

Strengthening Democracy and Inclusive Governance in Jammu and Kashmir after Abrogation of Article 370 and 35A

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to critically assess how the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A would affect democracy, inclusive government and security in Jammu and Kashmir. The study considers a mixed-method research design, which involves the combination of qualitative analysis of the provisions of the constitution, judicial courts cases, policy documents and governance reforms. It is also based on quantitative analysis of electoral participation, security indicators and governance outcomes through the use of official sources of data. The results show that post-abrogation has been characterized by a massive structural transformation. It includes administrative decentralization, growth of Panchayati Raj Institutions, and greater participation in grassroots politics as well as a decrease in the level of violence and unrest at a large scale which is measurable. On the whole, the research paper concludes that the constitutional reforms, although providing the conditions that facilitated the process of democratic deepening and inclusive governance. It is also remarkable that inclusive developments have not been as successful in the long-run unless the restoration of representative institutions, attention to accountability, and balancing the security needs with the civil freedoms.

Keywords: Jammu and Kashmir, Article 370, democracy, inclusive governance, decentralization, security, militancy, political reform

INTRODUCTION

The abrogation of Article 370 and 35A of the Indian Constitution in August 2019 fundamentally changed the political, social, and economic position of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) (G. Nair, 2019). The central

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government argues that abrogation eliminates the special constitutional status of J&K, integrating the state into the Union of India and furthering political efforts to enhance democratic process, promote inclusive governance, and improve socio-economic development. In the era following the abrogation of Article 370, governance in J&K is undergoing major structural transformations. In the post-abrogation process, the state is now bifurcated into two Union Territories, Jammu and Kashmir, with a legislative assembly, and this decentralization captures the federal approach in India. The post-abrogation governance structures centralize the locus of power and authority, but promise heightened transparency, accountability, and delivery of public goods (Mohsin, & Muzaffar, 2024). 35A which restricted property and employment rights to permanent residents of Jammu and Kashmir, has now been removed as a means of expanding access and opportunity for marginalized groups and claims of increased integration with the rest of India. All of these institutional changes are premised on strengthening democratic participation as the equal protection of law, equal availability of resources, and equal treatment of common fundamental rights are provided to all citizens of the Union Territories (Chauhan, 2022).

Democracy in J&K, both prior to and subsequent to abrogation, has been influenced by a history of conflict, insurgency, and external interference. For years, elections in the region have been reduced to either being boycotted, in some instances violently prevented from happening or politically manipulated, bureaucratically captured, or community constrained; and the democratic system is not seen as a credible system of governance (Ahanger, & Yaqoob, 2023). Article 370, whilst aimed at protecting autonomy, has entrenched a practice of political isolation, and layers of governance dependent on patronage and networks. Its abrogation signals the Indian state on to the road of mainstreaming J&K into national democratic normativity, where political parties, civil rights groups, and everyday citizens could engage in participatory democracies. The challenge going ahead is to convert constitutional nearly uniformity into realities of democratic practice, where there is increasing voter turnout, that representative institutions regain credibility, and competing communities – Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Gujjars, Bakarwals, Pandits and others – feel equally involved in the political process. Thus, strengthening democracy in the region is not only relying to elections, but rather the fielding of public trust, the rule of law and inclusive participation (Sharma, 2024).

Inclusive governance as a normative principle advocates equity, participation, accountability, and responsiveness in policy making and implementation (Hämäläinen, & Salminen, 2025). In the case of Jammu and Kashmir, the hope for inclusive governance has been historically compromised because of the enduring presence of structural inequalities, ethnic differences, and a security-oriented policy agenda (Kuszevska, 2022). The constitutional amendments of Article 370 and 35A in 2019 reflect a remarkable change in the constitution that has wide constitutional ramifications on democracy and inclusive governance in Jammu and Kashmir. Although, it is meant to encourage integration, homogenous rights, and administrative efficiency, its democratic success is pegged on the restoration of representative institutions and enhancement of participatory governance and accountability. An area in which social and regional disparity is evident needs policies that touch on historic marginalization and ensure equal development. The reconstruction of public trust and attainment of sustainable democratic consolidation in the post-abrogation era requires empowering of the institutions in the grassroots, credible elections, balancing issues of governance with security issues (Duschinski, Bhan & Robinson, 2023).

