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## De-hyphenation of India and Pakistan: An empirical assessment

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### Abstract

The objective of this study is to empirically examine the success of the India-Pakistan de-hyphenation strategy adopted by the Indian government since mid-2014. Ever since gaining independence, India and Pakistan have been viewed as one bloc premised on a shared history, common culture, and a longstanding rivalry centered on Kashmir. Western nations, especially the US, adopted this stance as their foreign policy towards South Asia, and occasional attempts by the Indian State to geopolitically delink itself from Pakistan remained largely unsuccessful. In the wake of the BJP-led government taking charge in mid-2014, the Indian state introduced targeted policies and programs to alter the equation vis-à-vis Pakistan. This involved establishing India as a legitimate global power rather than a regional player in the South Asian geopolitical arena and publicly calling out and exposing Pakistan for its role in promoting terrorism. The present paper evaluates whether such policies have succeeded in de-hyphenating the India-Pakistan dyad in terms of media representation. Data from Google Trends was utilized, with the sample being bifurcated into two samples centered on mid-2014. A Welch's t-test was conducted to ascertain if there were statistically significant differences between the two periods. Results indicate that there has been a statistically significant decline in India-Pakistan hyphenated searches after mid-2014 which lends support to the claim that the de-hyphenation policy adopted by the Indian State has been successful.

**Keywords:** India-Pakistan de-hyphenation, media representation, foreign policy, Google Trends, public opinion

### Introduction

During a press conference in Washington DC following the revocation of Article 370 of the Constitution of India in 2019, India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar took exception to some media personnel trying to "hyphenate" India with Pakistan. Responding to queries on the abrogation of Jammu and Kashmir's temporary special status and the impact on Pakistan, he responded: "How do you hyphenate a country, which is one-eighth of your economic size... which is reputationally your exact opposite?" (The Statesman, 2019) [14]. The question raised by the minister is an important one since there is significant disparity between India and Pakistan in terms of economy, education, healthcare, and judiciary. India's GDP is 11 times higher, its land area is four times larger, and its population is five times greater than Pakistan. India is the world's largest democracy, with a multi-party system and free and fair elections, while Pakistani polity tends towards military dictatorships. Hindu-majority India is constitutionally secular and supports a pluralistic multi-faith society, while Pakistan was created exclusively as a nation for Muslims. Pakistan lags behind India on most socioeconomic and human development indicators including literacy, employment, human rights, gender, and environment.

Nevertheless, many developed nations, especially in the West, have viewed India and Pakistan as comparable regional players in the South Asian region. For decades, it has been the official policy of the United States government to treat India and Pakistan at par, as seen in this excerpt from a cold war-era US Economic Development report:

"A comparison of India and Pakistan deals with countries that include nearly one-fifth of all humanity over half as many people as in all the rest of the less developed world except for China. A comparison of their development strategies, therefore, has some quantitative significance. It is also especially useful because the two countries were one until 1947, and still have similar economies, institutions, and people" (Papanek 1969, p. 1) [9]

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Hyphenation refers to this tendency to link the two countries together in policy decisions and treat them as a single entity. The hyphenation of India and Pakistan—often written as "India-Pakistan"—is premised on several factors, including shared history, similar geography, and conflict over Kashmir, among others: both nations “share the federal parliamentary republic government system, along with a mixed economy. India and Pakistan’s natural resources are also comparable. The shared resources include coal, ores, natural gas, petroleum, and arable land” (Qi, 2020, p. 78)<sup>[10]</sup>. Issues related to regional security, counter-terrorism efforts, disagreements over resource sharing, and nuclear non-proliferation in the South Asian region have historically prompted the US and European countries to adopt a hyphenated approach in policy considerations. According to Narayanan (2010, p. 166)<sup>[8]</sup>, the “inimitability of the India-Pakistan rivalry” has necessitated “the construction of theoretical approaches to study them as a ‘dyad’.”

