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Indian and Pakistani Publics Show Flexibility on Kashmir

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College Park, MD—A WorldPublicOpinion.org poll of the Indian and Pakistani publics reveals that half or more are open to a range of possible outcomes for Kashmir other than it being part of their respective countries. On neither side is there strong majority opposition to Kashmir becoming an independent country or dividing Kashmir between Pakistan and India.

More significant, Indians and Pakistanis show a readiness to have the Kashmiri people decide their fate. If a majority of all Kashmiris were to choose independence, a majority of Indians and Pakistanis would find such independence at least tolerable.

India and Pakistan have been in a state of tension over Kashmir since the late 1940s when India gained control of most of Kashmir and Pakistan the remainder. India and Pakistan have fought two wars over Kashmir, with the most recent war in 1999 raising the specter of nuclear war. While direct confrontation has abated, militant groups opposing Indian control of Kashmir have continued to carry out terrorist attacks against Indian targets, with India claiming and Pakistan denying that such groups are supported by Pakistan. As recently as July 10, India and Pakistani troops exchanged fire across the Line of Control dividing Kashmir.

“Given the deep roots of the conflict over Kashmir, it is surprising that the conflict does not muster clearly polarized majorities in Pakistan and India, falling in line behind their governments’ positions,” comments Clay Ramsay, research director of WorldPublicOpinion.org. “Instead, many show openness to considering different possibilities for resolving the conflict.”

In the survey, Indians and Pakistanis were asked to consider a range of possible outcomes for Indian-controlled Kashmir (known as Jammu and Kashmir) and to say whether they found them desirable, acceptable, tolerable, or unacceptable.

The idea that received the lowest level of opposition is for Jammu and Kashmir to become independent. Three quarters of Pakistanis called this outcome desirable or acceptable. While 50 percent of Indians said this idea is unacceptable, the other half said it was at least tolerable or did not provide an answer.

The idea of dividing Jammu and Kashmir between Pakistan and India gets little support on either side, but is also not opposed by a large majority. Pakistanis were roughly divided between 52 percent who found the idea unacceptable and 48 percent who said it was at least tolerable or did not answer. Among Indians, while 42 percent found division unacceptable, 58 percent said it was at least tolerable or did not answer.

However the greatest indicator of flexibility is that Indians as well as Pakistanis express a readiness to have the Kashmiri people decide their fate. Respondents were asked to “suppose the majority of all Kashmiris, including those on both sides of the Line of Control and refugees, want Kashmir to be an independent state.” In that case only 35 percent of Indians would find independence unacceptable. Among Pakistanis, only 11 percent found this outcome unacceptable.

A major controversy between India and Pakistan are the militant groups fighting against Indian control in Jammu and Kashmir and carrying out attacks against civilians in India in opposition to Indian control of Jammu and Kashmir. A majority of Pakistanis say Pakistan’s government does not provide support to militant groups that conduct attacks against civilians in India, while a majority of Indians tend to believe it is providing support.

Pakistani attitudes about such groups are complex. Less than half (39%) believe that such groups operating in Kashmir help either the security of Kashmiris, though few (9%) say it hurts security. In the context of the conflict in Kashmir, large majorities of Pakistanis say that attacks on Indian government officials are rarely or never justified. Attacks on security-related personnel in India—policemen, intelligence agents, military and paramilitary troops—are rejected by a plurality.

Asked about the possibility of the government “putting pressure on India by supporting militant groups in occupied Kashmir,” 37 percent favored it, while 26 percent opposed it and 37 percent did not provide an answer.

Overall both sides endorse their own governments’ approach to the conflict over Kashmir, especially Pakistanis (Indians 57%, Pakistanis 68%). Only minorities on either side call for their government to take a harder or softer line on the Kashmir issue in its dealing with the other country.

This survey of the urban population of Pakistan was carried out by AC Nielsen – Pakistan using a questionnaire developed by WorldPublicOpinion.org. All interviewing was conducted in Urdu. A total of 907 face-to-face interviews across 182 primary sampling units in 19 Pakistan cities were carried out between September 12 and September 28, 2007. Sampling error for a sample of this size is approximately +/- 3.3 percentage points.

In India, the survey was carried out by Team C Voter, using a questionnaire developed by WorldPublicOpinion.org. A face-to-face survey with 1,258 urban respondents was conducted in two waves during October and November of 2007 in 10 of the largest metropolitan areas. India’s population is approximately 30 percent urban. Sampling error for a sample of this size is approximately +/-2.8 percentage points.

WorldPublicOpinion.org is a project managed by the Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland. For more information, visit www.WorldPublicOpinion.org.

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