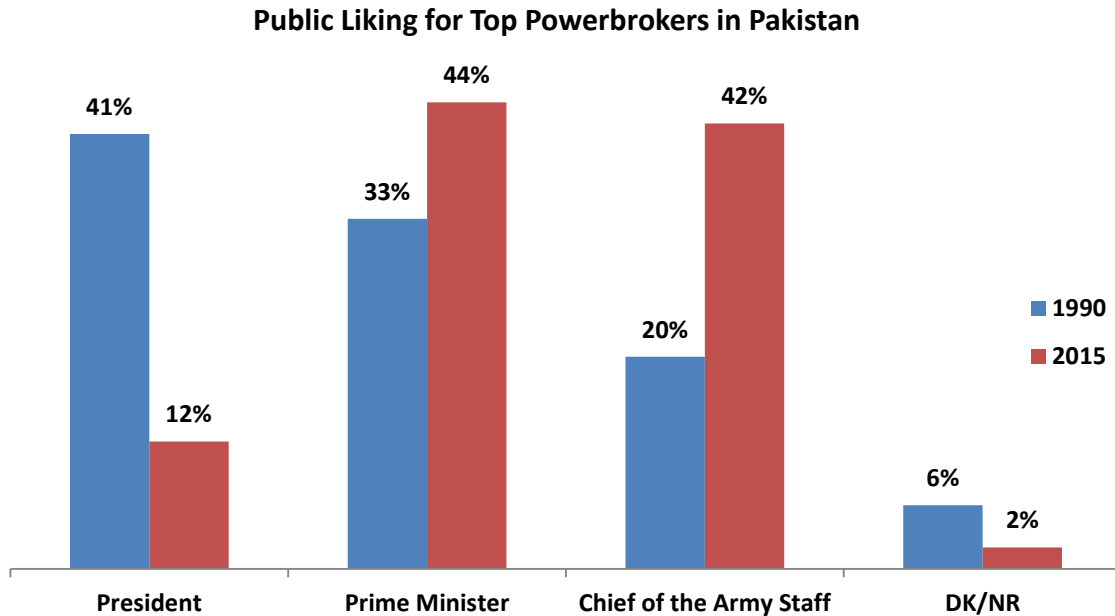
Gallup Pakistan History Project - **Weekend Read 18** ‘Powerbrokers in Pakistani Politics: Shifts in the last 25 Years’: by Murad Javed (Research Fellow, Gallup Pakistan History Project)

Students, practitioners, and observers of Pakistani politics understand, and comment extensively, on the troubled evolution of democracy in Pakistan. From the late 1950s to the late 1980s, democracy in Pakistan suffered three periods of direct military intervention, and rule. At the end of General Zia’s regime, Pakistan stood at a crossroads. Democracy returned to the country with the 1988 Elections that ushered in the PPP Government. However, this proved to be a false dawn in the country’s struggle for entrenching democratic politics. Pakistani politics in the 1990s witnessed a new form of political configuration. Power was passed back and forth between the PPP and PML-N in successive stints. Surreptitious military manipulation of and involvement in politics, and the political myopia of politicians were blamed as the destabilizing forces in Pakistani politics. The Prime Ministers represented the democratic system, while the Chiefs of the Army represented the military’s role in politics: the old school rivalry. However, a third actor entered the fray in the 1990s as a powerful political stakeholder: the Presidents of Pakistan. Successive democratic governments in the 1990s were sent packing home by the President of Pakistan via the tools introduced by General Zia’s mauling of Pakistan’s Constitution. However, by the end of 1990s, General Pervez Musharraf triggered a coup and set the foundations of another period of direct military intervention in the country. The pendulum swung once again towards democratic politics by the end of 2000s, with the Elections of 2008, and the ouster of General Pervez Musharraf from power. What effect has this constant back-and-forth between democratic and military/dictatorial political dispensation had on the stature of the supreme political positions in Pakistan? Are the Pakistani Prime Minister – and specifically the office that he/she holds – truly the most respected figure in the country?

The answers to these questions are provided by Gallup Pakistan’s rich annals of historical public opinion polling in Pakistan. The organization has kept detailed and meticulous records of opinions registered by Pakistanis across the country since the early 1980s. With data spanning the past three decades, this record provides useful and intriguing insights into Pakistan’s evolution – as seen through the lens of public opinion. Gallup’s public opinion record provides pertinent data on the theme central to this week’s analysis. The topsy-turvy domestic political evolution of Pakistan had had a direct impact on the strength and durability of democracy in the country. Intuitively, in 2015, the future for democratic politics in the country appears strong; albeit, still under the ubiquitous shadows of the country’s security establishment and its past forays into politics. Today, many in Pakistan confidently predict that democratic politics and its strengthening are the future of Pakistan’s political fortunes. What do the people of Pakistan think?

