

Intervention of Army in areas lying outside its constitutional ambit: Analysis of Public Opinion in Pakistan in Year 2015 by Abdullah Tajwar, Research Executive at Gallup Pakistan

Abstract: The results of this article are predicated on two surveys conducted by Gallup Pakistan in 2015 with the intent of gauging public opinion on the role of Pakistan Army in the politics and governance of Pakistan. In the first survey, a nationally representative sample of adult men and women, from across the four provinces was asked, "Some people think that the army should only intervene in those issues that concern the army, while others believe that they should help in other areas as well. What is your opinion about this?" In response to this question, 45% respondents said that it should be limited to army issues only, while 42% said that it should intervene in non-army issues as well and 13% respondent didn't respond. This survey was carried out among a sample of 1892 men and women in rural and urban areas of all four provinces of the country, during May 18 – May 25, 2015. Error margin is estimated to be approximately $\pm 2-3$ per cent at 95% confidence level. In another survey conducted by Gallup Pakistan, a nationally representative sample of adult men and women, from across the four provinces was asked for opinion after explaining the following incident, "Last week, Rangers in Karachi raided the office of Sindh Building Control Authority and took in its custody those government officers who had been allegedly engaging in illegal land grab, corruption and extortion. Some people are critical of this step by the Rangers saying that the Rangers' and Pakistan Army's job is not to sort out such corrupt practices; in fact their mandate simply requires them to maintain peace in the country. Whereas other people approve of this act saying that the Rangers can work for any such issue and even the Pakistan Army should intervene in issues concerning corruption, illegal land grabbing and extortion. What is your take on this issue, do you approve of the Rangers' act or are against it?" In response, 87% said that they approved of the Rangers' act and 12% said that they disapproved while 1% did not respond. This survey was carried out among a sample of 1822 men and women in rural and urban areas of all four provinces of the country, during June 29 – July 06, 2015. Error margin is estimated to be approximately $\pm 2-3$ per cent at 95% confidence level.

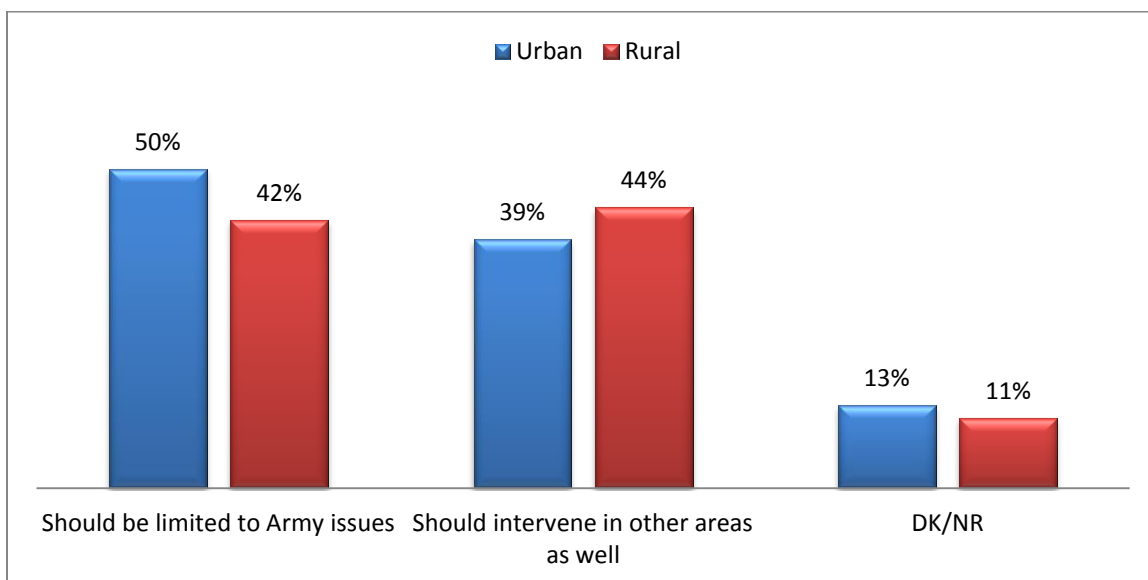
Background to Pakistan Army and Pakistani State

