

REVOCATION OF ARTICLE 370 AND 35A: INDIA'S STRATEGIC NARRATIVE AND PAKISTAN'S RESPONSE

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Abstract

The paper is dedicated to the removal of Articles 370 and 35A of the Indian Constitution by discussing Pakistan and Indian narratives in terms of the Constructivist theory. This article further highlights the decisive role of narrative construction in shaping international opinion and outcomes in contested sovereignty disputes. It presents the analysis of political speeches, official statements, and media coverage using qualitative discourse analysis in order to compare the process of how the move was framed in India with that of the counter-narrative of Pakistan. The results indicate that India planned its rhetoric by fitting into global security and counterterrorism narratives, a consistent position of Pakistan being a state sponsor of terrorism and justifying its own actions as a prerequisite to peace and integration. In comparison, the human rights and self-determination-informed narrative of Pakistan did not have a similar level of international traction. The paper concludes that the legitimacy of policies in a contested territory may be defined by the dominance of particular narrative frames and emphasizes that it is crucial that states should shape their discourses according to the current international expectations.

INTRODUCTION

On 5 August 2019, India's decision to revoke Articles 370 and 35A of its Constitution marked a major shift in the constitutional and political trajectory of Jammu and Kashmir. Article 370 had given the state a special semi-autonomous position in the Indian Union, retaining its own constitution and legislative powers in all other, non-defense, non-foreign and non-communications matters (D.M.R., A., and D.S. 2022). In the meantime, Article 35A, which was added by a Presidential Order in 1954, gave the state legislature the freedom to define permanent residents, who were granted preferential rights concerning land ownership, employment in the

government, and other welfare programs (Dar and Dar, 2023). Together, these provisions symbolized the region's distinctive political identity within India's federal framework. Their annulment, accompanied by the bifurcation of the state into the Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, constituted a decisive rupture in India's federal balance and radically redefined New Delhi's constitutional engagement with the region (Gupta et al., 2019).

The Indian government defended the move as an urgent and necessary intervention aimed at strengthening national integration, fostering socio-economic modernization, and eliminating what it

described as the institutional roots of separatism and terrorism. Prime Minister Narendra Modi repeatedly characterized Article 370 as the “root cause of separatism, corruption, and terrorism,” asserting that its abrogation was indispensable for restoring stability and advancing development (Kotwal, 2022). National Security Advisor Ajit Doval emphasized that the new constitutional order had created an improved security environment, weakening militant infrastructure and reducing Pakistan’s influence over the valley (Arif, Naudet, and Jaoul, 2020). Similarly, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar conveyed to foreign governments that the constitutional reforms were fully consistent with India’s sovereign framework, while also serving regional peace and development goals (Pandow, 2022). Indian officials framed the decision as both a security imperative and a developmental milestone, arguing that the integration of J&K into India’s mainstream would extend opportunities and rights equally to its residents. By contrast, Pakistan vehemently rejected the abrogation and sought to frame it as an unlawful violation of international law and United Nations Security Council resolutions on Kashmir. Prime Minister Imran Khan dismissed India’s counterterrorism justification as a façade to mask human rights abuses and the suppression of Kashmiri self-determination. He warned in his 2019 UNGA speech that “when the curfew is lifted, there will be a bloodbath,” portraying India’s measures as repression rather than reform. Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi described the abrogation as “demographic engineering under the guise of development” (Afzal, Hameed, and Jabeen, 2022)). Pakistan’s counter-narrative emphasized human rights violations, curfews, and mass detentions, framing India as a perpetrator of state terrorism. However, this framing failed to resonate strongly in global forums, where dominant post-9/11 discourses centered on counterterrorism, sovereignty, and stability (Khalid, 2021). This divergence demonstrates the strategic importance of discourse in shaping the legitimacy of contested state actions. The Modi administration’s careful narrative construction allowed the abrogation to

be reframed from a unilateral constitutional maneuver to a broader project of national security, integration, and modernization. By embedding its justifications within the global security consensus of the post-9/11 era where counterterrorism is treated as an overriding policy priority India was able to align its narrative with prevailing international norms. This alignment narrowed the scope for external criticism and enabled New Delhi to secure tacit acceptance, if not outright endorsement, from major powers such as the United States, Russia, and key Gulf states (Pathak and Mushahary, 2022).

Constructivism provides an effective theoretical framework for understanding this dynamic. It posits that international politics is shaped not solely by material power or institutions but by socially constructed meanings, norms, and identities (Hopf, 1998). In this case, India successfully constructed Pakistan’s identity as a “state sponsor of terrorism,” while simultaneously presenting itself as a responsible state committed to peace, integration, and development. This framing was reinforced by coordinated messaging from multiple state actors: Modi set the political vision, Jaishankar advanced the narrative in global diplomatic circles, Ajit Doval emphasized operational security benefits, and the Indian military lent credibility by highlighting defense imperatives (Gupta et al., 2019; Khaild, 2021). Ultimately, Pakistan’s discourse though grounded in principles of human rights and self-determination failed to generate comparable traction. Its emphasis on repression was overshadowed by India’s securitized framing, which resonated with powerful global stakeholders. This asymmetry illustrates how discourse itself can function as a form of soft power, shaping perceptions, defining legitimacy, and influencing outcomes in international politics. By dominating the narrative, India was able to present the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A as a legitimate and necessary step, while relegating Pakistan’s objections to the margins of global diplomacy.

