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## **Governance Challenges and Public Response in Azad Jammu & Kashmir: An Analytical Study of Charter of Demands of Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research examines the main governance challenges in Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJ&K) and the subsequent emergence of the Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) as a pivotal voice for socio-economic reforms. Centered on three fundamental research questions, the study explores the specific nature of governance challenges ranging from limited autonomy to perks and privileges of ruling elite. By analyzing the charter of demands of JAAC the paper highlights a significant shift in public discourse from passive grievance to organized civic resistance. The findings reveal that persistent administrative inertia and widening trust deficit have culminated this movement. Furthermore, the research argues that ignoring such peaceful and grassroots poses a strategic risk and the total erosion of the social contract between the state and its public. The article concludes by emphasizing the urgent need for structural reforms and inclusive policy making as the only sustainable path toward effective governance in AJ&K.

**Key words:** Governance Challenges, Public Response, Charter of Demands, Joint Awami Action Committee

### **Introduction**

The government of Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJ&K) commonly known as Pakistan administered Kashmir established on 24 October 1947. Administratively the region of AJ&K is comprised of three divisions and ten districts. AJ&K regarded as a semi-autonomous region having a limited autonomy with its own elected Prime minister, President, and legislative assembly of Azad Jammu & Kashmir. The governance challenges in AJ&K emerged immediately when the AJ&K government signed the Karachi Agreement (28<sup>th</sup> April 1949) with government of Pakistan and later with the creation of AJ&K council (1974) that subsequently resulted in the limited and paralyzed autonomy. Furthermore, endemic corruption and privileges which are relished by the ruling elite of AJ&K exacerbated these governance challenges. Subsequently, a major portion of the budget is consumed by either corruption or perks, leaving the basic needs of the common man unfulfilled. This chronic neglect has fueled growing public resentment against the government. These governance challenges on one side weakened the financial system of AJ&K while on other side the ruling elite have neglected the genuine concerns of public.

Public outrage reached a boiling point when the government's decision to hike the rates of wheat flour and electricity, sparking protests across various districts of AJ&K in 2022-23. As a result, Public Action Committees were initially formed in various districts of AJ&K that eventually led to the foundation of the JAAC in 2023. The JAAC transformed public grievances into a public movement and challenged the traditional political status quo. It led protests, sit-ins, wheel jams, shutter downs and long marches toward capital (Muzaffarabad). Initially, JAAC charter of demand was limited, but later it expanded to 38 points. This charter serves as a reflection of the public aspirations while simultaneously demanding structural reforms from the government. The primary objective of this study is to examine the governance challenges in AJ &K, and to analyze how these



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structural issues shape socio-economic grievances that fuel public mobilization under the JAAC. This study further explores the transition from individual grievances to collective action, highlighting how systemic governance's failures fueled the massive public movement (Tehreek) witnessed under the banner of JAAC. This research evaluates these demands not merely as a protest manifesto, but as a critical call for structural reforms. This study integrated both qualitative and quantitative data using a mixed method research methodology. The qualitative data is based on interviews that provide depth into the lived experiences of the JAAC leaders while the quantitative survey data offers a statistical breadth of public sentiment. Importantly, a correlation analysis of the findings is concluded in the study which established a scientific connection between the governance failures of AJ&K and the resentment of public reaction.

### **Foundational Causes of Governance Crises in AJ&K**

The governance challenges in Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJ&K) are deeply tied to its administrative evolution since 24 October 1947, when the region was declared autonomous. However, the Karachi Agreement of 28 April 1949 became a turning point that institutionalized structural limitations. It was the first agreement that shaped the administrative structure of AJ&K and determines the role & responsibilities of the government of Pakistan particularly related to defense, currency and foreign affairs of AJ&K<sup>i</sup>. The agreement provided limited autonomy to AJ&K in internal matters and introduced a scrappy nature of political structure. It shaped the nominal governance structure for AJ&K where AJ&K government has only authority to administer the routine matters without real political control. In resultant AJ&K's surrender its control over its own resources such as hydroelectric power generation and forest that limits its fiscal independence and capacity to invest in development. This symbolic autonomy restricts the AJ&K, s ability to make autonomous policy decisions creating interruptions and dependence on federal allocation.

In 1974, the interim constitution was introduced under the 1974 constitution of Pakistan, under which the Azad Jammu & Kashmir council commonly known as Kashmir Council was established, and the services of lent officers (Chief Sectary, Inspector General Police, Sectary Finance Accountant General and Sectary Health) were borrowed from Pakistan. The Kashmir council was intended to act as a bridge between AJ&K and the government of Pakistan. However, the reality turned out to be quite the opposite. The Kashmir council functioned as a parallel government and had significant administrative and financial powers limiting the autonomy of AJ&K government prior to the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment incorporated in interim constitution of 1974 of AJ&K in 2018. Most of the subjects related to public at large were assigned to Kashmir council. Kashmir council also had more legislative powers and executive authority. The Kashmir council had an unanswerable before AJ&K legislative assembly or parliament of Pakistan. Infect this structural imbalance and lack of authority paralyzed the administrative setup of AJ&K and made the government of AJ&K powerless.<sup>ii</sup>

