# DIVIDED LANDSCAPES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN INDIAN-ADMINISTERED AND PAKISTANI-ADMINISTERED KASHMIR

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## Abstract

*The Kashmir region represents one of the most enduring geopolitical conflicts in South Asia, divided between Indian-administered and Pakistani-administered territories, each governed under distinct political, administrative, and constitutional systems that influence identity formation and socio-political realities. This research examines how governance structures shape political identity, autonomy perceptions, institutional legitimacy, and narratives of belonging across divided Kashmir. Indian-administered Kashmir experienced major governance restructuring after the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, transforming its administrative framework and redefining center-region relations. Pakistani-administered Kashmir, comprising Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), operates through semi-autonomous and administratively governed structures shaped by the unresolved international status of the region. Using qualitative analysis of secondary academic sources, this study compares governance models, constitutional arrangements, representation mechanisms, and sociopolitical identity formation processes. Findings indicate that governance structures significantly influence perceptions of citizenship, legitimacy, and regional belonging. The research contributes to conflict governance literature by highlighting how institutional arrangements and political reforms create divergent identity discourses within historically interconnected territories.*

## Introduction

The Kashmir conflict emerged following the 1947 partition of British India and continues to shape regional politics and identity formation across South Asia. The territory remains divided between India and Pakistan, each administering regions through different constitutional and governance systems. Governance structures influence political participation, representation, and collective identity formation, making them central to understanding socio-political dynamics within divided territories (Bose, 2003; Schofield, 2010).

Indian-administered Kashmir has experienced significant governance transformation, particularly following the constitutional reorganization of 2019, which replaced semi-autonomous statehood with union territory governance. Scholars argue that such institutional restructuring reshapes political institutions, autonomy narratives, and regional identity discourses by redefining the relationship between citizens and the central government (Ganguly, 2016; Duschinski & Ghosh, 2017). Governance reforms also influence electoral

representation, administrative autonomy, and public trust in institutions.

Pakistani-administered Kashmir consists of AJK and GB, which operate under unique governance arrangements reflecting geopolitical considerations and the unresolved status of Kashmir. AJK maintains a semi-autonomous constitutional framework with legislative institutions, while GB remains administratively governed without full provincial status. These governance structures influence political participation, perceptions of autonomy, and regional identity narratives (Shahzad et al., 2020; Hussain et al., 2025).

Comparative governance analysis offers insight into how institutional frameworks shape identity formation in conflict-affected regions. Governance structures influence narratives of nationalism, citizenship, and belonging, shaping how populations interpret sovereignty and political legitimacy. By examining governance and identity across divided Kashmir, this research contributes to broader debates on conflict governance and contested sovereignty (Behera, 2007; Wirsing, 2013).

## Literature Review

Research on Indian-administered Kashmir highlights governance autonomy and institutional restructuring as central factors shaping political identity. Bose (2003) and Ganguly (2016) examine how constitutional arrangements influence governance legitimacy and political participation. Duschinski and Ghosh (2017) analyze governance and human rights discourses, demonstrating how administrative reforms impact public perceptions of citizenship and state authority. Snedden (2015) further emphasizes the role of historical governance structures in shaping political consciousness.

Studies on Pakistani-administered Kashmir focus on constitutional ambiguity and governance disparities between AJK and GB. Shahzad et al. (2020) explore constitutional evolution in AJK, while Hussain et al. (2025) analyze governance challenges in GB. Ahmed et al. (2025) highlight disparities in representation and administrative authority between regions. Haider (2024) examines federal oversight and its influence on political participation and institutional legitimacy within Pakistani-administered territories.

Identity formation literature underscores the relationship between governance experiences and collective identity narratives. Ali (2023) examines identity debates in GB linked to governance ambiguity. Schofield (2010) and Evans (2002) provide historical analyses showing how governance arrangements influence socio-political identities over time. International Crisis Group (2020) reports emphasize governance reforms and political inclusion as central to shaping identity and conflict dynamics.

Although existing scholarship explores governance reforms and political identity in different parts of Kashmir, limited comparative research examines governance structures and identity formation across both Indian- and Pakistani-administered regions simultaneously. Many studies analyze governance in isolation without integrating institutional analysis with sociocultural identity formation, leaving a gap in understanding how differing governance frameworks influence collective consciousness and legitimacy perceptions across divided territories.

