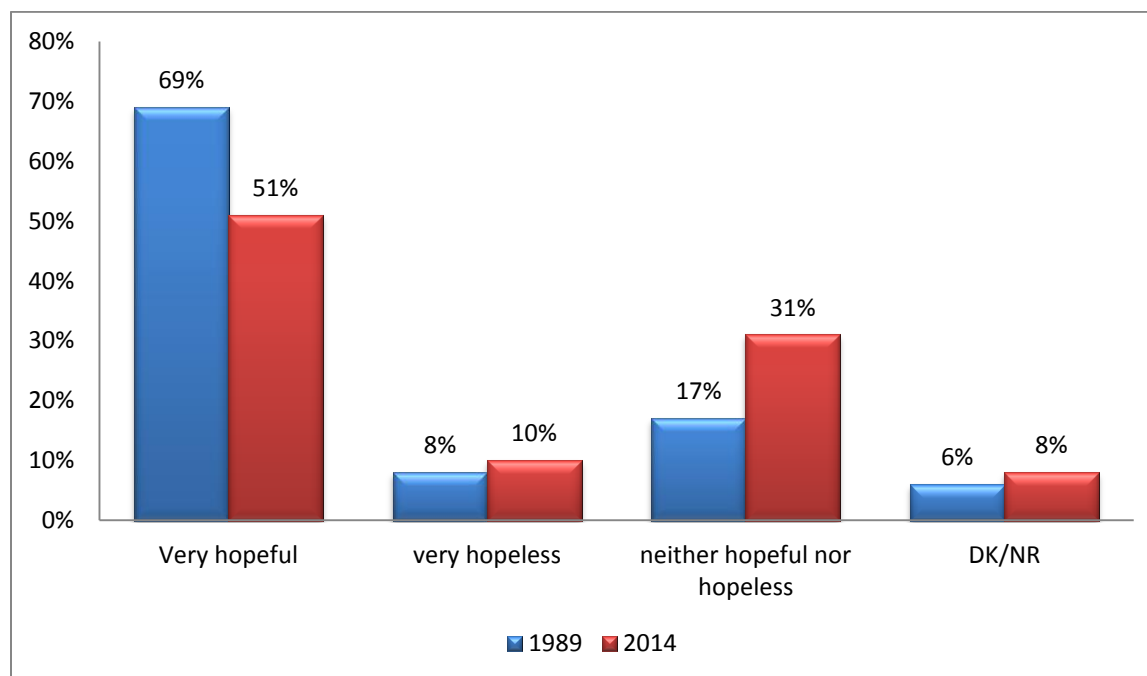


Changing Feelings of Hopefulness among Pakistanis on their Future: Some Trends from Gallup Pakistan History Project Polls Data by Abdullah Tajwar, Research Executive at Gallup Pakistan

Abstract: The conclusions and interpretations presented in this article are based on the empirical findings of a National Public Opinion Survey conducted by Gallup Pakistan in 1989 and again in 2014, with the objective of empirically determining the change in the perspectives of the people of Pakistan on their future. According to the survey, in the year 1989, 69% of the people of Pakistani were very hopeful about their future, 17% were neither hopeful nor hopeless, 8% of the public was very hopeless about its future whereas 6% of the people chose to not respond. In contrast, for 2014, 51% respondents said they were very hopeful about their future, 10% said they were very hopeless, while 31% said they were neither hopeful nor hopeless, and 8% did not respond. These surveys and polls were conducted by Gallup Pakistan, an affiliate of Gallup International, on a sample of over 1000 respondents in urban areas of all four provinces of Pakistan. This sample was statistically selected across all ages, income groups and educational levels. The error for a sample of this kind is estimated to be +/- 5% at a 95% confidence level.

There are a number of variables that shape future expectations of people. It would not be unreasonable to assume that every person inherently aspires towards a better future. What constitutes as better varies though from person to person. For some, a better future is a future with a more rewarding career, whereas for others, a better future may mean free healthcare for all. However, in this day and age, an individual's fortunes are often inextricably linked to the fortunes of his or her country. That is because a nation state is primarily responsible for the wellbeing, material and otherwise, of its citizens. Hence, people's hopes and dreams of a better fortune usually hinge on a better future for their respective country. Therefore, in order to understand and analyze the hopefulness of people regarding their personal futures, one has to take to also assess the fortunes of the country to which those people belong.

With regards to ascertaining the evolution of public opinion in Pakistan regarding optimism for the future, Gallup Pakistan conducted a survey, first in 1989 and again in 2014, on a nationally representative sample of Pakistani public, which specifically asked the following question: **‘Are you very hopeful about your personal future or not?’** The results of this survey, separated by a gap of six years have been presented below in a tabular form, in order to facilitate comparison between the opinions that the people of Pakistan had regarding their future then and now.



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

The empirical results of this survey clearly delineate a fall in the percentage of the Pakistani population that is very hopeful about the future. The percentage of this segment of the population fell from 69% in 1989, to 51% in 2014. The proportion of people very hopeless about their future has generally stayed low, which is a positive sign. It increased by only two percent in a span of twenty six years, from 8% in 1989 to 10% in 2014. A positive trend, however, was observed for the people who were neither hopeful nor hopeless about their future. **There was a rise in the proportion of an apathetic public, from 17% in 1989, to 31% in 2014, a worrisome rise of fourteen percent in a span of just two and a half decades.** The number of respondents who chose not to reply was 6% in 1989, and it rose to 8% of the population in 2014.

