



Political unrest in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir: Democratic Legitimacy, Governance, and Regional Security in a Contested Territory.

Dr. Jewan Lal Dhar

Associate Professor in Political Science

Higher Education Department, Govt. of Jammu & Kashmir

Email:ddhar.19@gmail.com

Abstract

How to Cite this Article:

Dhar, J. L. (2026). Political unrest in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir: Democratic Legitimacy, Governance, and Regional Security in a Contested Territory.. International Journal of Creative and Open Research in Engineering and Management, <i>02</i>(8), 1-9.
<https://doi.org/10.55041/ijcope.v2i8.129>

License:

This article is published under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author(s) and the source are credited.

© The Author(s). Published by International Journal of Creative and Open Research in Engineering and Management.



<https://doi.org/10.55041/ijcope.v2i8.129>

Political unrest in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (POK) has intensified debate concerning democratic legitimacy, constitutional governance, electoral integrity, and regional security in South Asia. While existing scholarship largely examines POK within the India–Pakistan dispute, comparatively limited attention has been given to its internal political dynamics, institutional performance, and governance structures. This study addresses this gap through an integrated framework combining Democratic Legitimacy Theory, State Capacity Theory, Centre–Periphery Theory, and Conflict Transformation Theory.

The study employs a qualitative case study design based exclusively on secondary data, including constitutional documents, government publications, international reports, peer-reviewed scholarship, policy papers, and credible media sources. Documentary evidence is examined through qualitative content and thematic analysis, focusing on constitutional arrangements, governance performance, electoral contestation, institutional accountability, and state–society relations.

The findings indicate that contemporary political unrest in POK results not from isolated political events but from the interaction of governance deficits, contested constitutional arrangements, declining institutional trust, and perceptions of limited political responsiveness. Electoral legitimacy constitutes only one dimension of broader democratic

legitimacy, while governance effectiveness significantly influences public confidence in political institutions. Constitutional ambiguity, administrative shortcomings, and competing political narratives further shape political mobilisation and institutional credibility.

The study also highlights the wider regional significance of political stability in contested territories. By integrating domestic governance, constitutional politics, and regional strategic dynamics, it contributes to comparative scholarship on contested territories, democratic governance, and conflict transformation. It further suggests that strengthening institutional accountability, inclusive participation, governance effectiveness, and constructive political dialogue is essential for sustainable political stability.

Keywords: Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (POK), democratic legitimacy, electoral contestation, governance, constitutional governance, state capacity, conflict transformation, regional security.



1. Introduction

The Kashmir dispute remains one of the longest-standing and most complex territorial conflicts in international politics, profoundly influencing the strategic, political, and security environment of South Asia since the partition of British India in 1947. While scholarly literature has traditionally examined Kashmir through the lens of interstate rivalry between India and Pakistan, growing attention has been directed towards the internal political dynamics of the regions under their respective control. Among these, Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (POK) represents an important yet comparatively under-researched case for understanding the relationship between constitutional governance, democratic legitimacy, electoral politics, and political stability within a contested territory.

Recent political developments in POK, including public protests, electoral controversies, governance debates, and constitutional disputes, have intensified discussion regarding the effectiveness of democratic institutions and the responsiveness of public administration. These developments have generated competing political narratives advanced by governments, political parties, civil society organisations, and international observers. Such competing interpretations underscore the importance of evidence-based political analysis that distinguishes documented evidence from political claims and normative assertions.

Comparative political science suggests that political unrest rarely arises from a single event or policy decision. Rather, it reflects the cumulative interaction of institutional performance, governance quality, constitutional arrangements, political representation, and public confidence in state institutions. Lipset (1959) argued that democratic stability depends upon both institutional effectiveness and political legitimacy, while Easton (1965) emphasised that the durability of political systems is closely linked to citizens' continued acceptance of political authority. Similarly, Dahl (1971) demonstrated that meaningful political participation, political competition, accountability, and civil liberties constitute essential foundations of democratic governance. These theoretical perspectives provide a valuable framework for analysing contemporary political developments in POK.

Governance literature further highlights that institutional legitimacy is closely associated with the state's capacity to deliver effective public administration, maintain accountability, and respond to citizens' expectations. Migdal (1988) argues that weak state capacity often contributes to recurring tensions between governments and society, whereas Fukuyama (2013) emphasises that governance quality depends on institutional effectiveness rather than merely the existence of formal political structures. In politically contested territories, where constitutional arrangements and political authority are frequently debated, governance performance assumes even greater significance in shaping public confidence and political stability.

Electoral legitimacy constitutes another critical dimension of democratic governance. Norris (2014) argues that public trust in elections depends not only upon adherence to legal procedures but also upon widespread perceptions of fairness, transparency, competitiveness, and impartial administration. Consequently, electoral disputes should be understood not merely as procedural disagreements but as potential indicators of broader concerns relating to democratic representation and institutional credibility.

