

Democracy in Action: Analyzing Voter Turnout in Jammu and Kashmir's DDC Elections

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Abstract

In the wake of the revocation of Article 370 and the reorganization of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories in 2019, significant efforts were undertaken to strengthen ties between Jammu and Kashmir and India. To restore the local democracy system in the newly created Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, the Indian government scheduled District Development Council (DDC) elections in November and December 2020. These elections were introduced as part of broader reforms aimed at fostering local governance and economic development. The DDCs, designed to ensure representation from both urban and rural regions within the District Planning Committee, played a pivotal role in this endeavour. This research examines the inaugural DDC election, providing insights into voter turnout and the composition of elected members, while also shedding light on the evolving political landscape in the region during this transformative period.

Keywords: Voter Turnout, DDC Elections, Jammu and Kashmir, District-wise Analysis, Voter Engagement, Electoral Process

Introduction

Elections and the electoral process are quintessential pillars underpinning the sustenance of a robust democratic framework. They epitomize the core mechanism through which citizenry engagement flourishes, affording individuals the pivotal agency to elect their chosen representatives and articulate their concerns.¹ Beyond this foundational aspect, elections assume an instrumental role in maintaining the accountability of elected officials. The act of voting is the proverbial compass that keeps those in authority tethered to the interests and desires of the electorate. Furthermore, elections foster a dynamic and competitive political ecosystem, where political parties and candidates engage in rigorous debates and formulate policies to address multifaceted societal issues. They serve as an inviolable shield, fortifying the rights of minority groups against the tidal forces of the majority. As a result, elections emerge as the fundamental mechanism through which democracy materialises, endowing citizens with the authority to direct the course of their state's destiny. Elections' essential function becomes even more important in diverse political settings. For instance, in the intricate tapestry of Indian democracy, particularly in Jammu and Kashmir, elections have been instrumental in shaping the region's political destiny. A significant juncture in this narrative unfolded on June 19, 2018, when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) decided to sever its coalition ties with the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). This seismic political shift was followed by the resignation of Mehbooba Mufti as the Chief Minister of J&K and the imposition of Governor's Rule, thereby underscoring the dynamic interplay between political parties, governance, and the democratic process in the region. Governor's rule was in force till December 19, 2018, at which point the Central Government imposed President's Rule in the State on December 20. Six months after it was imposed, the Governor's Rule in J&K was proclaimed to have ended, and President's Rule was declared to have taken effect. Therefore, when Jammu and Kashmir's special status was revoked on 5 August 2019, the state was already administered by the President, which sparked concerns about the developments in Jammu and Kashmir across the nation. The

¹ Wojtasik Waldemar (2013)

repeal of Article 370 and 35 A and consequent reorganisation of Jammu and Kashmir as a Union Territory on August 5, 2019, constituted a watershed moment with far-reaching ramifications for democratic processes in the region.² This momentous event not only transformed the administrative status but also shifted the governance structure of Jammu and Kashmir. Questions developed over how local participation in decision-making would be assured, as well as how democratic values would be kept in the Union Territory. In response to these concerns, and as a symbol of India's commitment to democracy in the newly formed Union Territory, the government has scheduled District Development Council (DDC) elections for November and December 2020. These elections were critical in reestablishing democratic government at the grassroots level, empowering local communities, and as well as guaranteeing that the people of Jammu and Kashmir have a direct say in local development and governance—an important step towards establishing democratic institutions within the greater framework of Indian democracy.³ The election marked the first major political event to be held in the Union Territory of J&K after the Government of India's decision to abrogate the former State's Semi-Autonomous Status and divide it into two separate Union Territories: J&K and Ladakh. This marks a return to normality and democracy in the region, following a period of centralized government and limited local control. The election also served as a symbol of the Government of India's determination to integrate Jammu and Kashmir fully into the Union of India and to extend the same democratic institutions and processes to the region as to the rest of the country. The Union Government in October 2020 implemented an amendment to the Panchayat Act of 1989 in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, which provided for the introduction of direct election to the District Development Councils (DDCs). This was in contrast to the previously established District Development Boards (DDBs), which acted primarily as government bodies. This election saw 280 members elected along with 20 chairpersons and vice-chairpersons (DDC Elections 2020, State Election Commission, 32)

Background

Prior to independence, the system of local self-government was not fully established. As a result, the constituent assembly included the issue of local governance to the state list and introduced Article 40 to provide it with an acceptable structure. Article 40 of India's Constitution addresses how village panchayats should be formed in the chapter on Directive Principles of State Policy. Even when the constituent assembly sought to strengthen its organisation, it was plagued by inconsistency. It was governed by state law, and local government laws differed per state. To solve this issue, India approved the 73rd amendment, which was viewed as a revolutionary change for Indian local self-government.⁴ In Jammu and Kashmir the same was governed by Panchayati Raj Act 1989. On December 16, 2020, the Ministry of Home Affairs amended Panchayati Raj Act of 1989 and the 1996 Rules to enable the creation of District Development Councils, a new type of elected local government, in Jammu and Kashmir. These councils are known as District Development Councils (DDCs).⁵ They are primarily intended to elect representatives from urban and rural areas to the District Planning Committee and the councils themselves, with fourteen representatives from each district, in order to promote quick growth and economic advancement. To assure the community development of a represented district, DDCs manage, administer, sponsor, and plan for five primary sectors including welfare, health, education, finance, public works, and development. As the main executive officer and council chairperson who represents the district, Additional District Development Commissioner (Additional D. C.) serves each council. Up until

