



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor (RJIF): 8.4
IJAR 2024; 10(9): 08-14
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 12-07-2024
Accepted: 13-08-2024

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Elections in Jammu and Kashmir since independence: A qualitative review of democratic processes and socio-political impacts

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22271/allresearch.2024.v10.i9a.11981>

Abstract

This paper methodically qualitatively reviews the socio-political consequences of elections in Jammu and Kashmir since their entrance to India in 1947. By means of a careful analysis of significant elections, the role of significant political parties and coalitions, and the effects of significant political developments including the abrogation of Article 370, the article explores the evolution of the democratic processes in the region. Analysing voter participation, government issues, and public faith in democratic institutions allows one to grasp the complex political climate of Jammu & Kashmir. When one considers the successes and continuous challenges in establishing stable administration and promoting public involvement, the road the region has travelled from early post-independence elections to present changes is clear-cut. This paper aims to inform academics and lawmakers on the crucial factors influencing the democratic processes in Jammu and Kashmir as well as add to the ongoing discussion on regional stability and development.

Keywords: Jammu and Kashmir, elections, article 370, political parties, democratic processes

Introduction

From its accession to India in 1947, Jammu and Kashmir, a territory of great geopolitical significance, has been the focus of intricate political processes. Article 370 of the Indian Constitution gave the area a special status that permitted it some degree of autonomy, therefore creating a different political climate from other Indian states. Elections in Jammu and Kashmir have been essential over the years in determining its sociopolitical scene, therefore impacting public involvement in democratic processes, governance, and regional stability. The objective of this qualitative research review is to give a thorough examination of Jammu and Kashmir's election procedures since their independence. Examining important elections, the function of political parties and coalitions, and the sociopolitical effects helps one to grasp the growth of democracy in the area and its consequences for government and social progress.

Methodological Approach

Using a qualitative methodology, the study makes use of a broad spectrum of secondary materials including historical narratives, government records, and scholarly publications. The study centres on a number of important factors:

Historical Context: Examining Jammu and Kashmir's political past with an eye on Article 370 and early elections.

Examining closely important elections from the 1950s to the present, we emphasize political changes and major results.

Examining recent election reforms-including the abrogation of Article 370 and the delimitation process-helps one better understand them.

Evaluation of the more general socio-political effects of elections on regional stability, public confidence, and governance.

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Significance of the study

For various reasons, knowing Jammu and Kashmir's election past is absolutely vital: Elections are pillars of democratic government and stability. Examining their behaviour and results helps one to better understand the political stability and governance difficulties of the area. Voter engagement represents popular confidence in democratic procedures. Examining election patterns lets one determine how well these mechanisms involve the people. The results can guide upcoming changes to enhance democracy in Jammu and Kashmir by informing legislators about the achievements and shortcomings of earlier voting methods. This paper presents a complex picture of how elections have shaped the political and social fabric of Jammu and Kashmir, stressing both the successes and continuous difficulties in the democratic path of the territory.

Historical Context

Background pre-independence and early post-independence

The Dogra dynasty governed the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir during British colonial era. Its strategic position and varied people helped it to be a notable subcontinent entity. Maharaja Hari Singh had to contend with demands to join either India or Pakistan following 1947. After Pakistani tribal forces invaded, the Maharaja signed the Instrument of Accession with India in October 1947, therefore bringing Jammu and Kashmir under Indian rule.

- **First Elections: 1951** was the first year Jammu & Kashmir had elections. These elections were important as they started the democratic process in the state run under Indian control (Pandita, 2015)^[28].
- **Dominance of the National Conference:** Under Sheikh Abdullah, the conference was instrumental in shaping early Jammu and Kashmir's political scene. The first democratic and administrative systems of the state were greatly shaped by the party (Tremblay, 1996)^[41].
- **1953 Dismissal of Sheikh Abdullah:** A turning point in early political history of Jammu and Kashmir, Sheikh Abdullah's dismissal and detention in 1953 resulted in major political unrest and mistrust of the central government (Samant, 2003)^[34].
- **Integration and Article 370:** Jammu and Kashmir was given particular autonomous status when Article 370 was included into the Indian Constitution, therefore enabling it to have its own constitution and great freedom over internal affairs (Imtiyaz, 2021)^[17].
- **Population and Demographics:** Jammu and Kashmir's political dynamics were much influenced by its mostly Hindu in Jammu and Muslim in the Kashmir Valley demographic mix. This variety affected political affiliations and voting habits (Shahbaz, 2015)^[37].
- **Early movements in politics:** Early years saw the emergence of several sociopolitical movements fighting for more autonomy and tackling local issues, therefore helping to shape the convoluted political environment (Singh, 2022)^[39].