Historical and Legal context of Article 370 and 35A

Article 370 of the Constitution of India was a temporary, transitional, and special provision, inserted in Part XXI of the Constitution, titled “*Temporary, Transitional and Special Provisions.*” It came into effect on 26 January 1950, and granted the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) a distinctive constitutional position within the Indian Union. The provision stemmed from the *Instrument of Accession* signed by Maharaja Hari Singh in October 1947, during the partition of British India. Under this arrangement, J&K acceded to India on matters of defense, foreign affairs, and communications, while retaining autonomy over all other legislative matters (Noorani, 2011). In practice, Article 370 meant that the Indian Parliament could legislate for J&K only in matters specified in the Instrument of Accession, and for other subjects, it required the concurrence of the J&K government (Dar and Dar, 2023). The state was permitted to have its own constitution adopted in 1957, its own flag, and significant control over residency laws and land rights. Importantly, the provision also gave the President of India the authority to extend central laws to J&K through Presidential Orders, subject to state government approval (Rather, 2020).

Article 35A, introduced in 1954 through the *Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order* issued by the President of India, complemented Article 370 by empowering the J&K legislature to define “permanent residents” of the state and confer upon them special rights and privileges (Bill and Bill, 2015). These included exclusive rights to own property, seek government employment, and access certain social welfare benefits. The objective was to safeguard the demographic composition and socio-economic rights of the local population. Supporters of these provisions argued that they were central to preserving J&K’s unique identity, ensuring political stability, and respecting the conditions of its accession to India (Zutshi, 2014). They maintained that Article 370 embodied the federal spirit of the Indian Constitution and was necessary to address the region’s distinct historical

and cultural context (Noorani, 2011). Critics, however, contended that the provisions encouraged separatism, impeded economic development, and created a legal barrier to full integration with the rest of India (Khalid, 2021). On 5 August 2019, the Government of India, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, announced the abrogation of Article 370 through *Constitutional Order C.O. 272* and superseded the 1954 Presidential Order. Simultaneously, Article 35A was rendered inoperative. The *Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Act, 2019* bifurcated the state into two Union Territories Jammu & Kashmir, and Ladakh bringing them under direct control of the central government (Modi, 2019). The abrogation marked a decisive constitutional shift, transforming J&K’s relationship with the Indian Union from one of asymmetrical federalism to direct central governance. The decision was justified by the Indian government as a means to enhance security, promote development, and integrate the region fully into the Indian polity. Conversely, Pakistan, Kashmiri political parties and several international observers denounced the move as a violation of bilateral agreements and international norms, arguing it undermined the region’s autonomy and rights (Jabeen & Nazir, 2023).

Problem Statement

The revocation of Article 370 redefined the Kashmir dispute, shifting its international framing from an unresolved territorial conflict to a domestic security and development issue in much of the global discourse. While India successfully aligned its messaging with international counterterrorism and modernization narratives, Pakistan’s fragmented and reactive response limited its ability to gain diplomatic traction. This gap highlights the decisive role of narrative construction in shaping international opinion and outcomes in contested sovereignty disputes.

Research Questions

1. How did the Modi administration frame the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A as a security and development imperative in domestic and international arenas?

2. Why did Pakistan's counter-narrative, grounded in international law and human rights, fail to gain comparable international traction?

Research Objectives

1. To analyze how India strategically employed counterterrorism, national security, and development narratives to legitimize the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A at domestic and global levels.
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of Pakistan's counter-discourse in shaping international opinion, and to assess its limitations within the frameworks of Constructivism and Securitization Theory.

Literature Review

Constructivist International Relations (IR) theory emphasizes that political realities are socially constructed through ideas, identities, and discourse rather than material capabilities alone (Hopf, 1998). In South Asia, where competing identities and historical narratives drive conflict, Constructivism provides a powerful lens for analyzing the Kashmir dispute. Basrur highlights how Indian foreign policy, while often projected as pragmatic, remains deeply embedded in socially constructed notions of national unity and security (Basrur, 2017). The legal-historical foundations of Article 370 reveal how identity was institutionalized in India's federal framework. Noorani traces the provision to the Instrument of Accession (1947), which secured Jammu and Kashmir's special status (Noorani, 2011). Basu (2018) underscores how the autonomy granted its own constitution, flag, and residency laws symbolized the distinct Kashmiri identity within the Indian Union (Basu, 2018). Zutshi similarly shows that autonomy provisions shaped a unique political narrative that later became contested. PRS Legislative Research (2019) documents how the J&K Reorganization Act, 2019, dissolved this framework by splitting the state into Union Territories, marking a decisive shift in constitutional and political discourse (Zutshi, 2014).