² Bhatia (2021), page 132 -141

³ India Today Web Desk (2018)

⁴ Rangin Halder (2021) 1

⁵ Naveed Iqbal (2023)

fresh DDC elections are announced or held, it operates at the district level for a five-year term. Additionally, it took the position of District Planning and Development Boards (DDB), which were introduced in the former state of Jammu and Kashmir in 1954 and were responsible for tasks such as formulating periodic and yearly plans for the development of a district. Before the 2020 elections, Jammu and Kashmir had DDCs in the form of District Planning and Development Boards, but its members were chosen by the state government of the formerly independent state of Jammu and Kashmir rather than elected.⁶

Jammu and Kashmir District Development Council Elections - 2020

The DDC elections were conducted in 8 phases in the month of November- December 2020 and have selected 280 DDC Members elected 20 Chairpersons and Vice Chairpersons. The National Conference (NC), the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the Communist Party of India (CPI), and the Awami National Conference (ANC), together known as the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD), agreed to unite in opposition to the Bharati Janta Party (BJP). There was a new player in the form of Jammu and Kashmir Apni Party (JKAP) in the political arena of Jammu and Kashmir as well. Below is the analysis of all 8 Phases and how the participation of people and percentage of voting varied across different districts in Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

Voting Recorded in DDC Elections across Kashmir in 8 Phases

Phase – 1

During the first phase of the District Development Council elections, which included 43 constituencies, a significant 51.76% turnout was reported. Out of a total of 700,842 eligible voters, 362,766 voted, comprising 193,375 men and 169,391 females. In the Jammu division, Reasi District had the highest polling percentage (74.62%), followed closely by Rajouri District (70.52%), and Poonch with a turnout of 68.69%. Kishtwar had a voting percentage of 55.16%, Doda had 64.49%, Ramban had 64.21%, Udhampur had 57.13%, Kathua had 62.82%, Samba had 68.61%, and Jammu had 61.49%. Budgam District dominated the Kashmir Division with a remarkable 56.96% polling percentage, followed by Kupwara District with 50.74% and Ganderbal with roughly 48.62%. However, polling percentages differed between districts within the Kashmir Division. Bandipora received 43.57% of the vote, followed by Baramulla (32.51%), Srinagar (33.76%), Pulwama (6.70%), Shopian (42.58%), Kulgam (34.35%), and Anantnag (43.32%).⁷

⁶ District Development Council, *Wikipedia*

⁷ Data Compiled from State Election Commission Compendium on DDC Election 2020, 45

