

Kashmir - People want to move on

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Politicians spin realities to create myths about their people and their country in order to take them forward to a better life. This is called leadership and when done with compassion and wisdom peoples and nations can achieve great advances. But when such myths are spun out of self-interest then, tragically, the result can be misery and death. Kashmir, it would seem falls into this second category. The reality, according to the people of Kashmir, is that they want an end to the corruption that has blighted their society, they want to live in harmony with their fellow countrymen and women, they want a secular state without borders, they want their children from different communities and faiths to go to school together, they want an end to all forms of discrimination, they want an end to the abuse of human rights and killings, they want India and Pakistan to stop using them for their own selfish reasons, they want to be masters of their own destinies and to this end they want negotiations in good faith. These were the major findings of the most extensive poll ever done in J & K two years ago to find out what solutions the people vision as the way forward for Kashmir (see 'About the Polls') and it stood in sharp contrast to the myths spun by their political leaders then seemingly living in the past. Now, two years on, following months of renewed violence and bloodshed, have the views of the people changed and do their leaders speak for them? To this end the most critical constitutional questions asked in May 2008 were repeated again in the latest poll run in August of this year.

No one wanted to 'Join Pakistan' in May 2008. Even 69% of those living in the Kashmir Valley considered this option 'unacceptable' then (the result was the same for Muslims) and there is no significant change now at 71% 'unacceptable' in August 2010 (see Table). Everyone interviewed was asked which of the various constitutional options on offer they considered to be 'essential', 'desirable', 'acceptable', 'tolerable' or 'unacceptable' so they could have chosen 'tolerable' but they didn't. Although Hindus and Buddhists, (predominantly in Jammu and Ladakh) want to 'Join India', 63% of those living in the Kashmir Valley in 2008 and 58% in 2010 do not so this option does not seem to work either as a solution to the Kashmir problem. But the UN resolutions for a plebiscite are limited to these two options – India or Pakistan. Clearly the people in the Kashmir Valley who want this plebiscite to go ahead do not understand this issue or have been seriously misled. What they want is 'Full Independence' at 63% 'essential' in 2008 and 65% in 2010 and that is not presently on offer.

Table: A Constitutional Package for Kashmir – Results for the Valley.

All of J and K should become a part of Pakistan like any other Pakistan Province				
Join Pakistan		2010	2008	Change
	Essential	5	7	-2
	Desirable	11	5	6
	Acceptable	9	8	1
	Tolerable	3	9	-6
	Unacceptable	71	69	2
All 5 Districts should join to become the independent state of Kashmir with responsibility for both their domestic and foreign policy and protecting their borders with Pakistan, India and China				
Full Independence		2010	2008	Change
	Essential	65	63	2
	Desirable	15	15	0
	Acceptable	6	10	-4
	Tolerable	2	4	-2
	Unacceptable	12	7	5
Each of the 5 Districts should be allowed to choose their own future with Pakistan or India				
Disintegration		2010	2008	Change
	Essential	32	12	20
	Desirable	8	10	-2
	Acceptable	19	11	8
	Tolerable	6	11	-5
	Unacceptable	34	53	-19
Pakistan and Indian Kashmir should function like a Co-Federation with an open border and decentralisation/local control in all Regions, Districts and Blocks				
Regional Integration and Devolution		2010	2008	Change
	Essential	44	18	26
	Desirable	10	20	-10
	Acceptable	25	24	1
	Tolerable	9	12	-3
	Unacceptable	12	22	-10
The status quo should stay the same with present Central, State and Regional arrangements for governance				
No Change		2010	2008	Change
	Essential	18	11	7
	Desirable	8	7	1
	Acceptable	6	10	-4
	Tolerable	18	12	6
	Unacceptable	50	58	-8
Full implementation of Article 370 and return to the status existing in J and K before 1953 with a Parliament and Prime Minister leaving only defense, foreign policy and communications to India				
Autonomy		2010	2008	Change
	Essential	39	18	21
	Desirable	15	14	1
	Acceptable	11	15	-4
	Tolerable	12	16	-4
	Unacceptable	24	34	-10
All of J and K should become a part of India like any other Indian State				
Join India		2010	2008	Change
	Essential	7	9	-2
	Desirable	2	8	-6
	Acceptable	19	9	10
	Tolerable	14	9	5
	Unacceptable	58	63	-5

But suppose it were. What would happen then? For 58% of Hindus and 74% of Buddhists this option was 'unacceptable' in 2008 (50% for Jammu Province and 62% for Ladakh) and remains so in 2010. A plebiscite, even if Pakistan, India and the UN agreed to it, would leave Kashmir divided and the people of the Kashmir Valley did not want that at 53% 'unacceptable' for the 'Disintegration' option in 2008. However, on this point there has been a significant change. Only 34% reject 'Disintegration' now as 'unacceptable'. Similarly, 'Regional integration and devolution' is far more popular than it was at 44% 'essential' in 2010 (12% 'unacceptable') up 26 points from only 18% 'essential' in 2008 (then 22% 'unacceptable').

The 'No change' option is still strongly rejected in the Kashmir Valley at 58% and 50% 'unacceptable' in 2008 and 2010 respectively. 'Autonomy' was 'unacceptable' to 61% of Buddhists in 2008 and no doubt remains so. But this option 'Full implementation of Article 370 and return to the status existing in J and K before 1953 with a Parliament and Prime Minister leaving only defence, foreign policy and communications to India' was by far the 'lesser of all the evils' at only 23% 'unacceptable' over all in 2008. Resistance to this option has also dropped significantly in the Kashmir Valley down from 34% 'unacceptable' in 2008 (18% 'essential') to only 24% 'unacceptable' in 2010 (now 39% 'essential') so providing the Buddhists can be persuaded that their minority rights and culture can be protected in an autonomous state then this option just might work and perhaps this can be done by leaving the responsibility for the rights of minorities with India and by implementing far reaching devolution to all levels of government. Coupled with all the other measures for reform dealt with in the 2008 poll peace just might be possible at the negotiating table. Critically all the compromise options are far more acceptable to the people of the Kashmir Valley now in 2010 than they were in 2008. The people of the Kashmir Valley want to move on.

About the Polls

The research for these polls was carried out by the staff of the Cvoter Foundation in Delhi and Dr. Colin Irwin from the Department of Politics at the University of Liverpool. The Questions were collected during a month of interviews undertaken by the research team in Ladakh, Jammu (including Kashmiri Pandit camps) and the Kashmir Valley. The Survey work for the first poll was completed between March and May 2008 and included a random sample of two thousand people from all parts of Jammu and Kashmir with additional booster samples for the Buddhist, Sikh, Gujjar and other minorities. The data for the second poll in this series was collected in August 2010 with a sample of 1,200 interviews. More results are available at <http://www.peacepolls.org>.