After the abrogation of Article 370, India reframed the Kashmir issue through a discourse centered on counterterrorism, integration, and development. Modi and his government consistently portrayed Pakistan as a "state sponsor of terrorism," while projecting India as a responsible democracy pursuing peace and equality (Jabeen & Nazir 2023). This framing resonated internationally, especially after 9/11, when counterterrorism narratives became central to global legitimacy (Gupta et al., 2019). Media studies further demonstrate how Indian outlets amplified government narratives of normalcy and integration while sidelining dissenting Kashmiri voices (Siddiqua, Iqbal, and Iqbal, 2024). Analysis by Pandow confirm that communications restrictions themselves became part of narrative contestation, as India sought to justify them as security necessities (Pandow, 2022).

Pakistan countered with a narrative emphasizing self-determination, human rights, and violations of international law. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan framed the abrogation as a breach of UNSC resolutions, stressing that India's move violated international norms. Researchers argued that the abrogation aimed to alter the region's demography by undermining Article 35A and related protections. However, scholars highlight that Pakistan's messaging was fragmented across political, military, and diplomatic actors, which weakened its international appeal (Gupta et al., 2019). Moreover, India's counter-accusations regarding Baluchistan further diluted Islamabad's moral claims, complicating its ability to mobilize broader international support (Rather, 2020).

Think-tank and policy reports track administrative reorganization, domicile rules, and investment outreach alongside continued security incidents (Bill and Bill, 2015). Human-rights organizations document detentions, media pressures, and periodic internet shutdowns through 2020–2022. The **G20 Tourism Working Group** meeting in Srinagar (May, 2023) is read as symbolic **international normalization** of India's post-370 status quo, which Pakistan criticized and sought to delegitimize (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023).

Despite extensive scholarly attention to the abrogation of Article 370, a notable gap persists in the literature. Most analyses have concentrated on the immediate diplomatic fallout of August 2019, including India's internal justification and Pakistan's international response. However, far less attention has been devoted to the long-term implications of narrative dominance in South Asia. In particular, the intersection between domestic narrative control and international image-building remains underexplored. Existing studies tend to overlook how Modi's government strategically employed speeches, symbolic acts, and media management not only to consolidate domestic legitimacy but also to reinforce India's position in global diplomatic circles. From a constructivist perspective, this gap is especially significant. Constructivism emphasizes that state power is shaped not only through material capabilities but also through discourse, identity, and meaning-making. The abrogation of Article 370, therefore, should be understood not merely as a constitutional amendment but as a deliberate act of narrative construction that sought to redefine Kashmir's status, delegitimize Pakistan's claims, and reshape the conflict's trajectory within both domestic and international contexts. Addressing this overlooked dimension is essential to fully grasp the evolving geopolitics of South Asia.

In summary, the literature suggests that the abrogation of Article 370 was not merely a constitutional change but a deliberate strategic act of narrative construction, blending internal security imperatives with a global counterterrorism framework. This dual-level framing domestic securitization and international legitimization played a critical role in limiting Pakistan's diplomatic success and consolidating India's position in the evolving geopolitical order of South Asia.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design within the constructivist paradigm, focusing on the role of discourse in shaping political realities. Using discourse analysis, it examines speeches, parliamentary debates, official statements, and

media reports from both India and Pakistan in the period following the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A on August 5, 2019. The data were purposively selected to include materials directly addressing security, development, and counterterrorism narratives, as well as bilateral diplomatic exchanges between July and December 2019, the peak phase of narrative contestation. Sources included primary documents such as statements by Prime Ministers, Foreign Ministers, and National Security Advisors, alongside coverage from national and international media outlets. Thematic coding was applied to identify dominant frames such as security justification, integration and development, victimhood, and Pakistan's delegitimization. The analysis was conducted manually to ensure contextual sensitivity, with reliability enhanced through cross-checking with existing scholarly literature on constructivism and securitization. This approach allowed the study to uncover how discourse itself functioned as a strategic resource in legitimizing India's constitutional changes and constraining Pakistan's counter-narrative.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Constructivist theory, which emphasizes that international politics is shaped not only by material power but also by ideas, identities, and narratives. From a constructivist perspective, the abrogation of Article 370 can be understood as a contest over meanings, where India and Pakistan sought to frame Kashmir in ways that supported their political objectives. Constructivism highlights that state actions are legitimized through shared understandings and discourses rather than material factors alone. Prime Minister Modi and his administration repeatedly described Article 370 as the "root cause of terrorism and separatism," socially constructing Pakistan's identity as a *state sponsor of terrorism*. Through this discourse, India attempted to normalize its constitutional changes as both a security necessity and a step toward national integration. At the same time, Pakistan constructed a counter-narrative that framed India's actions as *state terrorism* and a denial of Kashmiris' right to self-

determination. By invoking human rights and international law, Islamabad sought to shape global perceptions of itself as a defender of Kashmiri voices and to delegitimize New Delhi's claims. Thus, constructivism provides a framework to analyze how both states employed language, symbols, and narratives to socially construct contrasting realities of Kashmir. The struggle was less about military force and more about controlling the meaning of Article 370 in global discourse, demonstrating how identities and perceptions shape international outcomes.