While the lent officers intend to provide administrative expertise and bridge gaps between Islamabad and Muzafarabad<sup>iii</sup>. Contrary to these lent officers occupy the highest administrative ranks and hold the pen on major budgets and receive superior executive allowances. Being outsiders from AJ&K they often do not fully grasp the local context and norms and due to temporary place holding they cannot fully focus on issues facing the people of AJ&K. Even Ex PM of AJ&K Tanver Ilyas<sup>iv</sup> admitted while addressing on farewell function hosted in the State metropolis on Friday for the outgoing Chief Secretary [Shakeel](#) Qadir Khan. "It is difficult for lent officers to win hearts and minds of people"<sup>v</sup> On the other hand, the absence of effective coordination between federal officials sent from Pakistan and local bureaucracy further obscures governance. Their performance cannot be monitored by AJ&K government, even if there are allegations of corruption on them, then the government of AJ&K cannot investigate them. These officials are although accountable to federation rather than the AJ&K government. It is quite impossible to hold them accountable, as these officers can be recalled to Islamabad before investigations are completed. Citizens perceive governance as ineffective when officers have remained unaccountable.

Despite these facts there are common institutional weaknesses and lack of departmental autonomy in almost all departments of AJ&K which are providing fertile ground for corruption. Even



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appointments and transfer of government officials based on political grounds rather than merit. The culture of malpractices is common in AJ&K political setup which reflects how political favoritism and nepotism penetrated state institutions. The decisions are often influenced by political interests rather than public welfare. When political actors override the merit-based decision and undermine transparency then governance challenges intensifying. The AJ&K PM Anwar-ul-Haq on the completion of his collation government's second year alleged that mafias including corrupt politicians, bureaucrats, and segments of the media had looted Rs600 to 1000 billion from the region<sup>vi</sup>. Corruption and misuse of funds is difficult to prevent in AJ&K.<sup>vii</sup>

The corrupt practices have garnered disappointment, disillusionment and deep mistrust among the public<sup>viii</sup>. Furthermore, financial conditions and curbs which are being faced by AJ&K government since its inception worsen the problem. A significant portion of the budget utilizes corruption while remaining consumed by salaries, pensions, and administrative expenses, leaving little room for development projects. Due to limited financial autonomy of AJ&K remains dependent on federal allocations, which restricts its ability to prioritize local needs and long-term reforms. This interdependency not only reduces institutional capacity but also intensifies public frustration over the shortage of meaningful development initiatives.

A significant governance challenge in AJ&K lies in the lack of policy continuity, where projects initiated under one government are often cancelled or abandoned when administrations changes. From 2009 to 2026, AJ&K experienced six prime ministerial governments, reflecting the region's recurring political instability and governance challenges. This inconsistency sabotages long-term development planning and undermines public trust.<sup>ix</sup>

On other side the poor infrastructure of AJ&K like hospitals, schools and roads presents a dismal image of neglect. Along with these the grievances of electricity load shedding, rising wheat flour prices, poor cellular services, high inflation, and unemployment have compounded AJ&K's long-standing governance challenges and directly reduce citizens' trust in institutions.<sup>x</sup>

Citizens of AJ&K frequently express such concerns and demonstrations, yet their voices are not adequately heard or addressed properly, and ordinary people face significant barriers in accessing forums for redress. The absence of effective complaint resolution mechanisms further alienates the public, reinforcing perceptions of a governance system detached from grassroots needs.

This widens the gap of mistrust between citizen of AJ&K and State. Along with these concerns of citizens, the major concerns of public are the perks and privileges of ruling elite of AJ&K such as subsidized housing, foreign trips and lifetime pension consume maximum public funds. These structures distortion not only weaken government but also drain resources and create resentment among ordinary citizens of AJ&K.<sup>xi</sup>

### **The Genesis and Evolution of JAAC**

When governance model of AJ&K could not provide relief to its citizens and government increased the prices of wheat flour and electricity. This led to growing frustration among people of AJ&K resulting the protest demonstration begin from Rawalakot district of Azad Jammu & Kashmir in 2022 followed by widespread protests spreading to other districts of AJ&K under the banner of Local Awami Action Committees. Initially these protests lacked formalized agenda.

