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AFP

## Two thirds in Indian Kashmir want independence: poll

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About two thirds of residents in India-administered [Kashmir](#) want independence for their region, with less than one in ten seeking a merger with Pakistan, a survey showed Sunday.

The Kashmiri region is administered separately by India and Pakistan, with the Indian part subject to an insurgency and violent separatist movement for the last 20 years that has claimed an estimated 47,000 lives.

The poll, conducted for the Sunday Hindustan Times newspaper, showed that 66 percent of respondents in the Kashmir valley wanted "complete freedom to entire [Jammu and Kashmir](#) as a new country".

Jammu and Kashmir is the far northwestern state of India that includes the violence-wracked Muslim-majority Kashmir valley, the Hindu-majority region of Jammu and the mostly Buddhist Ladakh area.

Only six percent in Kashmir, where street violence flared again on Sunday, wanted a "complete merger of the entire Jammu and Kashmir in [Pakistan](#)."

The desire for independence for the state is not shared in the Jammu and Ladakh parts however, where 76 percent and 70 percent wanted a "complete merger" of the state into India.

Kashmir has a special status under the Indian constitution and was initially autonomous after partition of the subcontinent in 1947, though much of its autonomy has slowly been eroded.

The poll was conducted by Team CVoter and canvassed 2,369 people.

Respondents were also asked who was to blame for a current wave of unrest in the Kashmir area where young stone-throwers have clashed with [security forces](#) for the last three months.

Seventy protesters and bystanders -- some children -- have been killed, mostly by security forces who have fired on demonstrations.

In Kashmir, 56 percent blamed India for the unrest, while 44 percent of those asked in the "[rest of India](#)" thought neighbour and implacable foe Pakistan was responsible for stirring up trouble.

Majorities in all areas agreed that Indian forces should not use bullets against protesters, with 96 percent saying it was wrong in Kashmir, and 85 percent in the rest of India.

Two thirds thought it was wrong in Jammu, while 31 percent said it was acceptable.

On Sunday, Indian police fired shots and used teargas to control young Kashmiris who defied a strict curfew and separately attacked the residence of a senior local minister, police said.

The guards of Kashmir Education Minister Peerzada Mohammad Sayeed, who was unhurt, opened fire and lobbed teargas in southern Kokernag village to repulse an attack by stone-throwing protesters, a police spokesman said.

In the summer capital of Srinagar, scores of young men defied a curfew and held noisy demonstraions at two places, prompting security forces to fire teargas canisters and warning shots.

"One person has been brought here with head injuries," a doctor at Srinagar's main hospital said, asking not to be named.

Meanwhile, police filed a case against moderate separatist leader Mirwaiz Umar Farooq over the burning of a [government building](#) allegedly by a mob during a protest rally on Saturday that he was leading.

He denied involvement. Other separatists blamed "anti-movement elements" for setting fire to the building and called for a probe into the arson.

Police said they had imposed a curfew on Sunday to prevent further violence.

The Muslim-majority Kashmir region has been fought over by India and Pakistan since the partition of British-ruled India in 1947, with the region now cut in two along a UN-monitored line of control.