Framing Pakistan as a State Sponsor of Terrorism

The revocation of Article 370 in August 2019 was discursively framed by the Modi government as a decisive strike against Pakistan's alleged sponsorship of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. From a constructivist perspective, this move was not only a constitutional act but also a deliberate attempt to *socially construct* Pakistan's identity as the "other," linked to extremism and instability, while presenting India as a responsible state. In his August 8, 2019 address to the nation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared that Article 370 had long served as a "shield" for Pakistan to promote separatism and terrorism, and that its removal marked the end of that era (India Today, 2019). This reflects a constructivist strategy of framing Pakistan's role as inherently destabilizing while constructing India's action as necessary for peace and order. At the United Nations General Assembly in September 2019, Modi reinforced this framing by condemning "those who glorify terrorists, give them shelter, and use terrorism as a political weapon," a clear allusion to Pakistan without naming it directly (Times of India, 2019). Here, India's discourse sought to align with global counterterrorism norms, embedding its policy within internationally accepted security narratives. This discursive strategy was echoed by other senior officials. Home Minister Amit Shah, presenting the abrogation bill in Parliament, called Article 370 a "temporary provision" that had fueled separatism, terrorism, and corruption (Shah, 2019). Through a constructivist lens, Shah's statement reinforced the perception that removing

Article 370 was not just a legal reform but a socially necessary step to reframe Kashmir as an integral, stable part of India. National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, in remarks reported by Indian media, argued that Pakistan's Kashmir strategy depended heavily on proxy groups and suggested that the constitutional change would undermine Islamabad's ability to sustain militancy (Indian Express, 2019). This discourse exemplifies how India attempted to reconstruct the security environment by delegitimizing Pakistan's identity as a legitimate stakeholder. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar argued that Article 370 fostered separatism, violence, and terrorism, thereby obstructing Jammu and Kashmir's development. This framing implicitly located responsibility for regional instability in Pakistan's cross-border activities (VSK Bharat, 2019). Constructivism helps explain this rhetoric as India's effort to associate its constitutional move with modernization and progress, while reinforcing Pakistan's image as a source of violence. Then Army Chief General Bipin Rawat also stated, as reported by national outlets, that abrogating Article 370 would weaken Pakistan's ability to leverage local support for militancy (Hilali, 2021). This statement constructed the abrogation as a security achievement, framing Pakistan's influence as delegitimized and diminished in the region. Together, these narratives demonstrate how India systematically employed discourse to construct Pakistan's identity as a state sponsor of terrorism and to normalize its own actions as legitimate within global security frameworks.

Pakistan's Counter-Narrative

Pakistan countered India's framing by portraying the terrorism discourse as a political tool designed to suppress Kashmiri aspirations. From a constructivist perspective, Islamabad sought to reconstruct its own identity as a defender of Kashmiri rights and international law, while delegitimizing India's securitized narrative. Prime Minister Imran Khan, in his UNGA 2019 speech, warned of the risk of a "bloodbath" once restrictions in Kashmir were lifted, insisting that the issue was about the Kashmiri people rather

than terrorism (Reuters, 2019). This reflects a constructivist attempt to shift global attention from India's counterterrorism claims to a humanitarian and self-determination discourse, thereby constructing Pakistan as the voice of oppressed Kashmiris. Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, in an official briefing, rejected India's claims as "baseless propaganda" and accused New Delhi of committing "state terrorism" in the valley (Qureshi, 2019). His rhetoric exemplifies how Pakistan sought to socially construct India's identity as the aggressor and violator of international norms, while reinforcing its own legitimacy as a defender of justice and legality. Pakistan's military spokesperson, DG ISPR Major General Asif Ghafoor, similarly asserted in press interactions, reported by *Dawn*, that India's accusations were fabrications designed to justify its actions in Kashmir (Ghafoor, 2019). Through the constructivist lens, such statements highlight Pakistan's effort to undermine India's discursive power and to frame the abrogation as illegitimate occupation rather than a security reform.

Thus, the discourse around terrorism became a contested battlefield. India projected Pakistan as the architect of militancy and used the abrogation of Article 370 as proof of its resolve, while Pakistan countered that the terrorism frame was primarily rhetorical, designed to delegitimize Kashmiri self-determination. Constructivism helps explain this clash as a struggle over meanings, where both states attempted to construct contrasting identities one as the security guarantor, the other as the human rights defender.

India's Justification: Security as a Central Narrative

Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** consistently framed the abrogation of Article 370 and 35A as a security necessity, declaring in his national address on August 8, 2019, that "Article 370 and 35A did not give anything except separatism, corruption, terrorism and family rule. Pakistan used Article 370 as a tool to spread terrorism; over 42,000 people died" (India Today, 2019). Through a constructivist lens, Modi's framing socially constructed Article 370 as a symbol of insecurity and positioned its removal