Later in 16, 17 September 2023 the local Awami Action Committees of all the districts of AJ&K assembled in Muzaffarabad which transformed scattered discontent into an organized platform for collective action. Among 300 people, one hundred and two people delivered fiery speech against the government of AJ&K and the consultation lasted several hours. As a result of which a civil society-based group Jammu Kashmir Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) was formally constituted, from which it was officially announced to run a protest movement in an organized manner and presented a 10-point charter focusing on electricity bills, wheat flour subsidies and the curbing of elite privileges. This apolitical organization comprised on members of trade unions, civil society, student groups, lawyers, transporters, labor leaders, women, ordinary citizens and political activists across all AJ&K. Although these core members claim that they are apolitical but majority of them are associated with ideological organization and have experience of protest against the government.<sup>xii</sup>



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### Composition of JAAC

JAAC is composed of 30 members, in which each district is given equal representation. Every section of society is involved in JAAC shows a public vote of no-confidence against the governance issues of AJ&K. The JAAC mobilized the people of AJ&K under the slogan of “Awaz Du Hm Ek Hy” (We are one – آواز دو ہم ایک ہیں) highlighting the governance issues which have been facing the people of AJ&K since 1947. This movement gained momentum in May 2024 when JKJACC announced mass demonstrations and long march towards Muzafarabad. This long march compelled the government of AJ&K to announce concessions while the demands expanded to 16 points to include education, healthcare and infrastructure. By 2025, however, a fresh wave of protest emerged as the government failed to fully implement the promised reforms and the JKAAC charter evolved into a compressive 38 point named charter of demand.<sup>xiii</sup>

### The comprehensive charter of demands formulated by the JAAC.

Sr No	Charter of Demand
1	Abolition of perks and privileges (free petrol quotas, withdraw additional and luxury vehicles, end protocol culture, terminate free electricity and gas facilities and ban unnecessary foreign trips funded by the state) of ruling elite of AJ&K
2	End the exploitation by mobile companies and ensure 4G internet availability and improved speeds across all of AJ&K.
3	Abolish refugee's seats in Pakistan
4	Construction of Azad Patan Road to Sudhnoti road
5	Free and equal education for all and lift the ban on student unions in all educational institutions.
6	Construction of Airport
7	Prevention of Timber smuggling and ease restrictions on timber cutting for local domestic use.
8	Abolish quota system
9	Water supply for irrigation and agriculture
10	Implementation of electricity and wheat related matters
11	Withdrawal of all cases registered by AJ&K Police against JAAC
12	Establishment of Kashmir Expressway
13	Removal of external forces and black laws
14	Elimination of unemployment/provide unemployment allowance
15	Fixation of disabled quota and implement the reserved quotas for women.
16	End Adhocism and establish transparent mechanism for the regularization of ad-hoc and contract employees of AJ&K
17	Tax exemptions
18	Eradication of bribery, corruption, and nepotism in government departments and strictly enforce meritocracy in government jobs.
19	Review projects that cause environmental pollution and garbage management improvements in all districts
20	Grand the AJ&K bank to status of a scheduled bank
21	Construction of tunnel from Lohar Gali to Muzaffarabad
22	Construction of tunnel in Jhelum valley and Leepa valley
23	Construction of Shounder tunnel
24	Construction of Baydi Hawali tunnel
25	Implementation of High court decision issued in 2019
26	Construction of Rehman Bridge Kotli
27	Provision of interest free loans for youth of AJ&K
28	Reforms in judiciary
29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Devolution of powers to local representatives/ Local Govt Act conformity.</li> </ul>



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transfer full financial and administrative powers to local government institutions.</li> <li>• Make AJ&amp;K public service commission fully autonomous and free from political interference.</li> <li>• Empower the Ehtesab Bureau to decide major corruption cases.</li> </ul>
30	Provide protection to traders and financial support
31	Abolish 5KW condition/tariff revision
32	Transport policy review(1300cc)
33	Public disclosure of all state contracts and federal agreements
34	Access to information for citizens under Right to Know provisions
35	Expansion of education and healthcare opportunities for youth
36	Equitable fiscal distribution between Islamabad and Muzaffarabad
37	Support for local public action committees charter of demands and government employees demands.
38	Support for families of martyrs

The JAAC, s charter of demands, is a true reflection of the public, s collective desire for the systematic change in AJ&K.

### Literature Review

Under the auspices of the JAAC grassroots demonstrations in AJ&K progressively came together into a more structured framework after the COVID-19 epidemic. The movement, which was formally started in August 2022, intensified in May 2023 with protests, wheel jam strikes, sit-ins, and shutter closures. By September 2023, it had spread throughout all districts of AJ&K. It was comprised on thirty members of JAAC and districts have equal representation. The movement's core focused on regaining control over hydroelectric resources. Furthermore, JAAC demanded the guaranteeing access to energy at production cost, reduction of unfair taxes, reinstating wheat subsidies, and abolishing elite privileges were the movement's main objectives. These demands reflected public aspirations and broader vision of sovereignty and resource ownership<sup>xiv</sup>.

Alvi, A. B. criticized the role of JAAC that JAAC remains silent on everyday economic exploitation faced by the people of AJ&K and they purchase daily commodities on high prices beyond government prices. He also tried to link JAAC members with those forces who want to destabilize the AJ&K region<sup>xv</sup>. While JAAC and its members strongly rejected these types of allegations and have a stance that JAAC movement is against all types of exploitation.