Throughout the Cold War (1947 to 1989), the United States treated Pakistan at par with India even when Pakistani polity devolved into increasingly autocratic military regimes with minimal democratic processes and non-existent citizen rights. For the US, the primary goal was to contain and control the influence of the Soviet regime. Thus they “looked at the South Asian region from the global perspective where Pakistan emerged as an important ally for its containment strategy” (Bishoyi, 2016, p. 128)<sup>[1]</sup>. India has increasingly viewed this hyphenation with a less stable and less democratic Pakistan as undermining its economic and democratic achievements. By comparing a large secular democracy to a smaller autocratic Islamic state and with the West seemingly legitimizing Pakistan's concerns about the Kashmir issue, attention shifted away from Pakistan's growing militarization, radicalization of its masses, and cross-border terrorism against India. The constant hyphenation diluted India's efforts to establish itself as a distinct entity on the world stage and move beyond being known as a regional player.

Furthermore, the lack of consistent approach towards Pakistan by past governments exacerbated the situation, particularly in light of cross-border terrorism. The BJP-led NDA's relationship with the Pakistan establishment experienced several highs and lows. The Pakistani side displayed aggression and launched attacks during the Kargil war in 1999, as well as the Indian Parliament attack carried out by Pakistani-backed terror groups. Yet, the Indian State committed to the Lahore Declaration of 1999, seeking peaceful resolutions to all issues. Again, India attempted another round of talks in Agra with General Pervez Musharraf in 2001 which ended in failure (Narayanan, 2010, p. 174)<sup>[8]</sup>.

Later under the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) regime (2004-2014), following a sharp rise in Pakistan-backed terror attacks, India adopted the so-called “dossier diplomacy” and shared multiple reports with Pakistan containing leads and information about the perpetrators. The strategy did not work since Pakistan denied any involvement in terrorist attacks on India: “lack of transparency in Pakistan’s legal process and its internal political instability” were blamed for Pakistan’s constant stonewalling of India’s requests (Godbole, 2010, p.1)<sup>[3]</sup>. The soft and inconsistent stance of the Indian State under previous regimes and the pre-existing hyphenation policy of the West emboldened the Pakistani establishment to believe

that they were not accountable for their misadventures. The global community refused to take Pakistan-sponsored terrorism seriously and insisted that India and Pakistan resolve such regional issues bilaterally.

Various Indian governments have tried to “de-hyphenate India from Pakistan in their dealings with the outside world.” However, it was only since the late 1990s, especially after the 9/11 attacks in the US in 2001, that the United States and other Western nations took a more nuanced and arguably more de-hyphenated stance towards India. As noted by Maini (2016)<sup>[5]</sup>, the fact that “most terrorist attacks even outside South Asia have a Pakistan connection and the duplicitous approach of the Pakistani deep state even with countries considered its ‘strategic partners’ have certainly not helped Pakistan’s cause internationally.” Beginning with the Bush administration in 2001, concrete steps in the direction of de-hyphenation were taken by US policymakers based on the idea that “although both countries were relevant to U.S. interests in different ways, their respective geopolitical weights were radically divergent” (Tellis, 2008, p. 23)<sup>[12]</sup>. However, many in the Western world continued to follow the old equation, and it was not uncommon for India and Pakistan to be simultaneously taken to task by European nations for alleged human rights violations especially against minorities and failure to resolve bilateral issues. This hyphenation has also impacted the media representation of India-Pakistan dynamics, with the two neighbors being treated as a single bloc, disregarding their disparities and asymmetries.

