



NATIONAL SECURITY VERSUS DEVELOPMENT -

What do the masses in Pakistan value more:
national security or educational development?

National Security versus Development

What do the masses in Pakistan value more: national security or educational development?

By: Iman Basit (Summer Intern- Batch 2)

Insights from polling surveys conducting by Gallup & Gilani (1980-2018)

Abstract: According to Bloomberg, in the 71 years of Pakistan's inception, its military has come to earn an annual income of \$1.5 billion with investments in multiple sectors of the economy and a 20% share in the GDP. This is an anomaly for a country that spends less than 5% of its GDP on social services like education and healthcare, where one-third of the population is under the poverty line, and which ranks 150 out of 189 on the Human Development Index. To understand this dichotomy, this paper will delineate the civil-military dynamics in Pakistan and discuss factors that led to the military's dominance over democratic institutions. It will analyze how the public perceives the Army's budget in comparison to the budget allocations made to the key development indicator: national spending on education. The highlighted trends will then be contextualized to decipher the political and historical factors that increased/decreased support for the military versus education. For this study, education is being used as a comparative development indicator because Pakistan has a youthful demography with 35.4% of its population between 0 and 14 years of age. Moreover, according to a survey poll conducted by Gallup in 2018 in Pakistan, 41% of the respondents believed good education was most essential for a better life (Figure 1).

Question: Among the following which factor is most important to ensure a better life for the generations to come?

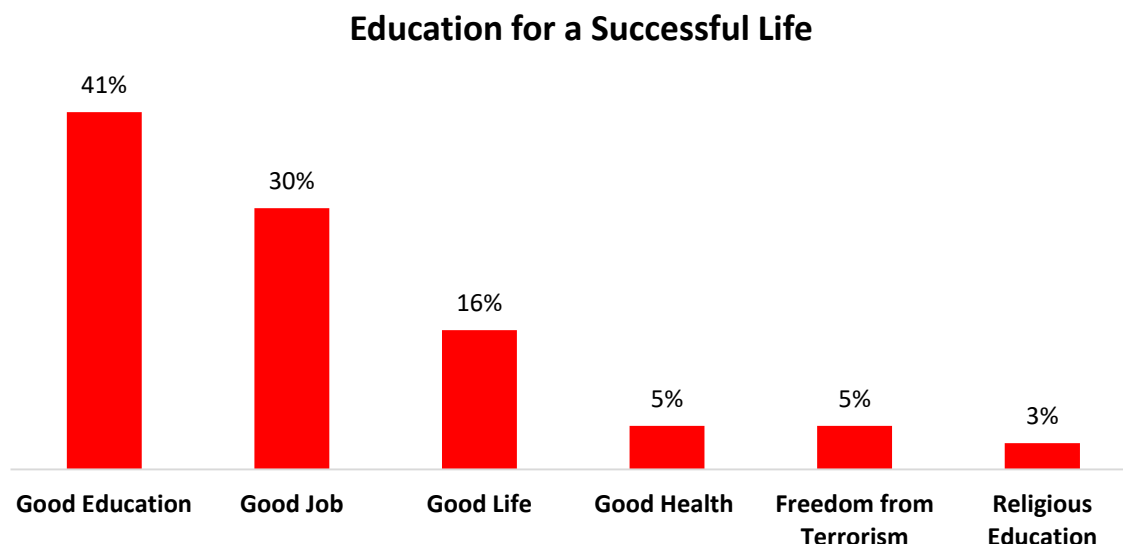


Figure 1. Source: Gallup and Gilani/National Survey 2018

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Introduction:

