

Gallup Pakistan History Project - **Weekend Read 13** ‘**Kashmir and India-Pakistan Relations**’: by Murad Javed (Research Fellow, Gallup Pakistan History Project)

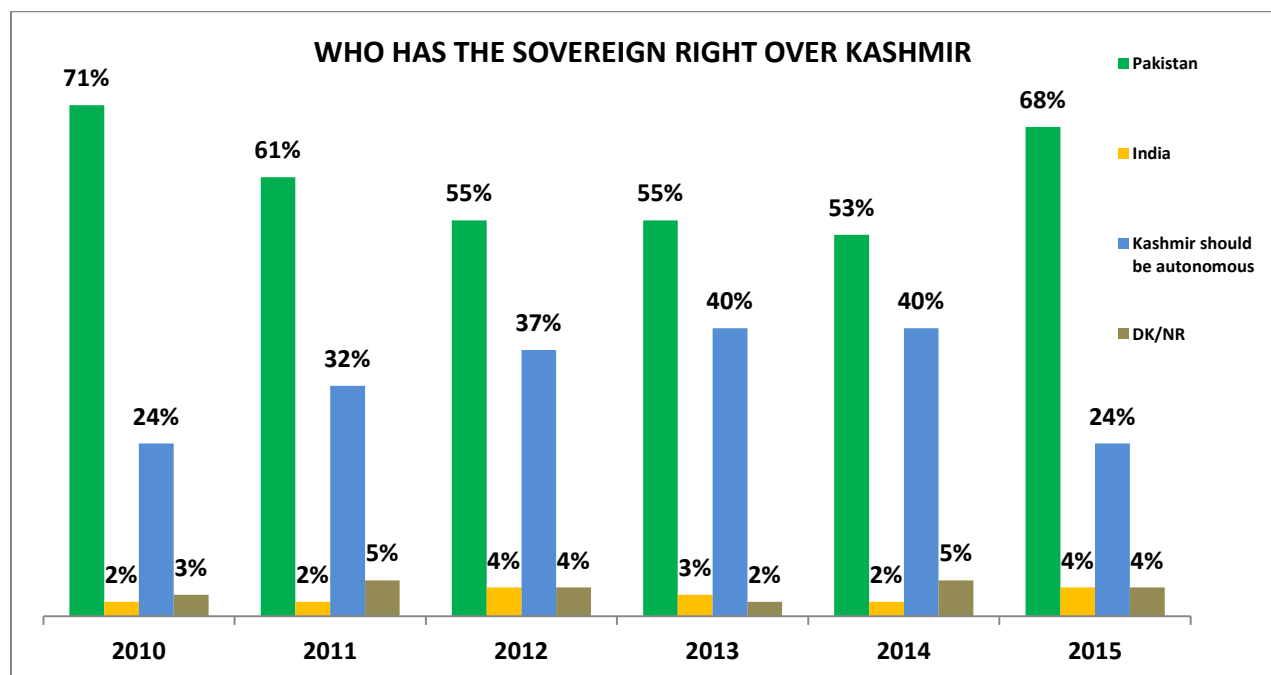
The history of bilateral relations between India and Pakistan is defined by and understood in the language of state-to-state political tension and sparring. Both countries have a chequered bilateral history defined by warfare, territorial disagreements, animosity, accelerated militarization/nuclearization, and political tensions. This largely negative orientation and tenor has occasionally experienced brief interludes of increased engagement, dialogue, and hopes for harmonious relations. However, such moments have been rare in the history of the region. The underlying belligerence between India and Pakistan is rooted in the disagreement over the political status of Kashmir; an issue bequeathed to the two states at their independence in 1947. Much has been written and disseminated about the Kashmir issue over the last 68 years. It remains the core outstanding issue between India and Pakistan – the key to unlocking harmonized relations between the two states.

Over the last two decades, Pakistan and India have gone through the full spectrum and range of possibilities that exist in this difficult bilateral relationship; from nearing harmonization of relations to the brink of full-scale warfare. Both countries detonated atomic weapons in 1998. The in 1998-1999, India and Pakistan embarked upon a series of confidence-building measures that culminated in a bold “Lahore Declaration” that had two dimensions: primarily, the Declaration dealt with the issue of creating bilateral trust and operational mechanisms and agreements vis-à-vis nuclear weapons; secondly, both countries established a roadmap for peace and stability in the region, including the resolution of the Kashmir issue. The euphoria and hope emanating from this breakthrough was short-lived. In the same year, the Kargil debacle completely unraveled the gains made by the two countries on the political front, and sent them back to the default positions on all issues, including Kashmir. In 2001, the Indian Parliament came under attack from insurgent groups in Kashmir. India blamed Pakistan for backing the groups, and two countries came desperately close to a full-scale war. In that same year, the Agra Summit almost achieved the critical breakthrough in bilateral relations, before negotiations unexpectedly broke down. In 2007, the Samjhauta Express Bombings further strained relations between the two countries, until the 2008 Mumbai attacks once again brought both countries to the brink of war. The series of events over the last two decades tell a story of highs and lows in the bilateral relationship between the two countries.