Gallup Pakistan asked the people of Pakistan in 1990, and then again in 2015, to register their proclivity towards/liking for the most important offices in Pakistani politics. Specifically, the following question was posed to a representative sample of Pakistani at these time intervals,

spaced 25 years apart: Three titles are considered very powerful in Pakistan: Prime Minister, President and Chief of Army Staff. Who among these three do you personally like the most? These offices and their public support and understanding provide a proxy estimation of the strength of democracy in Pakistan, as well as the evolutionary changes in Pakistan’s politics over the last 25 years. The figure below presents the public opinion data on this theme in the year 1990, and then in the year 2015:



The results shown here are telling of the changes that have taken place in Pakistan’s politics. In the year 1990, Pakistan’s nascent democratic government suffered its first short-circuiting, with the removal of the PPP Government. The previous government that had come into power in 1988 was dismissed by the President Ghulam Ishaq Khan. The resultant General Elections in 1990 were won by the Islamic Democratic Alliance (IDA) led by the PML-N Government. This event was a premonition for the next decade in Pakistani politics. In 1990, Pakistani democracy was trying to find its feet after the suffocating and debilitating era of General Zia’s regime. In the year, 1990, Pakistani politics thus came to be dominated by three competing (and occasionally collaborating) forces: the President, Prime Minister, and the Chief of the Army Staff. As the data indicates, 41% of the people of Pakistan expressed a liking for the office of the President of Pakistan. This was the highest level of support for the three top political stakeholders in the country. The Prime Minister of Pakistan was liked by a third of the country’s population (33%). The COAS was liked by a mere one-fifth of Pakistan’s people (20%). 6% of the respondents did not answer the question.

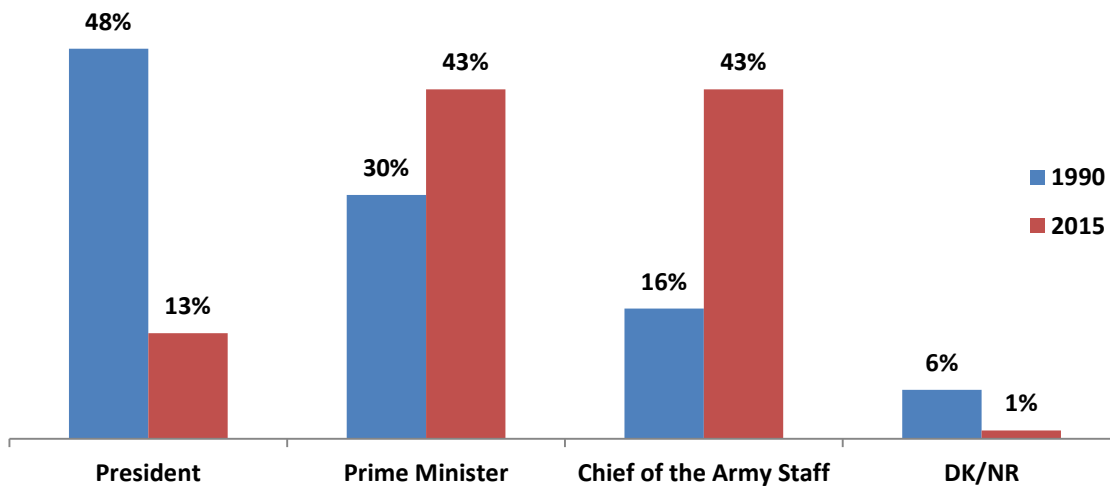
The year 1990 presented a deeply contested, controversial landscape, dominated by powerful personalities. President Ghulam Ishaq Khan was a powerful and imposing figure in Pakistani politics. He had succeeded General Zia, and inherited the powerful General’s arsenal of powers – appropriated for the Office of the President through constant marring of Pakistan’s