An examination of the JAAC's charter of demands it seems that, apart from the call for abolishing twelve refugees' legislative seats, most of its demands are rooted in basic rights. Initially JAAC, demands were limited. Later, the JAAC expanded its charter to include the elimination of elite privileges, highlighting the entrenched class divide between ruling elites and ordinary citizens. These demands reflect that public struggle for social justice, as they challenge systemic inequalities, corruption and rigid governance system<sup>xvi</sup>.

Scholar widely highlighted the multidimensional Pakistan and Azad Jammu & Kashmir government challenges and argued that these challenges are outcome of decades long policy weaknesses, poor governance, political discontinuity and a gradual deviation from national priorities. Studies emphasize that the AJ&K economy mainly reliance on federal resources. Despite these facts that AJ&K region is rich in natural resources, tourism, hydro power, minerals, and limited autonomy causes the uncertainty in AJ&K<sup>xvii</sup>.

He mentioned that economic challenges stand out as a major spark and state inability to address these issues timely and properly. He further elaborated that hidden clash between Prime Minister and his cabinet another issue of mismanagement in AJ&K which became



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the cause of unresolving the people's issues. This ignorance of genuine needs of the people in on hand, and on the other hand when government authorized the use of brutal force against the peaceful gathering, the protestors became enraged<sup>xviii</sup>.

He viewed that despite annual development budgets visible progress remains minimal in AJ&K. Poor Road conditions, inadequate health facilities, and weak infrastructure not only reflects but also evidence of mismanagement and governance failure in AJ&K<sup>xix</sup>.

Mariam Abbasi analyzed that Azad Jammu & Kashmir's governance challenges are shaped by limited autonomy under Pakistan's oversight in defense, foreign policy, and constitutional matters in one side on the other side persistent political instability driven by party rivalries and factionalism create hinder ness in development. While security concerns link to the Kashmir dispute and frequent skirmishes along the Line of Control, and economic dependency on Pakistan's financial aid put negative impact of the economy of AJ&K. Together, these interconnected issues weaken institutions, obstruct reforms, and prevent the region from achieving sustainable self-reliance and long-term stability<sup>xx</sup>.

### Research Gap

Most existing studies emphasize the demands raised by the Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC), yet there is insufficient attention has been given to identify the main governance challenges in Azad Jammu & Kashmir and how these challenges shape the socio-economic grievances that fuel public mobilization under the JAAC? Although the available literature discusses mainly the charter of demand, it missed the links that in what ways the Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) has transformed spontaneous public protests into a structured Charter of Demands

Our research addresses this gap by analyzing the main governance challenges in AJ&K and governance challenges. Furthermore, our research addresses to investigate the role of the JAAC in transforming spontaneous public protests into a structured charter of demands which reflect the aspiration of public.

### Significance of study

This research is significant because it explores the main governance challenges in AJ&K and analyses how these challenges shape the socio-economic grievances that spark public mobilization under the JAAC. This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by analyzing the role of JAAC that transformed public protest into a structured charter of demands. While previous literature often focuses on macro-level problems of AJ&K, this study provides a micro- level analysis of how a charter of demands reflect the aspiration of public. The findings of this study are an immense value to policymakers, state administrators, and government institutions. By identifying charter of demands, this research offers a strategic blueprint for improving public service delivery. It assists the government and policy makers in understanding reforms which are demanding by public. This study gains its significance from a mixed methods approach. By integrating quantitative data from a survey of 306 respondents with qualitative insights from interviews with JAAK members. It provides a validated and holistic view of the public response to governance challenges. Socially, this research documents the mass mobilization of public of AJ&K. It serves as a historical and analytical record of how organized collective efforts can bridge the gap between state policy and public aspirations.

### Research Questions

- What are the main governance challenges in AJ&K and how these challenges shape the socio-economic grievances that spark public mobilization under the JAAC?



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- How did JAAC transform public protests into a structured charter of demands, and how does this charter reflect the aspiration of public?
- What specific reforms do the people of AJ&K believe would most effectively improve the socio-economic conditions of the people of AJ&K?

### Research Objectives

- To critically analyze the main governance challenges in AJ&K and to examine how these challenges shape socio-economic grievances that spark public mobilization under the JAAC.
- To investigate the role of the JAAC in transforming public protests into a structured charter of demands, and to assess how this charter reflects aspiration of public
- To identify and analyze the reforms prioritized by the people of AJ&K that they believe would most effectively enhance socio-economic conditions of the people of AJ&K

### Materials and Method

In this research article, the mixed methods approach is used combining both qualitative as well as quantitative method to conduct comprehensive analysis of the desired research questions.

We collected data in both ways through primary sources as well as secondary sources. For primary data collection we have conducted interviews of different political figures, JAAC core members and Journalist to get deep insight of the research questions. Quantitative data gathered through surveys and questionnaire with simple size of 306. The survey was conducted among residents of AJ&K, and overseas Kashmiris to analyze the governance challenges and public response in AJ&K focus on an analytical study of demands of JAAC. The survey incorporated Likert-Scale questions, which were finalized and distributed online via Google Forms For data analysis we presented the survey results using statistical methods while using thematic analysis for the interviews to identify key points and themes. The data integrated using SPSS through univariate and bivariate analysis techniques. To quantify the qualitative responses, dichotomous questions were coded (1 for 'Yes', 2 for 'No') and Likert scales were mapped 1 through 4. This structured coding supported precise data extraction. The targeted population included AJ&K Nationals, and overseas Kashmiris, specifically investigating the main governance challenges of AJ&K, JAAC charter of demands and reforms do the people of AJ&K believe that would most effectively improve the socio-economic conditions of the people of AJ&K. A correlational approach was employed to examine the relationships between the role of JAAC, governance challenges, charter of demands and reforms.

