BETWEEN INEVITABILITY AND OPPORTUNITY: HOW PAKISTANIS VIEWED THE 2025 INDO-PAK WAR

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Abstract

This study, conducted by the Institute of International Relations & Media Research, examines perceptions of Pakistanis during May 2025 Indo-Pak clashes. This research used a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative survey analysis with qualitative thematic interpretation. The research draws on responses from diverse demographic and professional groups, including the judiciary, government officials, general public, military personnel, business leaders, educators, and cultural sector representatives to provide a multi-dimensional understanding of public opinion. Quantitative findings reveal that a majority leaned toward viewing the war as unavoidable, with high approval for government crisis management and strong consensus on the war's unifying effect. However, perceptions of media fairness, the war's economic impact, the role of the international community, and the possibility of future peace were more divided, showing cautious optimism mixed with skepticism. Thematic analysis uncovers how institutional roles and lived experiences shape interpretations. Judiciary respondents emphasized legal mechanisms and dispute resolution, government officials highlighted security and diplomatic strength, and the military underscored readiness and morale. The general public's responses ranged from patriotic pride to criticism of leadership and media bias, while business leaders focused on trade disruption and economic stability. Educators advocated for long-term peacebuilding through knowledge exchange, and cultural representatives emphasized the power of shared identity and soft diplomacy. By integrating statistical trends with rich qualitative narratives, this study shows that while the war fostered short-term unity, perceptions of its causes, costs, and long-term implications remain diverse. The findings suggest that sustainable peace will require a multi-pronged approach blending legal, diplomatic, military, economic, educational, and cultural strategies to bridge differences and prevent future conflicts.

INTRODUCTION

Historical Background and Enduring Rivalry

The relationship between Pakistan and India has been one of the most enduring and complex rivalries in the modern international system. Since their emergence as independent states in 1947, both countries have been engaged in repeated cycles of conflict, mistrust, and strategic competition (Ali, 2022). The origins of this antagonism lie in the traumatic partition of British India, which not only divided the subcontinent along religious lines but also left unresolved territorial disputes, most notably over Jammu and Kashmir.

Over the decades, this rivalry has been cemented by a series of wars. The first war of 1947–48 set the tone for future engagements, as both sides clashed over Kashmir in a conflict that ended with a United Nations–brokered ceasefire but no permanent settlement. The 1965 war further deepened hostilities, while the 1971 war, resulting in the creation of Bangladesh, marked a significant strategic setback for Pakistan (Hilali, 2005; Tyagi et al., 2020). The 1999 Kargil conflict, fought under the shadow of nuclear weapons, underscored the risks of miscalculation even in a nuclearized environment.

These wars have not existed in isolation. Between them have been numerous border skirmishes, periods of heightened tension, and political crises that have kept relations in a near-permanent state of alert. Diplomacy, though attempted at various intervals, has often faltered in the face of domestic political pressures and renewed violence. Yet alongside these adversarial trends, there have been sporadic efforts to foster goodwill and cultural exchange, which have offered moments of hope amid entrenched hostility.

Cultural diplomacy has occasionally bridged political divides, with exchanges involving artists, poets, writers, and filmmakers from both countries. Indian delegations have visited Pakistan for events such as the Lahore Literary Festival and commemorations of literary icons like Faiz Ahmed Faiz, whose works resonate across the subcontinent. In return, Pakistani artistic and literary delegations have traveled to India, participating in joint exhibitions, poetry recitals, and book fairs that highlight shared cultural heritage. Joint concerts featuring singers from both sides, including celebrated playback and folk artists, have drawn enthusiastic audiences, reminding many of the deep linguistic, musical, and emotional ties that transcend political boundaries.

Journalistic collaboration has also played a role in cross-border engagement. Television talk shows and joint media initiatives have hosted journalists from across the border, providing a platform for dialogue on pressing political and social issues. Cricket, too, has served as a powerful, if sporadic, unifying force. Despite the political chill, bilateral cricket series and high-profile matches in tournaments like the ICC World Cup have stirred shared passion for the sport and brought together fans in moments of sporting camaraderie.

Institutional and regional platforms have further offered opportunities for constructive engagement. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has provided a formal venue where both countries can participate in multilateral dialogue, even if political tensions have often limited its effectiveness. Similarly, the South Asia Free Media Association (SAFMA) has encouraged professional cooperation among journalists and media houses across the region, fostering conversations that occasionally succeed in sidestepping political stalemates. These exchanges, though fragile, have demonstrated that channels for dialogue and mutual understanding do exist and can be mobilized when political will permits.

Taken together, these episodes of cultural, social, and regional cooperation present a contrasting narrative to the story of conflict. They illustrate the enduring human, artistic, and social connections that continue to survive in the shadow of political discord. While such efforts have not yet transformed the fundamental nature of Indo-Pak relations, they remain vital reminders that beyond the rhetoric of rivalry, there is a shared civilizational fabric capable of sustaining dialogue, empathy, and perhaps one day, a lasting peace.

Strategic Environment and Role of External Actors

In recent decades, the South Asian security environment has become increasingly precarious. Military standoffs such as those following the 2016 Uri attack and the 2019 Pulwama incident, which was followed by India's Balakot airstrikes and Pakistan's retaliatory operations, demonstrated how quickly

bilateral crises can escalate (Khan, 2022). The presence of nuclear weapons in both countries adds a layer of strategic complexity, making each confrontation a potential flashpoint with global implications.

External actors play a significant role in this dynamic. Major powers, whether as mediators, arms suppliers, or strategic partners, influence the trajectory of India–Pakistan relations. A particularly important factor in Pakistan's strategic calculus is its long-standing partnership with China. This relationship, rooted in shared geopolitical interests, mutual support in international forums, and extensive defence cooperation, has been further deepened by economic initiatives such as the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (Malik, 2003). While Pakistan views this partnership as a source of strategic and economic strength, India perceives it as a challenge to its own regional aspirations.

