

Perspectives on climate change : Some Trends from Gallup Pakistan History Project Polls Data by **Abdullah Waqar Tajwar**, Research Intern at Gallup Pakistan History Project

Abstract : Climate change is a phenomenon that has been increasingly referred to as a crisis in recent years. It is perhaps the only such crisis that is not peculiar to a particular nation or region, but is in fact independent of all natural and manmade borders. It is an issue that concerns the entire earth, for it threatens the existence of all living things that make their home in it. Climate change is predominantly replaced with global warming. Both terms are akin to each other since the issue of climate change revolves around a rise in the average temperatures of the earth, which can lead to adverse and potentially fatal impacts on the earth's environment. The consequences of global warming are manifold. It has been extensively researched and documented that climate change will cause our sea levels to rise and our polar ice caps to disintegrate more rapidly, thus increasing the risk of floods, fires, storms and droughts. As instances of these climatic catastrophes become more frequent, the landscape of the earth will alter, thus severely affecting mankind, incurring acute social and economic losses as well as permanent changes to the earth's ecology which may in turn lead to a food crisis for mankind, as various crops, plants and animal species are driven to their extinction by higher temperatures. Needless to say, global warming does not bode well for the earth and for mankind. However, it is important to explicate man's connection to climate change, since the impending disaster that we refer to as global warming is in actuality a phenomenon kindled by the actions of man in the not too distant past.

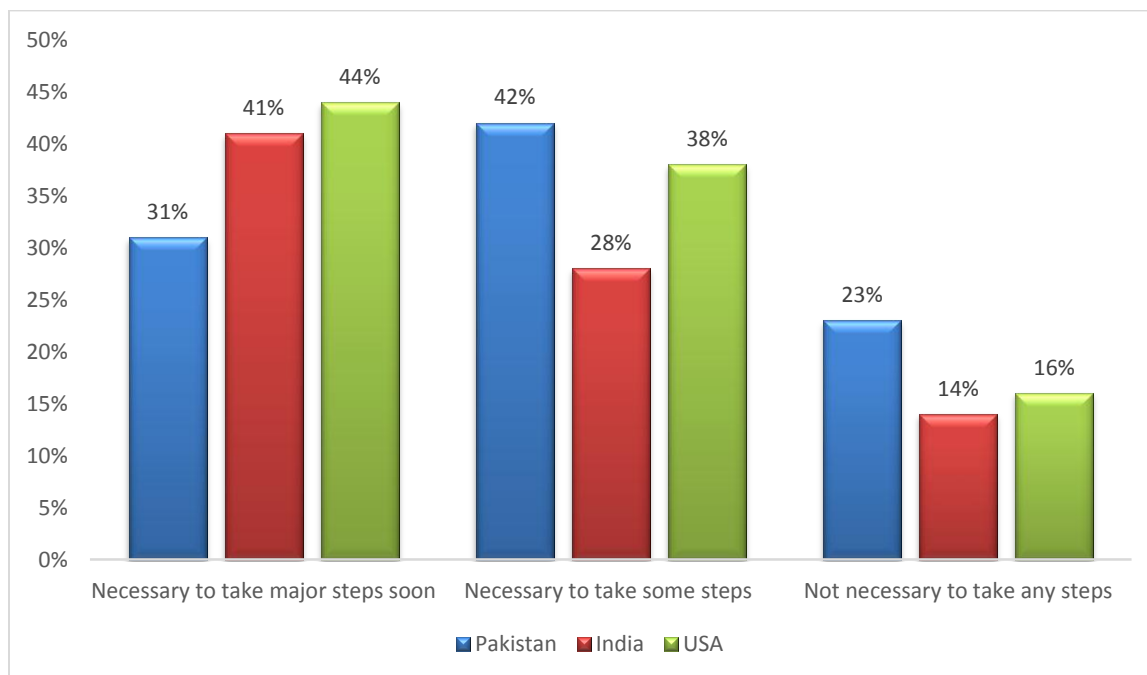
Man's relationship with the environment was altered dramatically in the aftermath of an event of cataclysmic proportions in the history of the earth. It was the Industrial revolution. An event that began in the early 18th century, it would lead to a permanent change in how mankind lived and functioned and how it treated the earth, continuing into the present day. The effects of the Industrial Revolution were profound, from human and technological developments, better health care and life expectancy, the usage of natural resources for harnessing energy and driving technological innovation, pollution and sanitation, all the way to the modern day consumer