Initial Elections: 1951–1970s

The 1951 Elections

Elections for the first Legislative Assembly: 1951 was the first year Jammu & Kashmir conducted legislative assembly elections. These elections were important as they were the

first ones carried out following state admission to India. Under Sheikh Abdullah's direction, the National Conference came out on top, unimposing all 75 seats. This prepared the ground for the National Conference's political predominance in the area (Mohan, 2002)^[27].

Elections for 1957 and 1962

- **1957 Elections:** These ones signalled the start of Jammu and Kashmir's more fiercely competitive political landscape. Other political players began to acquire ground, therefore preparing the basis for further political contests despite the ongoing supremacy of the National Conference (Pandita, 2015)^[29].
- **1962 Elections:** Adopted in 1957, the new constitution of Jammu and Kashmir defined the elections in 1962. These elections underlined the changing democratic procedures in the state and attracted more involvement from different political parties (Pandita, 2015)^[29].
- **Rising of Political Parties:** As fresh political parties emerged in Jammu and Kashmir throughout the 1960s, the political scene started to change. Electoral fraud and political unrest dogged the 1960s elections, yet other parties including the Indian National Congress also began to have a major influence on state politics (Pandita, 2015)^[29]. These problems added to political turbulence and doubt about the impartiality of the voting system (Samant, 2003)^[34].
- **1967 Elections:** Multiple political parties' more active engagement and rivalry made these elections noteworthy. Reflecting public increasing participation with the political process, the voter turnout was quite high (Schofield, 2019)^[35].
- **1972 Elections:** Crucially in determining the political destiny of Jammu & Kashmir, the 1972 elections were conducted following notable political upheavals. These elections confirmed the political systems and policies that would rule the state's affairs for years to come (Pandita, 2014)^[29].

Major Elections and Political Developments 1980s and Insurgency Period

- **Background Political Context:** Rising insurgency and political unrest defined the 1980s as a turning point in Jammu and Kashmir's political life. The elections carried out during this period greatly influenced the political and social scene of the area (Widmalm, 1997)^[43].
- **1987 State Elections and Allegations of Rigging:** Many view the 1987 state elections as turning point in the history of Jammu and Kashmir. Targeting the National Conference-Congress coalition specifically, several allegations of electoral fraud and cheating dogged the elections. These charges caused the Kashmiri community-especially the younger generation to grow extremely disappointed and bitter (Mohan, 2002)^[27].
- **Influence on Rebellion:** Many voters being denied due to what was thought to be a lack of election integrity led to the region's insurgency. Many rebel groups organized following the election, and young people turned to armed combat as a replacement for the failing democratic system (Ganguly, 1996)^[12]. Following the 1987 elections, several hardline groups emerged advocating either Jammu and Kashmir's full

independence or admission into Pakistan. Among these groups were two most well-known ones: the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) and Hizbul Mujahideen (Panwar, 2012) [30]. The Indian government quelled the growing revolt using military as well as diplomatic strategies. But according to Tremblay (1996) [41], these acts often made the Kashmiri people feel

- **1989 Rebellion:** Rebel activity was very high in 1989. Governmental Actions and Human Rights Breaches: The Indian government has been accused of violating human rights during its counter-insurgency operations. The daughter of India's Home Minister at the time, Dr Rubiya Sayeed, was abducted in this regard. These actions included the use of excessive force, arbitrary detentions, and other forms of repression, further aggravating the already unstable situation in the area (Grare, 2008) [14].

Consequences for Public Opinion Socio-Political

- **Change:** Political unrest and the start of insurgency throughout the 1980s fundamentally changed public sentiment in Jammu & Kashmir. The people's confidence in the democratic process dropped noticeably, which increased support for separatist groups and ideologies (Pandita, 2015) [28].
- **Long-Term Effects:** The insurgency and government reaction changed the sociopolitical environment of the area over time. The cycle of violence and persecution created deep-rooted resentment and distrust; these elements still influence the politics and society of the region (Hamid, 2019) [16].