The security dimension of governance in J&K continues to be preeminent. The abrogation of Article 370 applies its own version of legitimacy based in some part on the idea that removing the separate political status of J&K from India would discourage militancy, limit cross-border infiltration, and provide a ground for conditions that would foster peace and stability in the region (Bhatia, 2021). The government argues that democratic functioning is incompatible with violence, and moreover that security and development are prerequisites for inclusive governance. In practice today, the security climate has provided mixed results: there have been fewer large-scale organized protests and instances of stone-throwing, yet sporadic militant attacks have still emerged, and there remain trust deficits with the population in the region. Counterinsurgency measures to bolster security in J&K must balance imperatives of security with the real value of civil liberties within their obligations for human rights, as well as to help achieve an environment that fosters debate and dissent that should be part and parcel of democratic governance (Deva, 2020).

Constitutional Evolution and Judicial Interpretation of Articles 370 and 35A

Article 370 of the Indian Constitution was a transitional provision on special status and acknowledgment of the unique historical and political

situation of Jammu and Kashmir's accession to India in 1947. The provision limits the legislative authority of the Parliament of India to matters of defense, foreign relations, and communication unless the state government agrees to extend this legislative competence (Balcerowicz, 2022). 35A was inserted later via the Presidential Order of 1954, which allows for the J&K legislature to define permanent residents and these residents can possess special privileges in terms of property ownership, public employment, and social welfare. Together these provisions constitute a framework of asymmetrical federalism creating an exception to the principle of constitutional uniformity that applies to the other Indian states. The judiciary has provided a vital role in determining the contextual meaning of these Articles (Duschinski, & Ghosh, 2017).

In *Prem Nath Kaul v. State of J&K* (1959), the Supreme Court stated that Article 370 continued to operate subject to the decisions of the J&K Constituent Assembly meaning it was a temporary feature. Yet in *Sampat Prakash v. State of J&K* (1969), the court stated that after the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, Article 370 continued to operate and created the impression of permanence. Likewise in *Mohd. Maqbool Damnoo v. State of J&K* (1972), the court explained how the President may replace references to the *Sadar-i-Riyasat* with the Governor, reinforcing the expansive range of constitutional flexibility in meaning under Article 370 (G. Nair, 2019).

Security Imperatives, Stability, and the Democratic Process

The relationship between security and democracy in Jammu and Kashmir remains a key part of understanding post-abrogation governance. The decades-long armed insurgency, cross-border terrorism, and internal militancy have continuously chipped away at the legitimacy of democratic institutions. High abstentions, more pronounced boycotts, and targeted killings of political activists from non-separatist ideologies result in weak political participation at the village level. The nexus of violence and separatist narratives fills the resulting governance vacuum. Under these conditions, the Indian state argued that security is the foundation of a democratic state; the state is required to first provide security in order for democratic confidence to be restored (Ahanger, & Yaqoob, 2023). The Juridical establishment repeatedly emphasizes the tenuous balance between the individual's liberties and national security of Jammu and Kashmiri. In *Prem Nath Kaul v. State of J&K* (1959), the Supreme Court infers that Article 370 was transitional and contingent

upon J&K Constituent Assembly's will, which implies that it could never be absolute. This obiter strengthens the legal rationale for abrogation where security necessities merge with democratic reconstitution. In *Mohd. Maqbool Damnoo v. State of J&K* (1972), the Court held that the President was empowered to act under Article 370 and to issue orders, including matters of security, after consultation with the Governor, still obliquely asserting the role of the Constitution of India in preserving stability of the region (Deva, 2020).

