

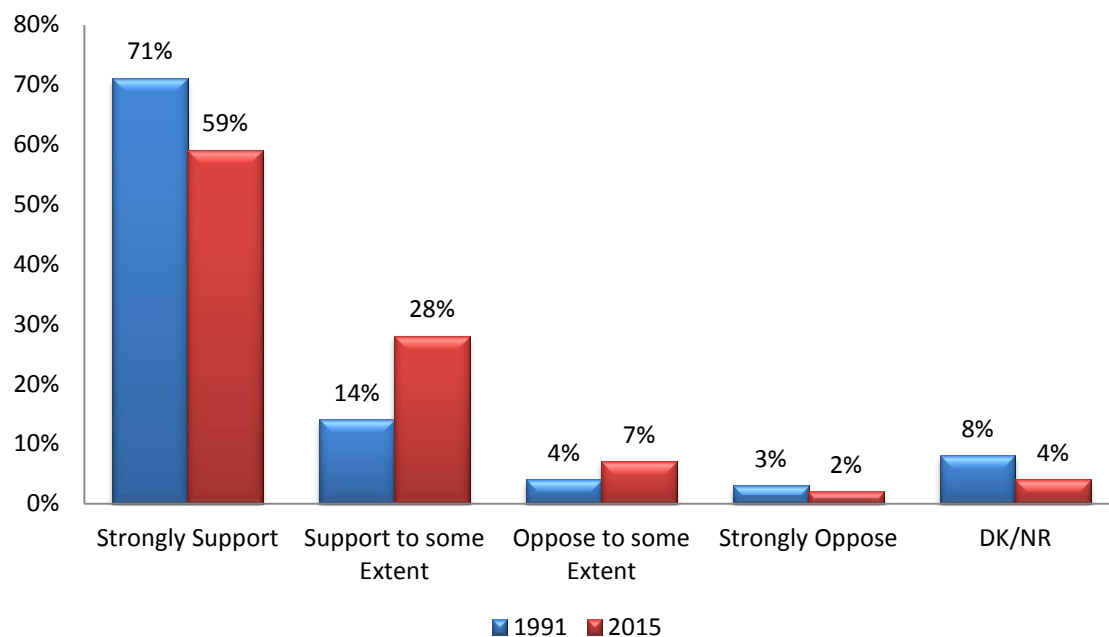
Gallup Pakistan History Project's Weekend

Read 32: Public Opinion on Pakistan's Nuclear Technology Program: Some Trends from Gallup Pakistan History Project Polls Data by Abdullah Tajwar, Research Executive at Gallup Pakistan

*Abstract: The analysis presented in this article is predicated on the empirical **findings of three surveys carried out by Gallup Pakistan** with the intent of gauging changes in public opinion regarding Pakistan's Nuclear Technology Program. The first survey, compiled and presented by Gallup Pakistan's History Project provides the change in public opinion regarding the production of nuclear weapons. This survey was first conducted in 1991 and again in 2015. A representative sample of the population was asked: "Some people believe that Pakistan should build nuclear weapons as they are a necessity while others believe that Pakistan should not build nuclear weapons. Please tell, to what extent do you support or oppose the building of nuclear weapons in Pakistan?" in the year 1991 (24 years ago), 71% Pakistanis strongly supported the building of nuclear armament and 14% supported it to some extent. On the other hand, 4% opposed it, 3% strongly opposed it and 8% had no opinion. In 2015, 59% of the respondents said that they strongly supported building nuclear weapons and 28% said that they supported it to some extent. On the other hand, 7% of the respondents said that they opposed it to some extent and 2% strongly opposed it. 4% did not respond. The second survey was part of a Global Snap Poll undertaken in 47 countries on a global sample of over 34,000 people by WIN-Gallup International in March-April 2011 on the question of the earthquake in Japan and its impact on views on Nuclear Energy. For Pakistan, support for nuclear energy dropped from 55% to 53% following the earthquake whereas opposition towards harnessing Nuclear Energy changed from 24% to 27% after the events in Japan. For the third survey, A nationally representative sample of men and women from across the four provinces was asked "Almost 14 years after Pakistan's nuclear tests, do you feel the country took the right step in taking this initiative?" Responding to this, 69% said it was the right step and 16% said it was wrong. However, 15% did not give a response.*