Political developments in POK also possess wider regional significance. Owing to the strategic importance of the Kashmir region, domestic political dynamics may influence diplomatic engagement, confidence-building initiatives, and regional security perceptions. However, regional security cannot be explained solely through internal political developments. It emerges from the interaction of historical disputes, constitutional arrangements, domestic governance, interstate relations, and broader geopolitical competition. Understanding these interconnections requires an analytical framework that integrates governance studies, democratic legitimacy, constitutional politics, and conflict analysis.

Despite extensive scholarship on the Kashmir dispute, important gaps remain in the existing literature. First, most studies continue to prioritise geopolitical rivalry and interstate security over systematic analysis of governance and democratic institutions within POK. Second, contemporary political developments have received limited scholarly



attention from the perspective of democratic legitimacy, institutional accountability, and governance performance. Third, relatively few studies integrate constitutional analysis, governance theory, electoral politics, and conflict transformation within a single analytical framework capable of explaining contemporary political unrest in contested territories.

This study addresses these gaps by examining political unrest in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir through the integrated perspectives of Democratic Legitimacy Theory, State Capacity Theory, Centre–Periphery Theory, and Conflict Transformation Theory. Employing a qualitative case study design based on documentary analysis and thematic interpretation, the study investigates how constitutional arrangements, governance performance, electoral contestation, and state–society relations interact to shape democratic legitimacy and political mobilisation. Rather than interpreting recent unrest as an isolated political episode, the article argues that it reflects deeper institutional and governance challenges with important implications for political stability and regional security.

The study makes three principal contributions to the existing literature. First, it shifts analytical attention from the traditional interstate dimension of the Kashmir dispute to the internal political dynamics of governance and democratic legitimacy in POK. Second, it develops an integrated theoretical framework that combines constitutional politics, governance studies, electoral legitimacy, and conflict transformation to explain political unrest in contested territories. Third, by synthesising constitutional documents, scholarly literature, policy reports, and contemporary evidence, the study contributes to broader comparative debates on democratic governance, institutional legitimacy, and conflict management in regions characterised by contested sovereignty and constitutional complexity.

2. Literature Review

Constitutional Governance and Political Autonomy

The constitutional and political status of Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (POK) has long attracted scholarly attention because of its unique institutional arrangement within Pakistan's federal framework. Existing literature generally agrees that POK possesses representative political institutions under the *Azad Jammu and Kashmir Interim Constitution Act, 1974*; however, scholars differ regarding the extent to which these institutions exercise meaningful political autonomy.

Khan (2006) and Snedden (2012) argue that although elected institutions exist, important constitutional and administrative powers remain closely connected to Pakistan's federal authorities. Similarly, Schofield (2010) contends that constitutional development in Kashmir has been shaped by the broader geopolitical dispute, resulting in governance structures that differ significantly from those of conventional federal systems. Comparative federalism scholarship further suggests that constitutional stability depends upon clearly defined institutional competencies, effective accountability, and meaningful regional participation in decision-making (Watts, 2008). Where constitutional authority remains contested or asymmetrical, tensions between central and regional institutions are likely to persist.

Recent comparative research increasingly recognises constitutional arrangements not merely as legal frameworks but as political institutions through which legitimacy, representation, and public confidence are constructed. Consequently, constitutional governance has become central to understanding political stability in contested territories.

Democratic Legitimacy and Electoral Governance

Democratic legitimacy constitutes one of the principal themes in contemporary political science. Lipset (1959) argued that democratic stability depends upon the combined effects of institutional effectiveness and public legitimacy, while Easton (1965) distinguished between citizens' evaluations of government performance and their long-term acceptance of the political system itself. Dahl's (1971) theory of polyarchy further emphasises that



democratic legitimacy requires meaningful political participation, electoral competition, civil liberties, and institutional accountability.

More recent scholarship has expanded these classical perspectives by demonstrating that legitimacy is influenced not only by electoral procedures but also by transparency, responsiveness, judicial independence, and inclusive governance (Linz & Stepan, 1996). Norris (2011, 2014) similarly argues that declining confidence in democratic institutions frequently precedes political protest and demands for institutional reform. Accordingly, electoral integrity should be understood as one dimension of democratic legitimacy rather than its sole determinant.

Within the context of POK, these theoretical perspectives suggest that the credibility of democratic institutions depends not only on the conduct of elections but also on broader perceptions of fairness, accountability, and political responsiveness.

Governance, State Capacity, and Institutional Performance

Governance scholarship provides an important framework for explaining political stability in conflict-affected and constitutionally contested societies. Migdal's (1988) State Capacity Theory argues that governments derive legitimacy from their ability to formulate and implement policies, provide public services, and maintain institutional authority. Fukuyama (2013) further contends that governance quality depends primarily on institutional effectiveness, professionalism, transparency, and accountability rather than on the formal existence of political institutions.

Rotberg (2004) argues that governance failures often weaken institutional legitimacy by reducing public trust and increasing political dissatisfaction. Similar conclusions emerge from studies of conflict-affected societies, where deficiencies in service delivery, judicial effectiveness, and administrative responsiveness frequently reinforce political mobilisation. These findings indicate that governance quality and democratic legitimacy are mutually reinforcing, particularly in politically sensitive regions characterised by constitutional ambiguity.

