

Gallup Pakistan History Project - **Weekend Read 11** ‘**Pakistani Emigrants: Changing Public Perceptions:** by Murad Javed (Research Fellow, Gallup Pakistan History Project)

Migration is a vital strategy for many to survive, explore, and procreate. The story of human migration begins with the very origins of human existence on earth. The first humans traversed the planet by migrating from one place to the next, in search of food and shelter. This ancient human practice of migration still remains a vital strategy for survival and procreation for millions. In contemporary times, migration is an omnipresent and permanent feature of human civilizations. Individuals and families move within cities, between regions, across states and continents as a means to surviving and finding pathways to meaningful livelihoods. This is especially true for countries with large populations with developing economies. This state of affairs places a limitation on resources, as well as the access to them, thereby pushing citizens into migrating towards new horizons to find opportunities and resources to build livelihoods.

Pakistan is well-acquainted with process and experience of migration. The country’s very foundation was steeped in an epochal and grand migration of humans in South Asia, as the subcontinent was carved into India and Pakistan in 1947. Pakistani citizens have moved within the country, as well as to new countries in large numbers over the last 67 years. With a rapidly increasing population, and an economy always struggling to provide enough for a large population, the state and the people of Pakistan have adopted and internalized migration as an indispensable strategy for survival. The state witnessed the substantial and rapid expansion in the population base, and the labour forces, and recognized that the national economy could not provide enough employment for all Pakistanis. It was during the 1970s that the Pakistani Government actively sought bilateral agreements with foreign countries (particularly with growing Middle Eastern states with immense oil wealth) to accommodate Pakistani workers. This strategy opened up the channels for millions of Pakistanis to emigrate from the country over the last few decades. Today, Pakistan remains one of the top countries in the world with a large emigrant population, as well as one of the largest recipients of substantial foreign exchange remittances from overseas Pakistanis.

Recent evidence indicates that a substantial proportion of Pakistan's labour force has emigrated from the country in the last few years. The 2010 Migration and Remittances Factbook published by the World Bank, ranks Pakistan 7th in the list of Top Emigration Countries, with a total of 4.7 million Pakistanis residing abroad.¹ The number of Pakistanis moving abroad has been on an upward trajectory in the last 8 years or so. The International Labour Organization's data shows that between 2008 and 2013, a total of 2.8 million Pakistanis emigrated abroad – with Saudi Arabia and UAE the most favoured destinations.² Given the size of this substantial overseas Pakistani population, it comes as no surprise that Pakistan also ranks highly in terms of the list of top recipient countries for foreign remittances. In 2013, Pakistan ranked 8th in the world with a new of USD \$15 billion worth of foreign remittances flowing into the country, which accounted for 137% of the total foreign exchange reserves.³ Between July and October last year, overseas Pakistanis sent home a total of USD \$4.69 billion.⁴

While the economic causes and consequences of foreign migration are well-understood and widely-discussed in Pakistan, the sociological and cultural understanding of this phenomenon is often overlooked. In particular, discussions on this subject lack empirical evidence on the kinds of cultural perspectives and sociological opinions formed by the Pakistani public on the relationship and understanding of Pakistani emigrants. With a large emigrant population base, many Pakistanis have first or second-hand experience of having someone in their social network that lives and works abroad. However, a more grounded and holistic understanding emerges from studying and observing Gallup Pakistan's invaluable public opinion tracking on the subject. Gallup Pakistan has asked Pakistani citizens living in the country about Pakistani emigrants since the early 1980s. This discussion features a particular question that has been asked at two points (1983 and 2014) to assess the opinions and understanding of Pakistani citizens about those citizens who have emigrated from the country.

Specifically, Gallup Pakistan asked a representative sample of Pakistanis across the country the following query: *Different things are said about those people who have gone abroad when*

¹ <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1199807908806/Top10.pdf>

² http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-islamabad/documents/publication/wcms_241600.pdf

³ <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1288990760745/MigrationandDevelopmentBrief21.pdf>

⁴ <http://tribune.com.pk/story/776017/remittances-grow-19-5-hit-4-69b/>

comparing them to those who have not gone abroad. Following are a few such statements. To what extent do you think that they are correct?