Considering ethical aspects, we ensured the confidentiality and consent of the participants and used the data solely for research purposes. Through this research we aimed to understand what the main governance challenges are and how they can be eliminated through reforms to improve the socio-economic conditions of the public and draw meaningful conclusion that could be useful for future researchers.

### Frequency Distribution and percentage (n=306)

Table: 1

Srs	Frequency (f)	%
<b>Age</b>		
18-25	194	63.4
26-30	47	15.4



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31 and above	65	21.2
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	157	51.3
Female	149	48.7
<b>Education</b>		
Under matric	4	1.3
Under BA/BSc	174	56.9
MA/Msc and above	128	41.8
<b>Region</b>		
AJ&K National	256	83.7
Overseas Kashmir	41	13.4

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage distribution of the demographic characteristics for the study's sample (n=306). The profile includes detailed information on the respondents' age, gender, educational attainment, and geographic region

The test population was predominantly young, with over 63.4% of respondents between the ages of 18 and 25 while the remaining portion of the sample comprised of individuals aged 26–30 (15.4%) and those 31 or older (21.2%).

The gender composition of the study was relatively balanced, with male respondents accounting for 51.3% of the sample and female members representing 48.7%.

The academic background of the participants was heterogeneous: 3.1% were under-matric, 56.9% earned bachelor level qualifications (BA/B.Sc.), and 41.8% had possessed postgraduate (MA/M.Sc. or above) qualifications.

The study population was distributed across two primary regions: AJ&K Nationals (83.7%) and overseas Kashmiris (13.4%)

### Results and analysis

Table: 1

Scale	Alpha (sign)	Skewness	Kurtosis
Governance Challenges	.610	1.5	0.8
Role of JAAC			

Reliability analysis for the scale produced Cronbach's alpha of .610, verifying that the instrument is reliable for this study. Descriptive statistics for the distribution showed a skewness of 1.5 and a kurtosis of 0.8. These results characterize the data as positively skewed and right tailed, reflecting the specific response patterns of the participants.

**Table: 2 Correlation between Role of JAAC, Governance Challenges, charter of demands and Reforms**

Sr	Role of JAAC
<b>Governance Challenges</b>	.178**
<b>Charter of Demands</b>	.343**
<b>Demand for Reforms</b>	201**

Note: \*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01\*\* level (2-tailed)

According to table 2, A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the **Role of JAAC** and several social factors. The results showed:

- A positive correlation between the Role of JAAC and Governance Challenges ( $r = .178, p < .01$ ).
- A significant positive correlation between the Role of JAAC and charter of demands ( $r = .343 **, p < .01$ ).



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- A moderate positive correlation between the Role of JAAC and the Reforms ( $r = .201, p < .01$ ).

### **Correlation between the role of JAAC and identification of Governance Challenges**

The results in Table 2 reveal a significant positive **correlation between the** role of JAAC and identification of Governance Challenges ( $r = .178, p < .01$ ).

This indicates that the formation of JAAC itself is a primary indicator of governance gaps and JAAC plays a critical role in highlighting and identifying various governance challenges. JAAC did not only just protest, but it also systematically unveiled and publicized the structural flaws withing the existing governance framework of AJ&K. The JAAC, s movement is fundamentally a reaction to the erosion of local decision-making power because the AJ&K government has limited autonomy to address local grievances without Islamabad approval. JAAC views this lack of autonomy as the root cause of the governance challenge which powerless AJ&K government to fulfill the basic demand of its citizens.

Amjid Ali, lawyer and core member of JAAC during interview alleges that despite other reasons the most visible point of friction between the public and the state is elite capture. Elites exploit public funds using them for foreign tours as ministers of AJ&K even though their state is not recognized internationally. Most of the AJ&K budget is spent on non-developmental privileges of ruling elite. These privileges are unjustified. He argues that initially government of AJ&K agreed to fulfill all demands of JAAC, but later on government tried to attempt to pressurize and registered unjustified FIRs against JAAC members. Government failed to take serous steps and police force started flag marches in every nook and corner of AJ&K cities. Such silly steps of government sparked public outrage and triggered a wave of public indignation.<sup>xxi</sup>

While another interview Imtyaz Asalm core member of JAAC, views when the public faces soaring inflation and unemployment, the ruling elite continue to enjoy massive allowances. He argued that due to these privileges very little is spent on human welfare and citizen have limited access to basic facilities because a large part of the government budget goes towards privileges, which includes lifelong privileges for ex-Prime ministers and Presidents. Among these privileges, the privileges of the bureaucracy and judges are the most numerous. While the court system of AJ&K is badly paralyzed. JAAC believes that AJ&K government has enough resources, but they are mismanaged through corrupt practices.<sup>xxii</sup>