as a necessary step toward peace and stability. Home Minister **Amit Shah**, while piloting the bill in Parliament, described Article 370 as "feeding terrorism, separatism, nepotism and corruption", presenting its abrogation as the beginning of a "new dawn" for Kashmir (Shah A. , 2019). This discourse constructed the abrogation not merely as a legal reform but as a transformative act designed to reframe Kashmir within the broader narrative of integration and security. National Security Advisor **Ajit Doval** reinforced this framing by asserting that "terrorism is the only instrument Pakistan has to create unrest in Kashmir", emphasizing that the special status had enabled terror proxies and that its revocation allowed security forces to dismantle militant networks more effectively (Indian Express, 2019). Constructivism explains this as India's effort to redefine the security environment by stripping legitimacy from Pakistan's role. External Affairs Minister **S. Jaishankar**, in international forums including Washington and Brussels, reiterated that "terrorism and development cannot coexist", directly linking Pakistan's role in sustaining instability with the need for constitutional change. Here, discourse operated as a soft power tool, embedding India's domestic decision within global counterterrorism norms. Supporting the civilian leadership, then Army Chief **General Bipin Rawat** argued that the revocation "denied Pakistan its local support base for terrorism in Kashmir" (Khattak, 2024). His statement reflected the construction of the abrogation as a decisive security victory, legitimizing the move as essential to dismantling Pakistan's influence in the region.

Pakistan's Rebuttal: Reframing the Security Narrative

In sharp contrast, Pakistan rejected India's security justification. Prime Minister **Imran Khan** warned at the UNGA that "when the curfew is lifted, there will be a bloodbath. This is not about terrorism; it is about the people of Kashmir" (Afzal, Hameed, and Jabeen, 2022). Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi dismissed India's claims as "baseless propaganda," asserting that New Delhi's narrative was intended to conceal unlawful actions (Qureshi, 2019). This discourse exemplifies

Pakistan's effort to deconstruct India's claim to legitimacy and reconstruct the debate around international law and self-determination. DG ISPR Major General Asif Ghafoor similarly condemned India's arguments as "fabrications designed to justify illegal occupation." Constructivism helps explain this rhetoric as part of Pakistan's attempt to socially construct India's identity as an oppressor while presenting itself as a principled advocate for the Kashmiri people. Thus, where India discursively projected the constitutional move as a counterterrorism imperative, Pakistan reframed it as a cover for repression and demographic engineering. The contest highlights the constructivist idea that legitimacy in international politics is not inherent but constructed through competing narratives.

India's Narrative: Diplomacy and Isolation of Pakistan

After the abrogation of Article 370 on August 5, 2019, India immediately launched a vigorous diplomatic campaign to portray the move as an internal constitutional reform while isolating Pakistan internationally. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his UN General Assembly speech in September 2019, indirectly targeted Islamabad by condemning "Terrorism and extremism have no religion or nationality; the world must fight it together." (Times of India, 2019). From a constructivist standpoint, Modi's language socially constructed Pakistan's identity as a global threat while positioning India within the dominant post-9/11 counterterrorism discourse. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, during his visits to Washington, Moscow, and Paris, firmly declared that "the constitutional changes in Jammu and Kashmir are an internal matter of India and fully consistent with our Constitution and security needs". Similarly, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, in meetings with foreign diplomats in New Delhi, emphasized that "normalcy is returning" and that the revocation would "boost governance, peace and development" (Indian Express, 2019). These narratives normalized the abrogation as a stabilizing measure consistent with sovereignty and development. Meanwhile, then Army Chief General Bipin Rawat argued that the change

"removed Pakistan's ability to create local disturbances and use separatism as a cover for terrorism". From a constructivist perspective, this discourse reinforced Pakistan's image as an aggressor while legitimizing India's security rationale. India also showcased diplomatic confidence by hosting the G20 Tourism Working Group Meeting in Srinagar in May 2023, framing it as proof of peace and development in Kashmir, despite Pakistan's objections.

Pakistan's Counter-Diplomacy: Contesting Isolation

On the other hand, Pakistan attempted an aggressive counter-diplomacy. Prime Minister Imran Khan warned world leaders that "this is not about terrorism, this is about the people of Kashmir being denied their right to self-determination", while appealing directly to Turkey, Malaysia, and China for support (Business Recorder, 2019). From a constructivist view, this positioned Pakistan as a defender of oppressed voices against India's security narrative. Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi sought backing in European capitals and declared at the UN that "Kashmir is not a bilateral issue; it is an international matter under UN resolutions" (Qureshi, 2019). This discourse illustrates Pakistan's effort to construct Kashmir as a global dispute requiring collective action, thereby challenging India's framing of the issue as an internal matter. Pakistan's efforts, however, failed to persuade most Western powers. The United States, the UK, and the EU largely echoed India's framing that Kashmir was a bilateral issue, marking a diplomatic win for New Delhi. Even China's attempt to convene a closed-door UNSC meeting in August 2019, at Pakistan's request, ended without a resolution, showing limited global traction for Islamabad's narrative. From a constructivist perspective, India's success lay in aligning its discourse with dominant international norms of sovereignty and counterterrorism, while Pakistan's human rights-based framing lacked comparable resonance. Thus, India effectively constructed legitimacy for the abrogation, while Pakistan's campaign, though vocal, reinforced its diplomatic isolation.