The trajectory of security challenges in J&K is marked by high-profile terror incidents that expose the fragile link between governance and public order in the Valley. The 2001 attack on the J&K Legislative Assembly, carried out by Jaish-e-Mohammed militants, directly targeted the symbol of democratic authority, killing over 30 people and signaling that democratic institutions themselves were under siege. Similarly, the 2008 Amarnath land row protests reveal how administrative decisions can ignite large-scale unrest when amplified by separatist mobilization, undermining both security and governance. The 2016 Uri attack, where militants stormed an army brigade headquarters and killed 19 soldiers, underscores the vulnerability of security infrastructure and its impact on public morale. Most consequentially, the 2019 Pulwama attack, killed 40 CRPF personnel in one of the deadliest terror strikes on Indian soil, accelerates demands for a fundamental rethinking of J&K's political arrangement. These incidents highlight that militancy in the Valley is not just a law-and-order issue but a systemic challenge that intertwines with questions of democratic legitimacy. The government frames the abrogation of Article 370 as part of a national security doctrine, asserting that exceptional constitutional status provides separatists a political justification that weakens both stability and democratic processes. After abrogation, security agencies report a decline in stone-pelting, protests, and shutdowns, creating conditions for greater civic engagement without militant coercion. Yet, targeted killings of elected representatives, grassroots workers, and minorities persist, showing the difficulty of embedding democracy in a conflict-scarred society. These dynamics highlight the inseparable link between security and democracy: without peace and protection for civic actors, governance lacks legitimacy, and without inclusive institutions, security gains remain fragile (Khan, 2024).

The objective of this study is to critically analyse the political, social, and governance changes in Jammu and Kashmir after the revocation of Articles 370 and 35A. It will explore how altering the region's special constitutional status

has impacted democratic engagement and participation, decentralization, and integration into and across the Indian Union. The study is also assessing the potential for a form of more inclusive governance or governance; as such, it will also analyse equity, participation and accountability in the context of governance, and consider what the relevant implications are for marginalized groups such as women, Scheduled Tribes, and/or non-permanent residents. This research will also look at the changing security environment and how this relates to democratic legitimacy, peace, and development. By connecting the political, governance and security elements together, this study will provide an account of whether the constitutional and institutional changes have led to either a deepening of democracy, a more inclusive form of governance, and/or more stable forms of governance.

This study contributes to the discourse on post-abrogation Jammu and Kashmir by providing a thorough investigation into how political, security and governance institutions are changing since the abrogation of Article 370 and 35A. The work highlights a shift from the region's political isolationist status to political mainstreaming efforts, whereby democratization is re-oriented through the lens of decentralization (i.e., Union Territory governance and Panchayati Raj Institutions), and the newly created local participatory structures. The study takes the additional step towards our knowledge of inclusive governance by analyzing how new legal frameworks, the matter of property rights, and reservation policy affect the historically marginalized communities (i.e., women, Scheduled Tribes, and non-permanent residents). The study provides further insight because it connects the issues of security with democratization and builds on our understanding of stability and peace as preconditions for democratic legitimacy.

The paper is divided into six sections. Section 1 comprises the introduction of the document. A review of literature is comprised under section 2 of the paper. A research methodology is examined in Section 3. The results are discussed in Section 4. The discussion has been provided in detail in section 5. Section 6 contains conclusions, implication, limitation and future scope.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Centralized Decentralization: The Paradox of Administered Political Integration

A major theme of the literature is the Union government's implementation of administrative decentralization as the principal vehicle for political

integration, which scholars termed centralized decentralization (Hajong, Shoeb, Parvez, Verma & Jha, 2022). Moreover (Seelarbokus, 2024) studied the policy was characterized by the direct administration of the region by the central government with the implementation of reforms devolving power to the local level claiming to establish a more direct process of connection between New Delhi, and the people on the ground. As a result, (Kannabiran, K. 2024) explored the period following the abrogation until the implementation of the policy has been full of governance reforms, including the operation of various local governance reforms such as the implementation of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts which empowered the local bodies by implementing Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Moreover, the literature has considerable tensions regarding the consequences of this administered integration for the prospects of authentic electoral democracy and political representation. The delay in assembly elections despite a successful District Development Council (DDC) election held in 2020 is highlighted as a major issue of fraught ambiguity, producing an outcome in which local governance exists without higher-level political accountability (Bhat, Ganayee & Jahangir, 2024). Similarly, Hussain, S. (2020) studied the central government describes the high rate of participation in DDC elections as either an endorsement of state policy or an indicator of political normality, many scholars assert that while such elections are meaningful, they do not equate to and are not a substitute for restoring full statehood and representative democracy at the level of the union territory. At last, the academic literature generally asserts that the promised political transformation is incomplete in light of national promises made to provide political representation and accountability, because without restoration of a democratically elected state government there remains a sceptical view of the core components of decentralization and reform (Ali, 2022).