The state of Pakistan is peculiar in many respects. Unlike most modern democracies where state power is primarily distributed between the legislative, executive and the judiciary; in Pakistan, despite this separation of powers enshrined in the Country's constitution, there is another organ of the state which often supersedes the aforementioned troika in Pakistan's power sharing status quo. That institution is the Pakistan Army. It would not be inaccurate to state that the Army is generally considered by all to be the strongest institution in the Country. The Pakistan Army, some would argue, is a legacy of the Colonial Raj that Pakistan inherited upon gaining independence from the British. With garrison towns of the Colonial Army splattered across the lands that became Pakistan, the Army was firmly entrenched in the newly carved nation long before any other formal institution of statecraft was established. Furthermore, through its various corporate agencies and self-financing mechanisms, the Pakistan Army soon became self-sufficient. Hence, from the get-go, there was a stark imbalance of power which soon became apparent in the wake of a coup d'état administered by the then Commander-in-Chief General Ayub Khan against the incumbent democratic government, just 11 years into Pakistan's independence. The civil bureaucracy was ousted by the Military on the basis of failing to effectively govern the state. As Ayub Khan became Pakistan's first Chief Martial Law Administrator, he set in motion a precedence that would later be repeated a number of times, as successive democratic governments would be toppled by Military Generals of the Army on the back of a mantra of saving Pakistan against inefficient and corrupt politicians.

Till date, Military has ruled Pakistan for a combined number of thirty three years. *It is noteworthy to mention that 2013 marked the only instance in the entire history of Pakistan when a democratically elected government was able to successfully transfer power to another civilian elected government via general elections.* This outright rarity of a democratic transition has naturally stunted the growth and maturation of institutions of democracy in Pakistan. Meanwhile, continuous forays of Pakistan's Army in politics and administration of the Country have had a profound impact on public perception regarding the basic responsibilities of the Army. Though the sole aim of a country's armed force should be to defend and provide security against both external and internal threats, in Pakistan, however, the Army has started to stand for something more; as an arbiter of justice, as a socio-economic benefactor and even as a welfare organization. The Frontier Works Organisation (FWO) and the National Logistics Cell (NLC) are just a few of the organisations that are run by the Pakistan Army that carry out developmental projects all over the Country. More recently, the Rangers Operation in Karachi aimed against terrorists as well as their benefactors has also come under the spotlight as a number of political leaders have been apprehended by the Rangers in this operation.

Public Opinion on the Issue of Pakistan Army: Two interesting Polls

In order to empirically determine whether the people of Pakistan approve of the Pakistan Army operating in issues that do not strictly fall under its constitutional domain, the Gilani Research Foundation of Gallup Pakistan carried out a survey during the month of May, 2015. In the survey, a nationally representative sample of men and women were asked the following question: ***‘Some people think that the army should only intervene in those issues that concern the army, while others believe that they should help in other areas as well. What is your opinion about this?’*** A rural-urban breakdown of the findings of this survey has been presented in a tabular form.