International community's reaction

The international community's response to India's abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019 was shaped less by human rights concerns and more by geopolitical calculations and strategic partnerships. The United States adopted a cautious but ultimately India-aligned stance. State Department spokesperson Morgan Ortogus noted: "We note that the Indian government has described these actions as strictly an internal matter. We call on all parties to maintain peace and stability along the Line of Control" (Business Today, 2019). Although President Donald Trump initially offered mediation during his July 2019 meeting with Prime Minister Imran Khan, India's outright rejection of third-party involvement ensured that Washington reframed the issue within its broader Indo-Pacific strategy, prioritizing its strategic partnership with New Delhi over Islamabad's narrative. From a constructivist lens, this demonstrated how U.S. discourse aligned with India's framing of sovereignty and stability rather than Pakistan's rights-based appeals. Russia strongly endorsed India's position, affirming New Delhi's constitutional sovereignty. The Russian Foreign Ministry declared: "We proceed from the fact that the changes associated with the change in the status of the state of Jammu and Kashmir are carried out within the framework of the Constitution of the Republic of India" (Voice of America, 2023). Moscow reiterated that Kashmir was strictly a bilateral matter under the Simla Agreement, thereby rejecting Pakistan's calls for internationalization. In contrast, China openly opposed the move, particularly the bifurcation of Ladakh into a Union Territory. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying asserted: "China opposes India's inclusion of Chinese territory in the western sector of the China India boundary into its administrative jurisdiction" (Chunying's, 2019). Beijing backed Pakistan's request for a UN Security Council meeting on August 16, 2019 the first such discussion on Kashmir in nearly five decades though the session concluded without a resolution, highlighting the limited global consensus. Among Gulf states, responses were shaped by economic pragmatism. The United

Arab Emirates (UAE) openly supported India's decision, with its Ambassador to New Delhi, Dr. Ahmed Al Banna, stating: "The reorganization of states is an internal matter as stipulated by the Indian Constitution" (Gulf News, 2019). Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia expressed only "concern," avoiding outright criticism of New Delhi to preserve its growing economic ties.

The European Union took a balanced approach. The European External Action Service (EEAS) issued a statement calling for "restraint and bilateral dialogue", but avoided sanctions or formal condemnation, reflecting its interest in expanding trade with India (European Commission, 2023). In May 2023, India hosted the G20 Tourism Working Group meeting in Srinagar, aiming to showcase stability in the region after the revocation of Article 370 in 2019. The event faced significant opposition, with China, Saudi Arabia, Mexico (Mexico sent a low-level delegation, signaling limited participation in the Srinagar G20 Tourism Working Group meeting (Tribune, IBTimes, Gulf News, etc), Turkiye, and Egypt either boycotting or sending low-level delegations, signaling their disapproval of India holding the meeting in a disputed territory. Pakistan strongly condemned the gathering, with Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari labeling it illegal and violating UN resolutions, while AJK leaders and civil society groups organized protests and submitted memorandums to international bodies. Activists also highlighted the selective participation of certain countries as a challenge to India's claims, emphasizing that the meeting could not legitimize India's administrative control over the contested region (Mohmand, 2023). Thus, while China and Pakistan remained vocal critics, the dominant international response reflected *realpolitik*: major powers and regional actors prioritized strategic and economic ties with India over Islamabad's counter-narrative, allowing New Delhi's framing of Article 370 as an "internal and sovereign matter" to gain greater legitimacy in global forums. India effectively constructed the abrogation as an "internal and sovereign matter" embedded in global norms of sovereignty and counterterrorism, whereas Pakistan's human

rights centered discourse struggled to achieve comparable legitimacy in international forums.

Development and National Integration Narrative

India's Narrative: Development and National Integration

A central strand of India's discourse following the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A was the promise of development and national integration. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his Independence Day address of August 15, 2019, declared that the aspirations of the people of Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh "will now be the same as those of every other Indian," emphasizing equal rights, equal opportunities, and equal responsibilities for the region's residents. This framing projected the revocation of special status not as a constitutional imposition but as a unifying step aimed at modernization and socio-economic progress. National Security Advisor Ajit Doval reinforced this narrative during his visits to Srinagar, highlighting infrastructure projects, education reforms, and healthcare initiatives as tangible dividends of integration. Similarly, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, in diplomatic forums, argued that political integration would open the door to foreign investment and sustainable economic growth. By linking development with security, Indian officials suggested that prosperity would erode the roots of separatism, as improved livelihoods and expanded opportunities would disincentivise militancy.

From a constructivist perspective, India's discourse sought to socially construct Kashmir as an integral part of the Indian nation, framing integration as modernization and progress. By embedding the abrogation within global norms of development and stability, New Delhi projected itself as a reformist and progressive state.

Pakistan's Counter-Narrative: Rejecting Development Claims

Pakistan, however, countered this narrative sharply. Prime Minister Imran Khan argued that "development without freedom is meaningless," rejecting India's promises as a façade for demographic and political engineering. Foreign

Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi further criticized India's claims, asserting that "you cannot pave over the graveyards of Kashmiris with new roads and call it progress" (Qureshi, 2019). Pakistan's military spokesperson DG ISPR also described India's development agenda as "propaganda for the international audience," implemented under the shadow of heavy militarization and restrictions on Kashmiri freedoms. Pakistan attempted to reconstruct its image as a defender of Kashmiri rights while portraying India's narrative as coercive and inconsistent with human rights norms. Although some states and business actors found India's framing credible, Pakistan's discourse highlighted the contradiction between promises of prosperity and the reality of political repression.