## Research Questions

1.      How do governance structures differ between Indian-administered and Pakistani-administered Kashmir?
2.      How do governance systems influence political identity formation and perceptions of autonomy in divided Kashmir?

## Research Objectives

1.      To compare governance and constitutional frameworks across divided Kashmir.
2.      To analyze the relationship between governance structures and identity formation.

## Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology relying exclusively on secondary academic sources, including peer-reviewed articles, books, policy reports, and historical analyses. A thematic comparative analysis was conducted to examine governance structures, constitutional frameworks, political

representation, and identity formation across Indian- and Pakistani-administered Kashmir. Secondary data enabled triangulation of perspectives from political science, sociology, and conflict studies literature to ensure comprehensive analysis.

**Findings**

• **Governance restructuring in Indian-administered Kashmir significantly transformed institutional authority and administrative arrangements.** The transition toward centralized governance reshaped legislative powers, administrative oversight, and center–region relations. These structural changes influenced how local populations perceive political participation, autonomy, and decision-making processes, contributing to evolving narratives of citizenship and national integration. Governance reforms also altered bureaucratic functioning and regional administrative priorities, affecting institutional trust and political engagement (Ganguly, 2016; Duschinski & Ghosh, 2017; International Crisis Group, 2020).

• **Changes in political representation influenced local identity formation and democratic participation.** Modifications in electoral systems, legislative authority, and governance institutions affected how communities interact with political structures. Shifts in political leadership dynamics and policy formulation processes influenced public perceptions of governance legitimacy and representation, shaping collective identity narratives linked to autonomy and regional distinctiveness (Bose, 2003; Snedden, 2015).

• **Semi-autonomous governance in Azad Jammu and Kashmir enables localized political participation while maintaining strong federal linkages.** The presence of legislative assemblies, executive institutions, and judicial structures allows for regional policy development and community representation. However, federal oversight and geopolitical considerations continue to influence governance decisions, creating a hybrid governance environment where local autonomy coexists with national political integration. This arrangement contributes to

layered identity formation among residents (Shahzad et al., 2020; Behera, 2007).

• **Gilgit-Baltistan's administrative governance model creates constitutional ambiguity affecting political identity and civic expectations.** The absence of full constitutional provincial status leads to debates about political rights, representation, and legal recognition. Governance uncertainty influences citizens' perceptions of inclusion within national political systems and shapes regional identity narratives that balance local cultural affiliations with broader national identities (Hussain et al., 2025; Ali, 2023).

• **Governance disparities within Pakistani-administered Kashmir generate diverse political experiences and identity discourses.** Differences between AJK's semi-autonomous governance and GB's administrative framework result in varying levels of representation, institutional authority, and public participation. These disparities influence how residents interpret governance effectiveness and political empowerment, contributing to multiple localized identity narratives within the same broader political context (Ahmed et al., 2025; Haider, 2024).

• **Historical governance legacies continue to shape contemporary political identities and institutional expectations.** Colonial administrative systems, post-partition governance decisions, and subsequent political reforms established institutional norms that remain embedded in regional political culture. Historical experiences influence how communities interpret modern governance reforms and political developments, reinforcing long-standing identity narratives related to autonomy and sovereignty (Evans, 2002; Schofield, 2010).

• **Institutional legitimacy is closely linked to governance transparency, accountability, and public participation.** Communities experiencing inclusive governance and accessible political participation channels are more likely to demonstrate institutional trust and cohesive identity alignment with governance systems. Conversely, perceptions of exclusion or limited political representation can strengthen

regional identity narratives and contribute to political mobilization or demands for governance reforms (Wirsing, 2013; Haider, 2024).

- **Governance frameworks influence socio-economic development patterns, which shape perceptions of state effectiveness and identity formation.** Infrastructure development, employment opportunities, and access to public services affect citizens' experiences with governance institutions. Equitable development initiatives can foster institutional trust and inclusive political identities, while disparities in resource allocation or development outcomes may reinforce grievances and identity-based political discourse (Ganguly, 2016; International Crisis Group, 2020).