The Centrality of the Kashmir Dispute

The Kashmir conflict remains the single most persistent and emotionally charged issue between the two countries. For Pakistan, Kashmir represents an unfinished chapter of partition and a moral commitment to support the right of self-determination for the Kashmiri people. The territory is often described in Pakistani political discourse as an occupied region, with references to human rights violations and the heavy militarization of the area serving to reinforce this perception (Mitra, 2002; Wang, 2022).

Domestic media narratives consistently highlight the plight of Kashmiris, creating a powerful and emotive national consensus around the issue. Cultural mediums, particularly cinema, have also contributed to embedding these perceptions in the public imagination, with films frequently portraying India as an aggressor and Pakistan as a defender of justice (Malik & Akhtar, 2019).

India's evolving military doctrine has been a source of heightened concern in Pakistan. The shift towards more proactive and assertive strategies, interpreted in Pakistan as an inclination towards pre-emptive action, has contributed to Islamabad's perception of increased vulnerability (Ali & Bukhari, 2022). Given the perceived asymmetry in conventional forces,

Pakistan's strategic thinking places considerable emphasis on maintaining a credible deterrent.

Pakistan's nuclear weapons program, widely supported domestically, is framed as a defensive measure that ensures strategic stability by deterring large-scale aggression (Sridharan, 2005). This nuclear posture is seen as a balancing factor against India's conventional superiority, reducing the likelihood of a full-scale war while simultaneously shaping the contours of any limited conflict.

The strategic rivalry is not limited to land borders. Maritime security has emerged as an increasingly important theatre of competition, especially in the context of Chinese–Pakistani cooperation in the Indian Ocean. The development of Gwadar Port, among other projects, is seen in Pakistan as a means of securing sea lanes, diversifying trade routes, and reducing dependence on vulnerable chokepoints (Ali, 2019).

India's expanding naval capabilities and its partnerships with other regional actors have intensified Pakistan's concerns in the maritime domain (Dwivedi, 2013; Hayat et al., 2020). For Islamabad, its alliance with China is as much about securing economic benefits as it is about ensuring strategic depth in the face of Indian influence in South Asia and the wider Indo-Pacific.

May 2025 Conflict

In May 2025, tensions between India and Pakistan escalated rapidly following a series of skirmishes along disputed border areas. What began as localized clashes soon intensified into a short but intense phase of hostilities, marked by heavy exchanges of fire, targeted missile strikes, and aerial engagements. The conflict saw the active use of drones for surveillance and offensive strikes, adding a new technological dimension to the battlefield. Fighting was not limited to the traditional flashpoints along the Line of Control in Kashmir; this time, the working boundary and even areas in Punjab came under direct attack first time in the recent history, with missile strikes targeting strategic and symbolic sites.

During the confrontation, Pakistan's air defense and air force operations succeeded in downing multiple Indian fighter jets, a development that significantly shifted the momentum of the conflict. This was partly attributed to advanced China-made military systems

integrated into Pakistan's defense network like the induction of 4.5 generation fighter aircraft J 10C, which many observers credited as a decisive factor in achieving aerial superiority. Indian forces, meanwhile, suffered notable operational setbacks, which some analysts linked to the challenges of managing a complex, multi-sourced defense arsenal lacking in interoperability and harmony. These vulnerabilities were further exposed under the pressure of simultaneous land and aerial engagements across multiple fronts.

The eventual de-escalation of the conflict was significantly influenced by diplomatic intervention from the United States. President Donald Trump played a central role in mediating between the two sides, engaging in intensive shuttle diplomacy and backchannel communications. Pakistan's leadership openly appreciated the US role, crediting it with preventing further escalation and facilitating a ceasefire. In contrast, India publicly rejected the notion that the United States had played any decisive role in ending hostilities and maintained that its Operation Sindoor was still active and ongoing. This divergence in official narratives became another point of contention in the post-conflict political discourse.

Culture and Drama, Film

During the May 2025 conflict, Pakistan's cultural and artistic community played a visible and proactive role in supporting the national stance against Indian aggression. Prominent figures from film, television, theatre, and music publicly condemned the attacks, often using their platforms to substantiate Pakistan's narrative both at home and abroad. Many leading actors, directors, and performers declared they would not participate in any Indian film projects or joint performing arts ventures, framing this decision as a matter of national solidarity. Various artists' bodies, including associations representing actors, musicians, and stage performers, issued joint statements aligning themselves with the government's position and urging unity among Pakistanis in the face of external threats. Public cultural events during this period often incorporated patriotic themes, with stage plays, television dramas, and musical performances reflecting the broader mood of resilience. These creative expressions not only served as morale boosters for the domestic audience but also acted as informal channels of cultural diplomacy, reinforcing Pakistan's case internationally.

ISPR Press Conferences

The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the media and public relations wing of the Pakistan Armed Forces, played a pivotal role in information management and public communication during the May 2025 conflict. ISPR maintained a consistent and high-profile media presence throughout the conflict, holding regular press conferences to keep the public and media houses informed about developments on the ground. These briefings often included updates on military engagements, operational successes, and rebuttals to claims made by the Indian side. Visual evidence, including drone/satellite footage and photographs of downed aircraft, was strategically released to reinforce the narrative of Pakistan's defensive preparedness and operational effectiveness. ISPR also emphasized the professionalism of the armed forces, the precision of military responses, and the country's adherence to international norms in the conduct of hostilities. By engaging both domestic and international journalists, the ISPR's media interactions sought to shape global perceptions, counter misinformation, and maintain public confidence in the military's handling of the situation.

Judiciary and Business Community

The judiciary's role during the conflict was largely framed in symbolic and stabilizing terms. Senior judicial figures, including representatives from the Pakistan Bar Council, provincial bar councils such as the Punjab Bar Council and Sindh Bar Council, and prominent associations like the Supreme Court Bar Association of Pakistan and the Lahore High Court Bar Association, backed Pakistan's armed forces in times of crisis. Through press conferences and televised media talks, these bodies reminded the public that wartime measures must remain aligned with legal norms and civil rights protections. Their collective stance reinforced the principle that national security should operate within the framework of the rule of law. This messaging served to reassure the population that judicial institutions remained functional, vigilant, and committed to safeguarding democratic values despite the external threat.