Electoral Politics and Political Representation

Electoral politics in POK operates within a distinctive constitutional and political environment influenced by regional and federal dynamics. Hussain (2018) and Ahmed (2021) identify electoral credibility, institutional independence, and political competition as central determinants of democratic legitimacy. Comparative electoral research likewise demonstrates that public confidence depends upon impartial administration, transparent electoral procedures, and effective dispute-resolution mechanisms (Norris, 2014).

Recent studies increasingly argue that electoral disputes should not be interpreted solely as procedural disagreements. Instead, they often reflect broader concerns regarding governance quality, institutional accountability, and public confidence in representative institutions. Electoral contestation therefore serves as an important indicator of democratic performance rather than an isolated political phenomenon.

Human Rights, Civil Liberties, and State–Society Relations

The relationship between governance and civil liberties has received growing attention in comparative political research. International human rights organisations have documented concerns relating to freedom of expression, political participation, peaceful assembly, and due process across numerous conflict-affected regions. Political theory generally suggests that the protection of civil liberties strengthens institutional legitimacy by encouraging peaceful political participation, whereas prolonged restrictions may increase political polarisation and weaken public trust.

State–society relations scholarship similarly argues that governments possessing stronger institutional legitimacy are better equipped to manage political dissent through dialogue and democratic institutions than through coercive



approaches. These perspectives provide an important analytical context for examining contemporary political developments in POK.

2.6 Political Unrest and Regional Security

The strategic importance of Kashmir has generated extensive scholarship linking domestic political developments with regional security. Ganguly (1997) and Cohen (2004) argue that unresolved political disputes in Kashmir continue to influence India–Pakistan relations. Buzan and Wæver's (2003) Regional Security Complex Theory further demonstrates that domestic political developments and interstate security are closely interconnected.

Nevertheless, contemporary scholarship cautions against reducing regional security to individual domestic political events. Security outcomes emerge from the interaction of historical disputes, constitutional arrangements, governance performance, interstate diplomacy, and broader geopolitical competition. This multidimensional perspective provides a more balanced framework for understanding the relationship between internal political developments in POK and regional strategic stability.

Research Gap

Despite a substantial body of scholarship on Kashmir, significant gaps remain in the literature. First, existing research continues to privilege interstate rivalry and geopolitical competition over systematic analyses of governance, democratic legitimacy, and institutional accountability within POK. Second, recent political developments have received comparatively limited attention from the perspectives of democratic legitimacy and governance studies. Third, relatively few studies integrate constitutional governance, electoral politics, state capacity, and conflict transformation within a single explanatory framework capable of accounting for contemporary political unrest. Finally, comparative insights from other contested territories have seldom been applied to explain political developments in POK.

The present study addresses these gaps by developing an integrated analytical framework that combines Democratic Legitimacy Theory, State Capacity Theory, Centre–Periphery Theory, and Conflict Transformation Theory to explain how constitutional arrangements, governance performance, electoral legitimacy, and state–society relations collectively influence political stability in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir.

3. Theoretical Framework

Political unrest in contested territories rarely results from a single constitutional, political, or administrative factor. Instead, it emerges through the interaction of institutional legitimacy, governance performance, constitutional arrangements, electoral processes, and state–society relations. Analysing such multidimensional political phenomena therefore requires an integrated theoretical perspective capable of explaining both the structural and institutional determinants of political mobilisation.

This study develops an integrated analytical framework by combining **Democratic Legitimacy Theory**, **State Capacity Theory**, **Centre–Periphery Theory**, and **Conflict Transformation Theory**. While each theory explains a distinct dimension of political development, their integration provides a more comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping political unrest in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (POK). Rather than treating constitutional politics, governance, electoral legitimacy, and political mobilisation as independent variables, the framework conceptualises them as mutually reinforcing processes that collectively influence democratic stability.

Democratic Legitimacy Theory

Democratic Legitimacy Theory constitutes the principal theoretical foundation of this study. Lipset (1959) argues that political stability depends upon the interaction between institutional effectiveness and public legitimacy.



Political institutions derive authority not merely from constitutional provisions or electoral outcomes but from citizens' confidence that they are representative, accountable, and capable of addressing public needs. When institutional legitimacy declines, political dissatisfaction and public mobilisation become increasingly likely.

Easton (1965) further distinguishes between *specific support*, which reflects citizens' evaluations of government performance, and *diffuse support*, which represents long-term acceptance of the political system itself. This distinction is particularly relevant in contested territories, where dissatisfaction may extend beyond individual governments to broader constitutional and institutional arrangements.

Dahl's (1971) concept of polyarchy expands this perspective by emphasising political competition, meaningful participation, civil liberties, and institutional accountability as essential conditions for democratic legitimacy. Consequently, elections alone cannot sustain democratic governance unless accompanied by transparent institutions, effective representation, and public confidence in the political process.