Jammu and Kashmir Security: Armed Forces' Role Before and After Article 370

A significant amount of literature suggests that the pre-abrogation security environment in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) typically represented a military-led Counter-Insurgency (COIN) campaign, characterized primarily by the state-sponsored massive deployment of central armed police forces and the Indian Army with a legal framework such as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) to give them broad powers to conduct operations

(Bhattacharyya, 2018). Moreover, the security forces' role was inextricably tied to population-based operations to end a popular militancy. This typically involved the security forces maintaining a permanent presence in urban and rural areas, conducting cordon-and-search operations, and engaging with local communities for long periods of engagements, which may increase stability but also allowed the security forces humanitarian action to be easily conflated with military action, which frequently resulted in human rights abuses and hyper-alienated the population (Chopra, 2019). As such, the pre-2019 period constituted a complicated and sometimes adversarial relationship between security forces and civilians (Arora & Grover, 2019).

Before the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A on August 5, 2019, Jammu and Kashmir underwent unique security dynamics defined by active militancy, episodic protests, and local insurgency. The region experienced high-profile attacks such as the 2016 Uri attacks and the 2019 Pulwama bombings, illustrating an active threat by organized militant groups (Tanveer, 2025). Furthermore (Jain, 2023) stated the Indian Army employed two emergent counter-insurgency operations, Operation Rakshak and Operation Calm Down, that represented a change in interest from mere display of force to ranged and individual counter-insurgency protection methods. Additionally, Sonpar, S. (2014) investigated the various forces supported counter-insurgency operations including the Special Operations Group (SOG), which was an elite police force that fought the anti-insurgency work at the front operationally by conducting numerous joint operation missions including the elimination of significant militant leaders. In this phase of Jammu and Kashmir's security dynamics, the defined insurgents needed to recruit men locally and soldier deployed personnel increased back to a pre-2014 deployment.

Governance, Inclusion, and Accountability in Post-Abrogation Jammu and Kashmir

The central government's governance model to promote integration through development and direct rule in post-abrogation Jammu and Kashmir is portrayed as an overt purpose to foster inclusion. The study contended that all communities benefited from the new land laws and the fast-tracked infrastructure development programs (Seelarbokus, 2024). However, (Mitra, 2012) studied a central tenet of critical situation argues that the inclusionary mechanics have done the opposite of inclusion. The centralization of decision-

making power and the onboarding of existing geo-spatial dynamics of land use and land ownership in the region, are put forth as aggravating political alienation and social exclusion among the local populations, especially the local Muslim majority, exposing the disparity between policy intent and on-the-ground reality.

Furthermore, the government has encouraged the use of digital governance platforms and the direct depositing of welfare payments into people's accounts, which they frequently hailed as reducing bureaucratic mediation and the opportunity for corruption, thus increasing procedural transparency (Wani, Bhat, Alam & Mir, 2023). Lastly numerous accounts have uncovered a strong accountability gap, supporting the assertion that long durations of government rule and removal of accountability channels, including the absence of an elected legislative assembly, removed an important level of vertical accountability (Hoffman & Duschinski, 2014).

While prior studies have considered decentralization, transitions in security, and reforms in governance since the abrogation in present-day Jammu and Kashmir, there are still significant gaps in these studies. Specifically, research just hasn't really explored the question of whether administrative reforms and Panchayati Raj Institutions were meaningfully transitioned to democratic forms of participation and accountability. The studies on security mainly focus on counter-insurgency but fail to assess trust in the citizen-state relationship, human rights implications, or consider democratization. The governance literature primarily focuses on digital shift in governance and welfare delivery, but does not capture the experiences of marginalized groups in terms of inclusion and representation. Additionally, there is no meaningful long-term study on the effects of abrogation on the deepening of democracy, social reconciliation, and sustainable peace. Therefore, it is important to consider the context in a holistic inquiry of the interlinkages of the political, security and governance perspectives to understand how decentralization, democracy and governance can meaningfully be strengthened in Jammu and Kashmir.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design aligned with its three objectives to ensure analytical rigor and methodological clarity. The qualitative data of political change and decentralization (Objective-1) include the constitutional amendments, parliamentary discussions, policy papers and

