

Changing Public Opinion on Kashmir Issue : Some Trends from Gallup Pakistan History Project Polls Data by Abdullah Tajwar , Research Intern at Gallup Pakistan History Project

Abstract: The conclusions presented in this article are predicated on the results of two National Surveys carried out by Gallup Pakistan, first in 1990 and then again in 2015, as well as in additional survey carried out in 2012, with the intent of gauging the opinion of the Pakistani public over the various aspects of the Kashmir Issue and comparing how it has changed through empirical analysis. The first survey dealt with the question of the independence of Kashmir from India. In 1990, 31% Pakistanis believed that Kashmir would be able to gain independence in one or two years, while 16% believed it would take less than one or two years. 27%, however, felt that it would take quite some time whereas 5% were of the view that Kashmir will not gain independence. This question was asked again in 2015. 17% of the public felt that Kashmir will gain independence in one or two years, 17% felt that it will gain independence in less than one or two years. This time however, 41% respondents said it will take quite some time and a remarkable 24% of the public said that Kashmir will not gain independence. Another survey conducted by Gallup asked the respondents whether they felt Pakistan should provide military aid to Kashmir. In 1990, 78% Pakistanis thought that Pakistan should supply arms to help the Kashmiri struggle for independence, 12% disagreed while the remaining 10% did not respond. Comparatively, in 2015, 57% of the public thought that Pakistan should supply arms to support the Kashmiri cause, while 42% respondents felt that Pakistan should not supply arms to Kashmir. 1% of the respondents did not respond. Finally, the results of a Gilani Research Foundation Survey carried out by Gallup Pakistan in 2012 were also used in which a representative sample of the Pakistani population was asked how they would resolve the Kashmir issue. 39% wished to resolve it through the United Nations, 34% through dialogue with India, 13% believed the solution lied in warfare, 7% felt that Kashmir should itself be involved in any decision, 6% said that they would resolve it silently while 1% opined that the Kashmir issue had already been resolved. These surveys and polls were conducted by Gallup Pakistan, an affiliate of Gallup International, on a sample of over 1100 respondents in urban areas of all four provinces of Pakistan. This sample was statistically selected across all ages, income groups and educational levels. The error for a sample of this kind is estimated to be +/- 5% at a 95% confidence level.

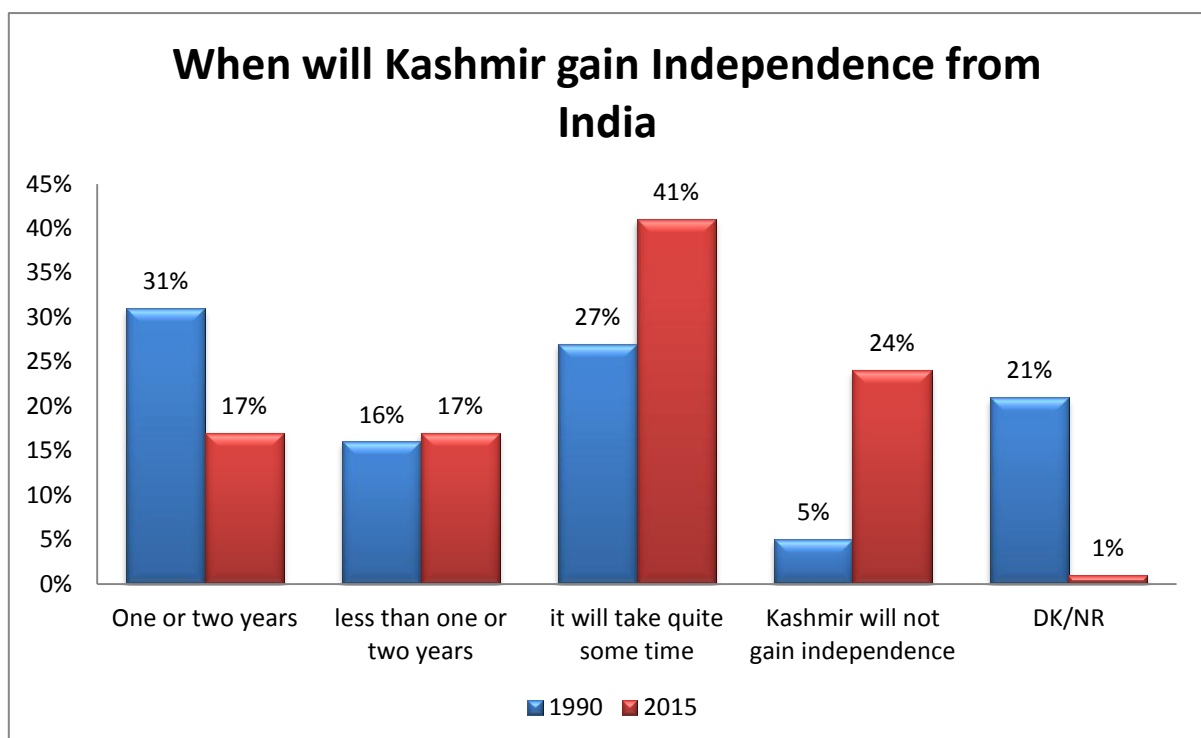
The two nation states of Pakistan and India, born out of the Colonial Raj of the British in the Sub-continent, have never really managed to maintain peaceful and civil ties with each other, despite coexisting as neighbors for nigh on sixty seven years. A major source of continued tension between these states has been the disputed territory of Kashmir. A dispute born out of the ill-conceived partition of the subcontinent by the British in 1947, the region of Kashmir has already been the subject of two wars fought between India and Pakistan, the first being the well documented war of 1965 and the relatively recent and albeit short-lived Kargil War in 1999.