International observers also noted contradictions in India's development framing. While New Delhi emphasized investment summits and tourism projects, reports from Amnesty International (2019) and Human Rights Watch (2019) highlighted restrictions on communication, movement, and political expression, which undermined the very freedoms necessary for genuine economic progress. Nonetheless, several states and business circles viewed India's narrative as credible, seeing the abrogation as a step toward political stability that could facilitate economic opportunity (Yatra, 2023). Thus, the "development and national integration" frame was strategically deployed to recast the abrogation of Article 370 as a forward-looking measure of modernization, effectively complementing India's counterterrorism discourse. By embedding its policy within global norms of economic growth and stability, India presented itself as a reformist and progressive state, while sidelining Pakistan's counter-claims as obstructionist and outdated.

Mutual Accusations: Kashmir vs. Baluchistan

Alongside the terrorism and development frames, India systematically invoked Pakistan's own human rights record in Baluchistan as a counter-narrative to Islamabad's allegations in Kashmir. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his Independence Day speech on August 15, 2016, declared: "The people of Baluchistan, Gilgit, and

Pakistan-occupied Kashmir have thanked me for speaking up for their rights”. Analysts observed that this was a calculated signal that India was willing to internationalize Baluchistan if Pakistan continued to raise Kashmir in global forums. Following the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019, Indian officials and political leaders increasingly highlighted enforced disappearances, targeted killings, and suppression of dissent in Baluchistan as evidence of Pakistan’s lack of moral credibility. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, during his engagements with Western diplomats, argued that: “Pakistan’s lectures on human rights ring hollow when you look at Baluchistan, where activists disappear and journalists are silenced” (VSK Bharat, 2019). National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, speaking at a security seminar in late 2019, reiterated that “Pakistan has no credibility on human rights issues given its track record in Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa” ((Siddiqua, Iqbal, and Iqbal, 2024). The Indian Army’s official briefings occasionally referenced Baluchistan as a rhetorical counter to Pakistan’s Kashmir stance, portraying Islamabad as guilty of the very abuses it accused India of. Pakistan consistently rejected these arguments as diversionary tactics. Prime Minister Imran Khan dismissed Modi’s Baluchistan reference as an attempt “to divert global attention from India’s illegal occupation of Kashmir” (Al Jazeera, 2019). Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi emphasized that “Baluchistan is an internal matter of Pakistan and cannot be equated with India’s international obligations in Jammu and Kashmir under UN resolutions” (Qureshi, 2019). DG ISPR Major General Asif Ghafoor also accused India of “funding terrorism in Baluchistan through RAW”, insisting that the unrest was externally driven rather than organic. This reciprocal framing reinforced the tit-for-tat nature of the India Pakistan narrative war. While Islamabad sought to depict New Delhi as a violator of Kashmiri rights, New Delhi attempted to erode Islamabad’s credibility by projecting Baluchistan as Pakistan’s unresolved human rights crisis. In both cases, the rhetoric of human rights functioned less as genuine accountability and more as a strategic tool of discourse warfare

(Ghafoor, 2019). From a constructivist perspective, this tit-for-tat rhetoric illustrates how both states attempted to socially construct each other’s identities as violators of human rights. For India, Baluchistan served as a discursive tool to erode Pakistan’s credibility on Kashmir, while Pakistan sought to reinforce its identity as the defender of Kashmiri self-determination by rejecting Indian counter-claims. In both cases, the language of human rights functioned less as an appeal to accountability and more as a strategic instrument of discourse warfare, shaping global perceptions of legitimacy.

Pakistan’s Diplomatic Setback on Article 370 and 35A

The abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A exposed the limits of Pakistan’s diplomatic influence in reshaping global opinion on Kashmir. Despite an immediate and sustained campaign, Islamabad was unable to translate its legal and moral arguments into actionable international pressure on New Delhi. This setback can be attributed to a combination of strategic, structural, and contextual factors. Firstly, Pakistan’s narrative lacked the strategic cohesion that characterized India’s communication. While India projected a unified message across political, diplomatic, and military channels, Pakistan’s approach was fragmented. Prime Minister Imran Khan focused on human rights violations and the threat of war, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi appealed for multilateral intervention and the DG ISPR emphasized security risks a multiplicity of themes that diluted the central message. This multiplicity of themes diluted the clarity and impact of Pakistan’s counter-narrative. Secondly, Pakistan failed to mobilize sustained support from influential powers. While Turkey, Malaysia, and the OIC voiced rhetorical backing (OIC, 2019), key actors such as the United States, Russia, France, and most Gulf states maintained a neutral or India leaning posture citing Kashmir as a bilateral issue. Notably, Russia publicly affirmed that the revocation occurred “within the framework of the Constitution” and insisted that Kashmir should be resolved bilaterally, rooted in the Shimla Agreement. Meanwhile, China’s