International Role and Prospects for Peace: Hope, Doubt, and the Road Ahead

The international community closely monitored the May 2025 conflict, with several states and organizations calling for immediate de-escalation. China's role was particularly significant, both as a strategic partner and as a member of the global diplomatic arena. While publicly affirming Pakistan's right to defend its sovereignty, Chinese diplomatic channels were also reported to be active in back-channel discussions aimed at preventing further escalation.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to understand how Pakistanis from different walks of life perceived the Indo-Pak conflicts of May 2025, an episode marked by India's loss of multiple fighter jets and a ceasefire successfully mediated by former US President Donald Trump. By employing both quantitative and qualitative methods, the research aims to capture broad patterns of opinion while also delving into the nuanced narratives shaped by individual experiences and institutional perspectives. The quantitative component measures the degree of agreement or disagreement with specific statements related to the inevitability of war, government crisis management, media coverage, national unity, economic impact, the role of the international community, and the prospects for future peace. The qualitative thematic analysis examines the distinctive viewpoints expressed by various groups, including the judiciary, government officials, armed forces, academia, media professionals, business community, and the general public. This dual approach ensures a more comprehensive picture of national sentiment during and after the conflict.

The central research question guiding this study is: *How do different segments of Pakistani society perceive the causes, conduct, and consequences of the May 2025 Indo-Pak conflict, and what factors shape these perceptions?* The rationale for pursuing this inquiry lies in the conflict's unique blend of military, political, and diplomatic dynamics. Understanding public perceptions is vital for policymakers, defense planners, diplomats, and media strategists who seek to navigate future crises. Insights from this study can inform strategies for strengthening national resilience, improving

communication during conflicts, and exploring more sustainable pathways to peace between India and Pakistan.

1. Literature Review

Media Narratives and the Construction of National Identity

Pakistani perceptions of conflict with India, including the events of May 2025, are shaped significantly by how these events are presented in the media. The concept of sublime violence, where acts of conflict are imbued with symbolic and emotional significance, helps explain the potency of these narratives (Verkaaik, 2013). In such portrayals, military actions are often elevated beyond their immediate tactical purpose, becoming emblematic of national pride, resistance, and moral righteousness.

Mainstream Pakistani media outlets frequently frame confrontations with India as defensive actions necessitated by aggression. The themes of sovereignty, national honor, and territorial integrity are central to this framing (Hassan, 2018). This is not a neutral process; the choice of language, imagery, and editorial emphasis reflects ideological positions and political alignments. The media often works in alignment with state objectives during times of crisis, presenting a unified front that minimizes dissenting voices.

Moreover, The Indo-Pak conflict of May 2025, and the public perceptions it generated, must be understood within the wider framework of hybrid warfare, media manipulation, and evolving geopolitical rivalries in South Asia. As documented by Solangi and Al-Arabi (2025) in *The War That Changed Everything*, the events surrounding the Pahalgam incident were not simply an extension of historic territorial disputes but a complex interplay of political agendas, psychological operations, and digitally amplified propaganda. The book's investigative narrative underscores how contemporary conflicts between India and Pakistan are shaped as much in the information space as on the battlefield, with disinformation, deepfakes, and selective framing used to influence domestic opinion, justify state actions, and sway international perceptions. Their findings resonate strongly with this study's thematic analysis, which also revealed how narratives were contested across societal groups in Pakistan, from judiciary and business communities to cultural and military

institutions. The book's meticulous examination of fabricated evidence, coordinated media strategies, and the scapegoating of Pakistan mirrors the skepticism and critical reflection found in segments of our survey responses, especially among legal, academic, and public respondents. By situating the May 2025 conflict within this broader continuum of strategic deception and narrative control, Solangi and Al-Arabi's work not only deepens the historical and political context for this study but also reinforces the need to analyze Indo-Pak tensions through the dual lenses of military engagement and information warfare. This perspective highlights that peacebuilding efforts must contend not only with physical disputes over territory but also with the entrenched machinery of perception management that continues to drive mistrust between the two nations.

Social Media, Polarization, and Information Warfare

The advent of social media has dramatically altered the information environment during crises. Platforms such as X, Facebook, and WhatsApp enable rapid dissemination of information but also facilitate the spread of rumors and misinformation. The Pulwama–Balakot episode in 2019 serves as a stark example of how social media can both inform and mislead (Tyagi et al., 2020). Within hours of the attacks, competing narratives flooded online spaces, shaping public opinion long before official accounts could establish a coherent message.

Political Rhetoric and Leadership Narratives

Political leaders and military officials in Pakistan play a central role in shaping public perceptions during conflicts. Their statements often emphasize unity, resilience, and a shared sense of purpose in confronting external threats. Such rhetoric is used to mobilize public support, consolidate political legitimacy, and maintain morale across different segments of society. During the May 2025 conflict, leaders from across the political spectrum became highly active on traditional and social media, each seeking to influence public opinion while projecting themselves as defenders of national security.

Most major political parties ran targeted campaigns on their official social media handles, blending statements, visuals, and hashtags to galvanize their support base. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), through accounts such as @pmln_org and its leadership pages, focused on highlighting the need for strategic diplomacy while reinforcing narratives of national dignity. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), led through its central handle @PTIofficial, emphasized themes of resilience and military pride, sharing video clips and images celebrating operational successes. The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), through @MediaCellPPP, adopted a messaging approach that balanced calls for peace with recognition of the armed forces' capabilities.