Since 2010, the relationship between the countries has remained static, with brief interludes of engagement that have failed to deliver meaningful progress. In 2013, the newly elected PML-N Government came to power and attempted to reconnect where it left off with the Lahore Declaration in 1999. However, this hope quickly dissipated when the ceasefire across the Line of Control and international border broke down in the second half of 2014. More recently, in 2015 – and especially in the last few weeks – both sides have given positive signals with regards to bilateral engagement, and resolution of outstanding disputes.

In the context of this whirlwind and intense bilateral relationship between the two states, Gallup Pakistan has kept a keen eye on public opinion in Pakistan on the subject of India-Pakistan relations, as well as the critical Kashmir issue, which continues to overshadow all other disagreements between the two countries. Since 2010, Gallup Pakistan has asked Pakistanis across the country a series of interrelated questions on the subject of bilateral relations between the two countries, the Kashmir dispute, and public confidence and hope in the future harmonized relations between the neighbours. This data is critical in that it provides an insight into Pakistanis' understanding, beliefs, and attitudes on the most important feature of Pakistan's foreign relations and regional politics. Moreover, the ability to deconstruct these opinions provides an indication of how the people of Pakistan assess and interpret bilateral relations and issues in the context of the complex history and the topsy-turvy nature of India-Pakistan dynamic over the last two decades. A closer look at this five-year data shows how public opinion on this complicated bilateral relationship changes in response to external events and developments.

The first of the crucial issues tracked by Gallup Pakistan is the question of right over Kashmir i.e. which party/stakeholder has the right to declare sovereignty over Kashmir. Specifically, the question posed to respondents was "Think impartially and tell us, who do you think has more right to Kashmir – Pakistan or India?" The response to this question over the last five years is provided in the Figure below:

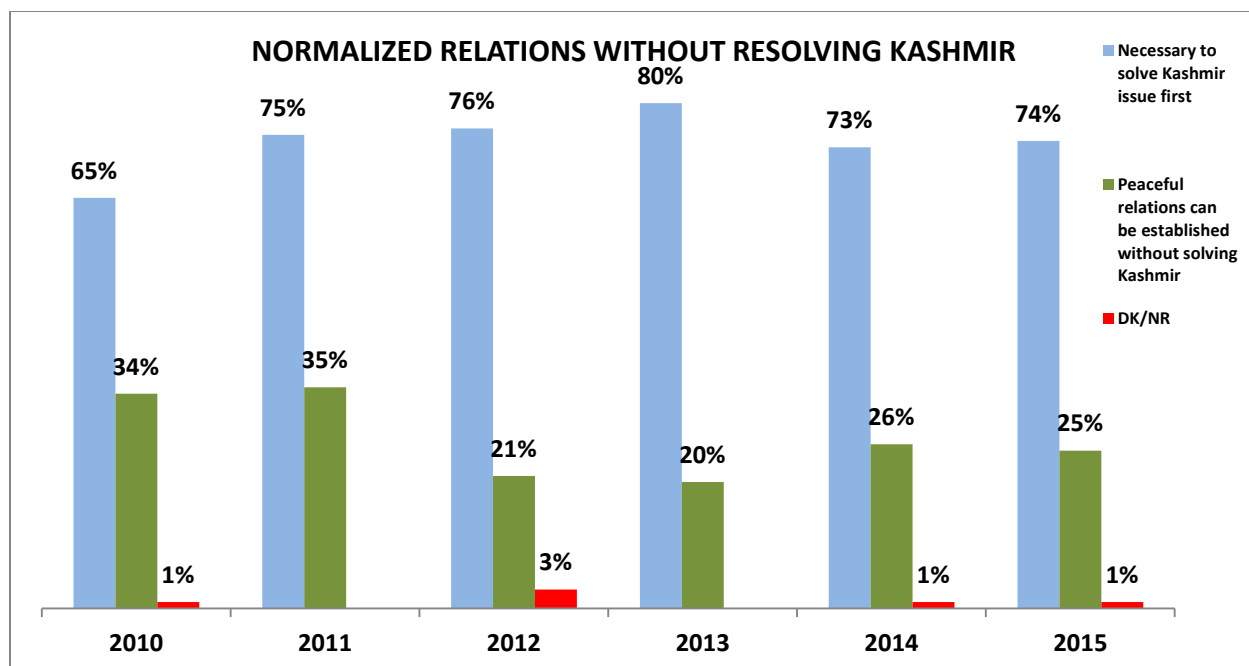


The data shown here over for the period 2010-15 shows how Pakistanis perceive of and understand the sovereign and legitimate right of control and governance in Kashmir. Three important interpretations can be made from this data. First, the assertion that Pakistan has the legitimate claim over sovereignty in Kashmir is the default opinion of the majority of Pakistanis.

However, the trend here shows important features of this thinking. In 2010, when relations remained strained between India and Pakistan over the Mumbai attacks, 71% Pakistanis believed that Pakistan has the sovereign right to claim Kashmir – the highest proportion over the last six years. However, as bilateral relations between India and Pakistan cooled off in the intervening years, public support for this position declined steadily year-on-year. In 2014, this position was supported by 53% Pakistanis; still the majority opinion, however, it signalled a decline of 18%. However, in the latter half of 2014, the breakdown of ceasefire over the LOC and international border between Indian and Pakistani troops signalled another period of belligerent tensions. This event has had an important impact on public opinion in Pakistan, as 68% Pakistanis in early 2015 have switched their opinions back to supporting and asserting Pakistan's right to sovereign control over Kashmir. This trend reveals an important feature of Pakistanis' public opinion on Kashmir: any rise in tensions between the two countries can quickly dilute any support for engagement and flexibility in stated positions on outstanding issues, particularly Kashmir. Crucially, this data shows that for those looking to 'manufacture' tensions between the two countries to legitimize and strengthen their positions and interests, the shortest route to achieving the objective lies in triggering a rapid deterioration of any stable aspect of the relationship between the two countries. In this case, this has proven to be the trade of fire and shelling across the LOC and international border.

The second important realization from this time series data the notion of accepting India's right to sovereign control over Kashmir is an unpopular position in Pakistan. Over the last six years, only a tiny minority of Pakistanis have supported this alternative assertion. The third interpretation from this data is perhaps the most interesting: an increasingly higher proportion of Pakistanis over the last six years support the idea of an independent and autonomous Pakistan. Support for this position was at its highest – 40% in 2013 and 2014. This indicates that an increasingly greater proportion of Pakistanis have an alternative position on the issue, beyond the dichotomy of choosing between India and Pakistan as legitimate claimants to Kashmir. This support shows the degree of flexibility in Pakistanis' opinions on Kashmir, especially over the last six years or so. However, and critically, support for this alternative position declined to a low of 24% at the beginning of 2015. Much like the aforementioned analysis, strains in relationship between the two countries quickly harden public opinions and beliefs, and this evaporates any degree of flexibility on offer on stated positions. The fall in support for Kashmir's right for independence and/or autonomy, has translated into a gain for public support for backing Pakistan's claims to Kashmir.