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Gallup Pakistan's History Project provides an illuminating picture on the changing trends in Pakistani society on a plethora of issues. Regarding the question of Pakistan developing a nuclear weapons arsenal and gauging the shift in public opinion on it, Gallup Pakistan conducted a survey in 1991 and also in 2015 whereby a nationally representative sample of the Pakistani public was asked the following question. **"Some people believe that Pakistan should build nuclear weapons as they are a necessity while others believe that Pakistan should not build nuclear weapons. Please tell, to what extent do you support or oppose the building of nuclear weapons in Pakistan?"** The results that have been unearthed in both 1991 and 2015 have been presented in a tabular form in order to elucidate the change in public opinion on the controversial issue of nuclear arms build-up over a time span of 24 years.



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

As can be seen from the bar chart, **the obvious conclusion that can be drawn is one of overwhelming support among the public regarding the development and growth of Pakistan's nuclear weapons.** Even though the proportion of the public strongly supporting nuclear weaponry fell from 71 percent to 59%, the segment of Pakistanis in partial support of this buildup of nuclear weapons doubled from 14 percent to 28 percent. Furthermore, the proportion of the people strongly opposing nuclear weapons in fact fell from 3 percent in 1991 to 2 percent in 2015

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whereas the public in partial opposition to nuclear weapons rose by 3 percent from 4 percent in 1991 to just 7 percent of the total population in 2015. **Overall, it can be concluded that the proportion of the public in support of nuclear weapons, both partial and strong, actually rose by a net level of 2 percent** in a time span of twenty four years. Despite being separated by a time period of 24 years, it can be seen that the Pakistani public is still very much in support of more nuclear weapons for Pakistan.

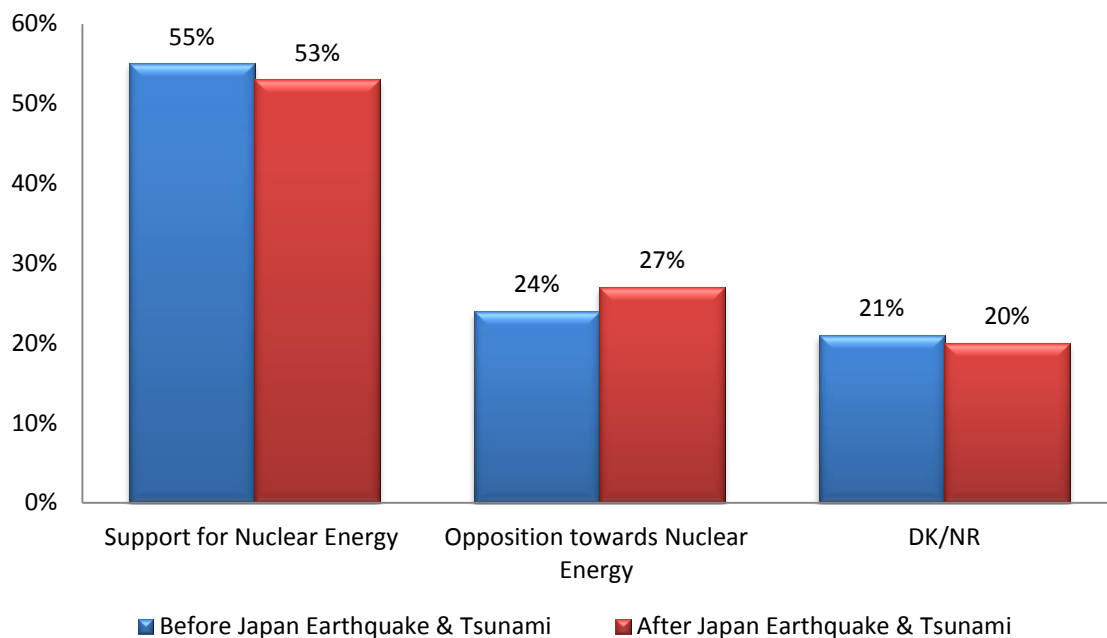
What is interesting is that the public has remained upbeat on developing nuclear technology even in light of certain accidents that occurred over the world preceding the years in which this survey was conducted. Two accidents in particular shook the entire world upon occurring and were classified as level 7 (the maximum level that is assigned to the most severe cases of nuclear accidents) on the International Nuclear and Radiological Events Scale introduced by the International Atomic Energy Agency in 1990.¹ A couple of years before 1991, disaster had struck in the city of Pripyat in Ukraine, then under the political writ of the USSR, when an accident of catastrophic proportions took place at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in 1986. Multiple explosions within the nuclear core resulted in the expulsion of massive quantities of radioactive particles in the atmosphere, thus causing the immediate evacuation of all residents of Pripyat and adjoining areas to locations far from the radioactive zone. The accident at Chernobyl remains to this day the worst incident related to nuclear power plants. It showed the whole world the extent of the risk associated with harnessing nuclear energy as well as the harmful effects of nuclear radiation. The abandoned city of Pripyat stands today as a ghastly reminder of the terrible risk that nuclear energy entails. Another incident of a similar magnitude occurred in 2011 at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in Japan. A tsunami, resulting from a massive earthquake, struck the eastern coast of Japan and flooded the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant, resulting in equipment failure which subsequently caused a nuclear meltdown and a release of an ominous quantity of radioactive particles into the atmosphere. Resultantly, this also led to a large scale evacuation of people living within the limits of the contamination zone for protection from radiation exposure which has been known to cause the growth of cancers in people. The incidents at Fukushima once again exposed the world to the dangers associated with Nuclear energy. There are many other countries that, upon witnessing the risk associated with this form of energy, have begun to decommission their reactors and power plants, with Germany being one such country that has begun the decommissioning process.