Religious Nationalism and Identity Politics

Religious identity plays a prominent role in framing the India–Pakistan conflict. In Pakistan, Islamic nationalism has been a central component of state identity since independence, and it frequently intersects with geopolitical disputes (Haque & Khan, 2023). In times of heightened tension, the conflict with India is sometimes depicted not only as a political or territorial contest but also as a civilizational struggle between Islamic Pakistan and Hindu-majority India. This framing draws heavily on the historical legacy of the Two Nation Theory, which argued that Muslims and Hindus in the subcontinent were distinct nations with irreconcilable cultural, religious, and political differences. During the May 2025 conflict, this theory was revisited and reemphasized by various political and religious leaders, once again presented as proof of the mandatory creation of Pakistan and as validation of the state's founding vision.

Religious political parties actively engaged in this narrative reinforcement. Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan (JI), Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), and Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) used public rallies, speeches, and digital platforms to frame the conflict in ideological terms. Their messaging often depicted the confrontation as part of a broader defense of the Muslim Ummah, while condemning what they portrayed as aggression by a Hindu nationalist state. This religiously infused rhetoric resonated with segments of the population, bolstering support for an uncompromising position in negotiations and increasing resistance to conciliatory measures.

Interplay of Media, Politics, and Identity

The combination of media framing, political rhetoric, and religious identity creates a powerful feedback loop in which each element reinforces the others. Once established, these narratives can be remarkably resistant to change. This dynamic explains why even relatively short conflicts, such as the events of May 2025, can leave lasting imprints on national identity and public perception.

2. Methodology:

This study used a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative survey analysis with qualitative thematic interpretation to capture both broad trends and deeper insights into Pakistani perceptions of the Indo-Pak War of May 2025. A structured bilingual questionnaire in Urdu and English was administered between June and July 2025 to a diverse set of participants across Pakistan, including representatives from the judiciary, government officials, the general public, military forces, the business community, educational and research institutions, and cultural organizations. The questionnaire contained Likert-scale questions designed to measure the level of agreement on topics such as the inevitability of the war, the government's handling of the crisis, media coverage, national unity, economic effects, the role of the international community, and the potential for future peace. It also included open-ended questions inviting participants to describe their personal experiences, views on the war's causes and consequences, assessments of leadership and diplomacy, ideas for peacebuilding, and personal reflections on regional stability.

In the quantitative strand of the study, the focus was on identifying overall perceptions across the dataset. Responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions. This allowed the study to measure general levels of agreement or disagreement and to highlight key patterns in public opinion.

The qualitative strand involved thematic analysis, which examined the narratives expressed in open-ended responses. Here, the emphasis was on identifying and comparing the recurring themes across different participant groups. Coding of responses revealed themes such as nationalism and unity, economic concerns, trust in media, perceptions of diplomatic effectiveness, and peacebuilding priorities. These themes were then compared between groups, for example contrasting how the judiciary's focus on legal solutions differed from the business community's emphasis on trade stability.

All participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the research. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout, and no personally identifiable information was reported. This design ensured that the study captured both measurable sentiment and the rich contextual factors behind those views

3. Findings

Following are the quantitative findings.
Quantitative Findings
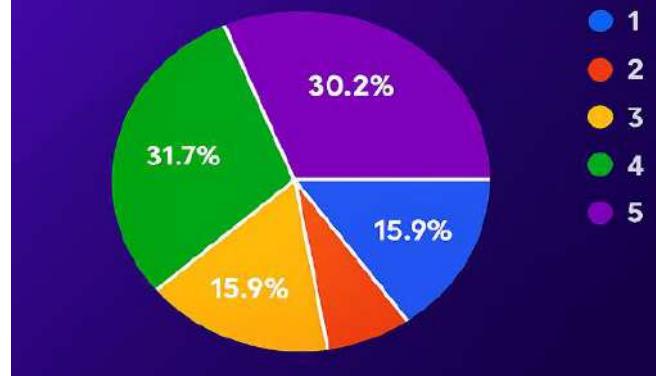
Figure 1

Figure 1 illustrates respondents' views on whether the Indo-Pak War of 2025 was inevitable, and the results show a strong leaning toward agreement. More than 60 percent of participants, 31.7 percent agreeing and 30.2 percent strongly agreeing felt the war could not have been avoided. This majority perspective suggests that many see the conflict as the outcome of entrenched historical grievances, persistent political tensions, and unchangeable geopolitical realities. On the other hand, 14.3 percent strongly disagreed and 7.9 percent disagreed, forming a smaller but notable segment that believes the war could have been prevented through more effective diplomacy, conflict management, or alternative policy decisions. Meanwhile, 15.9 percent of respondents remained neutral, indicating uncertainty or a nuanced position that acknowledges both the possibility and the difficulty of avoiding the conflict. Overall, while the prevailing sentiment is that the war was inevitable, the responses reveal a diversity of opinions that reflect the complexity of public perceptions on this issue.
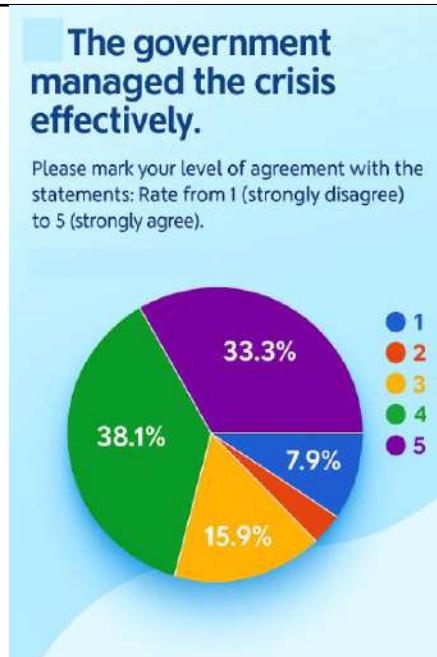
Figure 2