Usman Kasher another core member of JAAC interviewed and is concerned that perks, privileges and incentives of bureaucracy are linked to the budget, and the budget is made up of public taxes. This money is being spent on bureaucracy and politicians instead of being spent on the welfare of public which is systematic corruption.<sup>xxiii</sup> . The JAAC movement, therefore, is not merely a protest movement but a direct challenge to perks and privileges of ruling elite, demanding a transition from a heavy bureaucratic administration to a transparent self-governing model

### **Analysis**

In the light of the findings, it is evident that the correlation between the JAAC, s role and the identification of governance challenges is deeply rooted in the shift from passive grievances to organized resistance. JAAC has played a crucial role in mobilizing the public and highlighted governance challenges infront of public. It acted as a diagnostic tool for the state's administrative failures. The statistical findings provide a serious link between the role of JAAC and the struggle against systemic corruption in AJ&K. It is perceived as structural governance challenges rooted in the historical perks and privileges of ruling elite.

The positive correlation indicates that as JAAC intensified its movement, it successfully exposed how governance challenges is embedded withing the administrative framework and motivated the public that their socio-economic hardships such as high prices of wheat flour, electricity bills and poor infrastructure are the direct results of financial mismanagement and corrupt common practices which are penetrated in every department of AJ&K.

However, JAAC through its wheel jams, sit-ins and long marches has successfully transformed these grievances into a platform for political consciousness. This activism has fostered a significant level of political consciousness among the masses, empowering and educating the masses to



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recognize that their hardships are directly linked to governance failure of AJ&K. Consequently, this awareness has transitioned from passive frustration into an organized, collective movement against these persistent challenges

### **Correlation between the role of the JAAC and the charter of demands**

The results in Table 2 reveal a correlation analysis shows a statistically significant **positive** correlation between the role of the JAAC and the charter of demands ( $r = .343 **$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

The result confirms that the JAAC played effective role in transforming grassroots grievances into a structured charter of demands. It also suggests that charter of demand was influenced not only by the JAAC, s role but also by external structural factors such as the role of Kashmir council, limited autonomy, administrative influence of lent officers, corruption, weak institution and poor infrastructure. The JAAC identified these gaps and highlighted these shortcomings and built a strong narrative and gained widespread grassroots support. Governance shortcomings, and ignorance of public concern created a vacuum between the people and their legitimate representatives. This vacuum creates mistrust and provides opportunity to JAAC to mobilization of public against the government of AJ&K. The JAAC role was fundamentally centered on challenging the extravagant perks and privileged enjoyed by the ruling elite of AJ&K. JAAC mobilized the public and utilized this sentiment and arguing that the financial burden of these privileges is being shifted into common man through subsidies prices of wheat flour and free electricity bills. This narrative was a key driver in the JAAC success.

Shoukat Nawaz Mir a senior member of JAAC in an interview said, this is the first movement in 78 years that has resulted in every citizen getting basic rights without any discrimination because wheat flour and electricity are the necessities of everyone. JAAC mobilized people and gave voices to everyone. This was non-violent movement. Despite massive gathering, no direct violence was seen from the public. It was the great achievement of this movement. Where incidents of violence were reported, it was due to the poor strategy of the government. A clear difference between the earlier movements and this movement was public unity. For the first time in political history of AJ&K, people not only united under the umbrella of JAAC but also found out how they could meet their demands. Politicians keep them divided for their own purposes. Earlier this movement People were divided along tribal lines and political ideologies. Politicians are considering their politics are in danger due to the unity of the people because the rights that people have gained were not given by politicians but were obtained after a long march from Bhimber to Muzafarabad.<sup>xxiv</sup>

During an interview Danish Irshad (Journalist) stated that through this movement, people have become more aware that they can survive in long marches and sit-ins. This movement has shown the people a path for future movements, how the people can make their movements successful<sup>xxv</sup>.

While Imtyaz Ahmed core member of JAAC views, prior to this movement, the people of AJ&K did not get rights because these people are divided into Baradriism and regionalism. Politicians only use people for their own interest and then they change their political parties as well . As a result of this movement, people have realized that they can get their rights by standing together.<sup>xxvi</sup> While Usman Kasher stated that while people have received great relief in form of subsidies wheat flour and electricity, the biggest achievement of this movement is that a unity has been formed between AJ&K nationals and overseas Kashmiris.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Another JAAC member Amjid Ali a senior advocate, views this movement's impact across the region, noting that it has resulted in a greater level of political awakening among the people than ever before and citizens became informed and active. Even from Gilgit-Baltistan as an integral part of Jammu & Kashmir, voices have been heard echoing support for this movement and even inspired the people of Indian occupied Jammu & Kashmir to recognize their own rights. AJ&K diaspora pressurize the Pakistan government to ensure the protection of fundamental rights. Kashmir diaspora raised their voices against JAAC members arrest and have shown great concerns.

