



Less than Half of Pakistani Public Supports Attacking Al Qaeda, Cracking Down on Fundamentalists

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WASHINGTON, DC Oct. 31st—Pakistanis show only weak support for using force against Islamic militants and overwhelmingly oppose allowing outside forces to combat al Qaeda on Pakistani territory.

A WorldPublicOpinion.org poll finds that just 44 percent of urban Pakistanis favor sending the Pakistani army to the Northwestern tribal areas to “pursue and capture al Qaeda fighters.” Only 48 percent would allow the Pakistan army to act against “Taliban insurgents who have crossed over from Afghanistan.” In both cases, about a third oppose such military action and a fifth decline to answer.

Pakistanis reject overwhelmingly the idea of permitting foreign troops to attack al Qaeda on Pakistani territory. Four out of five (80%) say their government should not allow American or other foreign troops to enter Pakistan to pursue and capture al Qaeda fighters.” Three out of four (77%) oppose allowing foreign troops to attack Taliban insurgents based in Pakistan.

These are some of the results of a poll of 907 Pakistanis conducted in urban areas Sept. 12-28, 2007. The findings also reveal that a majority of urban Pakistanis believe their government’s decision to attack militants holding the Red Mosque in Islamabad was a mistake.

Polling took place before the massive suicide bombing apparently targeting former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto on her return from eight-years in exile. More than 130 people among the massive crowds celebrating Bhutto’s return died in the attack.

Pakistanis show little confidence in the leaders who have dominated Pakistani politics for much of the last 20 years. Less than a third express support for either current president Pervez Musharraf or former prime ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif.

Steven Kull, director of WorldPublicOpinion.org, comments, “The Pakistani people are not enthusiastic about Musharraf, do not support his recent crackdown on fundamentalists, and are lukewarm at best about going after al Qaeda or the Taliban in western Pakistan. It appears that a US strategy that rests on Musharraf being a frontline in the war on terrorism has poor prospects.”

Details

Since fleeing Afghanistan following the 2001 US-led invasion, Afghan Taliban insurgents and foreign militants from al Qaeda have managed to regroup in northwestern Pakistan. The remote, mountainous region is inhabited by Pashtun tribes who have enjoyed substantial autonomy since the mid-nineteenth century, when the country that is now Pakistan was a British colony

Asked whether the Pakistan army should enter the region—known as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas or FATA—to “pursue and capture al Qaeda fighters,” Pakistanis tend to say it should, but by only a narrow 44 percent to 36 percent margin. Large numbers (20%) decline to answer.

Support for allowing the Pakistan military to attack Taliban insurgents in the region also tends to be thin. When asked about “allowing the Pakistani army to pursue and capture Taliban insurgents who have crossed over from Afghanistan,” respondents support such action by only 48 percent to 34 percent. Another 18 percent do not answer.

There is overwhelming opposition to letting American or other foreign troops attack al Qaeda or Taliban forces in Pakistan, however. Eighty percent of those polled say American or other foreign troops should *not* be allowed “to enter Pakistan to pursue and capture al Qaeda fighters.” Only five percent say this should be allowed and an additional 15 percent do not answer.

An overwhelming majority (77%) also rejects allowing US or other foreign forces enter Pakistan “to pursue and capture Taliban insurgents who have crossed over from Afghanistan.” Only nine percent disagree and 14 percent decline to respond. Other [recent surveys](#) of Pakistan and other Muslim countries have also found strong objections to the presence of American troops in Muslim lands.

Pakistanis also show opposition to the government’s recent crackdown on Islamic fundamentalists. On July 11, Pakistan forces raided the Red Mosque in Islamabad to oust Islamic militants. More than 100 people died in the raid, including dozens of suspected militants and at least 10 Pakistani troops.

Nearly two out of three respondents (64%) say the raid was a “mistake” while only 22 percent say they support the decision.

These attitudes may also reflect Pakistani sympathy for at least some Islamist goals. A substantial 60 percent majority believes that “Shari’a should play a larger role in Pakistan law” than it does now. Only 26 percent say it should play the same role (15%) or a smaller role (11%) and 15 percent do not answer.

Opposition to attacks on militants may also be influenced by the continuing conflict and rising death toll. Tribesmen and militants launched numerous attacks on government

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positions, including a Sept. 13 suicide attack on an army mess hall that killed at least 15 soldiers.

The Pakistani public shows little enthusiasm for the leadership of either President Musharraf or the major candidates for prime minister in the general elections slated for January. Asked who is the [“the best person to lead Pakistan”](#) General Musharraf is cited by only 21 percent.

Former prime minister Benazir Bhutto who was forced out of office in 1996 amid allegations of corruption, is seen as the best to lead by only 27 percent of respondents. Bhutto plans to lead the Pakistan Peoples Party in the January legislative elections, though she is barred from a third time as Prime Minister unless she can change current law.

Nawar Sharif, the prime minister toppled by Musharraf in 1999, is seen as the best leader by 21 percent of those polled. Sharif attempted to return from exile in September but was deported within hours of his arrival.

But Pakistanis tend to favor allowing both Bhutto and Sharif to run for office. Those polled say Bhutto should be allowed to return to Pakistan and stand for election by a margin of 50 percent to 34 percent and that Sharif should be allowed to do so by a margin of 51 percent to 35 percent.

Respondents were divided (40% to 40%) about whether Bhutto should become prime minister.

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