Constitution in the 1980s. President Ghulam Ishaq Khan dismissed PPP's Government, and thus set the precedence for a "democratic" annulling of democracy in Pakistan. His actions further emboldened and empowered the Office of the President. His actions also reflected a new source of power in Pakistani politics – at least a third actor, visibly dissociated from Pakistan's powerful military establishment. Crucially, despite the democratic fervor and hope that seemed imminent after the end of General Zia's regime, the Prime Ministers of Pakistan were controversial and contested. Only a third of the people of Pakistan expressed a liking for this office. Perhaps, most interestingly, the COAS had slipped to the third place in this three-player race. This implies that the COAS' role in Pakistan remained soured by the memory of General Zia's dictatorial regime. In all likelihood, the Army understood this reality, and thereby set about playing the role of political interference from behind the scenes. This reality of Pakistani politics was finally vindicated and affirmed in the Supreme Court of Pakistan's landmark decision in the Ashgan Khan case. The Court declared that the two top Army Generals in the year 1990 (COAS General Mirza Aslam Beg and DG ISI General Asad Durrani) were in cahoots with President Ghulam Ishaq Khan before and during the Elections of 1990. The troika was responsible for manipulating the General Election in the year 1990 by directly funding the IDA, and making an attempt to diminish and extinguish PPP's influence and standing in Pakistani politics. Gallup's data from that year shows that in that year, the President was the supreme orchestrator in Pakistani politics, and commanded significant support.

By the year 2015, having gone through the democratic musical chairs in of the 1990s, and General Musharraf's complicated and controversial stay in power during the 2000s, things have changed dramatically. The Prime Minister of Pakistan is the most liked stakeholder amongst the three powerful actors in Pakistani politics, with the support of 44% of the country. Preditably, with the passage of the 18th Amendment (which made the President a ceremonial Head of State), and perhaps after the role of President Zardari in Pakistani politics since 2008, only 12% of the people of Pakistan express a liking for this office. Critically, the COAS is liked by a substantial 42% of the people of Pakistan. This shows that the military has made a come-back in Pakistani politics. Having suffered a dip in popularity after General Musharraf's experiment with power, the Pakistani COAS today is almost as popular – and in real terms, at least as powerful – as the Prime Minister of Pakistan.

Gallup Pakistan has also asked another critical question to the people of Pakistan – in line with the previous question. This question goes one step beyond favorability/likability ratings, and asked the people of Pakistan to assess the capability of the top three power brokers in Pakistani politics. Specifically, the question repeated in the years 1990 and 2015, asked the people of Pakistan: "Three titles are considered very powerful in Pakistan: Prime Minister, President, and Chief of the Army Staff. Who among these three do you personally consider most capable and efficient?" Longitudinal results of this question are shown in the Figure below:

Performance Evaluation of Top Three Powerful Personalities in Pakistan



Results shown here are reflective of the tremendous transformations that have taken place in Pakistani politics over the last twenty five years. These findings are reminiscent of the previous analysis. The President’s universal appeal in the year 1990 has diminished substantially by 2015. From a peak of 48% in the year 1990, today only 13% Pakistanis think that the President is a capable and efficient stakeholder in Pakistan. The Prime Minister has picked up some of this decline in the President’s evaluation, by increasing capability assessment from 30% in 1990 to 43% by 2015. This reflects the greater confidence and attitudinal investment that we witness in democratic governance today. Most crucially, the Chief of the Army Staff has made a remarkable return to the limelight. Whereas only 16% Pakistanis evaluated the incumbent as capable in the year 1990, today 43% Pakistanis positively rate the COAS as capable and efficient – the same as the Prime Minister of Pakistan. This transformation is more impressive given that a few years ago, the military establishment suffered a decline in popular support as a consequence of President Musharraf’s time in power, and the growing wave of violence and militancy in the country over the last decade.

This analysis, while indicating the transformation in Pakistani political consciousness over the last two and a half decades, is also indicative of the effect that incumbent personalities and their public perception and evaluation has in Pakistani politics. In the year 1990, Pakistan’s President was an ambitious, powerful, and canny operator in Pakistani politics; carefully guarding and expanding the turf and influence wrongfully appropriated for that office. In that same year, the COAS was ostensibly an unpopular figure in Pakistan, with low levels of performance and capability evaluation. Fast forward twenty five years, and the situation has changed in this three person power configuration. Today, the Prime Minister enjoys high levels of public support and positive evaluation. However, the COAS has recovered lost ground, and stands shoulder-to-shoulder with the PM, as a powerful stakeholder in the country’s politics. The consequences and projected outcomes of this political arrangement for the future of

Pakistan's democratic political evolution must be carefully considered and studied. Perhaps more crucially, democratic forces and stakeholders in the country need to understand and internalize the messages and findings emanating from this reading of public opinion and consciousness over the last twenty five years. Long-term sustenance of democratic governance and politics in the country will flow from an accurate and empirical understanding this historic transition to the current state of affairs in the country.