Source : Gallup Pakistan Nationally Representative Survey 2015

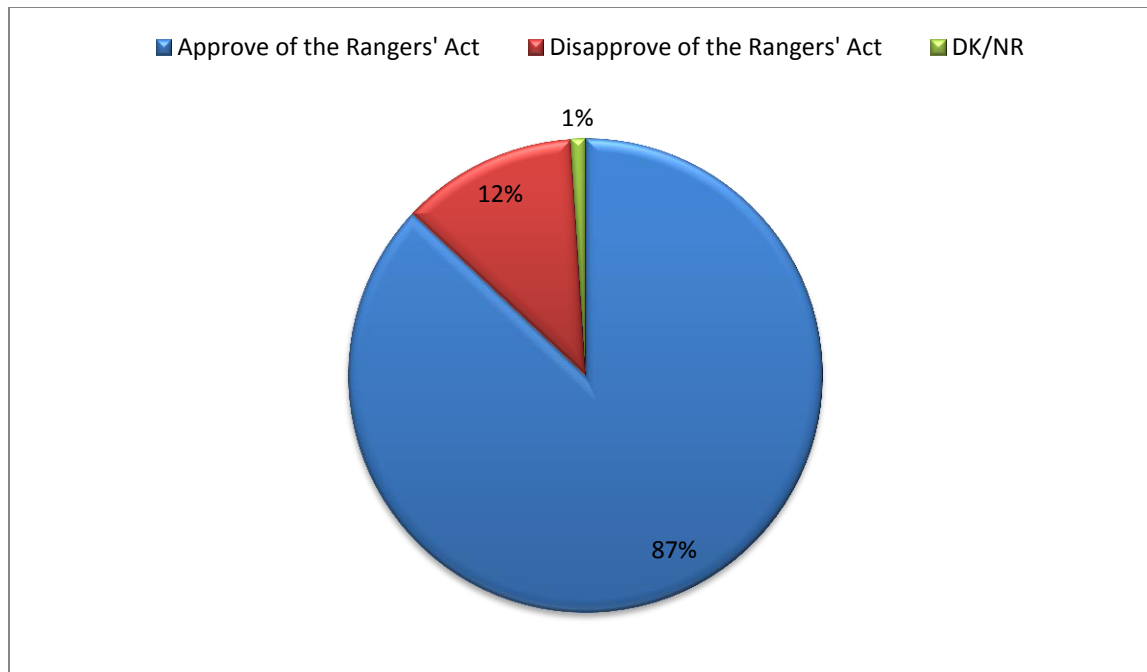
For the urban population of Pakistan, **50% of the respondents felt that an intervention by the Army should only be warranted for instances that are directly related to the Army. For people belonging to the rural areas of Pakistan, the ratio of respondents who felt this way still about the Army was slightly lower (42%) than the urban diaspora.** Meanwhile, the proportion of the rural population that felt the Army should intervene in areas lying outside its direct mandate was higher (44%) than the ratio that felt that the Army should only stick to issues relevant to it. The percentage of people living in urban centers who felt that the Army should intervene in other areas/issues fell (39%) in comparison to the percentage of urban respondents who felt that the Army should only stick to its mandate. Among the urban and the rural, the ratio of respondents who chose not to respond was (13%) and (11%) respectively. These findings indicate that a higher proportion of rural respondents felt that the Army should intervene

wherever it sees fit. However, a higher proportion of urban respondents felt that the Pakistan Army should only stick to areas that are directly relevant to the primary work of the armed forces, which is providing security, and should leave areas of governance and administration to their respective institutions.

Second Poll: Rangers and the Karachi Operation

In addition to this survey, Gallup Pakistan also undertook another survey that addressed the broader question of the **Army's involvement in matters deemed outside its jurisdiction**, while focusing on the ongoing operation by the Rangers in Karachi. This operation was started by the government of Nawaz Sharif in 2013 to root out crime and terrorism from the largest city of Pakistan and make it peaceful and secure. It involved hunting down the land grabbing mafias, extortionists, target killers, kidnappers and most importantly, terrorists. Currently in its second stage, this operation has ruffled the feathers of a number of political parties active in Sindh, particularly the Pakistan People's Party and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) as the Rangers have spared no one in their drive to secure the city of Karachi. MQM's headquarters as well as other government buildings have been raided and suspects, either government servants or party workers, have been apprehended. *Many in the Country have stated that tackling corruption and mismanagement does not come under the purview of the Army and its paramilitary wing, i.e. Rangers but instead comes under the responsibilities of the proper state institutions mandated to handle them, such as the National Accountability Bureau and the civil courts.* Nevertheless, there have been others who have applauded the work of the Army in cleansing the streets of Karachi of crime and terrorism.

To empirically ascertain the views of the Pakistani public on this military operation in Karachi, Gallup Pakistan conducted a survey between June and July of 2015 whereby a nationally representative sample of the Pakistani population was asked this question following a specific incident of the Operation: ***'Last week, Rangers in Karachi raided the office of Sindh Building Control Authority and took in its custody those government officers who had been allegedly engaging in illegal land grab, corruption and extortion. Some people are critical of this step by the Rangers saying that the Rangers' and Pakistan Army's job is not to sort out such corrupt practices; in fact their mandate simply requires them to maintain peace in the country. Whereas other people approve of this act saying that the Rangers can work for any such issue and even the Pakistan Army should intervene in issues concerning corruption, illegal land grabbing and extortion. What is your take on this issue, do you approve of the Rangers' act or are against it?'*** In response, a resounding majority (87%) of the public approved of this act carried out by the Rangers whereas the proportion of people in disapproval was a paltry 12% of all respondents. A pie chart of the findings has also been added to illustrate the sheer magnitude of the respondents in favour of this action carried out by the Rangers.