Jinnah's vision was a secular Pakistan firmly under civilian control and the military assisting the government as required. However, Pakistan did not take a similar historical trajectory and civilian governments have been an exception rather than the norm. The Army, soon after Jinnah passed away, became the self-proclaimed guarantor of Pakistan's survival. The acceptance of this title by the general populous and civilian governments led the Army to amass a disproportionate share of the scarce resources available to post-independence Pakistan. This culmination of resources by the Army came at the expense of the development of civilian institutions. Soon, fragile and underfunded civilian governments formed a dependence on the Army, seeking its support at times when democracy was tested. Consequentially, it wasn't long before the general public at large came to assert that the military is the only national institution capable of championing and defending national interests. In a survey carried out by the Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT), the army emerged as the most trustworthy institution with an approval rating of 75% (Figure 2).ⁱ It can be claimed that mass public support paved the way for the military to participate in the policymaking process, either by forming a government or through back chaneling with a civilian government. This convoluted the Pakistani identity and many deemed the military as synonymous with the state, a narrative that strengthened the military's roots in the economy and other key institutions.ⁱⁱ

Question: Which national institution do you trust the most?

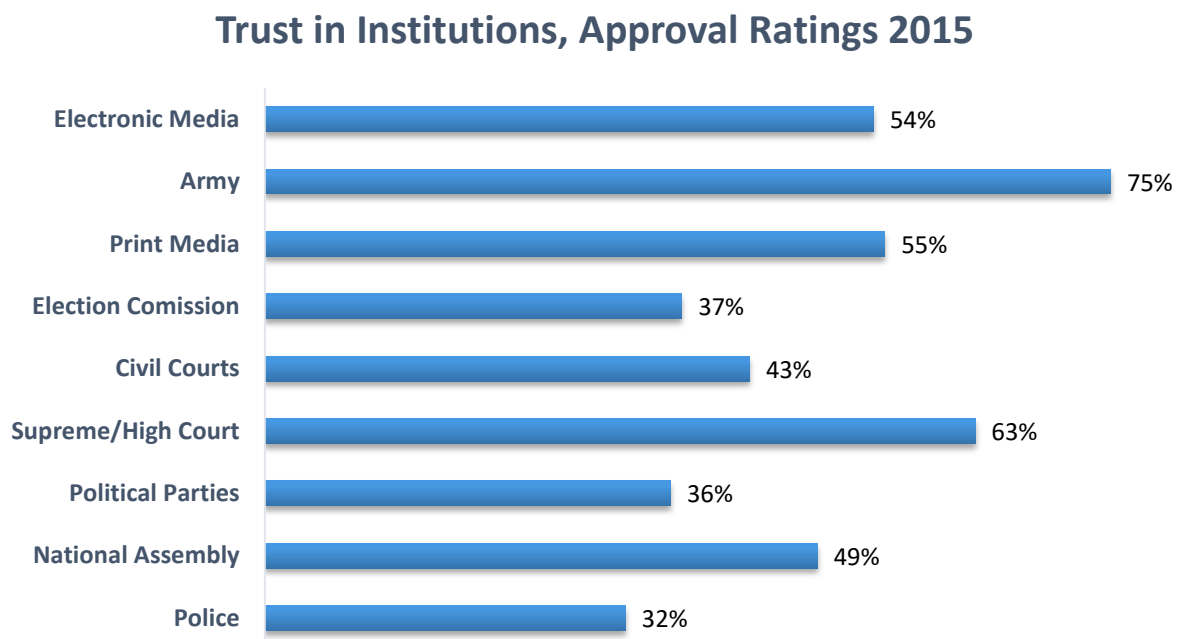


Figure 2. Source: PILDAT Survey, 2015

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Survey Findings:

The interpretations of this paper will largely be based on polling surveys longitudinally conducted by Gallup Pakistan. In 2018, Gallup Pakistan conducted a polling survey asking respondents, “Do you agree with the following statement: the government should spend more on defense than education?” 49% of the respondents agreed with the statement. Whereas 34% were in disagreement and 16% of respondents choose not to answer (Figure 2). The results show that the populace is largely in favor of a greater share of the budget being allocated to the Army. A comparative study of the results of similar questions posed over the years 1983,1998,2012,2018 reveals that the gap between those who agree and disagree has decreased from 1983 to 1998 but exponentially increased from 1998 till 2012 and remained more or less the consistent from 2012 to 2018 (Figure 2).

