

Gallup Pakistan

Latest Press Release

PUBLIC PULSE ON ELECTIONS AND OTHER RAGING ISSUES

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PUBLIC PULSE ON ELECTIONS AND OTHER RAGING ISSUES

The year 2008 is marked by reverberations from the past. While circumstances surrounding the assassination of PPP Chairperson, Ms. Benazir Bhutto, remain largely unsolved, there is continuing uncertainty about the February General Elections, despite repeated assurances to the contrary by the President of Pakistan, General (Rtd.) Pervez Musharraf. A severe atta (wheat) crisis has gripped the country leading the interim Government to issue “Rashan” (grocery) cards, even as the source of the wheat crisis remains ambiguous.

In the midst of all this, PML (N) leader Nawaz Sharif’s four proposals to give credence to the electoral process have not come as a surprise to the general public. In a press conference on January 16, 2008 he asked for President Musharraf to resign, the formation of a new Caretaker Government of National Consensus in consultation with all Political Parties, reconstitution of the Election Commission headed by Justice Rana Bhagwandas, and calling of fresh General Elections under a new poll schedule.

Gallup Pakistan asked more than 1300 men and women in all the four provinces of the country spanning cities, large and small towns and villages what they think about these emerging socio-political issues and found some revealing results. In the most recent nationwide polls carried out on January 19-20, 2008 and a week later on January 26-27, 2008, the fieldwork was carried out face-to-face and the error margin is estimated to be in the range of $\pm 3-5\%$ at 95% confidence level. Details on the sample are provided at the end.

Note: In figures not adding up to 100 %, the remaining are those who did not respond, unless otherwise mentioned.

The polls addressed the following issues:

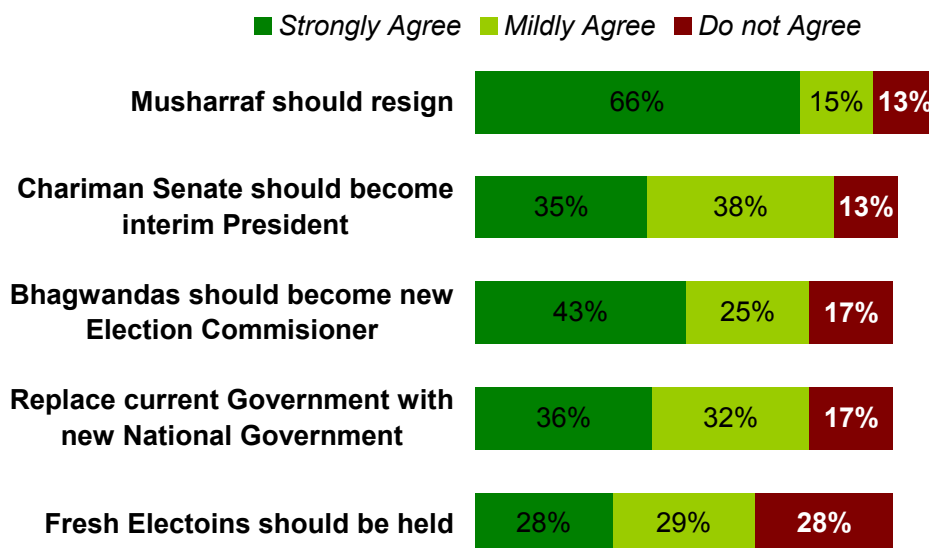
1. Public perceptions on exhuming Ms. Benazir Bhutto’s body
2. Public perceptions on Mr. Nawaz Sharif’s new set of proposals.
3. Public perceptions on Elections scheduled for February 18, 2008
4. Public perceptions on the Atta (Wheat) Crisis
5. Controversy around the person of President General Pervez Musharraf

Public Perceptions on Exhuming Ms. Benazir Bhutto's Body

Various investigation teams as well as the State have cited a number of reasons as the possible causes behind the tragic death of Benazir Bhutto on December 27, 2008 in Rawalpindi. While the PPP asserts that its Chairperson was shot dead, state investigation teams claim that it was a fatal blow to the head that caused her demise. Mr. Asif Zardari, Benazir Bhutto's husband and the Co-Chairperson of PPP, ruled out the possibility of an exhumation. When respondents were asked, "In your view, should Benazir Bhutto's body be exhumed for a postmortem" more than two-thirds of the respondents (69%) opposed any such measure, while only 29 % favored it. 2 % did not answer.

Confused Support for the Nawaz Formula on the Elections

National respondents were asked to give their opinion on whether they agree, mildly agree or disagree with each individual proposal put forward in the Nawaz formula. The results were as follows.



Source: Surveys Gallup Pakistan, January 19-20, 2008

When asked, "Do you agree or disagree that General Pervez Musharraf should resign?" a clear majority of 81% said they agree (66% strongly agree, 15% mildly agree), while only 13% disagree. Support for this proposal was higher in the rural areas where 73% strongly agree, 15% mildly agree and only 9% did not agree.

Similar support appeared for the proposal to make the Chairman of Senate, the new interim President. However, it was not as unequivocally strong as in the case of Musharraf's resignation. While 35% said they strongly agree that Chairman of Senate should become the interim President, a slightly higher number, 38%, mildly agree. 13% did not agree at all. 15% of the respondents did not answer this question.