In Pakistan, however, despite the events in Japan, the view of the public, even regarding the civilian use of Nuclear Technology remained positive. This claim comes from empirical evidence provided by a worldwide survey conducted by WIN-Gallup International in 47 countries including Pakistan in 2011 to

¹ (International Atomic Energy Agency 2011)

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gauge the change in opinion of people regarding Nuclear Energy in the aftermath of the incident in Japan. In this survey it was found that although **global net support for nuclear energy experienced a sharp decline from a significant 25 percent to a mere 6 percent, in Pakistan, however, the public approval and support for nuclear energy continued to remain stable**. Support for Nuclear Energy before the Japan Earthquake was 55 percent whereas it dropped by only 2 percent after the Earthquake. Thus, public support for harnessing nuclear technology for purposes of energy remained positive for the majority of Pakistanis even after witnessing the events unfolding at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. The complete results of this survey for Pakistan are presented in a bar chart to enable complete comparison between public opinion before and after the calamity in Japan.

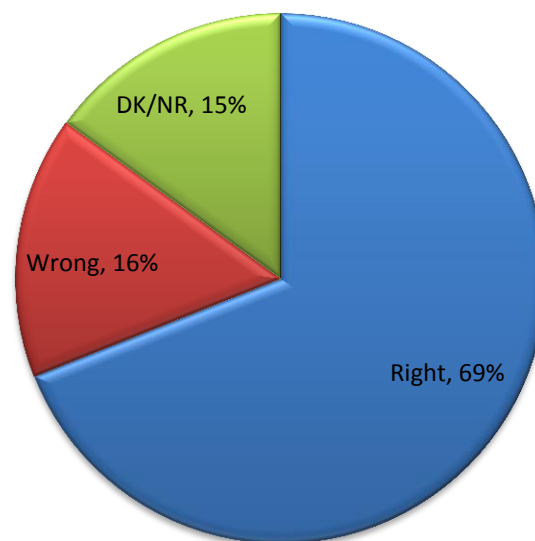


Source: Global Snap Poll in 47 countries by WIN-Gallup International (March 21-April 10, 2011)