Post-1996 Elections

Assembly Elections, 2002

- **Return to Democracy:** Following years of conflict, the 2002 assembly elections were a major step toward bringing democracy back to Jammu & Kashmir. A resurgence of faith in the democratic process resulted from the perception that these elections were mostly free and fair (Samant, 2003) [34].
- **Political Result:** The elections brought about a shift in power, as the National Conference (NC)'s long-standing hegemony was broken by the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the Indian National Congress (INC) in a coalition administration (Chowdhary, 2003) [8].

Assembly Elections in 2008 and 2014

- **2008 Elections:** Despite calls for a boycott by separatist organizations, the 2008 assembly elections were noteworthy for the high voter turnout. After emerging as the biggest party, the National Conference teamed up with the Congress to establish a coalition government (Mir, 2017).
- **Elections of 2014:** The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), which teamed up with the PDP to create a coalition government, rose to unprecedented prominence in these elections. According to Chowdhary (2015) [10], this alliance brought attention to the political differences throughout the area as well as the intricate interactions between local and national politics.

Elections for Panchayats

- **2011 Panchayat Elections:** The smoothly held 2011 Panchayat elections were viewed as a move in the right

direction toward grassroots democracy. Despite the ongoing fighting, a large number of people participated in these elections, which were seen as a way to strengthen local administration (Wani, 2011) [42].

- **Possibilities and Challenges:** The panchayat elections presented both chances and obstacles, emphasizing the necessity of ongoing initiatives to fortify regional democratic institutions in the face of political and security difficulties (Bhat, 2016) [6].
- **Parliamentary Elections in 2009 and 2014:** With substantial political mobilization and high voter turnout, these elections demonstrated the larger political tendencies and difficulties in Jammu and Kashmir. The ongoing separatist sentiments and the nuanced link between mainstream and separatist politics were also highlighted during the elections (Chowdhary, 2009) [9].

Consequences on Socio-Political Impact on Public Trust and Governance:

The post-1996 elections helped greatly to rebuild popular trust in democratic processes and government. The outcomes of the elections and the building of coalition governments reflected the popular expectations and the shifting political environment (Pandita, 2015) [28]. Notwithstanding the progress, the area faced significant challenges like political unrest, security issues, and political instability all of which affected the general efficiency of democratic administration (Schofield, 2019) [35].

Current Shifts and Election Reforms

Limitation & Illustration: Context & Background

Jammu and Kashmir has had many delimitation procedures in the past in order to distribute the legislative assembly's seats. Guaranteeing fair representation for many areas of the state depends on delimitation (Agha, 1965) [1]. The legal basis for delimitation in Jammu and Kashmir is shaped in part by many constitutional clauses, most notably Article 370 and following changes and acts. 2002 year The last major delimitation project was finished in 2002 previous to 2020. The complex political sensitivity and population of the area made this operation challenging (Wirsing, 1995) [44]. 2020–2021 Delimitation: The most current delimitation commission was formed in 2020 following the Article 370 repeal in 2019. This project aimed to establish the boundaries of the assembly and parliamentary seats thereby ensuring more fair representation. The 2021 delimitation process was quite significant as it changed the political environment and representation of Jammu & Kashmir (Shah, 2022) [36].

Change in Representation Population and Demographics:

The delimitation procedure considers population statistics, therefore influencing the distribution of seats to different regions. The existing line of reference aimed to correct the historical disparity in representation between the regions of Jammu and Kashmir (Bhat, 2017) [7]. Changes to constituency borders might significantly affect political dynamics. The present delimitation, which is supposed to help the Jammu region with a Hindu majority, may influence political outcomes of next elections.

Political and Social Effects

The delimitation procedure aims to provide a more balanced regional representation therefore reducing regional inequalities and guaranteeing equitable development

(Pandita, 2015)^[28]. Ensuring that every region has a role in the legislative process helps to assure fair delimitation, hence enhancing representation and political stability (Romshoo *et al.*, 2020)^[32].