Source: Gallup Pakistan Nationally Representative Survey 2015

These empirical findings primarily have their basis in the present socio-political landscape of Pakistan. Since the return of democracy to Pakistan in 2008, corruption within the civil government and bureaucracy has been rampant. Countless cases and allegations have been brought up against political leaders and numerous other cases of corruption, money laundering and weak governance in various institutions of the state have continuously kept airing on the media. Instances of corruption coupled with growing poverty, unemployment and an already sluggish economy crippled by power shortages have really pushed the public on edge. Furthermore, the security situation in Karachi had deteriorated rapidly during this time. Instances of kidnappings, extortions and terrorist activities had risen to an all-time high. It was only after the start of the operation that things have started to look up for Pakistan's former Capital, at least statistically and for the time being. In a report published by Rangers in July on their operation in Karachi, a total of 826 terrorists, 334 target killers and 296 extortionists are claimed to have been arrested. Furthermore, target killing in the city has also been reduced by over 80%, going down from a figure of 73 killings in 2013 to under 10 in June 2015. (The Express Tribune, 2015)¹ These statistics stand in stark contrast to the time period of the previous government in Pakistan which had proven to be rather ineffective in handling this security problem. That ineffectiveness has not been lost on the public as can be seen from the results of the survey in which the overwhelming majority have vehemently approved of the operation of the Rangers as it has clearly produce tangible results. Thus, this positive outcome has

¹ (The Express Tribune, 2015, p. 5)

undoubtedly been felt by the public in Karachi as well as in Pakistan and that has translated into a substantial proportion of the Pakistani public believing that the Army can intervene in areas outside of its mandate if the situation becomes utterly hopeless, as was the case in Karachi.

However, there is another line of reasoning that can be used to explain these empirical findings. An exploration of Pakistan Army's political history also offers another significant insight regarding a positive public opinion on the Army's involvement outside of matters of national security. Military coups have occurred in Pakistan on a recurring basis. Despite the fact that dictators in Pakistan for the most part ended their regimes as publicly disgraced figures for one reason or the other, the fact that their rule also usually coincided with a positive economic growth and development can also not be discounted. The statistical data published by the Federal Bureau of Statistics and published by Express tribune states that the highest average GDP growth rates out of all the rulers in Pakistan's history belong to the tenures of Zia ul Haq (5.88), Ayub Khan (5.82) and Parvez Musharraf (5.14). (The Express Tribune, 2012)² The lowest GDP growth rate was witnessed, albeit unsurprisingly, under the premiership of Asif Ali Zardari at just 2.62. In general Ayub Khan's time, Pakistan's only two large scale hydroelectric dams were built whereas in Zia ul Haq and Parvez Musharraf's time, the country's GDP growth rate was appreciably high, partly as a result of foreign funding in the wake of wars being fought in Afghanistan on both occasions. A part of this optimism regarding the extra judicial involvement of the Army in the eyes of the public may be explained by this trend of positive socio-economic growth coinciding with military dictatorships in Pakistan. Though some would constitute this argument as a generalization, however, it cannot be discounted that this knowledge of better growth rates under dictatorships may have had a subtle impact on public perception regarding the efficacy of Military rule. Furthermore, the relative success of Pakistan Army's Operation Zarb-e-Azb against the Taliban in Pakistan's tribal belt has also improved the public image and standing of the army in the eyes of the people, after it had been severely dented during the time of Parvez Musharraf. Therefore, it can be concluded that the people of Pakistan may feel that Pakistan Army is strong and stable enough to handle the problems facing them and just might do a better job than the civil bureaucracy in providing peace, security and prosperity to Pakistan.

Conclusion

These surveys have statistically proven that a significant proportion of the Pakistani public places its trust in the Pakistan Army with regards to solving the various problems that plague Pakistan. The fact that a resounding majority of the public was unequivocally in support of the Military's Operation in Karachi proves that Pakistanis still feel that the Army is the most

² (The Express Tribune, 2012, p. 5)

effective institution present in the Country. Though a portion of the public may feel that it is unconstitutional of the Army to meddle in affairs that lie outside its ambit, the majority still thinks otherwise. Though it can be argued that it is unconstitutional of the Army to wade into matters that are legally outside the scope of an institution that is primarily responsible for providing security, however, the ground reality in Pakistan is different. That, coupled with the excursions of Pakistan Army in the administration of Pakistan for over three decades in total is suggestive of the fact that the army in Pakistan functions differently to most other democratic nations. The surveys conducted by Gallup Pakistan bear witness to this statement since public opinion in Pakistan is in approval of the Army taking on more responsibilities regarding the effective governance of the state.