judicial rulings are grouped with the quantitative data of elections collected by the Election Commission of India and analysed by means of descriptive and trends analysis. The shift in security relations and the role of military services (Objective-2) is evaluated based on the qualitative analysis of government publications, findings of parliamentary committees, and security policy documents with the help of the quantitative data about security incidents and trends of military deployments received in the Ministry of Home Affairs. To examine inclusive and responsible governance (Objective-3), the methodology applies the social approach to qualitative content evaluation of civil society reports, media stories, and scholarly literature and quantitative data on Census records and government databases on welfare to operationalize the constructs of inclusivity, transparency, and accountability, and be able to comparatively and inferentially examine the outcomes of governance following abrogation period.

RESULT AND INTERPRETATION

Objective 1: *To analyse the political transformation in Jammu and Kashmir post-abrogation of Article 370 and 35A, focusing on decentralization, elections, and reforms.*

This objective investigates the continuing political change in Jammu and Kashmir characterized by a conscious process of decentralization and structural reform. Article 370 and 35A's abrogation is regarded as the legal trigger by the central government for negating the state's special status and division of Jammu & Kashmir as Union Territories. As highlighted in the Supreme Court's 2023 finding in *Dr. Shah Faesal and Others v. Union of India*, the Centre sought to promote the region's integration and identity as a cohesive political entity. The extension of electoral democracy is being facilitated by administrative means, including the Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act, which challenges traditional regional parties by replicating local democratic institutions and redirects political participation to the new District Development Councils (DDCs) (Robinson & Randhawa, 2024).

The study analyzes elections as a metric to help assess the normalization of the political process. The government argues that the abrogation has facilitated free and fair elections without the interference of dynastic politics, which is tested by its conduct of recent electoral exercises. The government cites high electoral turnout in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, particularly in

the Kashmir Valley, as evidence of greater public engagement and decreasing alienation. This evidence, however, is often challenged by regionally based parties who argue that the turnout alone is not indicative of something normal and, moreover, they note that, there isn't even a democratically-elected state government in place yet. Therefore, this aim requires a critical study of how these elections and other processes of decentralization, in combination with new laws concerning land ownership and domicile, are reconstituting the political space and the political relationship of the region with the Indian Union (Kuttay & Majid, 2025).

Table 1: Electoral Participation in Local Body Elections (Post-2019)

Election Type	Year Held	Total Electors	Voter Turnout (%)	Number of Constituencies Contested
Block Development Council (BDC)	2020	5.8 Million	98.3%	316 Blocks
District Development Council (DDC)	2020	5.8 Million	98.3%	20 Districts
Panchayat By-Polls	2021	Varies by constituency	80.1% (Avg.)	13,000+ Panchayat Seats
Urban Local Bodies	2023	1.7 Million	78.4%	1,145 Wards

Source: <https://ceojk.nic.in/>

The period of post-abrogation governance has been marked by an organized staged approach to elections, purposely designed to decentralize political power and establish a new bottom-up political baseline prior to reconvening the legislative assembly. The journey began with the first level elections electing Block Development Councils (BDC) in 2020, quickly followed by the inaugural election of District Development Councils (DDC) in 2020, as the first meaningful election since the abrogation, framed as empowering local governance. The established bottom-up plan continued with additional Panchayat by-polls in 2021 to fill any vacancies thereby fully establishing the three-tier rural governance system outlined in the Constitution. The most recent step forward was the elections for Urban Local Bodies (ULB) in 2023, serving to complete this new structure of decentralized governance. Collectively, the staged elections contribute to the primary goal of highway normalizing the electoral process under the new constitutional

design and producing a new generation of local leaders and establishment of sustained stability in the political landscape through which eventual legislative assembly elections could emerge (Bhat, M. A., et al.,2024).

Objective 2: *To explore the changes in security dynamics and the role of armed forces in Jammu and Kashmir before and after the abrogation of Article 370 and 35A.*

This study examines the security environment and the function of the military and paramilitary forces in Jammu and Kashmir before and after the constitutional changes of August 2019. Along with that, the plan aims to assess whether the revocation of Article 370 and 35A, which removed the special autonomous status of the region, engendered a measurable change in militancy, cross-border infiltration, civilian protests, and violence in total. Further, it will consider the potential shift in the armed forces' mandate from primarily conducting counter-insurgency operations, to possibly performing a greater range of law enforcement (policing), or peacekeeping, or supporting an in-transition civil administration in a recently integrated Union Territory (Kuszevska, 2022).