society. Perhaps the most significant aspect of the Industrial Revolution was the harnessing of fossil fuels for producing energy. The world as we know it today revolves around fossil fuels, such as coal and oil. They do not just drive our cars, they power our televisions, our air conditioners, our stoves and kettles, our computers and cell phones; literally shaping a person's life in today's world. However, this hasn't been their only contribution. The burning of fossil fuels produces massive amounts of carbon dioxide, which is a greenhouse gas. Greenhouse gases, as any elementary geography book will be to tell, cause the Greenhouse Effect. In the Greenhouse Effect, greenhouse gases act like earth's blanket, trapping the heat leaving the earth in the atmosphere, thereby preventing its loss into space and causing the temperatures to get higher than they should. Since pre-industrial times, the atmospheric concentration of Carbon Dioxide has risen exponentially. Some volcanic eruptions released large quantities of CO₂ in the distant past. However, the U.S. Geological Survey reports that human activities now emit more than 135 times as much CO₂ as volcanoes each year.

This, coupled with relentless global deforestation over the years to cater to the materialistic needs of an ever increasing population has meant that man, while producing abnormal amounts of greenhouse gases, has simultaneously reduced the Earth's natural air filters, namely trees. The second most significant impact of the Industrial revolution has been on the global world population. World population, which numbered in the millions before the dawn of the revolution has sky rocketed exponentially to an astounding 7 billion. As has been already established, an increasing population means an increasing demand for natural resources, food, energy etc. as well as an increase in waste products. Currently, the world's population is showing no signs of slowing down, thus implying that the world's temperatures will continue to rise. Thus, man's connection to climate change has now been firmly established. Therefore, several theories, initiatives and projects have sprung up all over the world in order to curtail global warming by making man's progress sustainable. However, the endeavor to achieve environmental sustainability is a responsibility that falls on all nations and their people.

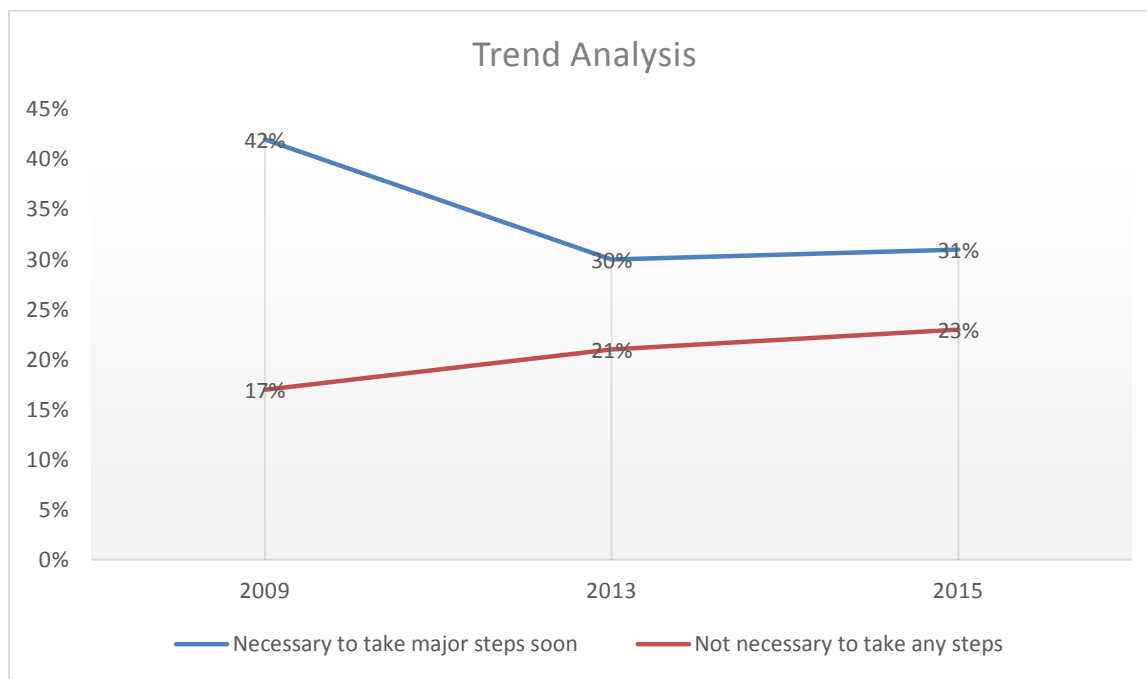
It therefore becomes important to observe just how seriously states and their citizens are taking the issue of climate change. In order to assess the seriousness of people towards addressing the issue of climate change, GlobesScan Canada conducted a study in twenty four countries. Gallup Pakistan conducted the fieldwork for this survey in Pakistan. The survey question specifically