Figure 2 reflects public perceptions regarding the government's effectiveness in managing the 2025 crisis, and the responses show a clear lean toward a positive assessment. The largest share, 38.1 percent, agreed that the government handled the crisis well, followed closely by 33.3 percent who strongly agreed. Together, these two categories make up over 71 percent of respondents, indicating that a strong majority held a favorable view of the government's crisis management. This suggests that many participants perceived the government's response as organized, timely, and capable of addressing the challenges posed by the conflict.
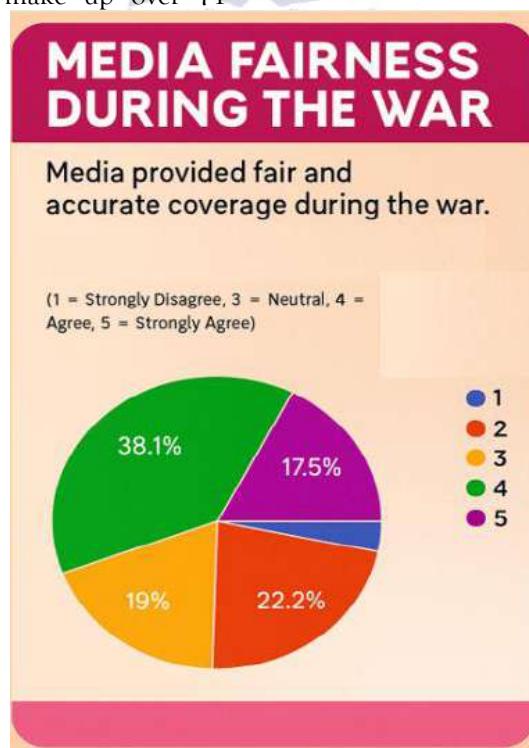
Figure 3

Figure 3 illustrates public perceptions of whether the media provided fair and accurate coverage during the war. The largest proportion, 38.1 percent, agreed with the statement, and a further 17.5 percent strongly agreed. Together, these categories make up over half of the respondents, indicating that a majority viewed the media's performance in a generally positive light. This suggests that many participants felt news outlets fulfilled their role in informing the public with balanced and factual reporting.
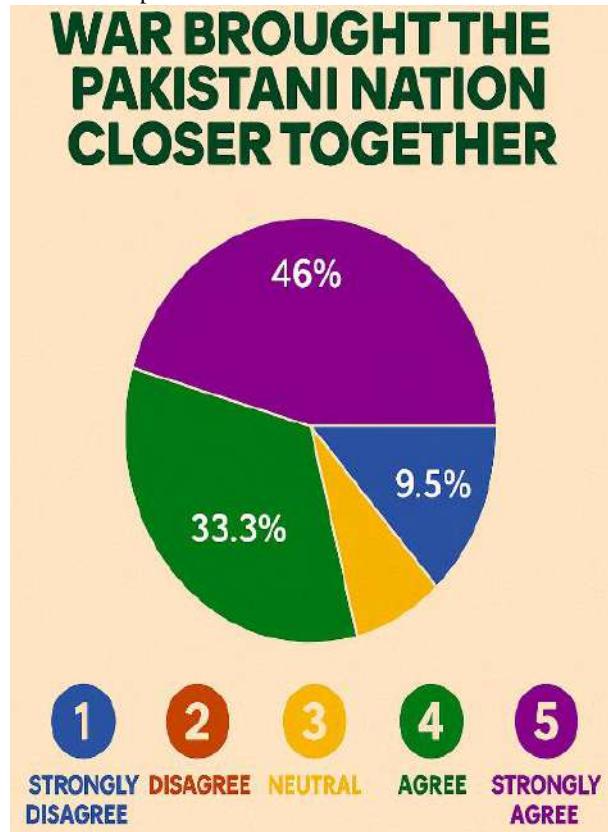

Figure 4

Figure 4 reflects how respondents perceived the unifying impact of the war on the Pakistani nation, and the results show a strong sense of solidarity. The largest portion, 46 percent, strongly agreed that the war brought the nation closer together, while 33.3 percent agreed. Combined, this indicates that nearly four out of five respondents believed the conflict fostered unity and strengthened national bonds, possibly due to a shared sense of purpose and collective identity in the face of external threat.

In contrast, only a small fraction expressed disagreement, with 9.5 percent strongly disagreeing and 3.2 percent disagreeing, suggesting that very few felt the war had a divisive effect. The neutral group, at 7.9 percent, represents those who were uncertain or saw both unifying and divisive outcomes.

Figure 5

Figure 5 presents respondents' views on whether the war had a negative impact on Pakistan's economy, and the results show a fairly balanced distribution of opinions with a slight lean toward agreement. About 25.4 percent agreed and 14.3 percent strongly agreed that the war harmed the economy, suggesting that roughly four in ten respondents saw clear economic damage as a result of the conflict.

However, 28.6 percent remained neutral, which is the largest single category. This indicates a significant number of respondents were either unsure about the economic consequences or believed the effects were complex, with both positive and negative aspects. On the other side, 17.5 percent disagreed and 14.3 percent strongly disagreed, together forming nearly one-third of the participants who did not see the war as economically damaging, perhaps believing that the impact was manageable or even offset by other benefits such as increased national unity or defense industry activity.
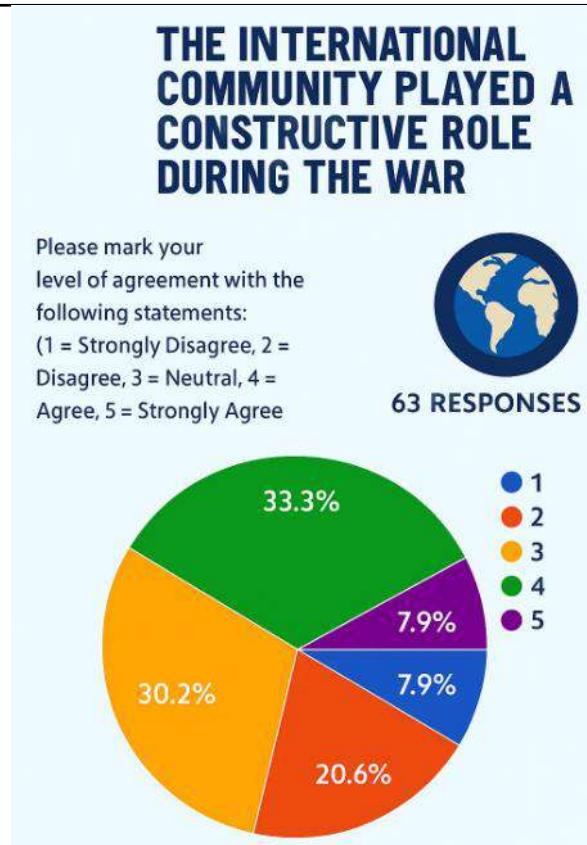
Figure 6