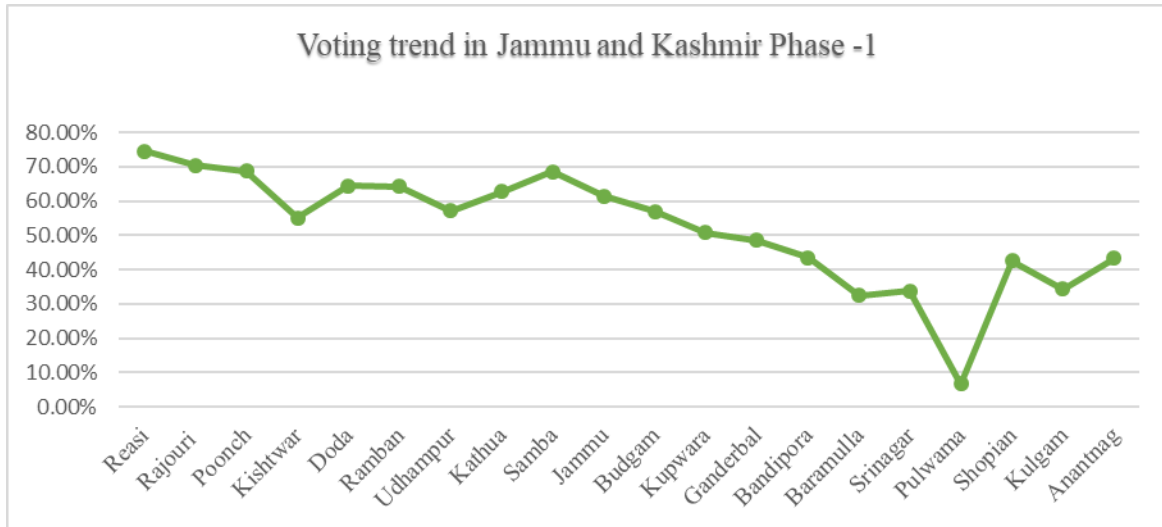


Figure 1

Phase-2

The second phase of the District Development Council elections had 43 seats, with 25 in Kashmir and 18 in Jammu. This phase saw a voter turnout of 48.62%. Out of a total of 795,118 eligible voters, 377,401 voted, including 201,792 men and 175,609 females. There were 2,142 voting stations, with 1,305 in the Kashmir division and 837 in the Jammu division. In terms of voting turnout, the Jammu division averaged 65.54%. Poonch District had the highest percentage (75.07%), followed by Jammu District with 69.97%. The Kathua district had the lowest voter participation in Jammu division, with 60.10%, followed by 61.64% in Kishtwar and 69.27% in Reasi. The Kashmir Division, on the other hand, had a lower voter turnout of 33.34%. Bandipora district had the highest polling percentage at 69.66%, followed by Kupwara District at 58.69%, and Ganderbal at around 49.14%. Budgam had a polling percentage of 43.51%, Srinagar had 33.78%, Kulgam had 29.90%, Baramulla had 28.95%, Shopian had 17.28%, Anantnag had 16.09%, and Pulwama had 8.67%.⁸

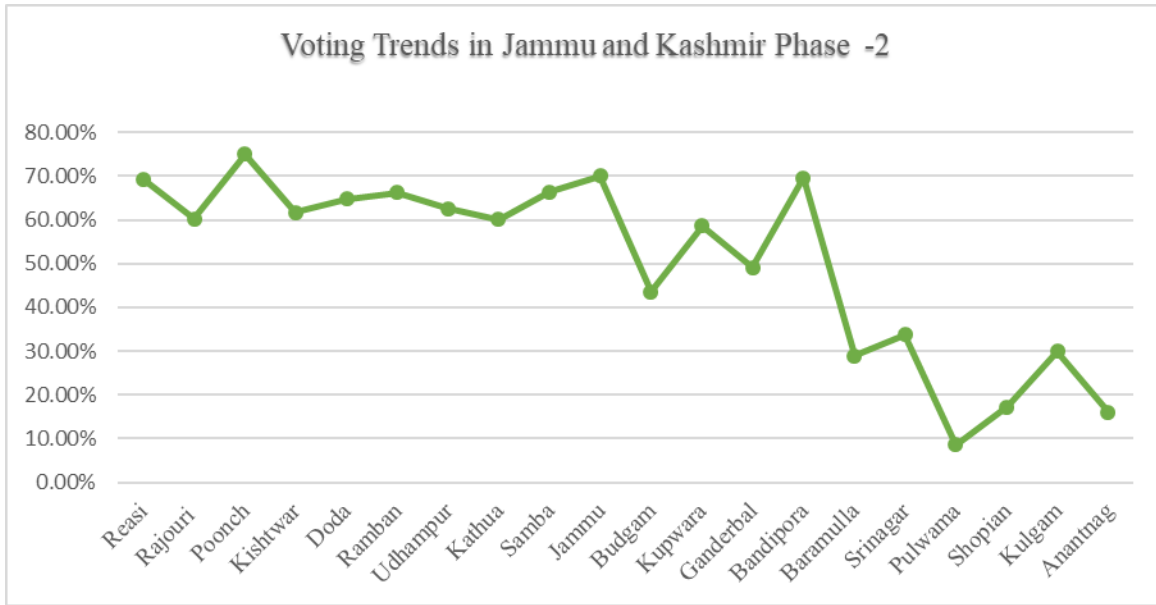


Figure 2

Phase -3

The third round of the District Development Council elections, which included 33 constituencies (16 in Kashmir and 17 in Jammu), saw a noteworthy voter participation of 50.53%. The voting procedure was mostly calm in the 33 constituencies, with 372,643 people exercising their right to vote. Out of a total of 737,648 eligible voters, 199,544 were men and 173,099 were females. The elections were held at 2,046 voting stations, 1,254 of which were in the Kashmir division and 792 in the Jammu division. The Jammu division had an average voter participation of 68.88%, with Reasi District having the highest percentage at 75.20%, followed by Rajouri District with 72.81%. Doda district had the lowest voter participation in Jammu division, with 59.51%, followed by Kathua (62.18%), and Poonch (72.18%). The Kashmir Division, on the other hand, saw an average attendance of 31.61%. During the third round of the elections, Kulgam District had the highest polling rate of 64.45%, followed by Bandipora District with 56.73% and Budgam District with 50.18%. Kupwara received 46.25% of the vote, followed by Baramulla (30.94%), Ganderbal (24.69%), Shopian (22.68%), Anantnag (21.64%), and Pulwama (10.87%).⁹