Both countries have never ceased to relinquish their claim on Kashmir. Kashmir, essentially being a Muslim Majority area, has always been considered by Pakistan, a country itself born to serve as a sovereign and independent state for the Muslims of India, as an unquestionable part of its territory. Unflinching support for the Kashmiri people has been a recurring state narrative in Pakistan that has always had unanimous public approval and support. Successive dictatorships and democracies have continued to resort to the Issue of Kashmir in order to sway public opinion and lend legitimacy to their respective regimes, whenever they have found themselves in hot water. Media, print and otherwise, has played an important role in keeping the Kashmir issue alive in Pakistan.

Documentaries and episodes showing violence being propagated against the innocent people of Kashmir by the Indian state, have continued to fuel a strong sentiment for Kashmir throughout Pakistanis. That, and the fact that every Pakistani can attribute the quote that "Kashmir is the Jugular Vein of Pakistan" to the father and National hero of Pakistan, the Quaid-e-Azam, serves to highlight the symbolic value that Kashmir holds in the eyes of Pakistanis of all denominations, sects and provinces. In educational institutes, ranging from primary all the way to higher education, the curriculum on Kashmir is heavily

administered by the state to ensure that the Pakistani public remains cognizant of the fact that Kashmir rightfully belongs to Pakistan and it is no less than a duty of Pakistan to free the people of the disputed territories of Kashmir from the oppressive yoke of the Hindu tyrant. Needless to say, the independence of Kashmir from India has been a topic that has never really felt center stage in Pakistan.

It is in the backdrop of this context that we delve into the history of Gallup



Pakistan and utilize its vast stores of Public Opinion Polling to empirically analyze

Source: Gallup Pakistan National Survey (covering 4 provinces and Urban/Rural areas)

the opinion of the Pakistani Public over the Issue of Kashmir. Gallup Pakistan conducted a national survey in the year 1990, in which the public was asked as to when, in their opinion, would Kashmir be able to gain independence from India. This question was asked again after twenty five years, in 2015, in order to

gauge the evolution of public opinion in Pakistan over this critical question. The results of the polls conducted by Gallup Pakistan over this question, as depicted in the table below, doubtlessly present a fascinating picture.