It gives a voice to voiceless and provides a platform across the AJ&K citizens to stand up and claim their basic rights<sup>xxviii</sup>

### **Analysis**

The results indicate that the charter of demands presented by the JAAC serves as a most important



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document manifestation of collective public grievances. The findings suggest that charter is rooted in the daily struggles of populace and transform fragmented individuals' complaints into structured formal document. JAAC has effectively given a collective voice to the public. The immense public support for this charter indicates a high level of perceived legitimacy. This charter reflects the aspirations of public and manifesto of needs with clear goals. It unites people of AJ&K from different sections under this charter and makes people realize that their problems are shared. A charter of demands is not just a piece of paper; it is the soul of the JAAC movement. It turns noise into a collective voice and a crowd into an organized force and body.

### **A positive correlation between the Role of JAAC and Reforms**

- **A moderate positive correlation between the Role of JAAC and Reforms** ( $r = .201, p < .01$ ).

The alignment between the survey findings and the role of JAAC indicating a strong demand for reforms (value: .201\*\*). It indicates a strong public mandate for comprehensive reforms in AJ&K. However comprehensive reforms have yet to be implemented.

Due to JAAC movement, when the government came under intense pressure then it provided interim relief to public. Government subsidies on wheat flour and electricity alongside the restoration of the health card. This was the defensive reaction by the government aimed at cooling down the momentum of the movement. However, government did not fully implement the core reforms demanded by JAAC such as the abolition of refugee seats, withdrawal of perks and privileges of ruling elite.

### **Analysis**

Consequently, JAAC perceives these partial reforms as a temporary political compromise rather than a permanent solution. JAAC enjoys overwhelming public support, its charter of demand is not merely a request for economic concessions but a comprehensive manifestation of public unrest and a vision for systematic reforms. Despite signing an agreement with the JAAC, the government's failure to bring about complete reforms has led to a significant trust deficit between the government and people. The people are not willing to accept partial reforms in a piecemeal fashion, the public is demanding a structural comprehensive reform.

Currently a deadlock persists between the government and JAAC regarding permanent reforms. Survey results indicate that if government fails to implement the promised reforms, it could trigger another protest movement in the future, potentially leading to further political and regional instability. Undoubtedly JAAC movement has served as a catalyst for public consciousness. This movement has awakened the masses who are now actively demanding structural reforms.

### **Strategic significance of JAAC charter of demands**

The JAAC Charter has dual strategic significance.

#### **Internal strategic significance**

Internally, JAAC charter of demands is not only a list of demands, in fact in political history of AJ&K it is a strategic turning point and shift in narrative prior political and ideological movement's mainly chanted only political and ideological slogans. While JAAC addressed the basic issues of all people, and common man connected with the movement. Thus, this JAAC movement gained momentum, and it became an all-encompassing mass movement. The JAAC biggest achievement was to bring together the people of every nook and corner on one platform with one slogan "Awaz do Hm Ek Hay (**we are one**). In the past, movements are divided into different regions, or ideologies but a united Kashmiri identity is built under the banner of JAAC. The JAAC also set a new trend for future, instead of closed room, decisions were made in open squares. This has not only reduced the influence of the traditional political elite but also an alternative grassroots leadership has emerged. The JAAC has put pressure on the state structure, resulting in the government revising its incentives and spending cuts. This movement has created a feeling among the people that the first right to the state resources belongs to the people of the state, which will have an impact on future politics.

JAAC protests, rallies, marches, and sit in has shown the political maturity in AJ&K. It was seen



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through slogans, songs and speeches that most of the people are on which side. Despite the shutdown of social media, public continued to connect with each other in traditional ways and the government narrative was countered on social media when government restored it. It is a kind of digital consensus.

### External strategic significance

Though this movement was based on economic demands due to this Pakistan suffered a setback at the international level because Pakistan always calls AJ&K a model state. This movement drew international media like BBC and Aljazeera attention to AJ&K.

India tried to use the demands like constitutional rights and control of resources in its favour in this movement. Indian media has tried to defend the cancellation of article 370 in illegally occupied Jammu & Kashmir by presenting this protest as a movement for independence from Pakistan. While the reality was the opposite, JAAC policy was clear on this, many JAAC members categorically stated in public gatherings that they are not against the state of Pakistan. This movement has provided an opportunity to the government of Pakistan to strengthen the AJ&K government by giving them internal autonomy to reduce the problems of public. If the government of Pakistan addressed constructively, it can strengthen Pakistan's moral and diplomatic position on the Kashmir issue by showing democratic inclusivity and responsive governance.

### Proposed Policy Recommendations

Young people are the driving force behind the recent wave of activism in AJ&K. It indicates they are politically and socially aware and mobilized.