In 1983, 50% more respondents agreed than disagreed (Figure 2 and 3). This difference decreased by a staggering 37% in the span of 15 years, coming down to 13% more agreements than disagreements by 1998 (Figure 3 and 4). However, from 1998 to 2012, there was an 18% increase in respondents who favored allocating budget toward defense as opposed to education (Figure 3 and 4). From 2012 to 2018, there was a dip not only in the number of respondents who agreed with the statement (16% decrease) but also in the number of respondents who disagreed with the statement (18% decrease) (Figure 2). The difference in agreement and disagreement was because 16% of the respondents refrained from answering the question (Figure 1 and 2). This is an anomaly in the trend given that in both 1983 and 1998, no responded chose to not respond and in 2012, the number of respondents was only 1% of the representative sample (Figure 1 and 2).

It can hence be inferred that over the years, the public’s stance on budget allocation between the army and education is fluctuating. Initially, there was mass support for the Army getting the bigger piece of the cake. Over the years this support has decreased but certainly not diminished. Simultaneously, the demand for education to be allocated more budget increased until 1998 but decreased at an increasing rate afterward till 2018 (Figure 2). Given fluctuating trends, a concrete inference about the public’s opinion cannot be made from the poll results. However, it would not be misleading to conjecture that the fluctuation in trends might be because of the changing socio-economic and security conditions of the country.

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Question: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: We should spend more on Army than education.

Army Versus Education

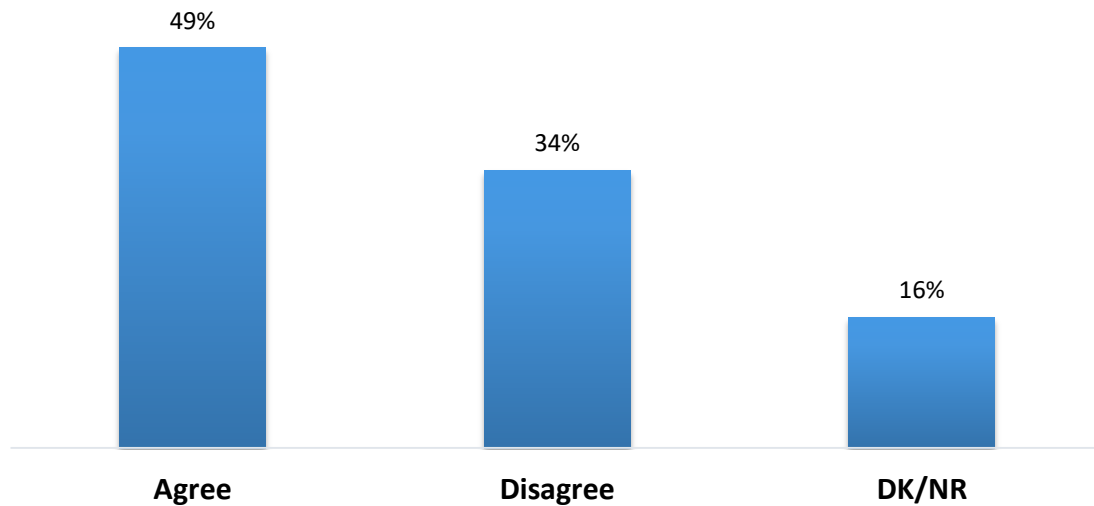


Figure 3. Source: Gallup & Gilani/National Survey 2018

Trend Data: Spending on Army Versus Education?