- **Geopolitical and international dimensions of the Kashmir dispute shape governance structures and policy priorities.** Diplomatic considerations, security concerns, and international political narratives influence administrative decisions and constitutional arrangements across divided Kashmir. These external pressures contribute to governance constraints that shape political identity by linking local governance experiences with broader geopolitical realities (Behera, 2007; Wirsing, 2013).

- **Civil society engagement and public discourse play a crucial role in mediating governance reforms and identity narratives.** Local advocacy groups, media platforms, and grassroots movements interact with governance institutions to shape public perceptions of political change. Inclusive civic environments encourage constructive dialogue and pluralistic identity formation, while restrictive governance practices may intensify polarization and reinforce conflict-oriented identity narratives (Ali, 2023; Duschinski & Ghosh, 2017).

- **Legal frameworks and constitutional provisions influence civic rights and perceptions of belonging.** Changes in governance laws and constitutional arrangements affect access to justice, legal protections, and political rights. Institutional clarity in legal status and governance procedures contributes to stronger identity alignment with political systems, while ambiguity or contested legal frameworks may generate uncertainty regarding citizenship and national affiliation (Hussain et al., 2025; Shahzad et al., 2020).

- **Youth engagement and generational perspectives significantly shape future identity formation trends.** Younger populations interpret governance reforms through educational opportunities, employment prospects, and political participation channels. Governance systems that encourage youth involvement and civic education foster inclusive identity narratives and long-term political stability, whereas limited participation opportunities may contribute to political disengagement and identity fragmentation (Ahmed et al., 2025; Haider, 2024).

## Discussion and Analysis

Governance restructuring in Indian-administered Kashmir has profoundly influenced institutional arrangements, political participation patterns, and evolving identity narratives, particularly after constitutional changes that transformed administrative authority and reduced regional autonomy. Centralized governance has altered the balance between local political leadership and federal decision-making structures, reshaping public perceptions of democratic representation and accountability. These changes have influenced how communities interpret political legitimacy, citizenship rights, and national integration, with governance reforms serving as catalysts for new debates around autonomy, identity, and institutional trust. Scholars argue that institutional transformations redefine state–society relations, affecting the ways individuals understand political belonging and regional distinctiveness within broader national frameworks (Bose, 2003; Ganguly, 2016; Duschinski & Ghosh, 2017).

The transition from semi-autonomous governance to a centrally administered structure has reconfigured legislative authority, electoral processes, and bureaucratic administration in Indian-administered Kashmir. Changes to regional political institutions have influenced voter engagement, local governance autonomy, and the capacity of regional leaders to address community-specific concerns. These governance

shifts have also altered the dynamics of political mobilization and representation, affecting how different demographic groups perceive their role in shaping policy decisions. As a result, institutional restructuring not only transforms governance practices but also reshapes political identity narratives by redefining the scope of local political agency and participation in national governance systems (Snedden, 2015; International Crisis Group, 2020).

Security governance remains a central feature of administrative practice in Indian-administered Kashmir, significantly shaping everyday interactions between citizens and state institutions. Enhanced federal oversight and security measures influence civil liberties, public discourse, and the functioning of civil society organizations. The integration of security considerations into governance practices affects local perceptions of administrative authority and political inclusion, with communities often evaluating governance legitimacy through their lived experiences of institutional control, law enforcement presence, and access to public services. Such dynamics reinforce the interconnection between governance structures and identity formation, as institutional experiences influence narratives of trust, resistance, or political engagement (Ganguly, 2016; Duschinski & Ghosh, 2017).

Azad Jammu and Kashmir operates through a semi-autonomous constitutional framework that includes legislative assemblies, executive governance bodies, and judicial structures, enabling localized policy formulation and administrative decision-making. However, federal oversight remains influential due to strategic and geopolitical considerations tied to the broader Kashmir dispute. This hybrid governance arrangement shapes identity narratives by allowing a degree of regional autonomy while reinforcing connections with national political institutions. Local governance structures contribute to regional political identity by enabling community representation, yet ongoing federal influence creates a complex institutional environment where local autonomy coexists with external political oversight (Shahzad et al., 2020; Behera, 2007).