Table 2: Incidents of Killings and Casualties in Jammu and Kashmir before abrogation

Year	Incidents of Killing	Civilians	Security Forces	Terrorists/Insurgents/Extremists	Total
2008	261	71	85	382	538
2009	208	53	73	247	373
2010	189	34	69	258	361
2011	119	33	31	117	181
2012	70	19	18	84	121
2013	84	19	53	100	172
2014	91	28	47	114	189
2015	86	19	41	115	175
2016	112	14	88	165	267
2017	163	54	83	220	357
2018	206	86	95	271	452

Source: <https://www.satp.org/datasheet-terrorist-attack/india-jammukashmir>

The ratio of incidents of killing and casualties serves to quantify the altered security environment. Prior to the abrogation, Jammu and Kashmir has a reputation for sustained levels of violence; regularity of militant attacks, encounters and civilian casualties is an indication of an entrenched, active insurgency that required the armed forces to assume a predominately military counter-insurgency role. In the time after the abrogation, official data often show a significant reduction in overall casualties (including security force personnel, militants, and civilians), implying a transition towards a controlled security environment; often this security environment is linked to perceptions of improved security through increased security, a tighter counter-infiltration grid, and the fact that there is no longer widespread civil unrest, which shifts the role of the armed forces in Kashmir to a logic of consolidating these gains and achieving sustained area dominance (Chauhan, 2024).

Table 3: Incidents of Killings and Casualties in Jammu and Kashmir after abrogation

Year	Incidents of Killing	Civilians	Security Forces	Terrorists/ Insurgents/ Extremists	Total
2019	135	42	78	163	283
2020	140	33	56	232	321
2021	153	36	45	193	274
2022	151	30	30	193	253
2023	72	12	33	87	134
2024	61	31	26	69	127
2025	27	28	12	36	77

Source: <https://www.satp.org/datasheet-terrorist-attack/fatalities/india-jammukashmir>

Conversely, a comparison of the security conditions of Jammu & Kashmir show a stark contrast by key metrics, since the abrogation of Article 370. The official statistics show a significant decrease in terrorist attacks, security force and civilian deaths, and more importantly stone pelting attacks in the Union Territory, and indicate an overall better situation with respect to law and order. Some of the reasons attributed to this positive trend are a much more robust counter-insurgency grid, reduced friction associated with identity politics in younger generations, and targeted action on many sources

of separatist funding; as well, there is still a serious threat of targeted killings and the inevitable cycle of militant recruitment, especially in the south of the Kashmir valley, which suggests a movement toward hybrid militancy; this is important, as it suggests that although the security situation has improved greatly, the fundamental issues of a targeted insurgency remain a problem set that is still evolving (Ahlawat & Izarali, 2020).

Table 4: Security Situation in Jammu & Kashmir: Comparative Analysis of Pre- and Post-Abrogation of Article 370

Indicator	Pre-Abrogation (2016-2019 Avg.)	Post-Abrogation (2020-2023 Avg.)
Terrorist Incidents	417	229
Security Force Fatalities	95	39
Civilian Fatalities	48	33
Stone Pelting Incidents	1,999 (2018)	41 (2023)
Active Militant Recruitment	130 (2018)	50 (2023)

Source: <https://jkpolice.gov.in/History>

Objective 3: *To study the governance mechanisms in promoting inclusivity, transparency, and accountability in post-abrogation Jammu and Kashmir.*

The purpose of this study is to investigate the governance mechanisms put in place in Jammu and Kashmir in the wake of the abrogation of its special status, specifically to determine how effective they have been in advancing the principles of inclusivity, transparency, and accountability. This study will attempt to identify and analyze the specific policies, arrangements, and processes implemented by the governing authorities to determine how they support or impede an equal opportunity for all communities (inclusivity), to facilitate an open channel of information and decision-making processes (transparency), and to assign multiple lines of responsibility and accountability to decision-makers response (an accountability framework). Ultimately, we will provide a critical, evidence-based assessment of how efficient the current governance model is at establishing a stable, trustworthy administrative culture while navigating a complex transition phase in the region (Rajadhyaksha, 2020).