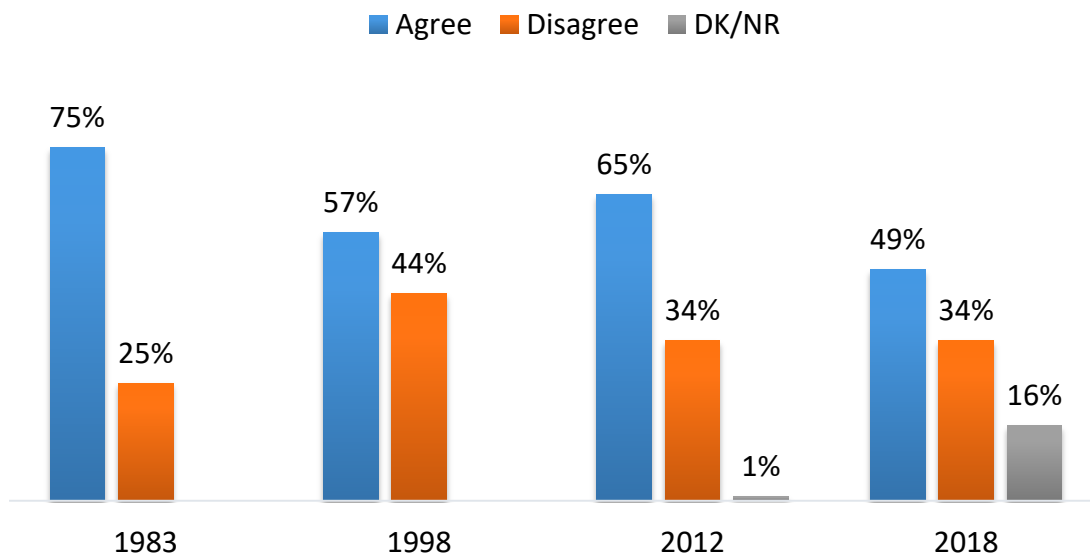


Figure 4. Source: Gallup & Gilani/National Survey, 1983, 1998, 2012, 2018

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Should we spend more on the Army than education?

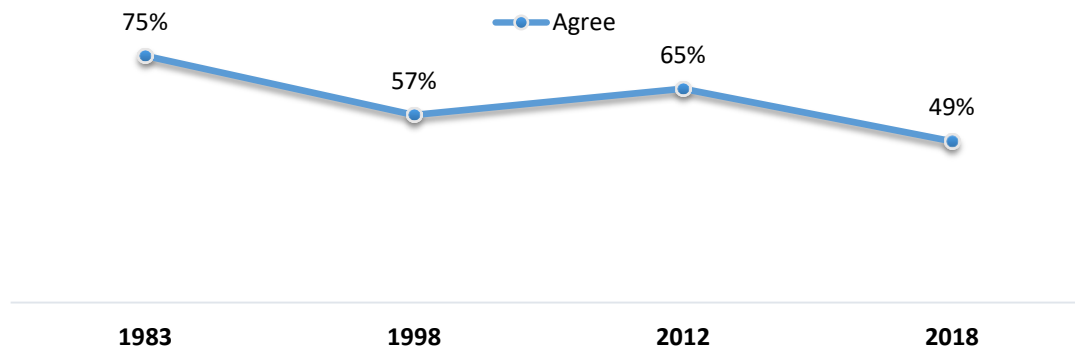


Figure 5. Source: Gallup & Gilani/National Survey, 1983, 1998, 2012, 2018

Should we spend more on the Army than education?