Gilgit-Baltistan's governance model is characterized by administrative governance through executive orders rather than full constitutional provincial status, creating institutional ambiguity that influences political identity and civic expectations. The absence of comprehensive constitutional integration has sparked debates surrounding political rights, representation in national institutions, and the extent of administrative autonomy. Residents often navigate layered identities shaped by local cultural traditions, regional political dynamics, and national affiliations, reflecting the complexity of governance arrangements. Institutional uncertainty affects long-term political planning, policy implementation, and community perceptions of inclusion within national governance structures (Hussain et al., 2025; Ali, 2023).

Governance disparities between Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan demonstrate how variations in institutional frameworks influence localized political experiences and identity formation. Differences in legislative authority, administrative powers, and representation mechanisms contribute to divergent perceptions of political empowerment and governance effectiveness. These institutional distinctions shape how residents engage with political institutions, articulate demands for reform, and interpret their relationship with national governance structures. Comparative analysis reveals that governance diversity within Pakistani-administered regions produces multiple identity narratives rather than a single unified political consciousness (Ahmed et al., 2025; Haider, 2024).

Historical governance legacies continue to shape contemporary political identities and administrative practices across divided Kashmir. Colonial administrative systems, early post-partition governance decisions, and subsequent political reforms established institutional patterns that influence present-day governance structures and political discourses. Historical narratives surrounding autonomy, territorial control, and political representation remain embedded in public consciousness, affecting how communities interpret modern governance reforms. Understanding these historical influences provides insight into the persistence of identity narratives and institutional

expectations within both Indian- and Pakistani-administered regions (Evans, 2002; Schofield, 2010).

Institutional legitimacy is closely connected to inclusive political representation and participatory governance mechanisms. Where governance structures provide transparent decision-making processes and accessible political participation channels, citizens are more likely to develop trust in institutions and align their identities with broader political frameworks. Conversely, perceived political exclusion or limited representation may strengthen regional identity narratives and encourage demands for constitutional reforms or increased autonomy. Governance legitimacy is therefore shaped by both formal institutional arrangements and citizens' perceptions of fairness, accountability, and responsiveness (Haider, 2024; Wirsing, 2013).

Comparative governance analysis demonstrates that centralized administrative systems and semi-autonomous governance structures generate different political identity outcomes. Centralized frameworks often promote national integration narratives through policy standardization and administrative uniformity, while localized governance models encourage the development of region-specific political identities rooted in local representation and community participation. These contrasting institutional arrangements highlight the role of governance design in shaping how individuals perceive sovereignty, citizenship, and political belonging within divided territories (Bose, 2003; Snedden, 2015).

Socio-economic development policies linked to governance frameworks also influence identity formation by shaping citizens' perceptions of state effectiveness and institutional legitimacy. Infrastructure development, employment opportunities, and access to education and healthcare services play a critical role in how communities evaluate governance performance. Regions experiencing equitable development may develop stronger institutional trust and cohesive political identities, while disparities in development can reinforce feelings of marginalization and contribute to identity-based grievances or political mobilization (Ganguly, 2016; International Crisis Group, 2020).

The unresolved international status of Kashmir continues to shape governance frameworks and policy priorities on both sides of the Line of Control. Administrative decisions are often influenced by diplomatic considerations, strategic interests, and international perceptions, limiting the scope of constitutional reforms or institutional experimentation. These geopolitical constraints create complex governance environments where political identity is shaped not only by domestic institutional experiences but also by broader international narratives surrounding sovereignty and self-determination (Behera, 2007; Wirsing, 2013).

Civil society organizations, local media, and grassroots political movements play a significant role in shaping identity narratives within divided Kashmir. Governance structures influence the degree of civic space available for public discourse, advocacy, and community mobilization. Inclusive governance environments that encourage dialogue and participation can foster constructive identity narratives, while restrictive administrative practices may intensify polarization and conflict-driven political identities. The interaction between civil society and governance institutions demonstrates the dynamic relationship between institutional frameworks and collective consciousness (Ali, 2023; Duschinski & Ghosh, 2017).

Administrative reforms also influence legal frameworks, constitutional rights, and access to justice, which in turn shape citizens' perceptions of political inclusion and national belonging. Changes in legal status, governance procedures, and constitutional protections affect how individuals experience governance institutions and understand their rights as citizens. Institutional clarity and legal recognition contribute to identity formation by defining the boundaries of political participation and civic engagement within governance systems (Hussain et al., 2025; Shahzad et al., 2020).