The removal of Article 370

Article 370: Jadhav, Krishnan, and Vijay (2021) claim that the Indian Constitution grants Jammu and Kashmir particular autonomy allowing it to establish its own constitution and jurisdiction over all internal concerns barring defence, communications, and foreign policy. Article 35A, derived from Article 370 (Khan *et al.*, 2021)^[24], gives particular rights and advantages to the permanent residents of Jammu and Kashmir.

Eliminating Article 370's challenges, the Indian government said that the abrogation will help Jammu and Kashmir to better integrate with the rest of India and promote economic development (Banoo, 2020)^[4]. As part of a long-standing political aim, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) has included in its manifestos the renunciation of Article 370 since the 1980s (Singh, 2022)^[39].

Method for Abrogation and Concern

- **Legal and political moves:** On August 5, 2019 the Indian government issued a presidential decree substituting the 1954 decree and extending the terms of the Indian Constitution to Jammu and Kashmir. Approved by the two houses of the Indian Parliament, a resolution backed this move (Imtiyaz, 2021)^[17].
- **Political and social consequences of the abrogation:** The abrogation caused significant political upheavals that split the state into two Union Territories, Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir. Reactions to this choice were mixed; some considered it as a necessary step toward unity while others felt it betrayed democratic norms (Aryal & Muneer, 2023)^[2].
- **Human Rights Concerns:** Rising militarization in the area and violations of human rights have been related to the abrogation. Reports following the abrogation indicate to curfews, disrupted communication, and arbitrary detentions (Khan *et al.*, 2021)^[24].
- **Investment Opportunities:** The removal of Article 370 is expected to raise Jammu and Kashmir's capacity for investment, hence fostering economic growth and employment creation (Kaushik, 2019)^[20].
- **Improvements in Education:** The area has been given more access and resources after the abrogation, thereby presenting opportunities for development in the educational field (Sharma & Sharma, 2020)^[38].
- **The response from Pakistan:** With Article 370 abrogated, Pakistan is seeking international support against India's action, thereby aggravating relations between the two nations. The subject has been discussed at several worldwide locations, including the UN (Sabar, 2021)^[33].
- **Globally: Views** Other countries' responses have been mixed; some have applauded India's move while others have expressed worries about violations of human rights and the manner the abrogation was executed (Rashid, 2023)^[31].

Case Studies

- **Crucially important Jammu and Kashmir Elections Overview:** Elections have been especially important in

Jammu & Kashmir in shaping the political environment and addressing the specific issues the region faces. Many important elections including their history, outcomes, and implications are covered in this part.

- **Legislative Assembly Elections of 1951:** Initiating the democratic process in Jammu and Kashmir, which India then oversaw, the 1951 legislative assembly elections were historic. Led by Sheikh Abdullah, the National Conference secured all 75 seats without any resistance. According to Mohan (2002)^[27], these elections helped the National Conference to acquire political influence in the region.
- **Elections for Legislative Assemblies 1987:** Generally speaking, the 1987 elections are seen as turning point in the political history of Jammu and Kashmir. Allegations of electoral fraud and cheating especially aimed at the National Conference-Congress coalition tainted the elections. Disenchantment following these elections led many young people in the area to pick up guns against the government (Mohan, 2002)^[27]. These elections revealed the frailty of democratic systems against political manipulation and helped to create prolonged conflicts (Tremblay, 1996)^[41].
- **Legislative Assembly Elections of 2002:** Seen as a vital first step toward the restoration of democracy in Jammu & Kashmir, the elections of 2002 followed years of political upheaval and insurgency. Formation of a coalition government by the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the Indian National Congress ended the long-standing monopoly of the National Conference (Samant, 2003)^[34]. Results of these elections included a change in the government and were very important in promoting public-government relations, therefore restoring some sort of stability (Chowdhary, 2003)^[8].
- **Legislative Assembly Elections of 2008:** Remarkably many people vote in this election in spite of suggestions for a boycott from separatist groups. Rising as the biggest party, the National Conference teamed up with the Congress to form a coalition government (Mir, 2017). These elections showed how locally democratic processes may resist lengthy conflicts and separatist attitudes.
- **Legislative Assembly Elections in 2014:** The 2014 elections showed an unmatched rise in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which teamed with the PDP to form a coalition government. Chowdhary (2015)^[10] claims that this coalition raised awareness of the political variances throughout the region as well as the complex linkages between local and national politics. These elections revealed how fresh political combinations are developing and how the political environment of Jammu and Kashmir is changing.
- **2011 Panchayat Elections Context:** A significant step towards grassroots democracy, the 2011 panchayat elections in Jammu & Kashmir. These elections attracted an amazing turnout despite continuous conflict, considered as a means to support local governance (Wani, 2011)^[42]. Success of these elections demonstrated the need of local government rebuilding public trust in democratic processes (Bhat, 2016)^[6].

