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Poll: Pakistanis Turn Against Bin Laden

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (AP) -- Sympathy for al-Qaida chief [Osama bin Laden](#) and the [Taliban](#) has dropped sharply in Pakistan amid a wave of deadly violence, according to the results of a recent opinion poll.

The survey, conducted last month for the U.S.-based Terror Free Tomorrow organization, also identified the party of assassinated opposition leader [Benazir Bhutto](#) as the country's most popular ahead of Feb. 18 elections, and said most Pakistanis want President [Pervez Musharraf](#) to quit.

The poll suggests Pakistanis are looking to peaceful opposition groups after months of political turmoil and a wave of suicide attacks.

In the latest bloodshed, a bomber blew himself up at an opposition rally in the northwestern town of Charsadda on Saturday, killing 27 people and injuring 50.

According to the poll results only 24 percent of Pakistanis approved of bin Laden when the survey was conducted last month, compared with 46 percent during a similar survey in August.

Backing for al-Qaida, whose senior leaders are believed to be hiding along the Pakistani-Afghan border, fell to 18 percent from 33 percent.

Support for the Taliban, whose Pakistani offshoots have seized control of much of the lawless border area and have been engaged in a growing

war against security forces, dropped by half to 19 percent from 38 percent, the results said.

Also, in a sharp rebuke to Musharraf -- who seized power in a 1999 coup and whose standing has slumped since he tried to fire Pakistan's chief justice last March -- 70 percent of voters think he should quit immediately.

Terror Free Tomorrow is a bipartisan group seeking to reduce support for international terrorism.

Its advisory board includes likely Republican presidential nominee Sen. [John McCain](#) and Lee Hamilton, a former Democratic congressman who helped lead a study of White House Iraq policy last year. The group's president, Ken Ballen, says the advisory board plays no role in individual polls.

The survey, based on interviews with 1,157 people across Pakistan from Jan. 19-29, had a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Only one percent of Pakistani voters would cast their ballots in favor of al-Qaida if it was running in parliamentary elections, the survey results said, adding that the Taliban would get 3 percent.

In contrast the moderate and secular Pakistan People's Party, led by Bhutto until her death in a suicide attack on Dec. 27, polled 36.7 percent.

The party of another former prime minister, [Nawaz Sharif](#), scored 25.3 percent, pushing the pro-Musharraf Pakistan Muslim League-Q into third place with just 12 percent.

Despite Musharraf's counter-terror alliance with Washington and calls for Pakistan to plot a course of "enlightened moderation," Pakistanis remain distrustful of the president and his authorities, especially the shadowy intelligence agencies.

Opposition parties accuse authorities of trying to rig the elections to prevent the formation of a hostile parliament which could impeach Musharraf, who imposed a state of emergency last year to safeguard his re-election.

The poll found that 58 percent of respondent voters suspected Musharraf, allied politicians or government agencies were responsible for Bhutto's death. Only 7 percent thought al-Qaida or the Taliban were behind her slaying.