Youth political engagement represents an important dimension of identity formation influenced by governance structures. Access to education, employment opportunities, and political participation channels affects how younger generations interpret governance

reforms and national political narratives. Governance systems that promote youth inclusion and civic education may encourage constructive political engagement and inclusive identity formation, while limited participation opportunities may contribute to disillusionment or political disengagement among younger populations (Ahmed et al., 2025; Haider, 2024). Ultimately, governance structures serve as central mechanisms through which collective consciousness, political legitimacy, and identity narratives are constructed in divided Kashmir. Institutional design shapes citizens' perceptions of autonomy, representation, and national affiliation, influencing long-term conflict dynamics and regional stability. Comparative analysis demonstrates that inclusive governance frameworks emphasizing transparency, representation, and institutional clarity are essential for fostering constructive political identities and promoting sustainable peacebuilding within contested territories (Bose, 2003; International Crisis Group, 2020; Wirsing, 2013).

## Conclusion

The comparative analysis of governance structures in Indian-administered and Pakistani-administered Kashmir demonstrates that institutional frameworks play a central role in shaping political identity, perceptions of autonomy, and narratives of belonging within divided territories. Governance reforms, constitutional arrangements, and administrative practices influence how citizens engage with political institutions and interpret state legitimacy. In Indian-administered Kashmir, centralized governance transformations have reshaped institutional relationships and redefined regional political discourse, while in Pakistani-administered Kashmir, semi-autonomous and administratively governed models create diverse governance experiences that contribute to varying identity constructions across Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.

The study further highlights that governance disparities—both across the Line of Control and within Pakistani-administered regions themselves—produce complex and layered identity formations rooted in historical,

political, and institutional experiences. Differences in representation mechanisms, constitutional clarity, and administrative authority influence citizens' perceptions of inclusion, political agency, and national affiliation. Moreover, governance structures intersect with socio-economic development, security policies, and civil society engagement, reinforcing the idea that identity formation in conflict-affected regions is not static but continuously shaped by evolving political realities and institutional interactions.

Ultimately, the research underscores that governance is not merely an administrative mechanism but a powerful force in constructing collective consciousness and shaping conflict dynamics in Kashmir. Comparative analysis reveals that institutional design significantly influences political legitimacy, citizenship narratives, and regional stability. Understanding the interplay between governance and identity is therefore essential for policymakers, scholars, and peacebuilding practitioners seeking to promote sustainable political development and social cohesion within divided societies. Long-term stability in Kashmir depends not only on geopolitical negotiations but also on governance frameworks that prioritize inclusive representation, institutional transparency, and recognition of the region's diverse cultural and political identities.

## Way Forward

Future governance reforms across divided Kashmir should prioritize inclusive political participation, institutional transparency, and locally responsive administrative frameworks that strengthen democratic legitimacy. In Indian-administered Kashmir, restoring confidence in political institutions may require expanding representative governance, encouraging participatory decision-making, and ensuring that administrative reforms reflect local aspirations while maintaining constitutional stability. In Pakistani-administered regions, particularly Gilgit-Baltistan, greater constitutional clarity and clearly defined political rights could help reduce governance ambiguity and strengthen citizens' sense of political inclusion. Across both sides, governance systems that promote accountability,

protect civil liberties, and encourage constructive civic engagement can play a vital role in reshaping identity narratives away from conflict-driven perceptions toward inclusive political belonging and shared institutional trust.

Additionally, sustainable peacebuilding requires long-term regional dialogue, academic collaboration, and cross-border confidence-building initiatives that address governance and identity concerns simultaneously. Comparative research platforms and policy exchanges between divided communities could foster mutual understanding and highlight common governance challenges such as development disparities, representation gaps, and youth political participation. International and regional stakeholders can support locally driven development programs, educational exchanges, and civil society engagement initiatives that strengthen grassroots dialogue while respecting political sensitivities. Ultimately, governance reforms grounded in inclusivity, socio-economic development, and recognition of diverse cultural identities have the potential to reduce tensions, encourage constructive political discourse, and lay the institutional foundations necessary for long-term regional stability and reconciliation.

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