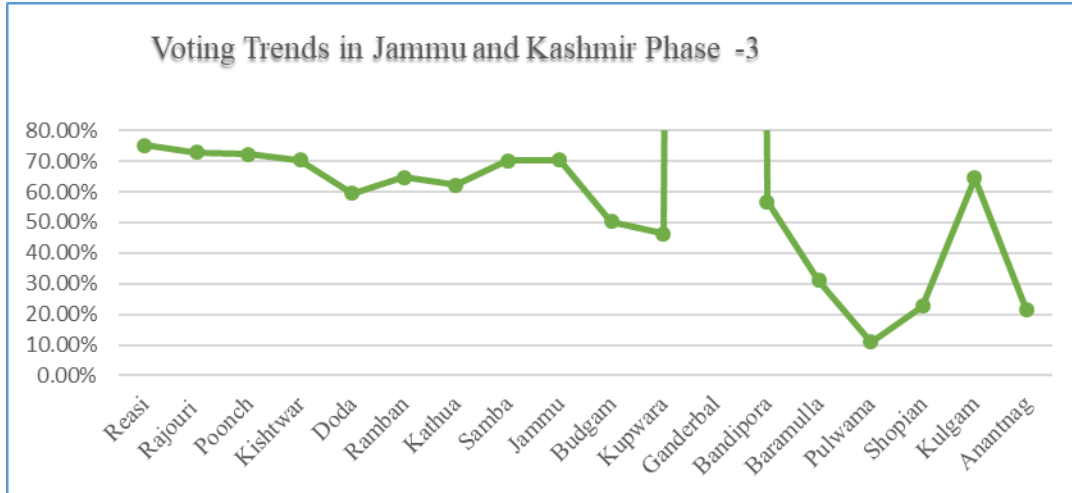


Figure 3

Phase – 4

A total of 364,527 people exercised their right to vote in the fourth round of the District Development Council elections, comprising 195,206 males and 169,321 females. This round had 34 seats evenly divided between the Kashmir and Jammu divisions, with an aggregate voter participation of 50.08%. Ganderbal district had the highest turnout at 56.28%, followed by Baramulla District at 47.43%, and Bandipora with approximately 45.22%, Kupwara at 44.35%, Budgam at 38.04%, Anantnag at 27.04%, Kulgam at 8.73%, Pulwama at 6.70%, and Shopian with the lowest at 1.96%. Jammu division, on the other hand, had stronger voter involvement, with an average voter turnout of 69.31%. Poonch District had the highest rate of turnout (75.42%), followed by Doda District (75.03%). Udhampur district had the lowest voter participation in Jammu division, with 59.90%, followed by Kathua (61.23%) and Samba (71.97%).¹⁰

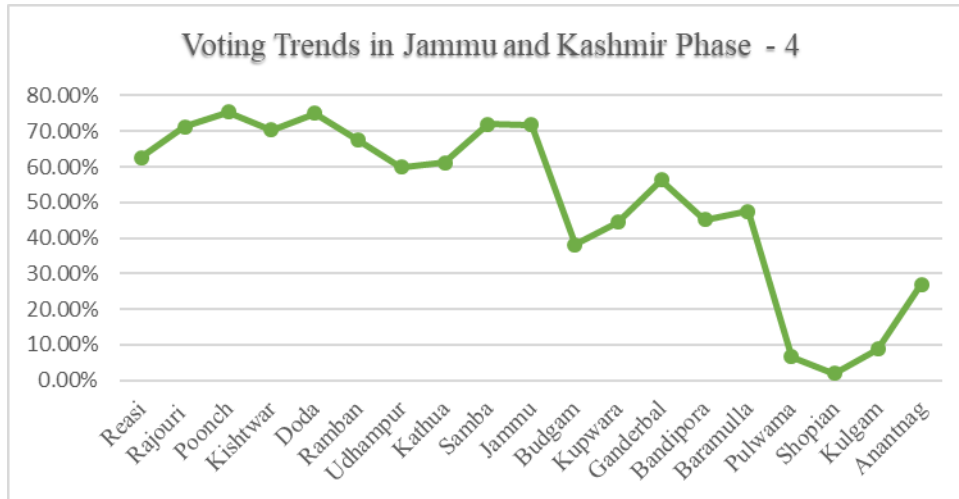


Figure 4

Phase – 5

A significant 51.20% of eligible voters exercised their right to vote in the fifth round of the District Development Councils (DDC) elections, which were held in 37 seats, including 17 in the Kashmir division and 20 in the Jammu division. There were a total of 2,104 voting stations in this phase, with 1,190 in the Kashmir division and 914 in the Jammu division. The average voter participation in Jammu division was 66.67%, with Poonch District leading with 71.62%, Doda District with 70.95%, and Rajouri District with 70.83%, ranging from 62.36% in Kathua to 69.47% in Udhampur. In comparison, the Kashmir Division had a voter turnout of 33.57%. Bandipora district had the highest voter participation (56.40%), followed by Kupwara District (52.35%), and Budgam (about 45.65%). Meanwhile, during this phase, polling percentages in various districts of the Kashmir division were as follows: Ganderbal at 37.47%, Baramulla at 44.31%, Anantnag at 21.89%, Kulgam at 26.94%, Pulwama at 8.12%, and Shopian at 5.52%.