Within the context of POK, Democratic Legitimacy Theory provides the primary analytical lens for examining how governance performance, constitutional arrangements, and electoral credibility influence public perceptions of political authority and institutional trust.

State Capacity Theory

The second component of the framework is State Capacity Theory, principally associated with Migdal (1988) and further developed by Fukuyama (2013). The theory argues that governments derive legitimacy from their ability to formulate and implement public policy, deliver essential services, enforce the rule of law, and maintain institutional effectiveness.

Migdal maintains that weak administrative capacity often creates a gap between state institutions and societal expectations, thereby encouraging political dissatisfaction. Fukuyama similarly contends that governance quality depends upon institutional professionalism, transparency, accountability, and administrative competence rather than the mere existence of formal political structures.

In politically contested regions such as POK, governance performance assumes heightened importance because constitutional ambiguity often raises public expectations regarding institutional responsiveness. Consequently, deficiencies in governance may erode democratic legitimacy independently of electoral or constitutional considerations.

State Capacity Theory therefore enables the present study to evaluate how institutional performance influences political trust, administrative legitimacy, and political mobilisation.

Centre–Periphery Theory

Centre–Periphery Theory, developed principally by Rokkan (1970), provides the third pillar of the analytical framework. The theory explains political conflict as a consequence of perceived imbalances in political authority between central governments and peripheral regions. Where regional institutions are viewed as possessing limited autonomy or constrained decision-making authority, demands for greater political representation and institutional accountability may intensify.

Unlike conventional federal systems characterised by clearly defined constitutional competencies, contested territories frequently operate under asymmetrical constitutional arrangements. Such arrangements may generate differing perceptions regarding political autonomy, institutional effectiveness, and democratic representation.



Applied to POK, Centre–Periphery Theory facilitates an examination of how constitutional relationships between regional institutions and Pakistan's federal authorities influence democratic legitimacy, governance, and public perceptions of political representation. The theory does not assume that constitutional asymmetry inevitably produces political instability; rather, it highlights how citizens' perceptions of constitutional authority and political autonomy shape political behaviour.

Conflict Transformation Theory

The fourth theoretical component is Conflict Transformation Theory, developed by Lederach (1997). Unlike approaches that focus primarily on conflict management or short-term political stability, Conflict Transformation Theory emphasises addressing the structural causes of political conflict through institutional reform, inclusive governance, democratic participation, and sustained political dialogue.

Lederach argues that durable political stability depends not solely on maintaining public order but on strengthening institutions capable of managing political disagreements through democratic processes. Accordingly, political unrest should be understood as an opportunity to identify institutional weaknesses and promote reforms that strengthen democratic governance.

Within the context of POK, this perspective suggests that sustainable political stability requires greater institutional accountability, improved governance, broader political participation, and constructive engagement among governments, political parties, and civil society.

Integrated Analytical Framework

Although each theory explains a particular dimension of political development, none independently provides a comprehensive explanation of contemporary political unrest in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir. Democratic Legitimacy Theory explains how public confidence influences political stability; State Capacity Theory identifies governance performance as a determinant of institutional legitimacy; Centre–Periphery Theory explains how constitutional relationships influence perceptions of autonomy and representation; and Conflict Transformation Theory identifies institutional reform as a pathway towards sustainable political stability.

The integration of these four perspectives constitutes the principal theoretical contribution of this study. It conceptualises political unrest as the outcome of dynamic interactions among constitutional governance, institutional capacity, democratic legitimacy, electoral credibility, and state–society relations rather than as the consequence of isolated political events.

Accordingly, the study advances an integrated explanatory model in which constitutional arrangements influence governance performance, governance shapes democratic legitimacy, democratic legitimacy affects political mobilisation, and institutional responses determine the long-term trajectory of political stability. Feedback effects operate throughout this process, enabling institutional reforms either to strengthen public confidence or, where governance deficits persist, to reinforce political contestation.

This integrated framework provides a comprehensive basis for analysing contemporary political developments in POK and offers broader theoretical insights into governance and political legitimacy in contested territories.

4. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative case study design to examine the structural factors underlying contemporary political unrest in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (POK). An interpretivist approach is employed to understand how constitutional arrangements, governance practices, institutional performance, and political perceptions shape legitimacy and political mobilisation.



POK is selected as an instrumental case study because of its disputed status, distinctive constitutional framework, asymmetrical relationship with Pakistan, and recurring debates over democratic representation, governance, and institutional accountability. The analysis is guided by four complementary perspectives: Democratic Legitimacy Theory, State Capacity Theory, Centre–Periphery Theory, and Conflict Transformation Theory.

The study relies exclusively on secondary qualitative data, including constitutional documents, government publications, international and human-rights reports, peer-reviewed books and journal articles, policy papers, and reports from reputable media organisations. Academic literature was identified through databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, Taylor & Francis, Sage, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar, with emphasis on research published between 2010 and 2026, particularly after 2020.