A significant shift in the India-Pakistan equation occurred with the advent of the Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to power in 2014. The BJP-led Indian establishment made it a priority at a policy level to de-hyphenate the India-Pakistan relationship through several measures centered on “greater political and military risk-taking to coerce behavioral change in Islamabad and Rawalpindi.” Some of the elements of India’s security and foreign policy stance on Pakistan included utilizing strong military options to retaliate against Pakistan-based terror attacks, undertaking pre-emptive strikes against “anticipated cross-border terrorism,” and diplomatically isolating Pakistan “by calling attention to its sponsorship of terrorism” (Neog, 2020). According to some media reports as well as claims by senior politicians of the BJP, by following such policies, India has successfully de-hyphenated itself from Pakistan, and this is reflected in India’s rising global stature and improved relationships with Gulf countries, traditionally considered allies and friends of Pakistan. The national president of the BJP, J. P. Nadda, claims that while India and Pakistan were traditionally hyphenated, currently India “is far ahead” of Pakistan, and “nobody keeps India and Pakistan in the same bracket” (The Indian Express, 20203)<sup>[13]</sup>.

To what extent has the Indian State successfully implemented the strategy of de-hyphenating India and Pakistan? Although some media reports indicate India's successful de-hyphenation from Pakistan in terms of geopolitics and international diplomacy, there is a lack of concrete research to support these claims. One possible way to measure the extent of de-hyphenation is by observing public sentiment and the frequency of the "India-Pakistan" term used in discussions. Specifically, it is important to measure any discernible shift in the prevalence of "India-Pakistan" references within public and media narratives

post-May 2014, when the BJP came to power. Public opinion is a reflection of a specific population's collective perspectives, convictions, and attitudes while also offering valuable insights into societal preferences. Studies indicate that when a particular issue is highly visible and relevant to a broader population, it can significantly shape decision-making and policy formulation (Mukhopadhyay, 2023a, p. 149)<sup>[6]</sup>. Conversely, when a topic consistently fails to garner sufficient attention, it is a sign that the public does not consider it as important as other issues. Therefore, if there is no change or perhaps an increase in media coverage of "India-Pakistan" hyphenated news, it may be inferred that the topic holds a prominent place in people's thoughts and can significantly shape public discourse.

This paper studies public opinion on the "India-Pakistan" hyphenation based on Google Trends (GT) data. GT is a tool that helps analyze search patterns and the popularity of specific search terms over an extended period. It enables comparisons between different terms as well as between the same term at different points in time by standardizing search data based on the time and location of a query. GT scores indicate the popularity of a search term compared to its past performance. A score of 100 indicates the highest level of popularity recorded during the given period. In contrast, a score of 50 suggests that it is searched only half as often as its peak (Mukhopadhyay, 2023b, p. 115)<sup>[7]</sup>. Studies have shown that GT data serve as a good indicator of public opinion on a wide array of issues of public interest, including environment, biodiversity, breast cancer screening, and short-term economic forecasting. GT is increasingly being used in sociology, political science, economics, and other social sciences. It has significant "value for social science researchers as a real-time monitoring tool or leading indicator of public opinion, and it may be especially well suited for measuring socially undesirable views" (Lorenz *et al.*, 2022, p. 203)<sup>[4]</sup>. In this study, we use GT to examine public opinion in India on the "India-Pakistan" narrative over an extended period of time and to evaluate whether there has been any noticeable change before and after mid-2014 when the BJP government assumed power.

## Methodology



**Fig 1:** GT data of the search term "India-Pakistan" for the 9 years, January 2010 to December 2018

This paper employs quantitative data analysis to investigate the claims that India has successfully de-hyphenated itself from Pakistan in media representations. The analysis is structured into two distinct phases: analysis and validation. Data for both phases have been sourced from Google Trends under the "Web Searches" category.

**Analysis Phase:** In this phase, monthly trend data for web searches from January 2010 to December 2018 has been collected for a period of 9 years. There are 108 data points, and the dataset is split into two groups of 54 each. The first sample ("Before") refers to the period before BJP came to power. While Prime Minister Modi was officially sworn in on May 26, 2014, for the sake of convenience, the study assumes the 30<sup>th</sup> of June as the mid-point of the sample. The first sample, therefore, corresponds to the period January 2010 to June 2014, while the second includes data from July 2014 through December 2018. Using an appropriate statistical test to compare the data before and after the BJP took charge, we can determine if there has been a noticeable and meaningful decline in online searches for the term "India-Pakistan". The statistical test used in this study is the Welch Two Sample t-test, which helps analyze whether there is a significant difference in the means of the two samples of potentially unequal variances. The null hypothesis is that the difference in means between the two samples "before" and "after", is less than or equal to 0, indicating that there is an increase in the searches for the keyword "India-Pakistan." The alternative hypothesis states that the difference in the means is greater than 0, implying a decrease in searches.