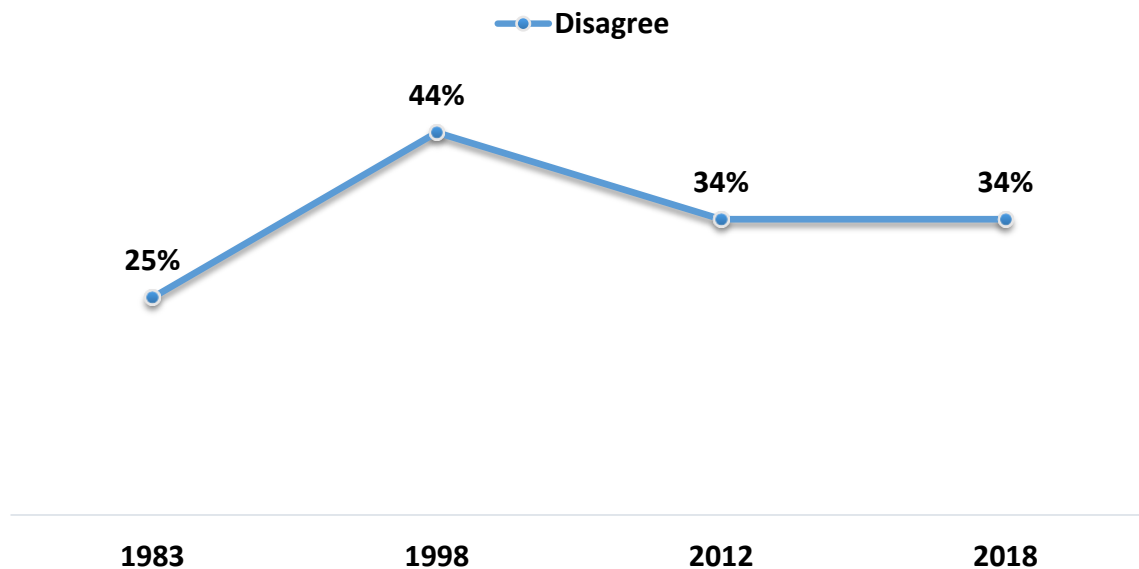


Figure 6. Source: Gallup & Gilani/National Survey, 1983, 1998, 2012, 2018

Analyzing the results:

In this section, results of the poll explained above will be contextualized to infer the socio-political and security dynamics at play during the polling years. The Army will remain to be the public's most trusted institution as long as the threat of Indian aggression is kept alive. Pakistan's internal and foreign policies are plagued with the "Indian Syndrome" where

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at all times India is portrayed as a threat to the existence of Pakistan. This rampant sense of insecurity has brought most of the population to take an India-centric outlook legitimizing the Army's praetorian state.ⁱⁱⁱ

In 1983, according to the polls, the majority of the public (75%) strongly preferred more budget to be allocated to defense. The dynamics of Pakistan's socio-political and security landscape can be analyzed to decipher the reasons behind this popular support. In 1983, the wounds of East Pakistan's separation as Bangladesh in 1971 and countrywide riots over the vote-rigging allegations in the 1977 elections were fresh. For both historical unfoldings, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and his People's Party were largely held accountable. Moreover, popular rhetoric at that time accused Bhutto's socialist policies of slowing down Pakistan's economy by stunting productivity and inflating costs.^{iv} In this context, in 1983, with Pakistan's steady involvement in the Soviet-Afghanistan war (1979-1989), rising tensions due to a military standoff between India and Pakistan in Siachen, and with an imminent threat of a full-scale civil war due to the momentum gained by Movement for the Restoration of Democracy, it can be claimed that the masses looked favorably upon the Army's swift action to restore law and order in the country.^v

Moreover, 1983 was the era of Zia ul Haq's martial law and even though in hindsight he is held to be the embodiment of whatever ails Pakistani society today, there is no denying that his policies echoed the majorities' desire for the public and political spheres to be given Islamic undertones. This claim can be evidenced by the results of a poll conducted by PEW Research Center in 2011 asking respondents, *"Do you favor or oppose making sharia the law of the land?"* More than eight in ten Muslims in Pakistan (84%) favored the claim.^{vi} Moreover, in a nationally representative opinion poll in 2011, Gallup and Gilani asked, *"Different people choose to identify themselves differently. Which identify due you identify yourself with first and foremost?"* As many as fifty-nine percent (59%) of the respondents choose to identify themselves as Muslims first, followed by twenty-two percent (22%) of respondents who said they are Pakistani first and foremost. Lastly, ten percent (10%), seven percent (7%), and two percent (2%) selected their provincial identity, the option of human beings, or no response, respectively (Figure 7).^{vii} Therefore, in 1983 it can be claimed that there was mass support for allocating more budget to the Army because it then promised the imposition of Sharia Law.

