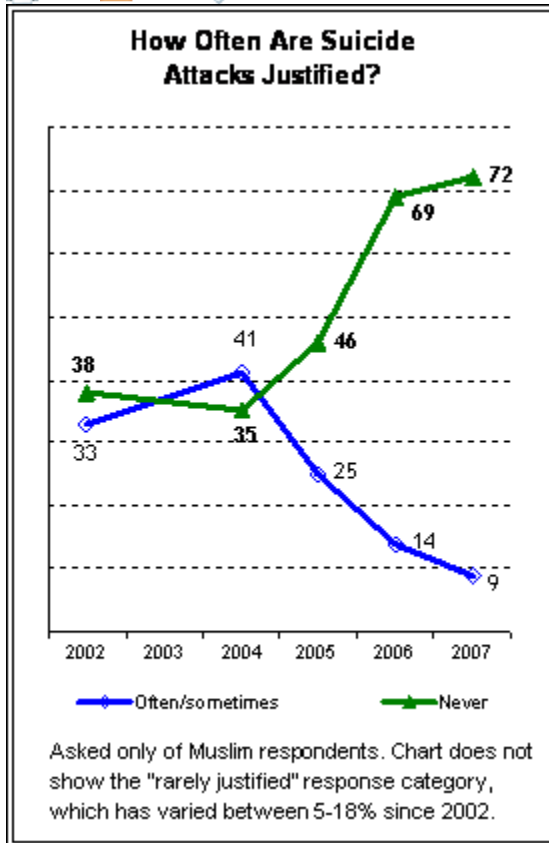


# View from Pakistan: Before Bhutto's Assassination, Public Opinion Was Increasingly Opposed to Terrorism

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The assassination of former Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto comes at a time when Pakistani public opinion has been increasingly turning against extremism and terrorist violence. As the 2007 Pew Global Attitudes survey highlighted, support for terrorism is on the decline in much of the Muslim world, and this is particularly true in Pakistan. In 2004, 41% of Pakistani Muslims said that suicide bombing and other forms of violence against civilians were "often" or "sometimes justified" in order to defend Islam from its enemies, while only 35% felt that such attacks were never justified. In the

spring of this year – just months before a suicide attacker would kill Bhutto – only 9% said suicide attacks are often or sometimes justified, while 72% said this kind of violence is never defensible (another 9% say they are "rarely" justified).

Although it is still not clear whether al Qaeda or some other group is responsible for the assassination, Pew surveys over the last few years suggest that al Qaeda is falling out of favor among Pakistanis, and that support for its leader, Osama bin Laden, is on the decline. In 2005, 51% of Pakistanis said they had a lot or some confidence in bin Laden to do the right thing in world affairs. Now, confidence in the terrorist leader has fallen to 38% -- still disturbingly high, but nonetheless a substantial decline in just two years.

Thursday's attack was the latest in a series of deadly bombings in Pakistan. In July, several suicide bombings followed a government raid on the Red Mosque, a militant Islamist stronghold in the capital city, Islamabad. And on October 18, Bhutto's return to Pakistan after eight years in exile was greeted with violence -- a suicide bomber attacked her motorcade in Islamabad, killing more than 100 of her supporters. Even before these incidents, Pakistanis were worried about violence and extremism -- in the 2007 Pew poll, more than three-in-four (76%) called terrorism a "very big problem" for the country. In fact, among the 47 countries included in survey, only Bangladeshis (77%) and Moroccans (81%) were more worried about terrorism. And in a 2006 Pew poll, 74% of Pakistanis said they were very or somewhat concerned about the rise of Islamic extremism in their country -- a higher level of concern than that found in the other predominantly Muslim countries included in the survey: Jordan (69%), Egypt (68%), Turkey (46%), and Indonesia (43%).

### **Few Back Musharraf**

While Pakistanis are increasingly rejecting the extremist elements in their society, they are also increasingly turning against their country's ruler, President Pervez Musharraf.

In the days following the Sept. 11, 2001 World Trade Center/Pentagon attacks, Musharraf made dramatic shifts in Pakistan's foreign policy, declaring his allegiance with the U.S. in the global war on terror and turning against the Taliban, which for many years had been supported by Pakistani intelligence services. Since then, the Bush Administration has stuck by Musharraf, overlooking his authoritarian tendencies in exchange for his cooperation in fighting al Qaeda. Within Pakistan, the general, who took power in a bloodless 1999 coup, remained largely popular for the first several years of his presidency. In 2002, a Pew survey found 76% of Pakistanis expressed the view that Musharraf was having a good influence on their country.

### Views of Musharraf Turn Negative

	Aug- Sept 2002	Feb- Mar 2007	April- May 2007	June- July 2007	Aug- Sept 2007	Nov 2007
<i>View of Musharraf</i>	%	%	%	%	%	%
Positive	76	54	56	34	21	30
Negative	16	26	36	49	62	60

August-September 2002 and April-May 2007 figures from a Pew Global Attitudes Project question, which asks whether Musharraf is having a good or bad influence in Pakistan.

February-March, June-July, August-September and November 2007 figures from an IRI question, which asks respondents whether they approve or disapprove of the job Musharraf is doing.