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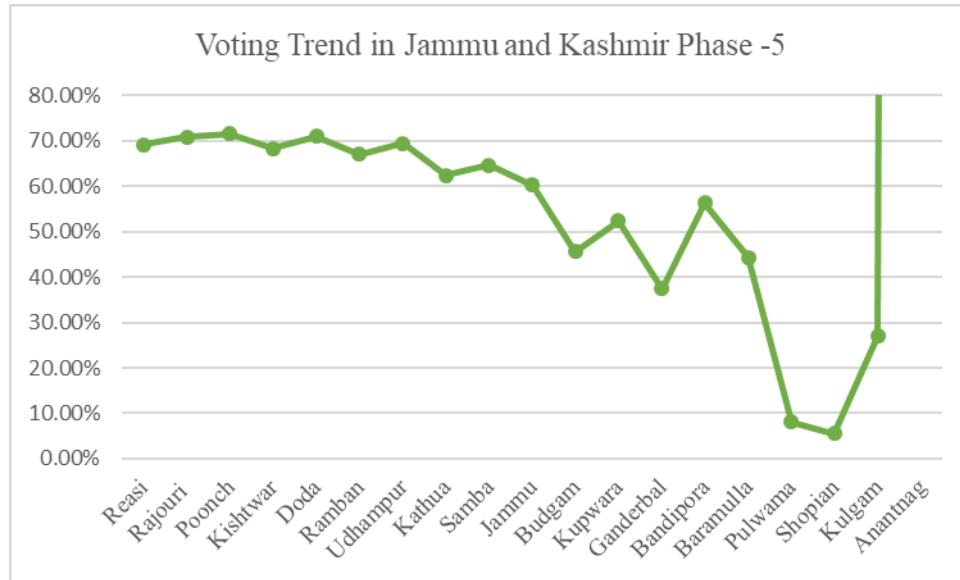


Figure 5

Phase - 6

A high 51.51% voter turnout was registered during the sixth round of District Development Council (DDC) elections held across Jammu & Kashmir. This phase had 31 seats, 14 in the Kashmir division and 17 in the Jammu division, with a total polling percentage of 51.51%. The elections were held in 2,071 polling stations, 1,208 in Kashmir and 863 in Jammu and Kashmir. The Jammu division showed a strong average voter participation of 68.56%, with Poonch District leading the way with 76.78%, Rajouri District with 74.03%, and Reasi District with 74.02%. However, the turnout in Kathua district was 60.95%, 62.93% in Doda, and 72.04% in Udhampur. In comparison, the Kashmir Division had a voting turnout of 31.55% on average. Ganderbal district had the greatest voter turnout, at 58.45%, followed by Kupwara District, at 51.08%, and Bandipora, at around 47.66%. Meanwhile, during this phase, polling percentages in various districts of the Kashmir division were as follows: Budgam at 30.99%, Baramulla at 34.56%, Anantnag at 24.06%, Kulgam at 37.74%, Pulwama at 8.16%, and Shopian at 4.60%. During this phase, 385,606 people, comprising 207,223 men and 178,383 women, exercised their right to vote across the Jammu and Kashmir Union Territory.¹²

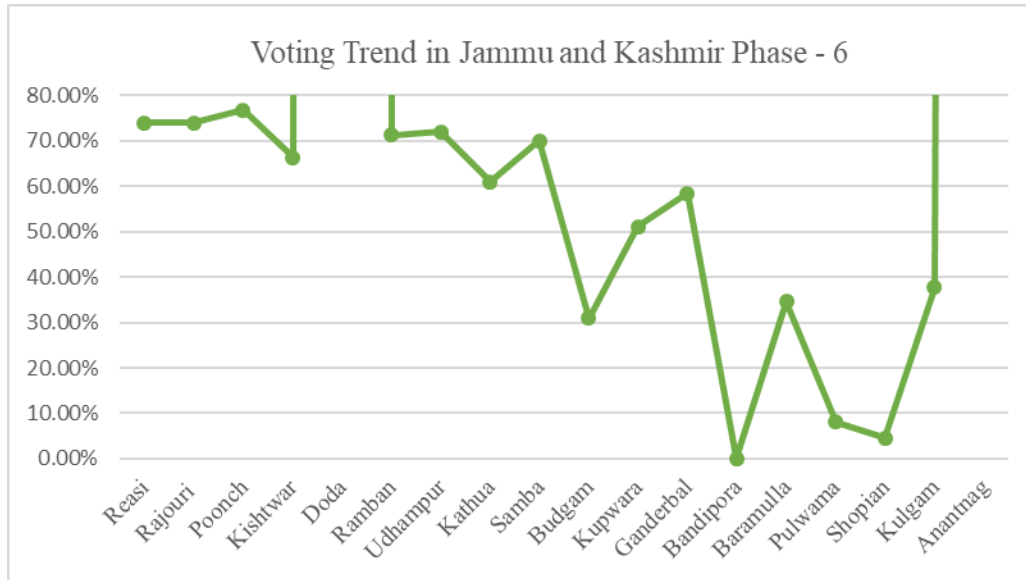


Figure 6

Phase - 7

The seventh round of the District Development Council (DDC) elections in Jammu and Kashmir had a high voter participation of 57.22%. This phase saw polling in 31 seats, 13 in the Kashmir division and 18 in the Jammu division, with an aggregate polling percentage of 57.22%. There were 1,852 voting stations in all, with 1,068 in the Kashmir division and 784 in the Jammu division. In terms of voter turnout, the Jammu division achieved a high average of 71.93%. Poonch district led the way with 80.12%, followed by Reasi district with 76.75% and Udhampur district with 75.63%. Doda district had the lowest voter participation in Jammu division, at 58.82%, ranging from 67.75% in Ramban to 74.38% in Samba. In comparison, the Kashmir Division had a voting turnout of 39.52% on average. Bandipora district had the highest turnout at 70.47%, followed by Baramulla at 59.53% and Kupwara at 59.23%. Meanwhile, the following districts in the Kashmir division had the highest polling percentages during this phase: Budgam (45.11%), Ganderbal (53.69%), Anantnag (22.46%), Kulgam (17.98%), Pulwama (11.06%), and Shopian (6.55%). During this phase, 393,200 people, comprising 210,479 men and 182,721 women, exercised their right to vote across the Jammu and Kashmir Union Territory.¹³