In 1998, the percentage of respondents who favored army being allocated a greater share of the budget as opposed to education decreased to 57% from 75% in 1983 (Figure 4). 1998 marked the heydays of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif who had come into power by winning an overwhelming victory with an exclusive mandate from all across Pakistan in the parliamentary elections of 1997. Public's hopes from that Pakistan Muslim League-Noon headed by Sharif would deliver on the promise of providing a stable conservative government and improve the overall socio-economic conditions of the country.^{viii} In May 1998, in the aftermath of Indian nuclear tests, the pressure was mounting on the Sharif government, from the opposition and the public akin to give India a suitable response. Therefore, despite ambiguous support from the international community, on the 28th and 30th of May, Pakistan carried out its first nuclear tests codenamed Chagai-I and Chagai-II. Sharif's political prestige

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reached its peak with praise being showered from opposition leaders, citizens, and international editorials.^{ix}

Question: Different people choose to identify themselves differently. What do you consider yourself to be, first and foremost?

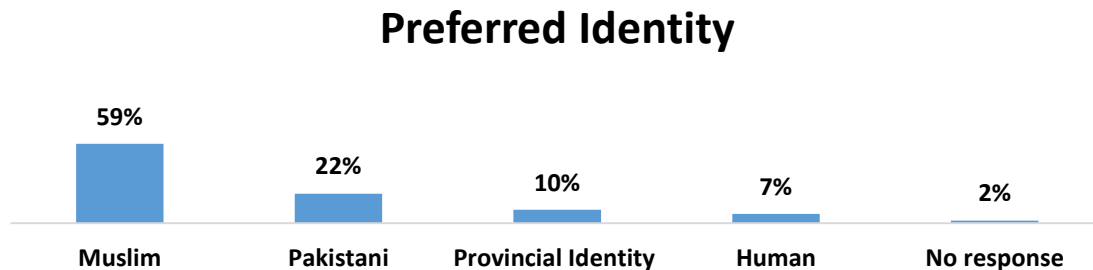


Figure7. Source: Gallup & Gilani 2013

Moreover, this was also the year when Indo-Pak relations took a positive turn when India and Pakistan signed an agreement to build an environment of peace and security and resolving conflicts bilaterally in 1998, followed by the historic visit of Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to Pakistan and signing of the Lahore Declaration in 1999.^x During the early days of Nawaz Sharif as Prime Minister, civil-military relations were extremely cordial making Nawaz Sharif the only senior civilian leader of the 90s to have maintained friendly relations with the military establishment even if for a limited period.^{xi}

Therefore, it can be said that Nawaz Sharif's popularity as a civilian leader, Pakistan's advent on the nuclear edifice, plummeting Indo-Pak hostilities, and stabilizing civil-military relations explain the dip of eighteen percent (18%) in support of the Army getting a bigger share of the budget as opposed to education. It can be reasoned that had the polling survey been conducted in the second half of the year 1999, public opinion would have been vastly different with the simultaneous onset of the Kargil Conflict (3rd May-26th July 1999) and the Afghanistan civil war (1996-2001), along with rampant economic turmoil with foreign debt, inflation, and unemployment at an all-time high.^{xii}

In 2012, the number of respondents who agreed that we should spend more on army than education slightly increased by eight percent (8%) from 1998 totaling at sixty-five percent (65%). 2012 marked the near end of Asif Ali Zardari's political regime as the President of Pakistan and also a phase of democratic transition. Despite rising tensions between the civilian government and military leadership over the "memogate scandal", (leaked memo alleging senior officials sought US aid against the imminent threat of a military coup post the killing of Osama Bin Laden in April), the military establishment headed by the Chief of Army Staff, General Kayani, took a non-interventionist approach toward politics allowing democracy and civilian leadership to play its constitutional role.

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Moreover, during Asif Ali Zardari's presidency from 2008 to 2013, casualties due to terrorist attacks all across Pakistan totaled 35,000 people with material damage to the economy translating into sixty-seven billion US dollars (\$67 Billion). In October 2012, an advocate for the education of girls, Malala Yousafzai was critically injured by Taliban gunmen sparking a brief upsurge of anger in Pakistan against the militants. Moreover, the 2012 floods in Pakistan affected a total of 21 million individuals and took the life of 1800.^{xiii} The economy was in shatters with Zardari frantically running from country to country seeking loans to prevent Pakistan from defaulting on payments due, finally settling for an IMF bailout with unfavorable terms. Zardari was also charged for corruption that too while in power.^{xiv}