**Validation Phase:** The same steps are repeated for two different time periods: a longer 15-year timeframe (January 2007 to December 2021) and a shorter 6-year timeframe (July 2011 to June 2017).

## Results and Discussion

**Analysis Phase:** The graph in Figure 1 shows GT data of the search term "India-Pakistan" for the 9 years, January 2010 to December 2018. It is clear from a visual analysis that there has been a decrease in the number of searches, and after June 2014, the trend remains relatively flat.

**The result of the Welch's t-test is given in Table 1.**

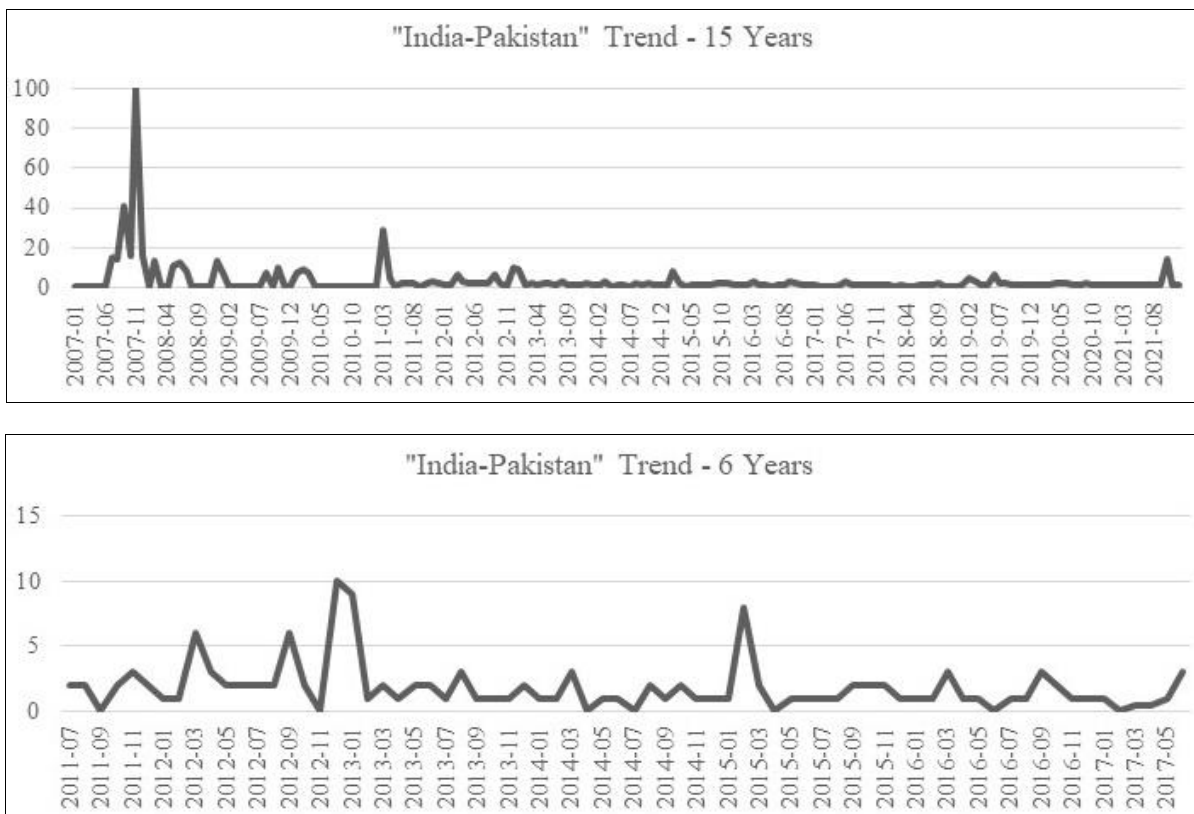
**Table 1:** Result of the Welch's t-test