Figure 6 illustrates respondents' views on whether the international community played a constructive role during the war. The largest portion, 33.3 percent, agreed with the statement, while 7.9 percent strongly agreed. This means that about four in ten respondents believed the international community contributed positively, perhaps through mediation, humanitarian assistance, or diplomatic efforts.
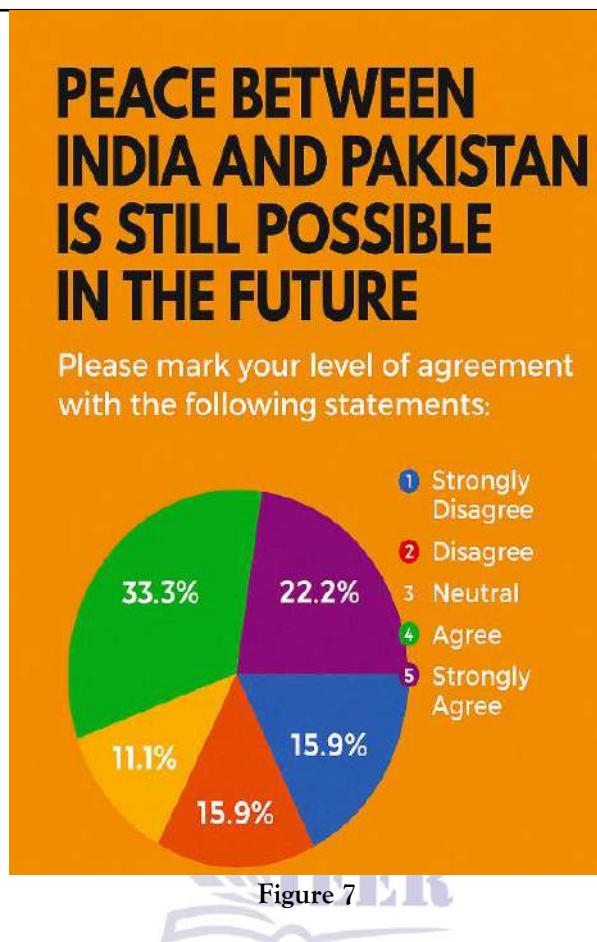
Figure 7

Figure 7 presents respondents' views on whether peace between India and Pakistan remains possible in the future, and the results indicate an overall sense of cautious optimism. The largest share, 33.3 percent, agreed with the statement, while 22.2 percent strongly agreed. Combined, more than half of the respondents expressed confidence that peace could still be achieved, suggesting that many see opportunities for reconciliation despite recent conflict and historical tensions.

Analysis

1. The Question of Inevitability, Was the War Bound to Happen?

The data reveals a country divided over one of the most fundamental questions: could the 2025 Indo-Pak War have been avoided? On the surface, the average score leaned slightly toward agreement, suggesting that many respondents felt the conflict was "inevitable." Yet this number conceals a far more complex picture. A closer look at the distribution shows significant variation, with responses spread across the entire spectrum from strong disagreement to strong agreement. This suggests that while the "inevitability" narrative resonated with a large portion of the public, it was far from universally accepted.

For those who agreed, the reasons are likely tied to decades of unresolved disputes, particularly over Kashmir, and the recurring cycles of escalation that have characterized Indo-Pak relations. The media and political leaders often frame such tensions as unavoidable outcomes of an entrenched rivalry, and for many citizens, these narratives reinforce a sense of fatalism. In this worldview, war was less a matter of choice and more a matter of when, not if.

2. Government Crisis Management, Perceptions of Competence and Gaps

If the inevitability of war was a contested subject, perceptions of how the government handled the crisis were notably more positive. Here, the average score was higher, and the median fell squarely in the "agree"

category. This indicates that, despite disagreements about whether the war should have happened at all, many Pakistanis were willing to give credit to their leaders for the way the conflict was managed once it began.

This positive perception likely stems from visible signals of readiness and resolve. During times of national crisis, the display of strong leadership, whether through military mobilization, assertive public statements, or visible coordination between civilian and military arms of government, can generate a sense of reassurance among the public. In the Pakistani context, where the military enjoys a strong institutional reputation, the swift and coordinated response to the conflict may have bolstered confidence in the overall crisis management effort.

4. The Media's Role Trust, Skepticism, and the Wartime Narrative

When it comes to how the media covered the war, the survey paints a picture of cautious engagement. The average rating hovers slightly above the neutral mark, showing that while some trust in the media exists, it is far from absolute. This middle-ground sentiment is telling, people did not, on the whole, reject the media narrative outright, but they also did not embrace it uncritically.

Those who rated the media more positively may have appreciated the sense of national unity and resolve that wartime reporting often seeks to foster. In conflict situations, the media frequently amplifies patriotic themes, reports military successes, and frames events in ways that reinforce the legitimacy of the national cause. Such coverage can strengthen morale and provide a shared narrative during uncertain times.

5. Unity and Economic Impact, Shared Purpose Meets Uneven Realities

Among all the survey questions, the one that drew the strongest agreement was whether the war brought the Pakistani nation closer together. The average score here was well into the "agree" range, and the consensus was striking. This reflects a familiar psychological phenomenon: external threats often act as social glue, temporarily minimizing internal divisions and rallying people around a shared identity. In the weeks of conflict, the flag, the anthem, and the

idea of Pakistan as a collective cause seemed to resonate across the country.