Elections to Jammu & Kashmir Local Bodies

Development of grassroots democracy and administration in Jammu and Kashmir depends on local body elections,

especially Panchayat elections. The unique political and social environment of the area has made holding these elections challenging as well as successful in different degrees.

- **2011 Panchayat Elections Context:** Held following a thirty-year gap, the 2011 Panchayat elections were notable. These elections were a necessary first step toward local democracy restoration in the context of ongoing violence. The public's strong desire for political involvement was suggested by the remarkable attendance in the elections despite the continuous fighting (Wani, 2011) ^[42]. Following the election, some elected officials faced intimidation and brutality, therefore highlighting the challenges in maintaining democratic processes in a nation engulfed in bloodshed (Bakloo, 2017) ^[3].
- **Context of the 2018 Panchayat polls:** Tensions and security issues arose during these polls. Separatist groups demanded boycotts, but the elections went ahead proving the government supports local governance. While certain areas had greater participation than others, the elections saw variances in voter turnout overall. This captures variations in political involvement among areas (Pandita, 2015) ^[28]. Bhat (2016) ^[6] claims that these elections were crucial in highlighting the resilience of democratic institutions and the ongoing attempts to strengthen local government structures.
- **Effect of Socio-Political Development and Empowerment:** Effective local body elections may inspire grassroots development projects and give local communities agency. According to Kumar *et al.* (2012) ^[25], addressing regional issues and fostering personal responsibility among the people depend much on empowerment. Women made up a sizable share of the voters in the 2011 Panchayat elections; one-third of the seats set aside for female candidates. This reserve program aimed to raise the representation of women working in local government as well as their numbers (Gul & Khurshid, 2017) ^[15].
- **Issues related to security:** The local body elections find it rather difficult to run without a hitch given the ongoing conflicts and security issues. Still a first concern is ensuring candidates and voters are secure (Bakloo, 2017) ^[3]. Local body elections cannot be successful without the political commitment to support local institutions and provide the means of operation they need. Continual efforts are required to preserve and enhance these democratic processes (Bhat, 2016) ^[6].

Key Political Parties and Alliances in Jammu and Kashmir

- **Early Political Movement:** Early political movements and leaders have greatly changed the political environment of Jammu & Kashmir. Originally started in 1932 by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference eventually changed its name to the National Conference (NC) in 1938. This change signaled a return toward inclusive, secular politics consistent with the Indian National Congress (Bazai, Rehman, & Rashid, 2021) ^[5]. From its founding, the National Conference, under Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, has been a potent political force in Jammu and Kashmir. The party has been extremely

important in the political evolution and administration of the area (Singh & Mehta, 2020) ^[40]. Historically close to the Indian National Congress, the NC has engaged in several coalition administrations including a noteworthy collaboration with the Congress between 2008–2014 (Mir, 2017). Often creating coalitions with regional parties like the NC and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) to construct coalition administrations, the INC has actively participated in the political scene of Jammu and Kashmir (Singh & Mehta, 2020) ^[40].

- **People's Democratic Party (PDP):** Mufti Mohammad Sayeed launched the PDP in 1999. It became clear as a major political player supporting regional development and peace. Reflecting its adaptable political style, the PDP has established coalition administrations including both the INC and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).
- **Bharatiya Janata Party, (BJP):** Particularly since the 2014 assembly elections when it established a coalition government with the PDP, the BJP has been somewhat more visible on the political scene of Jammu and Kashmir (Chowdhary, 2015) ^[10]. The BJP's policy program comprises divisive topics such the abrogation of Article 370, which gave Jammu and Kashmir (Schofield, 2019) ^[35] particular autonomy.