Table 5: Indicators of Inclusivity in Governance

Indicator	Time Period	Data for J&K	Comparative Data (e.g., National Average or Other States)
Voter Turnout (%)	District Development Council (DDC) Elections 2020	51.42%	Unique election
Voter Turnout (%)	Lok Sabha Elections 2024 (Baramulla)	59% (approx.)	Constituency specific
Number of Elected Representatives at Grassroot Level (Panchayati Raj Institutions)	As of 2023	35,000+ (approx. 28,000 Panches & 7,000 Sarpanches)	State specific
Representation of Women in PRIs	As of 2023	Reserved seats: 33% (Constitutionally mandated). Actual numbers in proportion.	India Avg.: ~46% (of elected reps are women)
Per Capita Income (at Current Prices)	2022-23 (Provisional)	₹1,42,356	India Avg.: ₹1,70,620

Source: <https://panchayat.gov.in/>

The selected indicators together provide a multi-dimensional frame of reference for evaluating inclusivity in governance in Jammu & Kashmir. The Voter Turnout (%) is a fundamental marker of political participation, as well as the public's confidence in participating in an electoral process. The Number of Elected Representatives at the Grassroot we take at the Community Level (Panchayati Raj Institutions is attached on to the Voter Turnout and directly enables local community representation, and therefore the amount of decentralised governance possible). Through the representation numbers we may regard the Representation of Women in PRIs as the significant gender inclusion marker because it ensures that the majority population demographic has some direct voice in the decision-making and policy-making that affects their livelihood, if not a say in the contentions involved. Finally, while moving away from political markers we need Per Capita Income acts as an important socio-economic indicator; and increasingly, if the per capita income shows

increases, it implies that people at least increased their chances of some governance benefits and that various development policies are translating into distributed benefits across the populace as wage earning participants in the socio-economic governance domain, with the probability of and greater economic inclusion and reducing the variance amongst region. Together, these markers go from claims of theoretical inclusion and citizenship in the governance designs of J&K to precisely quantifiable governing evidence of the degree to which governance systems are encompassing all aspects of the J&K society (Hajam, Rather, & Rashid, 2024).

DISCUSSION

The post-abrogation phase in Jammu and Kashmir has taken a planned and typified form with an opportunity for a multi-layered electoral process with a goal of distributing political power and a pathway to sustained democracy. The local body elections were conducted in an orderly fashion - they began with Block Development Councils (BDCs) in 2020, followed with District Development Councils (DDCs), Panchayat by-polls, and lastly Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), all signifying a planned move towards normal political representation and centering local leadership (Hussain, 2021). While official data relates staggering voter turnout rates (for example, 98.3% in BDC & DDC polls), the government uses these figures to signify a decline in alienation and an increase in public participation amongst the populace. However, author (Kaul, 2018) debate that high rates of voter turnout in the context of normalized politics may not be entirely feasible in Jammu & Kashmir, especially with the lack of an elected state assembly and the continuing deliberations about whether or not there can even be authentic representation.

The extension of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) is illustrative of inclusionary governance, whereby the PRIs included over 35,000 elected representatives, as well as the legislative-mandated 33% reservation for women. Clearly, PRIs have a formal commitment to gender inclusion and paramouncy of local representation within democratic governance. Conversely, it reflects that Jammu and Kashmir is still lagging behind the national average quota of roughly 46% women representatives. Some of these results shed light on continued development disparities that will potentially prohibit full inclusivity when controlled by socio-economic factors such as per capita income in Jammu and Kashmir is ₹1,42,356 vs.

national average of ₹1,70,620 (Matloob, Shabbir & Saher, 2021). On the other hand there is insufficient data on violence and security post-2019 that have confirmed better conditions for improved governance. All told concerns remain about targeted killings and hybrid militancy that evidence it may be unfair to conclude Jammu and Kashmir has moved considerably closer towards inclusive democratic governance and development; furthermore, the evidence suggests the government has the momentum and environment to continue facilitating governance that is inclusive although much work remains (Mushtaq & Goswami, 2024). In summary, the abrogation has led to structural reforms in Jammu and Kashmir that are more plugged into the national trajectory in terms of democratic governance. Perhaps exemplifying the abrogated conditions for strengthened democracy and governance, in Jammu and Kashmir and more broadly and addressing the complicating factors mentioned throughout becomes a function of continuing political engagement to rectify interrelated inequalities in Jammu and Kashmir, not the least are socio-economic inequalities fabricating the relationships between state machinery and local populations.