But support for the Pakistani president has faded at an accelerating pace in recent months as actions by his government – including Musharraf's effort in March to unseat Pakistani Supreme Court Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry, the bloody crackdown on Islamic extremists occupying Islamabad's Red Mosque and imposition of a six-week period of emergency rule in November – drew criticism from both liberal and conservative forces. An International Republican Institute (IRI) poll conducted in February and March put Musharraf's job approval at 54% -- a level of support very close to the finding in a Pew poll, conducted April 18-May 10, that a 56%-majority felt Musharraf was having a positive impact on the country.

More recent polling shows a rapid decline in public support. Musharraf's job approval rating sagged to 34% in a June-July IRI poll, and fell further to 21% in a September reading before recovering somewhat to a 30%-level in the Institute's November poll. With elections scheduled for early in January, Musharraf has been under intense pressure from liberals, who want democratic reforms and free elections, as well as from Islamists, who resent the military crackdown on extremists. Pressure has come as well as from the U.S. government, which hoped that an alliance between Musharraf and his erstwhile rival Bhutto, could lend greater legitimacy to the coming election.

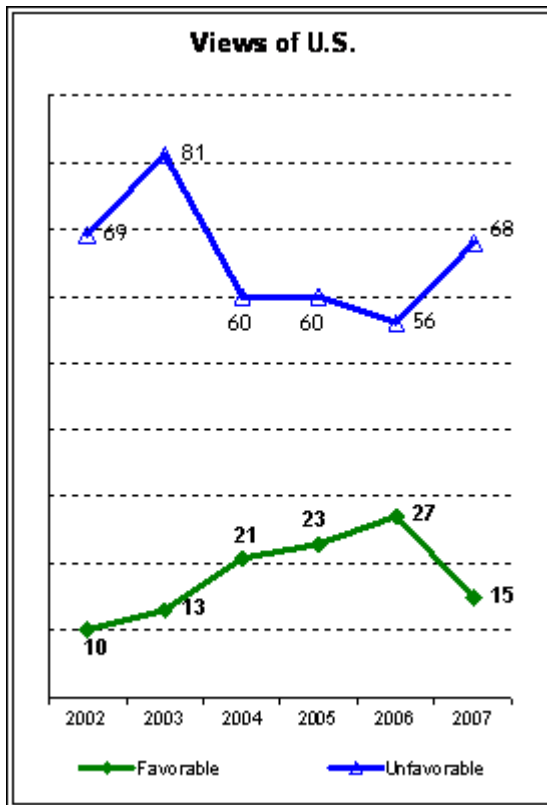
### Bhutto Was Seen as Most Able to Handle Problems

	June 2006	Sept 2006	Feb- Mar 2007	June 2007	Aug- Sept 2007	Nov 2007
Benazir Bhutto	23	21	26	32	28	31
Pervez Musharraf	28	24	32	27	17	23
Nawaz Sharif	16	14	15	21	36	25

IRI surveys find that, as support for Musharraf has faded, favorable views of his primary rivals -- both Bhutto and another former prime minister, Nawaz Sharif -- have risen

somewhat. Bhutto's ratings as "the one leader" who can "best handle the problems facing Pakistan" have risen gradually from 23% in a June 2006 IRI poll, to a peak of 32% in June 2007 a year later. Of the three, Sharif's rise was the most dramatic: In June 2006, only 16% rated him best able to handle Pakistan's problems; a year later, that rating had risen modestly to 21%. But by September more than a third of Pakistanis (36%) rated Sharif the best problem-handler, compared with 28% who picked Bhutto and only 17% who chose Musharraf. By November, however, Sharif's rating had receded to 25%, while Bhutto registered the highest approval among the three (31%).

### Little Support for the U.S.



With Bhutto's death, the United States has lost a key ally in Pakistani politics. American diplomats helped negotiate her return, engaging in shuttle diplomacy between Bhutto and Musharraf. What her death means for the country's stability and for U.S. policy toward Pakistan remains to be seen, but it is clear that Pakistani public opinion remains skeptical of the United States.

Fewer than one-in-five Pakistanis (15%) have a positive view of the U.S. -- of the publics included in the 2007 survey, only Palestinians (13%) and Turks (9%) are less favorably disposed. Moreover, despite their own concerns about terrorism, Pakistanis overwhelmingly oppose U.S.-led efforts to fight terrorism -- six-in-ten (59%) oppose America's anti-terror campaign, while only 13% back it. Pakistanis are also leery of American efforts to encourage democracy in their country -- 57% believe the U.S. only

promotes democracy when it serves its interests, and 72% say they dislike American ideas about democracy.

However, like other Muslim publics included in the 2007 Pew survey, Pakistanis overwhelmingly endorse key democratic values and institutions. For instance, 77% say having honest elections with a choice of at least two political parties is important to them. So while at this point it is not clear whether the country's upcoming elections will take place, it is clear that, in principle, Pakistanis overwhelmingly believe in the idea of free elections and political competition.

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## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Note that the Pew Pakistani samples are disproportionately urban. Each year, the sample designs have covered roughly 80% of the country's adult population.