Data were analysed using qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis. Documentary evidence was systematically examined, coded, and interpreted around key themes including constitutional governance, democratic legitimacy, electoral contestation, governance effectiveness, institutional accountability, state–society relations, political mobilisation, and regional security. Source triangulation was employed to compare evidence from different categories of sources and address competing interpretations.

Methodological trustworthiness was ensured through the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The research also maintains academic neutrality by distinguishing empirical evidence from interpretation and presenting competing perspectives fairly.

The study uses only publicly available sources and therefore involves no human participants. Its principal limitations are the absence of independent fieldwork, the contested nature of some contemporary political claims, and the qualitative case-study design, which supports analytical rather than statistical generalisation. Despite these limitations, the methodology provides a systematic and theoretically grounded basis for analysing political unrest and governance dynamics in POK.

Analysis and Discussion

This section critically examines the structural factors underlying contemporary political unrest in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (POK) through the integrated perspectives of Democratic Legitimacy Theory, State Capacity Theory, Centre–Periphery Theory, and Conflict Transformation Theory. Rather than treating recent political developments as isolated incidents, the analysis explores how constitutional arrangements, governance performance, electoral politics, and state–society relations interact to shape democratic legitimacy and political stability.

The discussion is organised under six interrelated themes: constitutional governance, democratic legitimacy, governance effectiveness, electoral contestation, political mobilisation, and regional security. Together, these dimensions provide a comprehensive explanation of the contemporary political dynamics in POK.

Constitutional Governance and Institutional Authority

The constitutional framework governing POK combines representative political institutions with a distinctive distribution of authority between regional institutions and Pakistan's federal government. Although elected institutions, including the Legislative Assembly and executive bodies, operate under the *Azad Jammu and Kashmir Interim Constitution Act, 1974*, debates continue regarding the extent of institutional autonomy and effective decision-making authority.

From the perspective of Centre–Periphery Theory, constitutional arrangements influence political stability not only through formal legal provisions but also through public perceptions of political autonomy and institutional effectiveness. Comparative federalism demonstrates that constitutional ambiguity may generate competing



expectations regarding representation, accountability, and regional participation. Consequently, constitutional governance in POK should be understood as a dynamic political process rather than merely a legal framework.

The analysis suggests that political debates concerning constitutional authority are significant because they shape citizens' perceptions of institutional legitimacy. Where constitutional arrangements are perceived as limiting effective regional decision-making, public confidence in representative institutions may weaken, thereby contributing to political dissatisfaction and mobilisation.

Democratic Legitimacy and Institutional Trust

Democratic legitimacy represents the central explanatory variable of this study. The evidence indicates that public confidence in political institutions depends upon considerably more than the conduct of periodic elections. Institutional legitimacy is influenced by perceptions of transparency, accountability, responsiveness, fairness, and the rule of law.

Consistent with Lipset's theory, political stability depends upon the interaction between institutional effectiveness and public legitimacy. Easton's distinction between specific and diffuse political support further explains why dissatisfaction may extend beyond incumbent governments to broader constitutional and institutional arrangements. In this context, public protests and political mobilisation should not automatically be interpreted as indicators of democratic failure. Within democratic systems, peaceful political participation frequently represents a legitimate mechanism through which citizens express dissatisfaction and seek institutional reform.

The analysis therefore suggests that the critical issue is not the existence of political protest itself but the extent to which political institutions possess the capacity and legitimacy to respond effectively to societal demands.

Governance Performance and State Capacity

Governance performance emerges as one of the most significant determinants of political legitimacy in POK. State Capacity Theory emphasises that governments derive legitimacy through their ability to formulate policies, provide effective public services, implement administrative decisions, and maintain institutional accountability.

The documentary evidence reviewed in this study identifies recurring debates concerning administrative responsiveness, public service delivery, policy implementation, economic governance, and institutional accountability. These issues are closely interconnected with constitutional politics and democratic legitimacy rather than functioning as independent administrative concerns.

The findings support Fukuyama's argument that governance quality depends upon institutional effectiveness rather than constitutional design alone. Consequently, governance deficits may reduce public confidence even where representative political institutions formally exist. Effective governance therefore constitutes an essential condition for sustaining democratic legitimacy and long-term political stability.

Electoral Contestation and Democratic Representation

Electoral politics constitutes the principal mechanism through which democratic systems derive political legitimacy. However, comparative political research consistently demonstrates that electoral credibility depends not only upon compliance with legal procedures but also upon public confidence in the transparency, impartiality, and fairness of electoral administration.

Within POK, electoral contestation should therefore be interpreted within a broader institutional context. Electoral disputes acquire greater political significance when accompanied by declining institutional trust, governance



dissatisfaction, constitutional debates, and increasing political polarisation. Under such circumstances, elections become indicators of wider concerns regarding democratic representation rather than isolated procedural events.

The analysis thus reinforces the proposition that electoral legitimacy forms one component of broader democratic legitimacy and cannot independently explain political stability or political unrest.