Therefore, given the bleak circumstances the democratic regime of Asif Ali Zardari had subjected Pakistan to, it is not surprising that the populace looked at the Army for relief, both against rising terrorist attacks and flood relief efforts. This can be evidenced by an online survey conducted by Dawn News in 2018 asking a total of 18,544 of its readers, "Who has been Pakistan's best ruler?" Asif Ali Zardari ranked worst in all provinces with sixty-nine percent (69%) of the respondents rating him "very poor" as a ruler.^{xv} The deteriorating sociopolitical and economic landscape of the country can be a reason for the eight percent (8%) increase in budgetary support for the military from 1998 and 2012 (figure 4).

Polling results in 2019 saw a decrease of sixteen percent (16%) in respondents who affirmed with the statement. This change in polling behavior can be attributed to the drastic improvement in the security condition of Pakistan. Between, 2014 and 2017, the total number of violence-related fatalities declined by over 73%, from 7,655 fatalities in 2014 to 2057 in 2017. Moreover, in four years, sixty (66) militant and affiliated supporting organizations were banned.^{xvi} This was a result of the kinetic counter-terrorism measures implemented under the National Action Plan of 2015. Moreover, in 2016 Pakistan adopted the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 agenda unanimously passed by the parliament which focuses on increasing enrollment rates along with other objectives.^{xvii}

In the aftermath of the Pulwama attack (14 February 2019), it was expected that support for the Army would increase, however; the majority of the populace remained calm amid the war hysteria and despite hardline rhetoric by the Indian state, Pakistanis remained calm and were keen on working toward peace with India. In a polling Survey by Gallup and Gilani post-Pulwama, respondents were asked, "If the condition stays the same then should Pakistan initiate war against India or not?" An overwhelming of seventy percent (70%) of the respondents opposed the initiation of war, while only twenty-two percent (22%) called for war, and nine percent (9%) did not respond (Figure 8).^{xviii} Moreover, status-quo peace efforts of the government are backed by the Army. In an address by the Chief of Army Staff, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, on the passing-out parade in 2018, called for a fight against hunger, disease, and illiteracy as opposed to a fight between both the states. Moreover, in accordance with the recent terms of the IMF bailout, the military has agreed to a cut of \$ 5 billion in its defense expenditure.^{xix}

Question: If the conditions remain the same, should Pakistan initiate war against India?

Should Pakistan Initiate War with India?

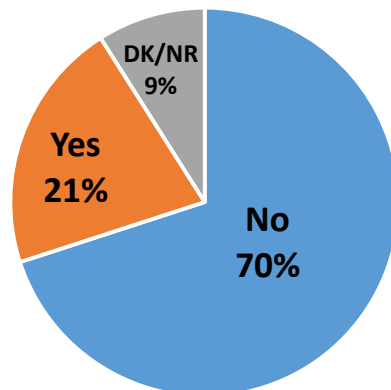


Figure 8. Source: Gallup & Gilani 2019

Therefore, it can be concluded that there is mass-support for the Army as an institution among the Pakistani population and this support is to some extent contingent on the social, economic, and political and security conditions in Pakistan and the greater South Asian Region. However, having said that, there is no denying that over the years education has moved up in priority. This can also be evidenced by a survey conducted by Gallup in 2018 asking respondents, “Should the Education Department have more, less, or the same budget as before?” 48% of the respondents answered with more, 31% said less, and 23% said it should remain unchanged (Figure 9). Therefore, it can be concluded that no matter how the social, economic, and security situation unfolds in Pakistan, education is and will remain a priority for the masses.

Question: In your opinion should the education department have more, less, or the same budget?

Education Budget

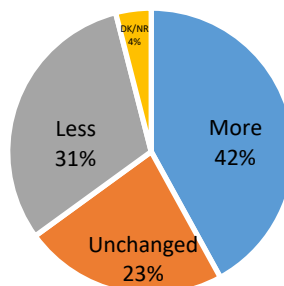


Figure 9. Source: Gallup & Gilani/National Survey 2018

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