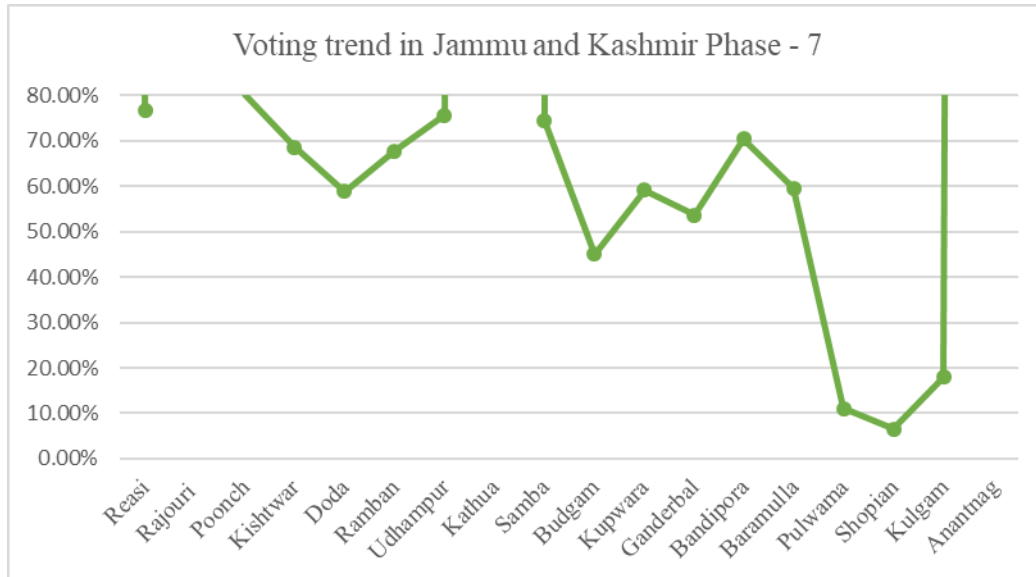


Figure 7

Phase – 8

Voter turnout was 50.98% in the last round of the District Development Council (DDC) elections in Jammu & Kashmir. This round featured voting in 28 seats, 13 in the Kashmir division and 15 in the Jammu division, for a total polling percentage of 50.98%. There were 1,703 voting stations in all, with 1,028 in the Kashmir division and 675 in the Jammu division. The Jammu division saw a remarkable average voter participation of 72.71%, with Poonch district leading the way with 83.58%, followed by Reasi with 81.92% and Rajouri with 77.31%. In comparison, Doda district had a considerably lower turnout of 60.49%, Udhampur had a turnout of 60.49%, and Kathua had a turnout of 73.93%. The Kashmir Division, on the other hand, had an average voter turnout of 29.91%. Kupwara district had the highest turnout (63.80%), followed by Bandipora (56.56%), and Baramulla (44.60%). Meanwhile, turnout rates in several Kashmir division districts during this phase were as follows: Budgam at 35.12%, Anantnag at 8.66%, Kulgam at 11.20%, Pulwama at 8.50%, and Shopian at 8.58%.¹⁴