The results, overall, portray a negative trend among Pakistanis over the question of the independence of Kashmir from India, with an astonishing 24% of the public believing that Kashmir will not be able to gain independence at all, in comparison to just 5% in 1990. In 1990, 27% of the people believed that the independence of Kashmir would take quite some time, whereas this figure spiked to an outrageous 41%, thus stating that an outright majority of Pakistan now believes that the independence of Kashmir from India will take a long time. These two statistics serve to show that in the minds of the Pakistani people, the probability of Kashmir gaining independence from India is becoming rather bleak. A number of explanations can be attributed to this growing resignation among the Pakistani polity over the independence of Kashmir over the span of two and a half decades. The most obvious explanation lies in the knowledge of the fact that a military solution for Kashmir's independence is not viable anymore. Both Pakistan and India possess Nuclear Weapons and any military initiative by Pakistan, either covert or overt, could, in all likelihood, result in a nuclear war between the two states. Therefore, the possibility of mutually assured destruction resulting from a nuclear war is a powerful deterrent against a military solution. However, this hypothesis only partly explains these statistics because Pakistan and India did fight the Kargil War at a time when both states had successfully test fired their nuclear weapons.

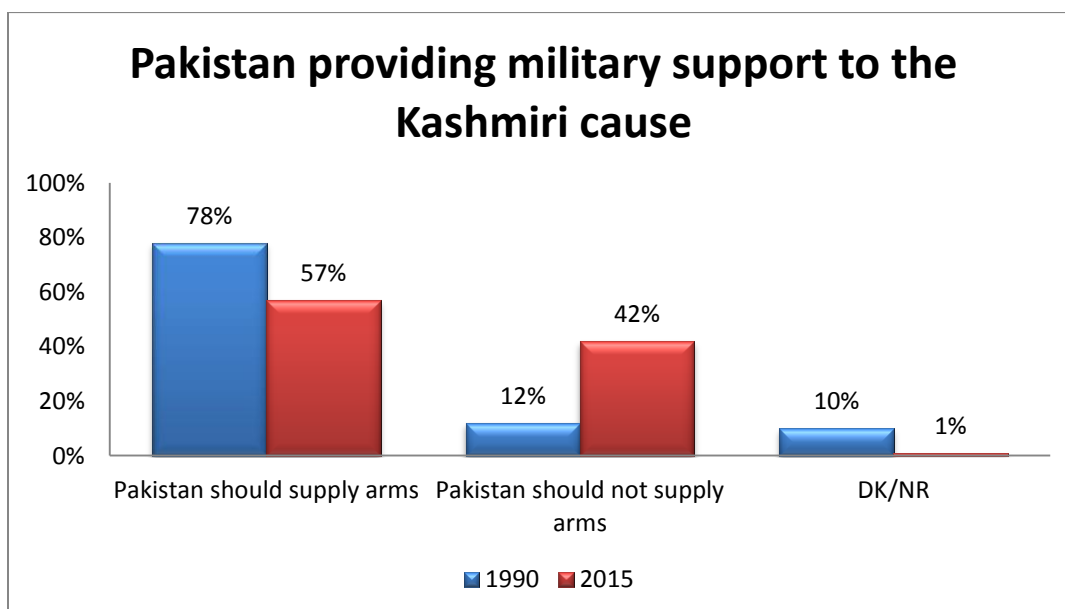
Another explanation can be traced by looking at the political trajectory of Indian-held Kashmir in recent years. Indian governments of late, particularly the BharatiyaJanata Party (BJP), have embarked on an aggressive campaign to assimilate Kashmir fully in the Indian Union. The recently concluded state elections of 2014 in Kashmir recorded the highest voter turnout in twenty five

years, despite several calls by the leaders of the separatist All Parties Hurriyat Conference to boycott the elections. This, coupled with the fact that the elections did not suffer from any major incidents of violence, showed to the Pakistani Public that perhaps the people of Kashmir are not as willing to separate from India as Pakistanis would believe them to be. Furthermore, extensive development projects have also taken place in Kashmir during this time to aid in its socio-economic development, an example of which is the under construction Chenab Rail Bridge, which once completed will become the tallest rail bridge in the world.