To convert the charter of demand into a sustainable framework, and to channel youth energy positively the following steps are advised:

- Government should establish, "Youth Councils" at grassroots level granting them advisory powers in local development projects. Young experts and talented students should be included as "Observers" in standing committees of AJ&K legislative assembly so then can learn and witness the legislative process. The AJ&K legislative assembly should establish a specialized committee focused solely on legislation, youth employment and education.
- The government should introduce digital apps and portals where youth can provide feedback and suggestions regarding AJ&K. Ministers and policy makers should regularly meet with students and youth delegations to listen to their genuine concerns directly. Furthermore, legitimate demands raised during JAAC movement should be incorporated into official policy documents. Government should launch policy fellowships in various departments of AJ&K, allowing youth graduates to assist directly in policy formation. Political parties must give youth key positions within their internal structures so they can transition from being workers (کارکن) to decision makers. Government should provide interest free loans or startups grants for youth. Government should provide vocational training and technical education to youth. Government must introduce paid internship programs for graduates. Government must facilitate the youth by providing digital skills to enable self-employment.
- Instead of a temporary subsidy, a long-lasting formula should be set by government.
- The government of Pakistan should be recognized as the first right over the electricity generated in AJ&K and it should enter into a legal agreement with the government of AJ&K to supply power on production cost. On the pattern of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (خیبر پختونخوا)



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- AJ&K should also be given water use charges on its electricity production as per international or national standards. A transparent formula for resource sharing must be signed between AJ&K and Pakistan.
- With the consultation of youth, a clear governance reforms model must be introduced and implemented.
- By reducing the expenses of the elite, that money should be invested in public welfare.
- The unnecessary political advisors, special assistants, and coordinators should be permanently abolished and restricted to only the essential cabinet.
- Government must impose ban on luxury protocol. It would be a powerful indication that the leadership is serious about economic recovery and is willing to lead by example through personal sacrifice. Such steps on one side encourages a culture of merit and on other hand rebuild the broken trust between the state and its public
- A fixed allowance should be introduced for ministers and senior officials by abolishing unlimited petrol quotas free electricity and phone, TA, DA (Travelling allowance and distance allowance) and buying expensive cars.
- By declaring AJ&K as a tourism zone, loans should be given to youngsters on easy terms so that they can generate self-employment.
- Ensure direct transfer of funds to local bodies.
- Educational fees like boards and universities fees should be reduced and technical training centers should be established there to produce skilled manpower. Students' union must be restored. Comprehensive legislation to be made through which students can play a constructive role.
- The Government should fulfill the shortage of medicines and staff in all the hospitals so that people can have easy access to health facilities. Health facilities must be geographically and financially accessible to the most vulnerable.
- Health cards should be given permanent constitutional protection so that the treatment of the poor is not affected by the change of government. A doctor and staff must be answerable for negligence. Every unexpected death or surgical complication should be reviewed by a peer committee to determine if it was preventable. Patients must have a direct, easy to use digital platform to report negligence without any fear of harassment. Furthermore, a strong medical ethics committee must notify for every hospital.
- A permanent consultative council comprised on AJ&K representative, JAAC members, and the representatives of the government of Pakistan should be formed for consultation before taking any major decision.
- The government of Pakistan must ensure and should be done the correctness of voter lists and electoral reforms to bring transparency to the seats of Kashmiri refugees residing in Pakistan
- The government should create a 'Tracking Dashboard' for the implementation of all these promises where people can see online how much work has been done on each demand. This will end the atmosphere of uncertainty from AJ&K
- Weak accountability fosters corruption, mismanagement, and erosion of public trust. Accountability must be ensured at every level regardless of any cast, creed and political affiliation.
- Institutional reforms must be brought with using modern technology. All government institutions must be cleared of political interference and digitalizing



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all government departments is essential to eliminate bureaucratic delays and curb corruption.

### Conclusion

The research reveals that the governance challenges like limited financial autonomy, corruption, privileges of ruling elite, high prices of electricity and wheat flour prices in AJ&K are symptoms of a deeper disconnect between the public and its state. Failure in governance has motivated the public that their taxes or resources are not benefiting for local populace. In resultant local resident of AJ&K established a JAAC and presented a charter of demands after long sit-ins, wheel jams, and marches towards Muzaffarabad. The emergence of the JAAC and its charter of demands signifies a shift from passive grievances into an organized civic movement. Undoubtedly these protests are powerful reminder that civil movement cannot be ignored.

The governance challenges of AJ&K have reached a tipping point where traditional bureaucratic measures are no longer sufficient. The JAAC, s charter of demands, is not just a list of grievances but a roadmap for structural reform. It indicates that temporary subsidies are not a solution. For AJ&K to achieve stability, the state must transition from a top-down administrative approach to a bottom-up, people centric governance model that honors the social contract and ensures equitable distribution of resources. However, if state ignores a charter of demands, the trust between the public and state will collapse. This might lead to social alienation where the public no longer feels represented by or obligated to the state's legal and administrative frameworks. In case of ignoring charter of demands it will provide fertile ground for external factors to exploit the situation for propaganda, potentially fueling an anti-state narrative that is difficult to reverse.

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