response centered on concerns over Ladakh, denouncing India's inclusion of territory beyond its internationally recognized boundaries, but stopping short of condemning the abrogation itself. Thirdly, India's counter offensive exploited Pakistan's own vulnerabilities, particularly in Baluchistan. By drawing parallels between alleged human rights abuses in Baluchistan and Pakistan's accusations over Kashmir, New Delhi undermined Islamabad's moral standing. This tit-for-tat framing weakened Pakistan's credibility in the eyes of neutral observers. Finally, geopolitical realities worked against Pakistan. India's growing economic clout, defense partnerships, and role in the Indo-Pacific security architecture made major powers reluctant to confront it on Kashmir. Pakistan's international image shaped in part by its association with regional instability and terrorism allegations further limited the resonance of its claims. In effect, Pakistan's inability to counter India's securitization of Articles 370 and 35A not only diminished its diplomatic leverage on Kashmir but also risked normalizing the abrogation in the international arena. The episode highlights the importance of message discipline, alliance-building, and the anticipation of counter-narratives in diplomatic contests over disputed territories. The episode illustrates how India's discourse successfully shaped international perceptions of sovereignty, security, and legitimacy, while Pakistan's fragmented narrative struggled to construct a coherent identity as the defender of Kashmiri rights. In effect, Pakistan's inability to counter India's securitization of Articles 370 and 35A not only diminished its diplomatic leverage but also risked normalizing the abrogation in the international arena. The case highlights the importance of discursive consistency, alliance-building, and anticipation of counter-narratives in diplomatic contests over disputed territories.

Key Findings

- India strategically aligned its discourse with global counterterrorism narratives, enhancing its legitimacy.
- Prime Minister Modi and other leaders consistently framed Pakistan as a state sponsor of terrorism.
- The abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A was justified as essential for peace, security, and national integration.
- India's narrative resonated internationally because it echoed prevailing global norms of sovereignty, security, and development.
- Pakistan, in contrast, framed the move as repression and a denial of Kashmiri self-determination.
- Islamabad's human rights-centered discourse, however, failed to achieve comparable global traction.
- Discursive dominance shaped how international actors interpreted the abrogation, privileging India's framing.
- Ultimately, India's coordinated discursive strategy consolidated its legitimacy, while Pakistan's fragmented framing struggled to mobilize sustained support.

Discussion

India's revocation of Articles 370 and 35A in August 2019 was strategically framed as both a security necessity and a pathway to national integration. Indian leaders consistently linked Kashmir's unrest to cross-border terrorism, presenting the abrogation as a decisive step to dismantle Pakistan's alleged proxy networks and to stabilize the region. This securitization was complemented by a parallel development narrative that emphasized integration, equal rights, and modernization. By projecting infrastructure development, education reforms, and new economic opportunities as outcomes of the constitutional change, India sought to legitimize the move as progressive and forward-looking. To deflect Pakistan's human rights accusations, Indian officials simultaneously advanced a counter-narrative by highlighting Pakistan's own record in Baluchistan. This rhetorical strategy functioned as a discursive mirror, eroding

Islamabad's credibility and reframing the debate in terms of Pakistan's domestic shortcomings. Such tit-for-tat discourse demonstrates how identity construction and counter-construction operated at the core of the Kashmir issue. Pakistan, for its part, rejected India's framing, portraying the abrogation as an act of repression, demographic engineering, and state-sponsored violence. Islamabad attempted to reconstruct its identity as the defender of Kashmiri self-determination, warning of dire humanitarian consequences and emphasizing international legal obligations. However, its fragmented messaging split across human rights, security, and appeals to multilateralism diluted its effectiveness. At the international level, India's narrative proved more persuasive. By aligning its discourse with dominant global norms of sovereignty, counterterrorism, and development, New Delhi secured tacit or explicit support from major powers. In contrast, Pakistan's human rights centered discourse gained limited traction, finding support mainly from a small group of allies. Events such as the G20 Tourism Meeting in Srinagar further consolidated India's constructed image of normalcy and integration, reinforcing its legitimacy while isolating Pakistan diplomatically. Overall, the competing narratives underscore how discourse, identity, and framing shaped international interpretations of the abrogation. India's coherent and norm-aligned strategy strengthened its legitimacy, whereas Pakistan's fragmented discourse struggled to mobilize sustained international backing.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates how discourse and framing decisively shaped international perceptions of the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A. India advanced a coherent strategy that fused security and development, portraying the move as both a counterterrorism necessity and a step toward modernization and integration. By embedding its narrative within global norms of sovereignty, stability, and progress, New Delhi strengthened its legitimacy and narrowed Pakistan's diplomatic space. In contrast, Pakistan framed the decision as repression and a denial of

self-determination, but its fragmented messaging and limited external support weakened its position. India's counter-framing, particularly its invocation of Baluchistan, further eroded Pakistan's credibility and shifted attention away from Kashmir. The largely cautious yet India-aligned response of major powers highlighted how narrative dominance, rather than moral or legal arguments, shaped international outcomes. From a constructivist lens, this research underscores the significance of identity construction and discursive power in international relations. India effectively positioned itself as a reformist and security-conscious state, while Pakistan's counter-narrative failed to mobilize comparable legitimacy. The analysis confirms that in global politics, the struggle over narratives can be as consequential as material power in shaping responses to contested sovereignty.

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