Political Mobilisation and State–Society Relations

Political mobilisation represents one of the most visible manifestations of changing relationships between the state and society. Conflict Transformation Theory suggests that sustained political mobilisation generally reflects accumulated institutional grievances rather than spontaneous reactions to isolated political developments.

The evidence examined indicates that political mobilisation in POK is influenced by the combined effects of governance performance, constitutional debates, electoral perceptions, economic concerns, and public expectations regarding institutional accountability. Peaceful public participation, civil society engagement, and political activism should therefore be understood as legitimate components of democratic politics rather than as automatic indicators of institutional instability.

The analysis further suggests that democratic resilience depends substantially upon governments' willingness and institutional capacity to address political grievances through dialogue, transparency, and inclusive governance rather than through exclusively administrative or coercive responses.

Regional Security Implications

Political developments in POK possess wider strategic significance because of the continuing geopolitical importance of the Kashmir region. Nevertheless, attributing regional security outcomes solely to domestic political developments would oversimplify an inherently complex regional environment.

Regional Security Complex Theory demonstrates that security outcomes emerge through the interaction of historical disputes, constitutional politics, domestic governance, interstate diplomacy, military considerations, and wider geopolitical competition. Political unrest should therefore be regarded as one component within a broader regional security framework rather than the exclusive determinant of interstate stability.

This interpretation provides a more balanced understanding of the relationship between domestic governance and regional strategic dynamics while avoiding monocausal explanations of political conflict.

Comparative Perspective

Comparative experiences from Northern Ireland, Aceh, Bougainville, and South Tyrol demonstrate that sustainable political stability is most likely where constitutional reforms are accompanied by inclusive governance, transparent institutions, effective political representation, and sustained democratic dialogue.

Although each case possesses distinct historical and constitutional characteristics, comparative political scholarship consistently identifies several common determinants of long-term stability: institutional accountability, constitutional clarity, effective governance, public participation, and confidence-building measures. These experiences reinforce the broader argument that durable political stability depends less upon constitutional design alone than upon the capacity of political institutions to command public confidence and respond effectively to societal expectations.



Discussion

The analysis demonstrates that political unrest in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir cannot be satisfactorily explained through electoral disputes, constitutional arrangements, or governance performance considered independently. Instead, political developments reflect the interaction of institutional legitimacy, governance capacity, constitutional relationships, electoral credibility, and state–society relations.

The integrated theoretical framework provides a more comprehensive explanation than any single theoretical perspective. Democratic Legitimacy Theory explains the importance of institutional trust; State Capacity Theory highlights governance effectiveness; Centre–Periphery Theory clarifies the role of constitutional relationships; and Conflict Transformation Theory explains how institutional reform and inclusive governance contribute to long-term political stability.

Accordingly, the study argues that strengthening democratic institutions, improving governance capacity, enhancing transparency and accountability, and encouraging constructive political dialogue are more likely to promote sustainable political stability than approaches focusing exclusively on constitutional or electoral issues. These findings contribute to broader comparative debates concerning democratic governance and conflict management in constitutionally contested territories.

6. Findings and Policy Recommendations

Major Findings

The study demonstrates that contemporary political unrest in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (POK) is best understood as a multidimensional political phenomenon resulting from the interaction of constitutional arrangements, governance performance, democratic legitimacy, electoral politics, and state–society relations. The principal findings are summarised below.

Finding 1: Democratic legitimacy extends beyond electoral procedures

The analysis reveals that democratic legitimacy is not determined solely by the conduct of elections. Public confidence in political institutions depends equally upon transparency, accountability, institutional responsiveness, adherence to the rule of law, and effective public administration. Elections provide formal political legitimacy, but sustained democratic stability requires continuous institutional performance and public trust.

Finding 2: Governance quality significantly influences political stability

Governance effectiveness emerges as one of the strongest determinants of institutional legitimacy. Administrative responsiveness, efficient public service delivery, policy implementation, and institutional accountability directly influence citizens' perceptions of governmental effectiveness. Weak governance reduces public confidence and increases the likelihood of political dissatisfaction and mobilization.

Finding 3: Constitutional arrangements shape political perceptions

The study finds that constitutional structures influence political behaviour not merely through legal provisions but through public perceptions of political autonomy, representation, and institutional authority. Consequently, debates surrounding constitutional governance remain central to understanding political developments in POK.



Finding 4: Electoral contestation reflects broader institutional challenges

Electoral disputes should not be interpreted exclusively as procedural disagreements. Rather, they often reflect broader concerns regarding governance quality, institutional accountability, political representation, and public confidence in democratic institutions. Electoral credibility therefore constitutes one component of a wider framework of democratic legitimacy.

Finding 5: Political mobilisation reflects structural institutional issues

Political mobilisation in POK appears to arise from the cumulative interaction of governance concerns, constitutional debates, economic issues, and perceptions of institutional responsiveness rather than from isolated political events. This finding supports the argument that long-term political stability depends upon addressing structural governance challenges rather than responding only to immediate political crises.