In 1990, an outright majority of Pakistanis (31%) believed that Kashmir would gain independence from India in one or two years. This figure, as a result of the reasons outlined above, fell markedly to just 17% in a span of 25 years. A significant event took place in Pakistan in 2002 that may very well have had far reaching consequences for the people of Pakistan as well as on the outcome of this poll conducted in 2015. That event was the liberalization of the Pakistani Media done during the regime of General Parvez Musharraf, which allowed privately owned channels to be aired in Pakistan. Hence, in a matter of a few years, Pakistan went on from having just three state owned channels to a vast number of private channels. This event enabled, for the first time, for information other than that controlled and monitored by the state, to become widely available to the public of Pakistan. This historic event, coupled with another explosion of information brought about by the Internet meant that it had now become nearly impossible for the Government to hide information from the public. This was in marked contrast to the decade of the 90's, where the Pakistan Television Network was the only news channel that the Pakistanis had access to. Therefore, among other things, the public watching television was only exposed to the State's narrative on Kashmir. However, now, developments such as the internal elections and development projects of the Indian Government in Kashmir have become common knowledge, as have various

other narratives on the issue of Kashmir. However, some people were still of the view that Kashmir would gain independence from India in less than two years. 16% of the public felt this in 1990 and 17% of the people still felt it in 2015. Furthermore, in comparison to the 21% who chose to not respond in 1990, that percentage of non-respondents dropped to just 1%.

Another critical question regarding the resolution of the Kashmir Issue was out towards the people of Pakistan by Gallup Pakistan. In the National Survey conducted in 1990 and in 2015, Gallup Pakistan aimed to gauge the proportion of the public of Pakistan who were in favor of a military solution for resolving the issue of the independence of Kashmir from Pakistan. Specifically, a nationally representative sample of the Pakistani public was asked the following question: ***Some people are of the opinion that Pakistani Government should provide arms to support the Kashmiri's struggle for independence while others disagree with this. What is your opinion about this issue?*** The results of this questionnaire have been tabulated and are presented below in a longitudinal bar graph:



Source: Gallup Pakistan National Survey (covering 4 provinces and Urban/Rural areas)

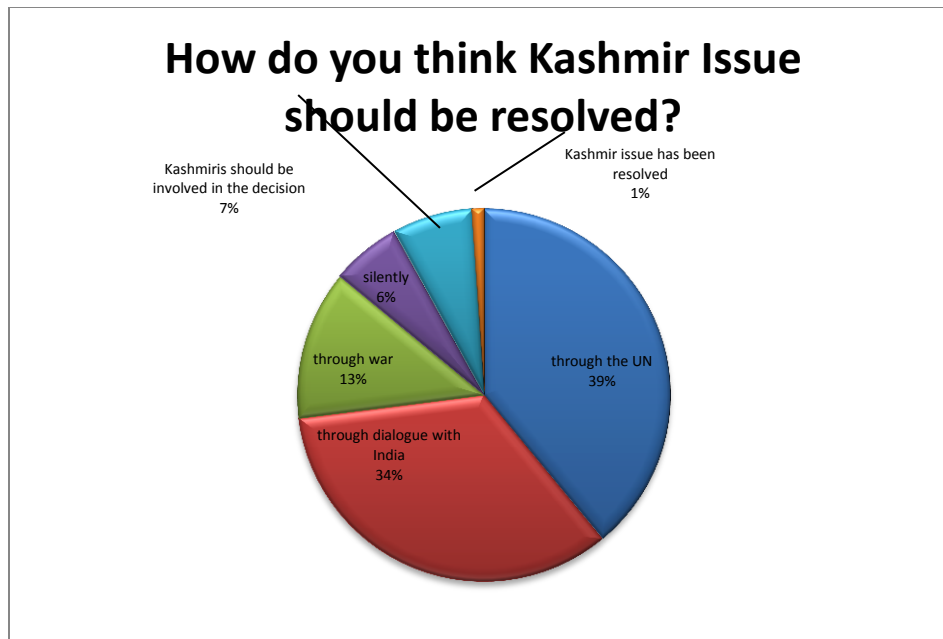
As can be seen above, an overwhelming majority of the population of Pakistan (78%) was in compliance with the decision to supply arms and ammunition to Kashmir in order to advance their struggle for separation from India. However, in a time span of twenty five years, this figure observed a drop of nearly twenty percent, falling down to 57%. In stark contrast, the proportion of Pakistanis who were opposed to the idea of militarily supporting the Kashmiri cause increased sharply in the time span of twenty five years. At 1990, the percentage of this segment of the population stood at a mere 12%, whereas in 2015, the section of the people who disapproved of armed assistance to Kashmir increased visibly to reach a figure of 42%.