This sense of unity likely cut across urban-rural divides and class distinctions, at least temporarily. Social media campaigns, street-level mobilization, and community solidarity efforts may have reinforced the idea that everyone was part of a shared national struggle. For many, the war was not just about defending territory but about affirming identity and resilience in the face of an external challenge.

However, this was not a universal experience. A small but notable minority rejected the idea that the war fostered unity, suggesting that in some contexts, existing divisions may have deepened instead. These divisions could be along political, ethnic, or regional lines, where certain communities felt excluded from the national narrative or bore disproportionate burdens during the conflict.

6. International Role and Prospects for Peace , Hope, Doubt, and the Road Ahead

When asked about the international community's role during the war, respondents landed in a middle ground, with opinions split between those who saw foreign actors as constructive and those who viewed them as ineffective or self-serving. On the positive side, some may have appreciated diplomatic mediation efforts, humanitarian aid, or pressure applied to prevent further escalation. On the negative side, there's a long-standing suspicion in Pakistan that international powers act primarily in their own interests, using conflicts like the Indo-Pak tensions as leverage in broader geopolitical games.

The question of whether peace between India and Pakistan is still possible produced one of the most divided sets of responses in the entire survey. For optimists, the hope for peace is tied to ideas of sustained dialogue, trade cooperation, and people-to-people exchanges that could break the cycle of hostility. This vision rests on the belief that ordinary citizens share more common ground than their political leaders allow, and that these connections can form the foundation for a more stable future.

Thematic Analysis of Perceptions by Group

The Indo-Pak War of 2025 triggered a wave of responses across different sectors of Pakistani society, each colored by professional orientation, lived

experiences, and personal values. By grouping survey respondents into seven distinct categories Judiciary/Legal Fraternity, Government Officials, General Public, Military Forces, Business Community, Educational/Research Organizations, and Cultural Institutions we can see clear thematic patterns that both converge and diverge across these segments.

1. Judiciary / Legal Fraternity Law, Structure, and Institutional Reform

During and after the May 2025 conflict, the organized legal community also played a visible role in public discourse. Leading bar councils, such as the Pakistan Bar Council (PBC), the Punjab Bar Council, the Sindh Bar Council, and the Islamabad Bar Council, issued press statements and convened press conferences calling for diplomatic engagement and legally binding conflict-resolution mechanisms. Prominent lawyers' associations, including the Supreme Court Bar Association of Pakistan (SCBAP) and the Lahore High Court Bar Association (LHCBA), participated in televised media talks where senior advocates highlighted the importance of treaty-based settlements and third-party arbitration backed by enforceable legal frameworks.

Members of the judiciary and legal profession approached the war's causes and consequences with a focus on structural and institutional dimensions. Their open-ended responses often tied the conflict to the *absence of robust dispute resolution mechanisms* and the failure to institutionalize cross-border arbitration processes.

2. Government Officials , Security, Diplomacy, and National Image

Government officials' responses were security-oriented, framing the war primarily as a defensive necessity against *Indian provocation*. They consistently described Pakistan's military and diplomatic response as both proportionate and effective, highlighting swift mobilization, international lobbying, and strategic restraint.

Leadership was rated highly, with many citing close civil-military coordination as a strength. Unity was celebrated as a national asset, reinforced by wartime volunteerism, public morale, and social media campaigns promoting patriotism.

3. General Public Lived Experience, Skepticism, and Emotional Polarization

The general public offered the widest range of responses, reflecting diverse personal and regional realities. Many adopted the state's framing of India as the aggressor, but a substantial portion criticized *both governments* for letting tensions escalate.

For those far from conflict zones, the war had minimal day-to-day impact. Others, especially in urban centers, reported *anxiety, price hikes, disrupted business, and mobility issues*. Trust in leadership was polarized , some praised decisive action, while others accused leaders of politicizing the conflict or diverting attention from domestic problems.

4. Military Forces , Duty, Morale, and Strategic Lessons

Respondents from the armed forces viewed the conflict through the lens of *duty, sacrifice, and operational effectiveness*. They framed the war as a test of readiness, discipline, and national resilience, and expressed pride in Pakistan's ability to defend itself while avoiding protracted ground conflict.

Leadership was praised almost universally, with special emphasis on *tactical adaptability* and *joint operations*. Many highlighted the role of morale, not just among soldiers but in the broader civilian population, as crucial to sustaining the fight.

On unity, military respondents were among the most optimistic, viewing the wartime surge in patriotism as proof of the armed forces' ability to inspire national cohesion. Economic impacts were acknowledged but framed as a necessary trade-off for security. For preventing future wars, their recommendations focused on strengthening intelligence capabilities, maintaining high readiness levels, and sustaining public support for the armed forces.

5. Business Community, Economic Survival, Trade Disruption, and Strategic Caution

The business community's responses were dominated by economic concerns. They saw the war primarily through the lens of *disruption*, halted trade, reduced consumer demand, supply chain interruptions, and increased operational costs due to inflation.

Some respondents described short-term losses that could be recovered, but others feared lasting damage to foreign investor confidence and regional trade networks. For them, unity during the war was less

about emotion and more about economic pragmatism, maintaining market stability, protecting jobs, and preventing capital flight.

6. Educational / Research Organizations, Knowledge, Critical Reflection, and Long-Term Vision

Academics, researchers, and educators brought an analytical and often forward-looking perspective. They were more likely to explore *root causes* in depth, connecting the war to *historical grievances, lack of sustained dialogue, and failure to invest in peace education*. Their responses often blended criticism with constructive proposals. For instance, several suggested integrating peace studies and conflict resolution into national curricula, fostering youth exchanges with India, and funding joint research on shared challenges like climate change.