¹⁴ Ibid, 75

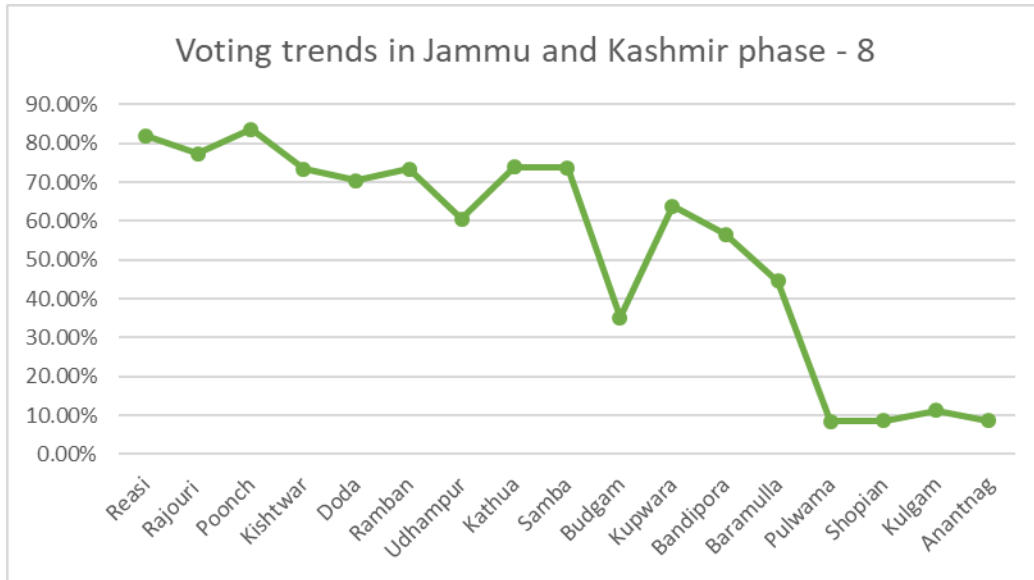


Figure 8

The District Development Council (DDC) elections in Jammu and Kashmir, held in eight stages, were a watershed moment in India's relationship with the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. These elections meant more than simply the election of local representatives; they symbolised a greater commitment to democratic principles and the empowerment of local administration in Jammu and Kashmir. Trust-building was a prominent element in the first phase, which marked the start of the election process. India exhibited its dedication to democratic procedures by assuring the people of Jammu and Kashmir that their opinions would be heard and respected. As the phases advanced, each made a unique contribution to the relationship's development. The second phase emphasised the necessity of strengthening local government, which corresponded to India's objective of decentralisation and grassroots democracy. This displayed an understanding of the region's distinct requirements and goals. Improving security was a top priority, especially in a region with a history of security issues. The third and fourth phase demonstrated India's commitment to providing a safe environment for voters, which resulted in improved voter turnout and enhanced faith in the democratic process. Despite difficult conditions, the fifth phase emphasised India's steadfast commitment to interacting with all parts of society, overcoming gaps, and developing a more cohesive and inclusive partnership. India maintained a balanced approach throughout the phases, as demonstrated in phase six, considering the demands of both the Jammu and Kashmir divisions. This balanced approach to growth was critical in sustaining regional stability and establishing a healthy partnership. The emphasis on local representation in phase seven reinforced the idea that local communities should have a vote in their own government, promoting democratic and self-governance ideas. The last stage represented the relationship's steady advancement. India's commitment to sustaining democratic norms, supporting stability, and furthering development demonstrated the country's long-term commitment to the region. To summarise, the DDC elections were about more than just choosing local members; they were also about forging a more constructive and collaborative relationship between India and Jammu and Kashmir. India has proved its commitment to democratic ideals, inclusivity, regional development, and security via these elections, laying the groundwork for a stronger, more trustworthy, and mutually beneficial relationship with the region.

Comparison and Similarity between 8 Phases

The District Development Council (DDC) elections in Jammu and Kashmir were held in eight phases, each with its own set of voter turnout and participation patterns. Here is a comparison of voter participation similarities and differences between these eight phases:

The District Development Council (DDC) elections in Jammu and Kashmir, which took place in eight phases, provided an intriguing glimpse into the dynamics of voter involvement in this territory distinguished by its distinct political and historical backdrop. The most notable element across all phases was the considerable difference in turnout between Jammu and Kashmir. The Jammu division typically had higher voter attendance rates, averaging around 66%, while the Kashmir division lagged behind, with a turnout percentage of around 34%. This disparity might be attributable to a variety of causes, including past voting tendencies, security concerns, and disparities in political landscapes. The district-level variances in voting turnout within each division were also noteworthy. Some districts regularly had high levels of involvement, while others had lower levels of engagement. Districts like Poonch and Reasi, for example, frequently claimed strong participation levels in the Jammu division, with percentages topping 70%. Districts like as Doda and Kathua, on the other hand, had lower participation percentages. Bandipora and Kupwara were the frontrunners in terms of voter participation in the Kashmir division, routinely topping 50%, whereas districts like as Pulwama and Shopian frequently recorded lower numbers. These disparities indicated that local political dynamics, campaign activities, and geographical considerations all had an impact on voter involvement. Gender variations in voting turnout were another notable aspect. Men outweighed women in turnout throughout several periods, showing gender dynamics and possibly the influence of local campaigns targeting specific groups. This disparity highlights the significance of gender-sensitive policies in fostering larger and more inclusive political involvement. Overall, voter participation in Jammu and Kashmir's DDC elections was challenging. While total turnout was approximately 50%, the interaction of variables like as regional inequalities, district-level variances, and gender-specific distinctions highlighted the varied character of political engagement in a region distinguished by its distinct political history and various demography.

Research Methodology

This research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative analyses to comprehensively examine the District Development Council (DDC) elections in Jammu and Kashmir. By integrating both types of analyses, it aims to provide a holistic understanding of the electoral process, voter participation, and the factors influencing it. The primary data sources encompass Compendium Final booklet on DDC Election 2020, by State Election Commission, serving as a foundational source of quantitative data with official election results, voter turnout statistics, and essential electoral data. Complementing this, news reports from reputable sources constitute another primary data source, offering crucial insights into the intricate dynamics of the elections, campaign activities, security conditions, and the multifaceted local factors influencing voter participation. Additionally, academic papers and research articles in the secondary data sources provide in-depth analyses of the historical context, political landscape, and potential factors affecting voter engagement.