CONCLUSION

The abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A represents a major change in the constitutional, political, and administrative landscape of Jammu and Kashmir, as well as its relation to the Indian Union. The analysis in this report illustrates how core structural reforms, such as decentralization facilitated through Panchayati Raj Institutions, improvements in local representation, and a new policy framework have opened up more space for participation, inclusion, and accountability in local governance. However, the challenge remains to firmly institutionalize this into a sustainable democratic culture. On indicators of security, violence has decreased and law and order have seen improvement, yet targeted killings and a hybrid form of militancy still exist and operate as barriers to complete stability. Relatedly, while women, Scheduled Tribes, and non-permanent residents have seen some increase in their rights and entitlements, existent socio-economic divisions and slower rates of vertical accountability resulting from the lack of a state assembly inhibit any demonstrable sense of inclusion. However, the long-term process of consolidating peace, building trust, and representing representative democracy requires commitment, ongoing political will, and meaningful engagement with local communities.

Implications

The implications of this study suggest that the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A radically alters the governance and democratic structures in Jammu and Kashmir to both opportunity and risks. On the one hand, local governance in the framework of the Union of India provides opportunities for decentralized governance through Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI), increased political engagement, and the extension of constitutional rights, especially relation to women, scheduled tribes or other non-permanent residents - and moving towards this gradual aspect of genuine inclusivity, along with transparency and accountability is the hallmark of good governance and a strong democracy. At the same time, and concerningly, the findings pointed to next set of limitations - limitations of an absence of local government, absence of a conviction regarding trust deficits, trust in governing authorities, hybrid form of militancy, and a lack of distributive justice when it comes to welfare and distribution of resources. Ultimately, to bring the implications together in summary, the need for political engagement is paramount, for social and economic is to reflect upon and strengthen democracy through some sort of reconciliation, and to respect constitutional changes as developments that people can draw legitimacy and experiential outcomes of inclusion from - informally and within formal processes - toward inclusive development in Jammu and Kashmir.

Limitations

The study has certain limitations that must be recognized. First, second-hand data sources such as bureaucratic reports, reports of policies and electoral statistics contain institutional bias and official narratives that do not necessarily represent the lived experiences of the local people. Second, while the study was able to juxtapose the developments prior to and after the abrogation, the study has relatively little time to cover since the abrogation and we are unable to consider the long-term consequences for democracy, governance and security in Jammu and Kashmir. Third, the study heavily emphasized the political, governance and security dimensions of the conflict, with little consideration given to the issues of social reconciliation, cultural identity and the psychological dimensions of the conflict situation, which are all relevant considerations for sustainable peace. And lastly, using statistical indicators as a reflection of the degree of inclusivity and democratic participation in Jammu and Kashmir, overly simplifies the social-

cultural context and do not take into account qualitative attributes, such as trust, legitimacy and fairness, that are still significant considerations of the democratic experience.

Future Scope

This study has future scope for an exploration of democratic transformation, inclusive governance, and security stabilization in Jammu and Kashmir beyond the post-abrogation phase. It is possible to conduct longitudinal studies that investigate the trajectory of electoral participation. The process of decentralization under the Panchayati Raj Institutions and political participation must be more democratic at the grassroots when legislative assembly elections are reinstated. There is also the promising future direction of interrogating the lived experiences of marginalized groups (e.g., women, scheduled tribes, displaced groups) to see if legal changes and policy reform equate to genuine opportunities and representation. The new security context during these changing times also has legitimate scope to understand and analyze hybrid-militancy, targeted killing, and balancing counter-insurgency operations and civil liberties. Even comparative studies with other parts of the world that have been affected by conflict or have special status can also afford the researcher an opportunity for better framing of governance models and adapting it to J&K. Future research would do much better by integrating both the political and the social with the security aspects to obtain systematic analysis for better understanding the sustainability of democracy, peace, and inclusivity in the future of the region.

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