The opinion that an average Pakistani holds regarding Pakistan's nuclear weapons capability can be empirically encapsulated in a poll conducted by the Gilani Research Foundation at the end of June 2013. The survey, carried out among a sample of 2606 men and women in rural and urban areas of all four provinces of Pakistan at an error margin of 2-3% at the 95% confidence level, asked the following question. **"Almost 14 years after Pakistan's nuclear tests, do you feel the country took the right step in taking this initiative?"** This question refers to the successful tests conducted by Pakistan in May of 1998

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in the district of Chagai in Baluchistan Province. These events are etched in the memory of every citizen of the country for they proclaimed Pakistan's status as the only Muslim country in the world to possess nuclear weapons. The response by a majority of the population was overwhelmingly positive. **An astounding proportion of 69 percent were of the unflinching opinion that this was indeed a right step taken by Pakistan all those years ago.** Conversely, a mere 16 percent said that it was a wrong step that Pakistan took in that time. A relatively high percentage of the population (15%), however, chose not to respond to this question. A pie chart of these findings is given to further elucidate the stark difference between the majority and the minority regarding Pakistan's successful nuclear tests.



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

Keeping in line with the spirit of the 'weekend read', the results produced by the surveys mentioned above need to be explained within the context of Pakistan's socio-political atmosphere. Perhaps the most significant step towards understanding these persistently high approval ratings among the Pakistani public for developing nuclear technology requires delving into Pakistan's relations with India. Ever since the disintegration of the British Empire of South Asia into independent states of Pakistan and India, the relationship between these two nation states, for the most part, has been an uneasy one. The basis of this rocky relationship lies within an understanding of the history of partition of the

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Subcontinent and is thus not relevant to this article. The fact that hostilities have historically existed between India and Pakistan, not to mention three full scale wars fought in less than a century, is enough to claim that Pakistan and her people have tended to view India primarily as a threat to the sovereignty of Pakistan. Therefore, in lieu of a major security concern posed by India, public opinion in Pakistan is bound to be in support of all measures that aid in ensuring Pakistan's safety and security. As it so happens, nuclear weapons do exactly that. The world has regretfully been a witness to the shocking extent of devastation caused by an atomic bomb at the time of the Second World War. Therefore, if two nuclear weapon possessing countries were to engage in a nuclear war, the certainty of destruction would be absolute. **Therefore, it is this threat of 'Mutually Assured Destruction' that makes the nuclear bomb a rather effective deterrent to war.** Though there are both sides to this Nuclear Deterrence Theory, however, in the case of the sub-continent, the efficacy of a nuclear weapon's deterrence capability cannot be understated. This makes it easier to make sense of the unflinching seal of approval given by an outright majority of Pakistan's public to the decision undertaken by Pakistan to conduct nuclear tests in 1998. Despite debilitating economic sanctions being imposed on Pakistan coupled with increasing international isolation in the wake of these tests, the Pakistani public still feels that attaining nuclear weapons capability was worth suffering the economic uncertainty and hardship that came along with that capacity. Therefore, these surveys conducted by Gallup Pakistan invariably lead to the conclusion that in the minds of Pakistanis, the concern regarding the nation's security trumps all other macro-level problems and areas associated to Pakistan. This overwhelming security concern is fuelled primarily by the aggression of India towards Pakistan, which continues to the present day in the form of recurring border skirmishes, the disputed issue of Kashmir as well as the recent spate of intolerance overtly exercised by right wing Hindu organizations like the Shiv Sena against Pakistanis coming to India as well as against India's sizeable Muslim minority. However, that is not to overlook or trivialize the role played by the Pakistani State in popularizing this anti India narrative over the course of Pakistan's history as well as in the present day which further adds to the seeming security threat posed by India towards Pakistan.

Conclusion

These surveys serve to illustrate the continuing support and approval enjoyed by Nuclear Energy as well as weaponry in Pakistan. It has been effectively argued that the basis of this continued support lies predominantly in the fact that nuclear weapons greatly aid in guaranteeing immunity from any possible attack on Pakistan, whether it be India or any other external threat to the sovereignty of Pakistan. Notwithstanding the significant risk associated with harnessing this technology and the potential threat of the limitless devastation that a serious nuclear accident can cause, the public of Pakistan continues to put its store in nuclear technology with the intent of furthering the country's nuclear stockpile as well as fulfilling Pakistan's energy requirements.

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