Findings

High-Stakes Election: In Jammu and Kashmir, elections for the District Development Council (DDC), which were held in eight phases, attracted a lot of national interest. After the former state's unique constitutional status was revoked and it was reorganised into a Union Territory, they were the first significant political activity. Political analysts paid particular attention to the elections because of the more important issues at risk, such as the validity of the August 2019 reforms, the political deadlock, and the significance of the mainstream parties in the new political landscape.

The Role of PAGD: The People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD), which is made up of a number of regional groups, made the decision to run as a single front in the election and call for the restoration of Jammu and Kashmir to the way things were before August 5. This choice led to a high-stakes and high-profile election, in which the BJP sought to demonstrate popular support for the changes it had implemented and the PAGD sought to establish the legitimacy of its resistance to those changes.

Regional Disparities: Voter participation varied significantly between Kashmir and the Jammu region. In contrast to Kashmir, where turnout ranged from 29.91% to 40.65%, Jammu had greater voter turnout, with phases seeing turnouts between 64.21% and 72.71%. However, the DDC election turnouts in Kashmir were much greater than those for prior panchayat and parliamentary elections, showing improved political involvement.

Variation within Kashmir: The amount of involvement varied throughout the Kashmir region. The lowest turnouts were recorded in the separatist and militantly afflicted South Kashmir regions, where they ranged from 7.65% to almost 25%. North Kashmir, on the other hand, saw greater turnouts than south Kashmir, with an average turnout of over 45%. The voter participation in Kashmir's core region was average, ranging from 35.3% to 44.3%.

Discussion

The political climate of the Union Territory was significantly impacted by the DDC elections in Jammu and Kashmir. They gave major political parties a platform on which to interact with voters and demonstrate their importance in the new political landscape. The PAGD's choice to take part as a single, united front underlined the significance of these elections in addressing more significant problems pertaining to the validity of the August 2019 amendments. The large regional differences in voting turnout show the intricate regional dynamics. While turnout was substantially greater in certain places, it was lower in others, notably in militancy-affected districts. The higher attendance compared to past elections suggests that the coalition parties' choice to participate rather than boycott, notably, helped to reenergize the political landscape in Kashmir. In the post-reorganization political scene of the Union Territory, the eight-phase DDC elections in Jammu and Kashmir were a crucial political turning point. Following the revisions in August 2019, they were used to measure public opinion and involvement. The varying difficulties and possibilities in the political environment are highlighted by the various voter turnouts throughout the various areas of Jammu & Kashmir. The elections gave major political parties a stage on which to stake out their positions and significance, with the PAGD's coordinated engagement advancing democracy. Although the elections increased the amount of democratic space in Kashmir, it is clear that the involvement of old mainstream parties was essential to the success of the poll. The DDC elections ultimately provided insights into the changing political dynamics of Jammu and Kashmir in the post-reorganization era, with ramifications for the governance and political environment of the Union Territory.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the revocation of Articles 370 and 35A and the reorganization of Jammu and Kashmir into a Union Territory on August 5, 2019, marked a significant turning point in the region's history. This move brought about a profound transformation in the relationship between India and Jammu and Kashmir, with the former state undergoing a shift from semi-autonomy to direct central governance. The period leading up to this transformation was marked by political upheaval, including the breakup of the BJP-PDP coalition and the imposition of Governor's and President's Rule. However, in an effort to restore democratic processes and strengthen ties between Jammu and Kashmir and the rest of India, the government organized District Development Council (DDC) elections in November and December 2020. These elections represented a return to normalcy and democracy in the region, allowing local voices to be heard and decisions to be made at the grassroots level. The shift from District Development Boards (DDBs) to directly elected DDCs signified a move towards greater local control and autonomy. The DDC elections provided valuable insights into the evolving political landscape of Jammu and Kashmir post-reorganization. They demonstrated varying voter turnouts across different regions, reflecting the complex political dynamics and challenges in the region. The participation of mainstream political parties, including the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD), played a crucial role in the success of these elections, underlining their significance in advancing democracy in the Union Territory. In essence, the DDC elections were a pivotal moment in the post-reorganization era, offering a glimpse into the changing political dynamics of Jammu and Kashmir. They highlighted the evolving relationship between the region and the rest of India, emphasizing the government's commitment to integrating Jammu and

Kashmir fully into the Indian democratic framework. As the Union Territory continues to adapt to these changes, the ramifications of these elections are likely to influence its governance and political environment in the years to come.

Suggestions

A diversified strategy is required to improve the integrity and efficacy of District Development Council (DDC) elections or comparable local elections in regions such as Jammu and Kashmir. First and foremost, extensive voter awareness initiatives must be launched well in advance of elections. These efforts should not only inform voters on the importance of local elections and the role of DDCs, but they should also emphasise the beneficial influence their involvement may have on local development. Furthermore, addressing gender-specific hurdles through awareness activities might encourage women's active engagement. To provide a safe voting environment, robust security measures must be in place, particularly in places where security is an issue. Transparency, accountability, and technology may all be used to improve the election process, while open debate venues and access to information about candidates can help voters make educated judgements. Inclusion, internet voting, and youth involvement efforts are also critical to maintaining a more diverse and representative electoral scene. To foster continual progress in these elections, constant assessment and feedback systems should be implemented, eventually boosting democratic government and local development.

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