Kashmir including Jammu Social Political Consequences of Elections

Notable sociopolitical consequences of elections in Jammu and Kashmir have altered its democratic processes, governance, and social dynamics. This section examines the many implications elections have had on the social situation of Jammu & Kashmir. Depending on public faith in the democratic process, election voter participation will vary in degrees. General election voter turnout between 1967 and 2014 was at 46.76%; male participation (60%) above female participation (39.90%). These figures highlight the challenges obtaining gender balance in political participation (Pandita, 2015) ^[28].

- **Reconfiguration of Faith in Democracy:** The seamless administration of elections-especially after 1996-has greatly helped to rebuild faith in the democratic system. For instance, the 2002 assembly elections were very important in enabling the people to be once more linked with democratic administration (Samant, 2003) ^[34].
- **Affects Governance and Political Stability:** Governmental Alliance By proving coalition administrations, the 2014 emergence of the PDP-BJP alliance reveals the complex political processes and regional diversities of Jammu and Kashmir. These partnerships have had to balance the subtleties of regional political variances and the separatist mentality (Chowdhary, 2015) ^[10]. Like the Panchayat elections in 2011, local body elections have been quite significant in promoting grassroots democracy. Notwithstanding political alienation and challenges to elected officials, these elections have empowered local communities and strengthened local governance (Wani, 2011) ^[42]. Women's political participation has obviously evolved in reaction to elections. Crucially in enabling women to engage in governance has been reserving one-third of Panchayat seats for women and other projects aiming at

increasing female involvement (Gul & Khurshid, 2017) ^[15].

- **Youth Political engagement:** The voting process has also affected youthful political engagement. Although successive elections have seen attempts to re-engage the youth in political processes, many young people joined insurgent organizations (Mohan, 2002) ^[27] driven by dissatisfaction following 1987 elections. Impact on Developmental and Economic Policies Honest elections help to bring about good governance that may drive public services development and economic prosperity. Underlining the need of stability and development, the 2008 assembly elections produced a coalition government.
- The ongoing political turmoil and violence in Jammu and Kashmir has harmed their tourism and economic growth. Still a key cause of concern is the interaction of political stability, economic prosperity, and election results (Islam, 2014) ^[18].

Challenges and Future Prospects

Elections conducted in a conflict zone provide a number of challenges, chief among them ensuring the candidates' and voters' safety. Many times, security concerns have lower voter turnout and raise tensions all through the election process (Bakloo, 2017) ^[3]. The persistence of separatist impulses gravely compromises the political stability and electoral processes in Jammu and Kashmir. Dealing with these emotions requires a methodical approach combining political communication with economic progress (Schofield, 2019) ^[35].

Conclusion

The elections of Jammu and Kashmir have greatly influenced its social situation. From the early post-independence era to the present, the voting process has been a main instrument for strengthening democracy, government, and public engagement in a region troubled by political upheaval and warfare. Elections have been rather important in enabling the democratic processes of Jammu and Kashmir to be rebuilt and maintained. Notwithstanding political unrest and war, the region has had remarkable popular faith in democracy shown by voting. The complexity of regional politics and the importance of competent government have been underscored by the evolution of coalition administrations and the good performance of local body elections. These developments have contributed to foster political stability and regional development. Elections have had a significant influence on sociopolitical dynamics including young engagement and women's political activity. Targeting campaigns and quotas has helped to increase political process involvement and representation

Good administration brought about by honest elections has the ability to drive public services improvement and economic development. Still, constant political turmoil and conflict make it impossible for consistent economic growth. Guaranteeing free and fair elections in the future years depends on better security. This addresses defending candidates and voters as well as creating a safe forum for democratic participation Constant political engagement and contact with separatist ideas will help to ensure long-term political stability and peace in the region. Essential are inclusive political processes meant to alleviate the basic

causes of discontent. By empowering elected representatives at the grassroots level and strengthening local government systems, one may assist to better address local issues and increase democratic participation. Basically, even if the elections of Jammu and Kashmir have offered certain challenges, they remain a necessary component of the democratic framework of the nation. Encouragement of peace, stability, and prosperity in Jammu and Kashmir would largely rely on continuous attempts to ensure fair, transparent, and inclusive election procedures.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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