This rather telling dataset paves way for some important interpretations and conclusions. **Back in 1990, Pakistan had just witnessed the end of a nine year battle waged between Afghanistan and the U.S.S.R. Pakistan, then led by General and later President Zia ulHaq, had been a major supporter and a benefactor of the Afghan Mujahedeen**, and along with the US, had been responsible for training and arming the Mujahedeen. The US and Pakistan had allied against the U.S.S.R., and the US had started covertly trading billions of dollars worth of arms and ammunitions into Pakistan to arm the Afghan Insurgency, led by the Mujahedeen. Pakistan was the center via which all aid, military and otherwise, was funneled into Afghanistan. Pakistan's notorious secret agency, the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), had a considerable role in providing arms and military training to the Afghans. Nevertheless, by 1990, Pakistan was clearly reeling in the success of aiding its Afghan brethren in their fight against the Soviets and clearly felt that a similar form of support for their Muslim brothers in Kashmir would produce a similar result. Hence, this mindset percolating within the Pakistani populace could have been behind a unanimous section of the population believing that an armed insurgency would be the best route to take for Kashmir. It was convenient for Pakistan as well, as it had clearly had no shortage of arms and ammunitions at its disposal, which it

had received from the foreign nations, primarily the USA, supporting the Afghan cause.

However, the reason that a majority of the population of Pakistan has shrugged this mindset in favor of one against the supply of arms to Kashmir has been brought about primarily by Pakistan's own security situation that has suffered tremendously in the last decade or so. A wave of terrorism has swept the country in recent years, with the seeming majority of terrorist groups being ideological off-shoots of the Afghan Taliban and Al-Qaeda, two organizations that Pakistan had a critical role in founding, back at the time of the Afghan War. To elucidate, a banned terrorist outfit of Pakistan, the Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a militant organization based in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, carried out a horrific attack on the Army Public School (APS) Campus of Peshawar, killing scores of innocent children. Currently, the Pakistan Army is carrying out an armed offensive against militants based in the tribal belt of Pakistan, called the Operation Zarb e Azb. Therefore, as a result of suffering from years at the hands of militants and terrorists and with incidents like the one at APS still fresh in memory, the Pakistani populace has come round to the idea that a proliferation of arms in the hands of people not directly under the ambit of the state tends to create more problems than solve them, as has been evidenced by the role of Pakistan in Afghanistan.

This realization can be further seen in another poll conducted by Gallup Pakistan in 2012 where a representative sample of Pakistan's population was asked on its thoughts on the resolution of the Kashmir issue. Specifically, Gallup Pakistan asked the respondents: "How do you think the Kashmir issue should be resolved? The results of this survey have been illustrated below in a pie chart.



Source: Gallup Pakistan National Survey (covering 4 provinces and Urban/Rural areas)

This data set further expounds on the conclusions that have been arrived at earlier. The public opinion on waging a war to resolve the Kashmir issue is a scanty 13%, thus highlighting the change in mindset that has gradually taken place among the people of Pakistan. Having been the victims of an internal war that is still not showing enough signs of abating any time soon, despite lasting for over a decade, has perhaps been the key factor that has shifted the focus of the public towards finding more democratic solutions for the issue of Kashmir. The strategy of engaging in an armed struggle for the cause of Kashmir has begun to lose footing, as has been evidenced above by the two studies undertaken by Gallup Pakistan.

Though the people of Pakistan certainly have not forgotten the people of Kashmir or the fact that there has been a well documented and reliable history of violence perpetrated by India against the Muslims of Kashmir, they have now, based on the opinion captured by Gallup Pakistan, realized that the independence of Kashmir from India may not be as simple or uncomplicated as

they had once thought it would be. The idea of supporting Kashmir militarily has also fizzled out in light of terrorist attacks on the internal security of Pakistan, as the people have felt the full effects of placing arms and ammunition in the hands of the wrong people. The Pakistani public has realized as well that just inspiring an armed insurgency in Kashmir, by sending in supplies of arms into the region, won't be as successful in liberating Kashmir as they once thought. Finally, and most importantly, the internal status of Indian occupied Kashmir has also made the people of Pakistan err in their fight for the independence of Kashmir. India has come a long way from treating Kashmir just as another region to be suppressed militarily and the public of Pakistan seems to have caught up on that, albeit grudgingly.