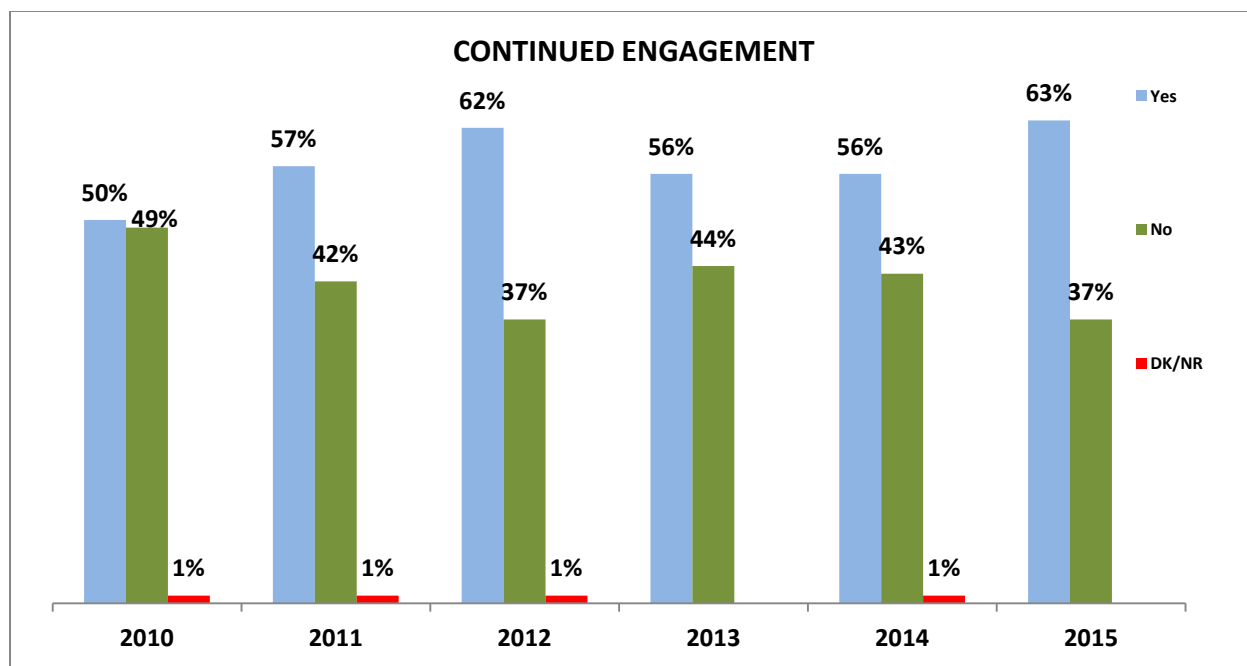
Another crucial question posed by Gallup Pakistan has revolved around the issue of the importance of resolving Kashmir to normalizing relations between India and Pakistan. Specifically, a representative sample of Pakistanis has been asked the following questions over the last six years: Do you think in establishing peaceful relations with India, it is necessary to first solve the Kashmir issue, or can peaceful relations be established without it as well? Pakistanis' responses on this question show the public's mindset and attitude towards recognizing Kashmir as the central bone of contention between the two countries. The figure below shows this time-series data:



The data for the last six years on this issue of Kashmir's importance to achieving normalcy in India-Pakistan bilateral relations is relatively self-explanatory. The majority of Pakistanis believe that the resolution of Kashmir is the key to establishing harmonized and peaceful relations between India and Pakistan in South Asia. Between 2010 and 2015, the proportion of Pakistanis with this opinion has increased slightly. The highest support for this belief, 80%, was recorded in 2013. Interestingly, this increase coincides with the positivity and enthusiasm expressed by the PML-N Government in establishing peaceful relations with India. This positive sentiment seems to increase Pakistanis' belief in the centrality and importance of resolving Kashmir to establish peaceful bilateral relations between the two countries.

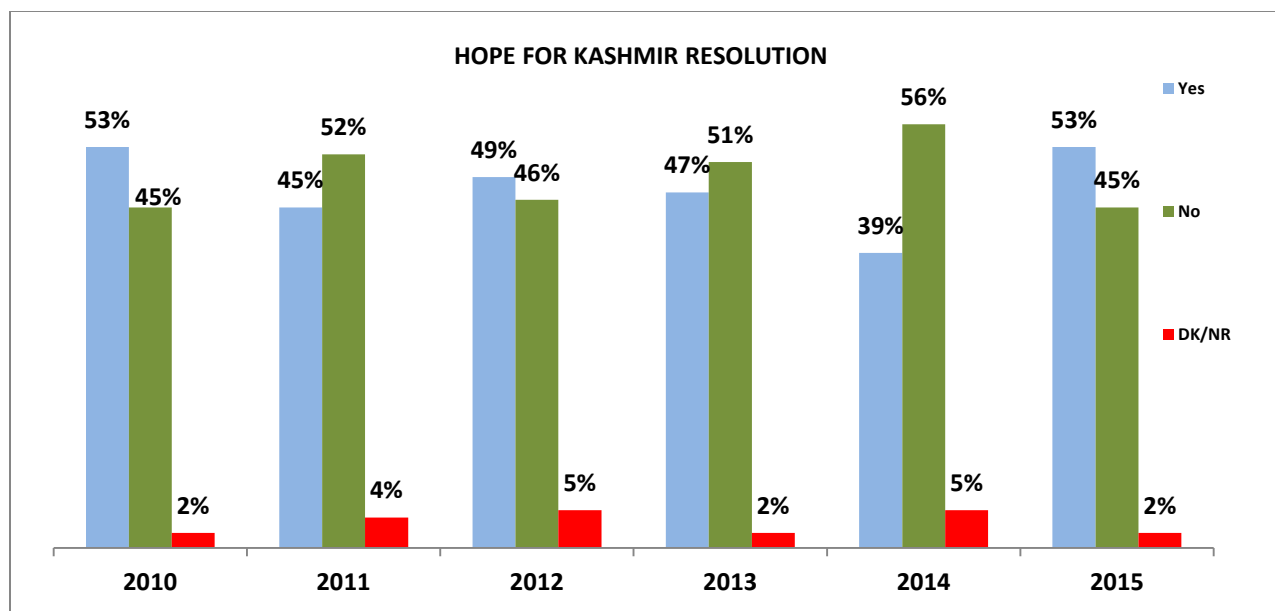
Over the last six years, many experts and diplomats have suggested that India and Pakistan can achieve normalized relations in areas other than Kashmir e.g. trade relations, before turning to resolving the difficult task of finding a resolution to disagreement over Kashmir. Between 2010 and 2015, the proportion of Pakistanis supporting this alternative hypothesis has fluctuated from one-third to one-quarter of all Pakistanis. In 2015, exactly a quarter of all Pakistanis (25%) believed that peaceful bilateral relations can be established between the two countries without finding a resolution to the Kashmir dispute. The data seems to indicate that a healthy constituency of support backs progress on other outstanding issues between the two countries, before Kashmir is resolved.