Parameter	Value
Sample size	54 (both)
Mean ("Before")	8.85
Mean ("After")	3.96
Variance ("Before")	238.62
Variance ("After")	14.11
p-value	0.014

The average of the sample 'before' is 8.85, and the average of the sample 'after' is 3.96. Since the p-value of 0.014 is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected, and we can conclude that the decrease to 3.96 is statistically significant. This implies that there has been a

significant reduction of almost 55% in online searches for "India-Pakistan" following the de-hyphenation policy adopted by the government in mid-2014.

**Validation Phase:** A similar analysis is repeated for two different time periods centered around June 2014. By studying a 15-year timeframe, we can gain a better perspective on the long-term trends and the evolution of strategic initiatives after mid-2014 over 7.5 years. In contrast, a shorter 6-year interval provides insight into the government's commitment, the immediacy of strategy implementation, and the promptness of its impact. The graphs in Figure 2 and Figure 3 show GT data of the search term "India-Pakistan" for the 15 years, January 2007 to December 2021 and the 6 years, July 2011 to June 2017.



**Fig 2, 3:** GT data of the search term "India-Pakistan" for the 15 years, January 2007 to December 2021 and the 6 years, July 2011 to June 2017

It is clear from a visual analysis of Figure 2 that there has been a substantial decrease in the number of searches, and after June 2014, the trend remains relatively flat. We can observe significant clustering from 2007 to 2011. This period coincided with several Pakistan-backed terror attacks, including the 2008 Mumbai blasts, the 2010 Pune bombing, and persistent separatist violence in Jammu and Kashmir. The period also coincided with extensive media coverage on the India-Pakistan peace process, including so-called "cricket diplomacy" and cross-country media-sponsored initiatives like "Aman ki Asha" (Flamenbaum & Neville, 2011; Sarwar, 2013) <sup>[2, 11]</sup>.

Figure 3, corresponding to a 6-year timeframe also shows a decreasing trend in searches for "India-Pakistan" related news and literature, with more local maxima in the period from July 2011 to June 2014, than the period after. However, visually, the pattern is not as evident as it is in Figures 1 and 2. This drop in "India-Pakistan" hyphenated

news prior to 2014 can be explained by the increased media attention on other matters such as the 2012 Delhi gang-rape case and corruption allegations against UPA ministers. The results of the Welch's t-test for the 15-year and 6-year samples are given in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Results of the Welch's t-test for the 15-year and 6-year samples

Parameter	15-year	6-year
Sample size	90 (both)	36 (both)
Mean ("before")	4.71	7.38
Mean ("after")	1.47	4.80
Variance ("before")	144.93	59.15
Variance ("after")	3.09	17.93
P-Value	0.006	0.042

Since the p-values of 0.006 in the 15-year sample and 0.042 in the 6-year sample are less than the level of significance of

0.05, the null hypothesis in both cases is rejected, and we can conclude that the 69% and 35% decreases, respectively, are statistically significant.

### Conclusion

The study highlights a substantial decrease in India-Pakistan hyphenated searches over three separate time frames. This implies that the government's choice to implement a de-hyphenation policy in 2014 has effectively influenced public perception and ensured that both countries are evaluated based on their own merits and achievements on the global stage rather than as a single regional bloc. It is worth noting that there may be other potential factors at play which the study did not investigate, but prima-facie it appears that the Indian state's strategic initiative to delink itself from Pakistan in geopolitical terms has yielded positive outcomes. This study opens the door for further investigation in the area of "India-Pakistan" de-hyphenation and highlights the need for more research to confirm the initial findings using different tools and methodologies.

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