In order to explain these empirical results, an analysis of Pakistan's social, political and economic climate has to be undertaken, for the period of 1989 as well as for the present day. The year 1989, in many ways, was a year of new beginnings for Pakistan. A number of developments had taken place at this time, in Pakistan as well as in the world, which would have resounding implications for the people of Pakistan. The war in Afghanistan had ended, concluding almost a decade of conflict between the Afghans and Soviets and had brought with it the hope of peace to come for many a year. Pakistan had shouldered the burden of accommodating and rehabilitating the estimated 3 million Afghan citizens, who had fled to Pakistan during the war years, and could now potentially look towards aiding them in resettling back to their homelands.

1989 was also a historic year for Pakistani politics. The previous year, General Zia ul Haq, Pakistan's President, had been assassinated in a plane crash. Zia's assassination also ended His reign as Pakistan's military dictator and paved the way for democracy to return to Pakistan after an eleven year long hiatus. Political parties, including the popular party of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the Pakistan People's Party, made its return into the politics of Pakistan, led now by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's equally charming and intelligent daughter, Benazir Bhutto. The Pakistan People's Party had also won the general elections of 1988, thus making Benazir the first female Prime Minister of a Muslim State. Her appointment as Prime Minister put Pakistan back into the world map, drawing appraisals from the West for Pakistan and its people, for electing a female to be their Premier. The government of the People's Party had, at least on paper, a promising agenda of rectifying the ills of the previous regime and securing socio-economic stability for Pakistan. The future, at that instance in time, held a lot of promise, hence elucidating the astonishingly high percentage of the Pakistani public stating that they were very hopeful about their futures. Their hope flourished against the backdrop of a favorable wind in the sails of Pakistan's fortunes. However, there were still some who were averse to these developments and were cautious of getting ahead of themselves, as can be seen by the 17% of the population choosing to neither be hopeful or hopeless. However, this percentage was dwarfed by the people who were emboldened by this surge of optimism running through the country.

However, the unraveling of Pakistan's history reveals that this post Zia-ul-Haq euphoria was relatively short lived. As the 20th century drew to a close, Pakistan's ailing economy and deteriorating social conditions struggled to show a positive resurgence. Pakistan's Democracy

was derailed yet again by another military dictator, Parvez Musharraf. Nevertheless, it would be the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, on the United States of America, that would have the most far reaching consequences for Pakistan and its people. In the aftermath of these attacks perpetrated by the Taliban, the US launched its ‘War on Terror’ against the Taliban, Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups in Afghanistan. Pakistan sided with the US and fully supported America’s war in Afghanistan. Although Pakistan gained a considerable amount of monetary aid as a result of its orientation with the US, it also laid the roots of extremism and terrorism within its own borders. Since this time, terrorism in Pakistan has flourished ominously, culminating in the takeover by the Taliban of the entire district of Swat in 2007. Since then, Pakistan’s army has been in a continuous state of warfare with these extremist elements. Terrorism, to this day, is the biggest security threat to the state of Pakistan and has already claimed lives of citizens measuring to the thousands. Sectarian violence in Pakistan has also become widespread, culminating in various acts of terrorism, the most horrific being the numerous acts committed against the peaceful Shiite Hazara community of Pakistan, which have, to date, claimed countless innocent lives. As Pakistan has plunged deeper into the abyss of fear and insecurity, the hopes of Pakistan’s people over their futures have also floundered, causing the percentage of the people who are very hopeful of the future to fall down by eighteen percent from the value in 1989.

Despite the return of democracy to Pakistan, the massive corruption inherent in the administrative organs of the state has caused Pakistan’s social and economic condition to greatly suffer. Successive governments have been unable to provide people with their basic rights, which include healthcare, food security, education, employment, sanitation, justice and most importantly, security. Pakistan’s problems have been expounded by the ongoing energy crisis. Persistent power outages have caused untold misery to Pakistan’s urban and particularly its rural population. With no end in sight to Pakistan’s problems, a large proportion of Pakistan’s population has become apathetic towards its future, with a resounding 31% people saying that they are neither hopeful nor hopeless. Many people have probably begun to believe that is foolish to hope for the better. This mindset has also been driven in part into the people by the country’s print and electronic media. These days, there are at least more than ten Pakistani news channels which daily highlight and reiterate the various instances of corruption , mismanagement and terrorism occurring throughout. This constant barraging of information by the media has led

to a further disillusionment of the Pakistani people towards their future, which is tied inextricably to the future of Pakistan.

A plethora of political, social and economic hurdles during the recent history of Pakistan have culminated to cause the public to question the prosperity of Pakistan's future. The people of Pakistan have overall become less optimistic about the future of Pakistan over the course of two and a half decades. Perhaps the most significant culprit has been the worsening security situation in the country, as terrorist attacks have wreaked havoc in Pakistan, taking the lives not just of soldiers and security personnel, but even of little school going children. These events have culminated in a lack of optimism among Pakistanis regarding the future of their country and have subsequently made them less hopeful of their own individual future, which has also now been empirically proven by the findings of Gallup Pakistan.