asked the nationally representative sample of Pakistani adult men and women: ‘As you may know there is some discussion these days about whether it is necessary to take steps to reduce the impact of human activities that are thought to cause global warming or climate change. Would you say that you believe that . . . ?’ In response to this question, 31% of the respondents believed that it is necessary to take major steps very soon; 42% of the population of Pakistan felt that it was necessary to take some steps, whereas 23% of the public believed that it was not necessary to take any steps. From the results of this survey carried out in twenty four countries, a mean percentage of the aforementioned responses to the survey question across twenty countries were calculated. Accordingly, it was the average response of 53% of the public that it was necessary to take major steps soon. In comparison to the average, 22% fewer Pakistanis are of the belief that immediate steps need to be taken in order to address climate change. The statistics for Pakistan on this survey have been compared in a table shown below with India and the United States of America, two other countries also surveyed by GlobeScan to figure out the opinion of their public regarding curtailing human activities causing or contributing to global warming.



As can be seen from the percentages in the chart above, Pakistan does not fare well against either India or the United States, when it comes to climate change and global warming. In comparison

with 44% of the American public and 41% of the Indian citizenry, only 31% Pakistanis believe that it is imperative to take major steps against human activities contributing to global warming. For the segment of the population that felt it wasn't necessary to take any steps against climate change, Pakistan ranked in at the bottom as well. A resounding 23% of Pakistanis felt this way, in comparison to just 14% for India and 16% for the US. Before delving into the probable reasons behind a seeming antipathy of the Pakistani public towards global warming, it is worthwhile to also analyze the time-series trend of the percentage of people who feel the need to address climate change on an imminent basis, which has been made available by Gallup Pakistan's invaluable archive of historical polling data. The polling data collected from National Surveys on this issue of climate change on the years 2009, 2013 and 2015 are shown in a



The trend for the people who believed it was necessary to take major steps soon to overcome global warming reduced from 42% in 2009 to 30% in 2013 before settling at 31% in 2015. Furthermore, the percentage of the Pakistani public which felt that it was not necessary to take any steps regarding climate change rose from 17% in 2009 to 21% in 2013 and 23% in 2015. This trend analysis also serves to reiterate the lack of importance given to the issue of climate change by the people of Pakistan over a span of six years.