The third important question tracked by Gallup Pakistan revolves around the importance of continued engagement with India and the resumption of ties in different spheres, before the resolution of the Kashmir issue. Specifically, a nationally representative sample of Pakistanis across the country has been asked the following question over the last six years: In your opinion, should Pakistan keep ties with India on any level before the issue of Kashmir is resolved? Public opinion data on this issue over the last six years is shown in the figure below:



Most Pakistanis understand and appreciate the importance of continued engagement with India despite the outstanding and contested status of Kashmir in Pakistan's foreign policy. Between 2010 and 2015, the proportion of Pakistanis that support this position has increased gradually from 50% to 63% respectively. This increase in support for establishment and continuation of ties with India before the resolution of the Kashmir dispute shows that Pakistanis recognize the importance of dialogue and negotiations as the pathway to resolving all outstanding issues and disagreements between the two countries. Crucially, the support for ceasing all ties with India before resolving the Kashmir issue has dissipated in the last six years, from a high of 49% in 2010, to the low of 37% in 2015. This decline shows that over time, an increasing proportion of Pakistanis understand that resolving disputes with India requires channels and framework of engagement in bilateral ties at some level or in certain affairs – outside the scope of the Kashmir question.

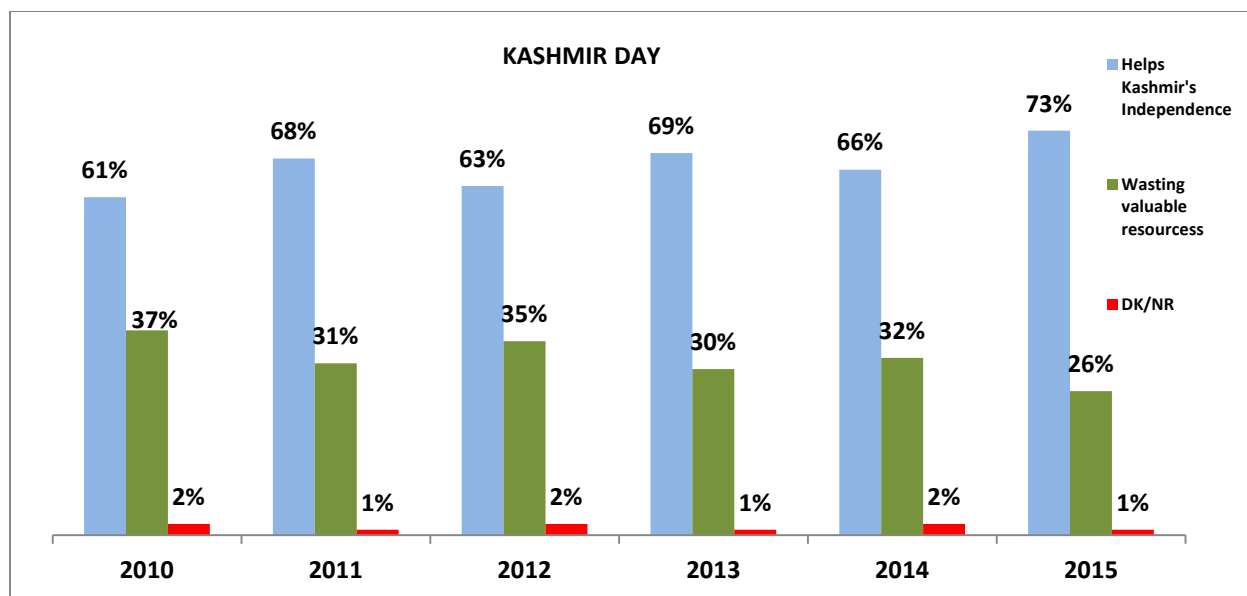
Crucially, Gallup Pakistan has also asked Pakistanis an important question regarding their hopes for the future of bilateral relations between India and Pakistan, and in particular, the resolution of Kashmir dispute. Gallup Pakistan has asked Pakistanis across the country the following question over the last six years: In your opinion, can the issue of Kashmir be solved in your lifetime? Data on this question is shown in the figure below:



Pakistanis remain divided over their hopes for a resolution to the Kashmir dispute in their lifetimes. Several generations of Indians and Pakistanis have lived through and experienced the bitter political animosity and warfare between the two countries. These generations have had to accept the obduracy of the outstanding issues between the two countries, and the continued inability of leadership in both countries to find a meaningful and durable solution for all unresolved issues; particularly, the Kashmir issue.

Data shown previously indicates the importance that Pakistanis attach to the Kashmir issue. The majority of the country still views and understands the resolution to Kashmir dispute as the Holy Grail for peace in the region, and harmonized relations between India and Pakistan. However, several millions of Indians and Pakistanis have come and gone with the dream of living in peace in the South Asian regional neighbourhood. In 2015, a slight majority of Pakistanis (53%) think that they will see resolution to the Kashmir issue in their lifetime. However, evidence indicates that confidence in this dream for peaceful resolution of the Kashmir conundrum has fluctuated in recent years. Crucially, a substantial proportion of Pakistanis also believes that perhaps this vision of a peaceful future in the region is not attainable in their lives. In 2014, 56% Pakistanis believed that the Kashmir issue would not be resolved in their lifetime – the highest proportion over the last six years. This data shows that Pakistanis remain unclear and divided in their understanding of whether the critical and complicated bone of contention between India and Pakistan can be resolved in their lifetime.

Support for Kashmiris, and their rights, remains high in Pakistan. Officially, the country celebrates solidarity with Kashmiris on February 5th every year. Each year, the state of Pakistan expresses its support for Kashmiris' rights. Gallup Pakistan has asked Pakistanis about their opinions on this annual day of solidarity through the question, "Some people think that celebrating Kashmir Day helps in Kashmiri independence, while some think that in celebrating Kashmir Day we are wasting valuable resources. What is your opinion?" That data is show below:



Public opinion data over the last six years shows that Pakistanis retain their consistent support for the rights of Kashmiris. This is reflected in the substantial support for celebrating February 5th as Kashmir Day in Pakistan. In 2015, Gallup Pakistan recorded the highest proportion of Pakistanis supporting Kashmir Day as a way to helping Kashmiris gain independence. One-third to a quarter of all Pakistanis sees this official day of solidarity as futile, and wastage of resources.

CONCLUSION:

The series of interrelated public opinion polling by Gallup Pakistan on Kashmir and India-Pakistan relations shows the sociocultural and political attitudes and mindset of Pakistanis with regards to bilateral relations between the two countries, as well as opinions on the status and importance of resolving the Kashmir issue. Data for the last six years shows that Pakistanis' opinions are sensitive to the changing tenor and rhetoric in bilateral ties between the two countries. Deterioration in relations on one front tends to spike Pakistanis' opinions on the bilateral relations towards hardened, traditional positions – particularly on the Kashmir issue. The data and discussion presented here shows that Pakistanis are mindful of the importance and criticality of Kashmir as the bedrock of tensions between India and Pakistanis. However, the underlying sentiment tracked through this data indicates that Pakistanis seem desirous of resolving Kashmir through continued engagement in cross-sectional ties through negotiations and dialogue. Generations of Indians and Pakistanis have lived through the bitter animosity that has imperiled both countries, and sent them to war against each other. Both countries seem to be awaiting the arrival of visionary leadership that could alter the dynamic of this relationship, unhinge frozen alliances to hardened and classical positions, and lay the foundations of peaceful relations between India and Pakistan as a pathway to unleashing progress, collaboration, and prosperity for humanity in South Asia.