Finding 6: Integrated theoretical analysis provides greater explanatory power

No single theoretical perspective adequately explains contemporary political unrest in POK. The integration of Democratic Legitimacy Theory, State Capacity Theory, Centre–Periphery Theory, and Conflict Transformation Theory offers a more comprehensive explanation by demonstrating how constitutional governance, institutional performance, democratic legitimacy, and political mobilisation operate as interconnected processes.

Collectively, these findings suggest that political stability in contested territories depends upon strengthening institutional legitimacy, improving governance quality, promoting democratic accountability, and fostering constructive engagement between state institutions and society.

6.2 Policy Recommendations

Drawing upon the foregoing analysis, the following policy recommendations are proposed.

1. Strengthen Democratic Institutions

Institutional legitimacy can be enhanced by improving transparency, accountability, and responsiveness across public institutions. Strengthening democratic governance should extend beyond periodic elections to include effective institutional oversight and greater public participation.

2. Improve Governance Capacity

Administrative reforms should prioritise efficient public service delivery, institutional professionalism, transparent decision-making, and effective policy implementation. Enhanced governance capacity is essential for strengthening public confidence and reducing political dissatisfaction.

3. Enhance Electoral Credibility

Electoral processes should be supported by transparent administrative procedures, impartial institutions, effective grievance-redress mechanisms, and public confidence-building measures to reinforce democratic legitimacy.

4. Promote Inclusive Political Dialogue

Constructive engagement among governments, political parties, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders should be encouraged to address political disagreements through democratic institutions rather than prolonged political confrontation.



5. Strengthen Institutional Accountability

Independent oversight mechanisms, transparent administrative practices, and adherence to the rule of law should be reinforced to improve institutional credibility and public trust.

6. Encourage Evidence-Based Policymaking

Public policy relating to governance in contested territories should be informed by credible empirical research rather than political narratives alone. Evidence-based policymaking is more likely to produce sustainable institutional reforms and improve governance outcomes.

7. Promote Comparative Research

Future research should examine governance, democratic legitimacy, and conflict transformation across different contested territories to identify institutional practices that contribute to long-term political stability and democratic resilience.

Overall Finding

The study concludes that political unrest in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir is not adequately explained by constitutional arrangements, governance performance, or electoral politics considered independently. Rather, it results from the dynamic interaction of institutional legitimacy, governance effectiveness, constitutional relationships, and political participation. Sustainable political stability therefore depends upon strengthening democratic institutions, improving governance quality, enhancing institutional accountability, and encouraging inclusive political dialogue.

7. Conclusion

This study examined contemporary political unrest in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (POK) through the integrated perspectives of Democratic Legitimacy Theory, State Capacity Theory, Centre–Periphery Theory, and Conflict Transformation Theory. The findings demonstrate that political instability cannot be attributed to a single factor; rather, it results from the interaction of constitutional arrangements, institutional performance, governance deficits, electoral processes, and state–society relations.

The integrated framework shows that democratic legitimacy extends beyond elections to include transparency, accountability, administrative responsiveness, institutional effectiveness, and public trust. While Centre–Periphery Theory explains tensions surrounding political autonomy and constitutional authority, State Capacity Theory highlights governance effectiveness, and Conflict Transformation Theory emphasises institutional reform, inclusive participation, and dialogue. Together, these perspectives provide a comprehensive explanation of political contestation in contested territories.

The study further suggests that strengthening democratic institutions, improving governance capacity, ensuring electoral credibility, enhancing transparency and accountability, and promoting inclusive political dialogue are essential for long-term political stability. However, the research is limited by its reliance on secondary sources and the absence of independent fieldwork. Future studies should incorporate interviews, surveys, comparative analysis, and longitudinal research.

Overall, the study concludes that political unrest in POK is best understood as the outcome of interconnected constitutional, institutional, administrative, and societal processes. Understanding these dynamics contributes to wider scholarship on democratic governance, contested territories, institutional legitimacy, and sustainable political stability.



References:

1. Ahmed, I. (2021). Electoral politics and democratic governance in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. *Journal of Asian Political Studies*, 15(2), 145–168.
2. Amnesty International. (2024). *Annual report 2023/24: Human rights around the world*.
3. Azad Jammu and Kashmir Interim Constitution Act. (1974). Government of Azad Jammu and Kashmir.
4. Bose, S. (2003). *Kashmir: Roots of conflict, paths to peace*. Harvard University Press.
5. Bovens, M. (2007). Analysing and assessing accountability. *European Law Journal*, 13(4), 447–468.
6. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
7. Buzan, B., & Wæver, O. (2003). *Regions and powers: The structure of international security*. Cambridge University Press.
8. Carothers, T. (2002). The end of the transition paradigm. *Journal of Democracy*, 13(1), 5–21.
9. Cohen, S. P. (2004). *The idea of Pakistan*. Brookings Institution Press.
10. Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.
11. Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design* (4th ed.). Sage.
12. Dahl, R. A. (1971). *Polyarchy: Participation and opposition*. Yale University Press.
13. Diamond, L. (1999). *Developing democracy: Toward consolidation*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
14. Diamond, L. (2008). *The spirit of democracy*. Times Books.
15. Easton, D. (1965). *A systems analysis of political life*. Wiley.
16. Freedom House. (2024). *Freedom in the World 2024*.
17. Fukuyama, F. (2013). What is governance? *Governance*, 26(3), 347–368.
18. Ganaie, N. A. (2026). *Kashmir conflict evolution from armed insurgency to democratic governance following Article 370 abrogation*. *Discover Global Society*, 4, Article 84.
19. Ganguly, S. (1997). *The crisis in Kashmir*. Cambridge University Press.
20. Ganguly, S. (2001). *Conflict unending: India–Pakistan tensions since 1947*. Columbia University Press.
21. Gerring, J. (2017). *Case study research* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
22. Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.
23. Held, D. (2006). *Models of democracy* (3rd ed.). Stanford University Press.
24. Human Rights Watch. (2024). *World Report 2024*.
25. Huntington, S. P. (1991). *The third wave: Democratization in the late twentieth century*. University of Oklahoma Press.
26. International Commission of Jurists. (2022). *Rule of law and judicial independence in South Asia*.
27. Khan, H. (2006). *Constitutional and political history of Pakistan*. Oxford University Press.
28. Krippendorff, K. (2019). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (4th ed.). Sage.
29. Lederach, J. P. (1997). *Building peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. United States Institute of Peace Press.
30. Lijphart, A. (2012). *Patterns of democracy* (2nd ed.). Yale University Press.
31. Linz, J. J., & Stepan, A. (1996). *Problems of democratic transition and consolidation*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
32. Lipset, S. M. (1959). Some social requisites of democracy. *American Political Science Review*, 53(1), 69–105.
33. Mansfield, E. D., & Snyder, J. (2005). *Electing to fight*. MIT Press.
34. Marshall, M. G., & Gurr, T. R. (2020). *Polity V project*.



35. Menski, W., & Yousuf, M. (2025). *Kashmir after 2019: Abrogation of Article 370 and completing the partition*. Routledge.
36. Migdal, J. S. (1988). *Strong societies and weak states*. Princeton University Press.
37. Morlino, L. (2011). *Changes for democracy*. Oxford University Press.
38. Norris, P. (2011). *Democratic deficit*. Cambridge University Press.
39. Norris, P. (2014). *Why electoral integrity matters*. Cambridge University Press.
40. North, D. C., Wallis, J. J., & Weingast, B. R. (2009). *Violence and social orders*. Cambridge University Press.
41. OECD. (2020). *Government at a glance 2020*.
42. Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Sage.
43. Putnam, R. D. (1993). *Making democracy work*. Princeton University Press.
44. Rawls, J. (1999). *A theory of justice* (Rev. ed.). Harvard University Press.
45. Resen, P. T. K. (2024). India's policy toward Jammu and Kashmir: Understanding the use of religious ideology as political legitimacy. *Global Strategis*, 18(2), 267–284.
46. Rokkan, S. (1970). *Citizens, elections, parties*. Universitetsforlaget.
47. Rotberg, R. I. (2004). *When states fail*. Princeton University Press.
48. Schedler, A. (2002). Elections without democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 13(2), 36–50.
49. Schofield, V. (2010). *Kashmir in conflict* (2nd ed.). I.B. Tauris.
50. Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Oxford University Press.
51. Snedden, C. (2012). *The untold story of the people of Azad Kashmir*. Hurst.
52. Stepan, A. (1999). Federalism and democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 10(4), 19–34.
53. Taj, F. (2011). *The real story of 1947*. Routledge.
54. Tremblay, R. C. (2017). Contested governance, competing nationalisms and disenchanted publics: Kashmir beyond intractability? In C. Zutshi (Ed.), *Kashmir: History, politics, representation* (pp. 220–244). Cambridge University Press.
55. United Nations Development Programme. (2022). *Human development report 2021/2022*.
56. United Nations Development Programme. (2024). *Human development report 2023/2024*.
57. United Nations General Assembly. (1949). *United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) resolutions*.
58. United Nations. (1948). *United Nations Security Council Resolution 47*.
59. Wani, A. A., & Yaqoob, M. (2021). Governance and democracy in Jammu and Kashmir: Measuring public trust in formal institutions. *Studies in Indian Politics*, 9(2), 192–207.
60. Watts, R. L. (2008). *Comparing federal systems* (3rd ed.). McGill-Queen's University Press.
61. Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and society*. University of California Press.
62. World Bank. (2017). *World development report 2017: Governance and the law*.
63. World Bank. (2024). *Worldwide governance indicators*.
64. Yaqoob, M., & Wani, A. A. (2026). Speaking through land: Territoriality, identity and legitimacy in Jammu and Kashmir. *Territory, Politics, Governance*.
65. Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications* (6th ed.). Sage.