A number of probable conclusions can be formulated based upon the results of this study as well as the trend shown above. It will not be an over exaggeration to claim that these last six years have not been kind to the people of Pakistan. The root of the problems that the people have been facing throughout this time stem primarily from terrorism. The year 2009 in Pakistan is remembered mainly for reasons threatening the internal security of the state. The Taliban had managed a successful insurgency in the Swat Valley, a heavenly place for tourists that had famously been dubbed by Queen Elizabeth II as the Switzerland of the East. The Taliban had overrun Swat already in 2007, displacing thousands upon thousands of Pakistanis living in the district, thus causing a massive humanitarian crisis in the country, as the state hopelessly scrambled to rehabilitate these Internally Displaced People. Despite an extensive military operation by the Pakistan Army that was already running into its third year in 2009, the situation had not gotten better. The Taliban had more or less successfully fended off the army inflicting a high number of casualties in the process. Furthermore, the Taliban had attained immunity against further military action by making a peace agreement with the civilian government of the Pakistan People's Party, causing even more fear among the people of Pakistan. Seeing the Pakistani Army struggle this way had further sapped the morale of the public. However, the Army would launch another offensive against the Taliban in April of 2009, retaking the Swat Valley from the militants once more, security threats would still remain and it would be a while before tourists would begin to visit the Swat Valley again. Furthermore, by 2007, terrorist attacks had become alarmingly frequent in all parts of the country, and they would continue to occur at an alarming rate and at a devastating magnitude, up to 2014. Terrorist attacks of a sectarian nature would also become commonplace, inflicting serious harm on the social fabric of the Pakistani society. If one were to provide a list of even the major terrorist attacks to have occurred in this time span of six years, the list would span a couple of pages whereas the number of innocents murdered in these attacks would easily number in the thousands, such has been the devastation that has been brought upon the people of Pakistan by terrorism. Therefore, it only makes common sense to assume that climate change and global warming would hardly figure as a serious concern in the minds of the Pakistani public, who have been craving for peace and lasting security for themselves and their fellow citizens, having seen their fellow citizens, friends, relatives and family members become victims of terrorism. Such has been the security situation in Pakistan over these past couple of years, that it has become difficult to prioritize anything else other than

this. A semblance of security has only just started to seep back into the eyes of the public, after the relative successes of the Operation Zar e Azb, launched by the Pakistan Army in 2013, which has reduced the incidence of terrorist attacks in Pakistan.

However, terrorism is not the only problem that the people of Pakistan have had to face, though it does have a tangible link to a majority of other problems that are associated to Pakistan.

Pakistan's sorry socio-economic state has also been a cause of major concern for Pakistanis.

Pakistan is still under the grip of basic social problems of rampant illiteracy, poverty, lack of basic healthcare, massive unemployment, child labor, corruption, victimization of women, religious conservatism engendering extremism and terrorism, and the list would go on. These aren't imaginary problems and nor can anyone say that these problems aren't that severe, because they actually are. Despite it being 2015, Pakistan still suffers from the ignominy of still not being polio-free. An outright majority of the Pakistani population lives in villages, where they still do not have access to quality education, healthcare, sanitation, clean food and water, and a lack of law and order among other things. There is still an outright majority of the population of all four provinces of Pakistan that is Food Insecure. Needless to say, these are the basic needs to life, which are not fulfilled for the majority of the Pakistani public even to this day. To add to the misery of both Urban and rural diaspora, regular power outages have become a consistent feature of everyday life. A lack of electricity in Pakistan has had adverse economic impacts, causing industries to suffer massively, thus furthering the trajectory of Pakistan's development. Power outages, coupled with the impact of terrorism on investment and corrupt governments, have further crippled Pakistan's economy. What is even more distressing is the cognizance of the fact that these fundamental problems see no signs of resolving in the near future.

Hence, in lieu of this knowledge on the current plight of the Pakistani public, it appears rational that only a small percentage of the population believes that major initiatives should be taken to combat global warming. For the majority of Pakistanis, however, global warming is only a problem that they can contend with in a distant future, provided that they are able to attain their basic needs by then. Though the threat of global warming is real and concerns all humanity, the sad reality is that states like Pakistan, which are beset by more foundational issues, cannot do much about it. To conclude, for a person who spends every night unsure about whether he will

be able to put up a meal for himself and his family tomorrow cannot be reasonably expected by anyone to delve even briefly on issues of climate change. Unless the plight of that person can be adequately addressed, Climate Change will never be able to take center stage, in any policy discussion.