Pakistani emigrants are more intelligent

Pakistani emigrants like to boast

Pakistani emigrants do not care much about the members of their households

Pakistani emigrants are more hardworking

Pakistani emigrants love their country less

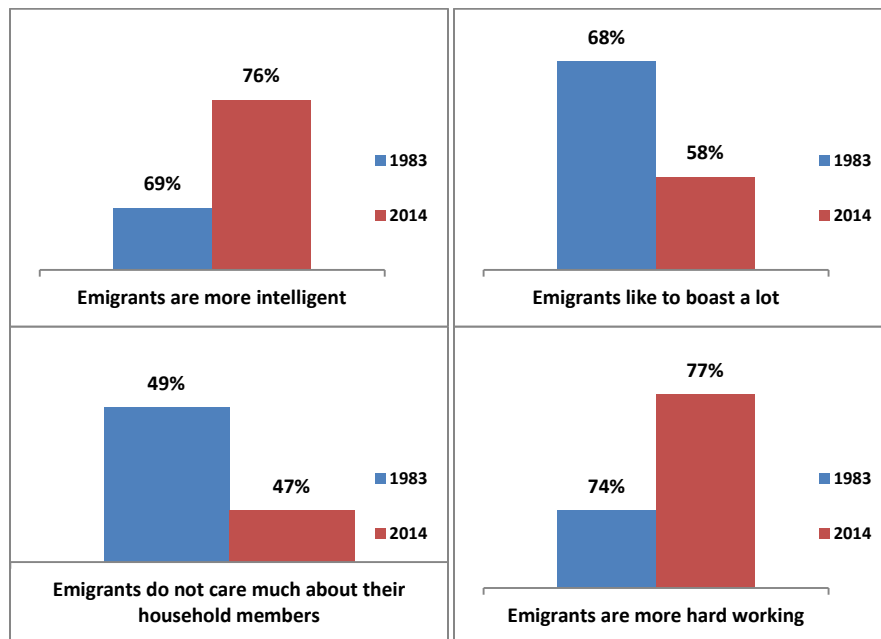
Pakistani emigrants have no worth in their adopted countries

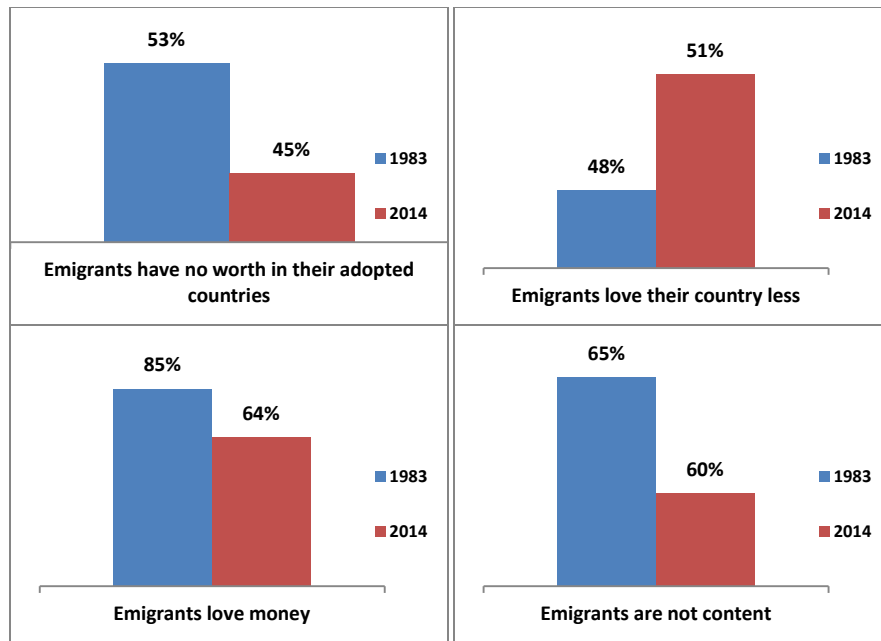
Pakistani emigrants love money

Pakistani emigrants are not content

Pakistani emigrants do not treat their women well

These statements were selected to assess the degree to which Pakistanis frequently associate with and attempt to understand the lives and experiences of emigrants. The data from these highly intriguing queries is shown below:





The data shown in these figures is indicative of the significant changes that have taken root in Pakistan's society over the last thirty years. Collectively, it shows that over the last three decades Pakistanis have generally become more positive about emigrants from the country. This shift is noticeable in the decline in agreement with negative statements, and increase in agreement with positive evaluations of emigrant Pakistanis. The single largest increase has been registered on the statement that "Pakistani emigrants are more intelligent", increasing from 69% in 1983 to 76% in 2014. This increase reflects the assessment by most Pakistanis regarding emigrants having greater intelligence and qualifications than their peers. More interestingly, it could be hypothesized, that this belief is reflective of the tenor of outward migration from Pakistan over the last few years i.e. anecdotal evidence indicates that more and more Pakistanis with superior qualifications and professional backgrounds are seeking foreign homes. Secondary data from other sources could confirm this observation. The public opinion shift gauged here shows that Pakistani might be experiencing a brain drain – a phenomenon that has been identified and assessed on different forums. If this is indeed the case, then Pakistan and its policymakers need to be alarmed regarding the loss of valuable human resource from the country. Furthermore, this evidence could implicate the continuing failure of the economy and state to accommodate citizens within the country, rather than facilitating push factors that propel them into emigrating abroad.

Similarly, more Pakistanis now think that emigrants are hardworking individuals. In 1983, 74% Pakistanis viewed emigrants as hardworking, while in 2014, this proportion has increased to 77%. In continuation of the aforementioned observation, this increase could be indicative of the economic and livelihood challenges faced by Pakistanis here at home. Pakistanis who move abroad for employment and permanent residence are seen as individuals who sacrifice their homes, social networks, and loved ones to make a living for their households.

The other statements tracked by Gallup Pakistan are negative in nature. There has been an across the board decline on all, barring one: Pakistani emigrants love their country less. The proportion of Pakistanis who agree with this statement has increased from 48% in 1983 to 51% in 2014. This slight increase raises crucial questions about how the society at home understands and interprets the decision of Pakistanis to emigrate. While viewing these individuals as hardworking and intelligent, as well as seeing them less negatively on other factors, the increase on this metric could indicate that at some level, Pakistani citizens see those who leave as having left their homes and country; escaping and avoiding the challenges that are faced by millions of ordinary Pakistanis still eking out a living in the country. Another possible explanation might emanate from Pakistani politics over the last five to eight years. The issue of allowing emigrant Pakistanis the right to vote and contest in Elections has been a thorny and divisive one. While overseas Pakistanis can be legally facilitated in voting, and indeed have the right to return to Pakistan to vote, they are barred from contesting in Elections. Negative rhetoric around this dichotomy has emanated from the highest institutions, including the Supreme Court of Pakistan. This negative political sentiment is based on the assumption that overseas Pakistanis have voluntarily moved abroad, and in most cases, where they seek foreign residence, are loyal to a different country's laws and regulations. This Pakistani state seems to sanction Pakistanis who avail this outcome of migrating abroad by restricting them from participating in politics. Over the last few years, several high profile public cases and debates have accused overseas Pakistanis as being unfit to be loyal political leaders and elected office-bearers for the state. While the contradictions inherent in this rhetoric are interesting, it could explain the increase in the negative public assessment with regards to emigrant Pakistanis' love and loyalty for Pakistan.

Migration is deeply intertwined with the origins and the current state of Pakistan. Millions of Pakistanis have migrated abroad in search of shelter, succor, and security. For scholars of migration patterns and changes in migratory trends, this data could provide useful longitudinal insights into how Pakistanis at home view, frame, and assess their countrymen and women who have left their homes and moved abroad.