7. Cultural Institutions, Identity, Narrative, and People-to-People Bridges

Artists, cultural organizers, and heritage workers interpreted the war through the lens of *national identity and cultural narratives*. They emphasized the role of cultural production, films, music, literature, in shaping public morale during wartime.

Several respondents warned against allowing wartime narratives to harden into *permanent enmity*. They argued for using cultural exchange as a tool for soft diplomacy, fostering empathy, and countering stereotypes. For them, unity during the war was as much about shared cultural expression as political solidarity.

Economically, they worried about reduced funding for the arts during times of conflict, warning that cultural institutions often face budget cuts despite their role in national morale. Peacebuilding suggestions revolved around *artist exchanges, joint cultural festivals, and heritage preservation projects involving both countries*.

Cross-Cutting Themes Across All Groups

Despite their differences, several recurring themes emerged across the seven groups:

1. Kashmir as the Core Dispute

Across the judiciary, government, military, public, business, academic, and cultural respondents, Kashmir remained the unifying reference point. The legal fraternity focused on the absence of binding agreements to settle the dispute. The public often framed it as a moral cause, while military respondents saw it as the strategic heart of the conflict. The business community considered Kashmir an indirect but powerful barrier to regional trade stability, and academics regarded it as a root cause preventing long-term reconciliation. Cultural groups linked it to narratives of identity and shared history, making it a core theme that cuts across emotional, strategic, and institutional lines.

2. Diplomatic Gaps and Missed Opportunities

Nearly all groups recognized that channels for preemptive diplomacy existed but were underused. Government officials described this as a calculated choice to maintain deterrence credibility. The judiciary and academics saw it as a failure to prioritize peace over escalation. Cultural stakeholders and the business community highlighted the loss of trust-building opportunities that could have prevented the crisis. Military respondents, while supportive of deterrence, acknowledged that strategic diplomacy could complement readiness.

3. Unity as a Resource and its Durability

Every group acknowledged that wartime unity surged to levels rarely seen in recent years. Officials and military personnel saw it as a sustainable strength. The judiciary, academics, and segments of the public were more skeptical, stressing that unity built on emotion alone risks fading without reforms. Cultural groups interpreted unity through the lens of shared cultural expression, while business respondents framed it as an essential condition for maintaining market stability during crisis.

4. Economic Impacts with Sector-Specific Realities

Economic consequences were felt unevenly. Business respondents reported heavy trade and supply chain disruptions. Public responses ranged from mild inconvenience to significant hardship depending on location and livelihood. Officials and the military downplayed the impact, portraying it as an acceptable sacrifice. Academics emphasized the longer-term effects on human capital, innovation, and education, while cultural institutions worried about funding cuts to the arts.

5. Role and Credibility of the International Community

Views on the role of external actors varied widely. Many respondents acknowledged the constructive roles played by countries like China and the United States in mediating or influencing the conflict's trajectory. However, skepticism was particularly high among judiciary and public respondents, who saw some foreign interventions as self-serving. Business leaders supported stronger international engagement if it could stabilize trade, while academics advocated for broader multilateral frameworks to manage disputes.

6. Media Influence and Competing Narratives

The media's role was a recurring topic. Government officials and military respondents praised domestic media for reinforcing the national narrative, while members of the public and judiciary questioned the accuracy and objectivity of coverage. Cultural institutions recognized media as a bridge for soft diplomacy but also warned about entrenched stereotypes. Academics called for more balanced reporting and fact-checking to prevent misinformation from shaping public perception.

7. Civil-Military Coordination and National Image

Civil-military synergy during the conflict was highlighted by officials and armed forces as a key factor in operational success. The judiciary saw it as necessary but cautioned that such alignment should remain within democratic oversight. Cultural and business respondents noted that this coordination projected a unified national image abroad, even if domestic debates persisted about policy direction.

8. Law, Institutions, and Conflict Prevention

The judiciary, supported by academics, consistently emphasized institutional mechanisms as the sustainable path to peace. They argued that without enforceable legal frameworks—such as treaty-based dispute settlements and third-party arbitration—cycles of escalation will repeat.

9. Cultural Identity and People-to-People Engagement

Cultural respondents saw the war as a reminder of the power of shared heritage and soft diplomacy. They pushed for increased artist exchanges, literary events, and heritage collaborations as tools to de-escalate hostility over time. The public and academics echoed this by highlighting the emotional and symbolic weight of cultural interaction, while the business community linked cultural diplomacy to trade potential.

10. Peacebuilding as a Multi-Sector Responsibility

Finally, there was broad acknowledgment that peace cannot be built by any single group. Military respondents linked peace to readiness, government officials to diplomacy, judiciary to legal mechanisms, business leaders to economic stability, academics to education and research, cultural bodies to narrative change, and the public to grassroots trust. The thematic convergence suggests that durable peace requires a coordinated multi-sector effort, aligning security, economic, legal, and cultural dimensions.

7. Conclusion

The Indo-Pak War of 2025 was not a single, uniform story but a layered national experience. This study combined surveys with thematic analysis to capture both broad public sentiment and the nuanced perspectives of different societal groups.Quantitative data revealed that most Pakistanis saw the war as unavoidable, with many approving the government's handling of the crisis. A strong sense of national unity emerged, though responses were more divided on media fairness, economic fallout, and the prospects for long-term peace.

Thematic narratives highlighted these divisions. The judiciary emphasized the absence of legal mechanisms to prevent escalation, while government officials focused on projecting strength and diplomacy. Military voices framed the conflict as proof of readiness and deterrence. Business leaders underscored economic disruption and instability, while educators and researchers stressed the importance of peace education for future generations. Cultural figures called for art, literature, and exchanges to strengthen identity and people-to-people ties across borders.

Overall, the war is remembered as a moment of resilience and unity but also a reminder of unresolved disputes and economic vulnerability. The findings point to the need for multidimensional strategies including legal, diplomatic, economic, cultural, and educational—to ensure that temporary unity in times of crisis translates into lasting peace.

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