On the proposal to reconstitute the Election Commission, when respondents were asked, "Do you agree or disagree with the view that Justice Rana Bhagwandas should be made the new Election Commissioner", 78% said they agree (43% strongly, 25% mildly). 17% did not agree and 15% did not answer. Support for this view was lower in urban areas where only 53% of the respondents agree (30% strongly, 23% mildly) while 21% disagree and the rest did not answer.

The proposal to form of a new Caretaker Government based on a National Consensus also received high public support. While 36% agree strongly with the view that "the present Caretaker Government should be replaced by a new one in which PPP, PML (N), PML (Q); MMA and MQM, in other words all major political parties are represented", 32% agree mildly. 17% disagree.

The most interesting results were seen in response to the final proposal – calling fresh elections. When national respondents were asked, "Do you agree or disagree with the view that the new caretaker government should hold General Elections that are truly free sometime later this year instead of in February", close to one third of the respondents did not agree (28%). Support for this proposal rested at 28% strongly and 29% mildly agree. But the greatest opposition to this proposal came from supporters of PML-Q (37%) and surprisingly PML-N (35%).

CONFUSION ABOUT THE DESIRABILITY OF ELECTIONS OF FEBRUARY 18



Source: Surveys Gallup Pakistan, January 2008

Despite the convincing support to the Nawaz formula, polling data shows that the support is rather self-contradictory and confused in some ways. Thus, when asked, “In your view, would the forthcoming elections produce a fruitful political outcome” 67% answer ‘yes’, 13% say no and only 6% say the elections will further add to the political crisis. Thus a majority of the voters on the one hand support the Nawaz formula, which in effect devalues the ability of the forthcoming election in solving the current political crisis, and on the other hand expect a positive outcome from the February elections.

This confusion might reflect the ambiguity in the actions of political leadership itself. Thus Nawaz presents his formula, which devalues the elections yet actively participates in it and insists that PML-N will contest the elections.

In a way the voter here mirrors the political stance of the leadership. In both cases the bottom line is **Confusion on the political value of the Elections on February 18**. This confusion explains the apparent lack of interest in the election campaign.

Public Perceptions on the Atta (Wheat) Crisis

While political uncertainty prevails, during the past one month Atta (wheat) crisis had gripped the country but the exact nature of the crisis is not centered on the unavailability of this staple food item but its availability at exceedingly high prices. For 46% of the national respondents the most significant problem facing them while purchasing wheat was the availability of expensive wheat. For 20% of the respondents it was unavailability of the food item; 11% were most troubled by standing in queues while only 22% did not face any difficulties.

Addressing some of the concerns of the citizens, the Caretaker Prime Minister recently initiated a “Rashan Card Program”. Almost 80% of the respondents had heard or read about the new scheme (54%; 25%); 21% say they did not know about it. When whether this new scheme was a good or a bad method, only 37% of the respondents answered in an affirmative, for 41% it was a bad method, while 23% did not answer.

Although the wheat crisis has led to a shuffling of blame within the ranks of the previous government, public opinion on who is responsible for this crisis finds fault with wheat traders as well as the government. Respondents were asked, “Who in your opinion, is most responsible for the wheat crisis?” 44% believe President Musharraf is to blame, followed by 29% who think ‘Wheat Traders’ are responsible. While 14% blame the former Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz,

Former State Minister Pervaiz Elahi is considered responsible by 8% of the respondents. 4% gave various other options.

Controversy Around The Person Of President General Pervez Musharraf

While President Musharraf's claims to be necessary for the safety of the country from terrorist forces, he seems unsuccessful in the ability to project this image to the public. Respondents were asked, "In your opinion, will controlling acts of terrorism become easier or more difficult if Musharraf resigned". More than half of the respondents (56 %) believed that it would actually become easier while 25% said it would not have any effect. Only 17% of the respondents believed that Musharraf's resignation would make it more difficult to control acts of terrorism in the country. 2 % did not respond.

Sample Composition

Total $\approx$ 1300

BREAKDOWN

Province-wise

Punjab	n $\approx$	725	(54%)
Sindh	n $\approx$	350	(26%)
NWFP	n $\approx$	175	(13%)
Balochistan	n $\approx$	100	(7%)

Location-wise

Large Cities (over 2 million)	n $\approx$	300	(23%)
Medium Cities (over half a million)	n $\approx$	350	(27%)
Towns (Population 5000 plus)	n $\approx$	400	(31%)
Villages	n $\approx$	250	(19%)

Weighting:

The achieved sample is re-weighted to correspond with the census distribution of provincial and urban rural segments of Pakistani Population.

Note: There is a slight variation in the achieved number of respondents from survey to survey. The approximate breakdown (generally within 2-3% variation) is given above

Sampling Methodology

The findings are based on a national sample comprising a cross-section of Pakistani men and women age 18+, belonging to all provinces of Pakistan, its large and medium cities, towns and villages according to the approximate sizes noted above. The achieved sample is re-weighted to correspond with the census distribution of provincial and urban rural segments of Pakistani population. The sample was selected through multi-stage area probability sampling. The error margin for a sample of this type would be approximately $\pm 3-5\%$ at 95% confidence level. Fieldwork was carried out face to face during on January 19-20, 2008 and January 26-27, 2008.