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The Ground Speaks: PoJK Protests and the Unravelling of Pakistan's Kashmir Narrative

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IR**POLITY****GS2**

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GS2



INTERVIEW ANGLE

"India's position is that Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir is Indian territory under illegal occupation. How should India calibrate its public support for the rights of people in PoJK so that it strengthens rather than complicates the position of those raising demands on the ground?"

✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources

THE LIFT LINE

A territory whose people are protesting the price of its own electricity is telling you something precise about who its resources are being administered for.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

India-Pakistan relations and the Jammu and Kashmir question are perennial GS2 themes, and questions in this area reward candidates who can distinguish India's formal legal position, its diplomatic strategy, and the on-ground governance evidence, rather than blending all three into general commentary.

GS Paper 2: India and its neighbourhood relations; bilateral agreements involving India; important international institutions; effect of policies of other countries on India's interests.

For **Prelims**, be precise on India's official position and the constitutional status of the territory under Pakistan's own arrangements.

CONCEPT	MEANING	WHY UPSC TESTS IT
PoJK / PoK	Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir; territory of the erstwhile princely State of Jammu and Kashmir under illegal Pakistani occupation	India's official terminology and position; Parliament has reaffirmed that the whole of Jammu and Kashmir, including PoJK, is an integral part of India
Instrument of Accession, 1947	The legal instrument by which the ruler of Jammu and Kashmir acceded to India	The legal foundation of India's position
Representation deficit	Absence of full constitutional representative rights for a territory's population	The structural grievance driving the protests
Resource-benefit asymmetry	A territory generating a resource whose benefits accrue substantially elsewhere	The specific complaint underlying the electricity-tariff agitation

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The whole of Jammu and Kashmir, including the areas under illegal Pakistani occupation, is an integral part of India, a position grounded in the Instrument of Accession of 1947 and repeatedly reaffirmed by the Indian Parliament. The territory Pakistan administers as so-called “Azad Jammu and Kashmir” and [Gilgit-Baltistan](#) has never been granted the full constitutional representation of a Pakistani province, producing a durable structural ambiguity in which the population lacks both provincial representation and genuine autonomy.

The 2026 agitation has run in two phases, the first from 7 to 30 June and the second from 27 July, led by the Jammu Kashmir Joint Awami Action Committee around a **38-point charter**. Reporting indicates a severe crackdown: protester deaths reported in the dozens, with at least 14 killed at Rawalakot on 27-28 July, more than 600 activists arrested including the committee's leader, internet shutdowns, and the proscription of the Joint Awami Action Committee under anti-terrorism law. Casualty figures in such circumstances are difficult to verify independently and reported totals have varied widely, so they are best cited as reported ranges rather than settled counts.

GRIEVANCE RAISED IN PROTESTS	UNDERLYING STRUCTURAL ISSUE
Electricity tariffs	Territory hosts substantial hydropower generation, notably the Mangla Dam , whose benefit largely accrues outside it; protesters demand supply at actual cost of generation rather than national commercial tariffs
Subsidy withdrawal	Fiscal decisions taken without genuinely representative local consent
Elite privileges	An administrative and political class insulated from the conditions it governs
Denial of political rights	Constitutional status providing neither provincial representation nor autonomy; the single most-reported demand of the 2026 wave is abolition of the 12 seats reserved in the PoJK Assembly for Kashmiri migrants settled in Pakistan

THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

The crackdown is part of the evidence

An argument that protest exposes a legitimacy deficit is incomplete if it omits how the administration responded to the protest. Reported protester deaths, mass arrests including of the movement's leadership, internet shutdowns, and the banning of the Joint Awami Action Committee under anti-terrorism legislation are themselves data about the relationship between the administration and the governed. A government confident of its popular **mandate** does not typically proscribe as terrorist a committee demanding electricity at cost price and the abolition of reserved seats.

Why the nature of the grievances is the important detail

If the agitation were framed primarily in terms of external actors or communal grievance, it would tell an observer relatively little about the quality of governance. It is not. It is framed around electricity pricing, subsidies, elite privilege and the right to genuine representation, which are the grievances of a population making claims on the administration that governs it. That register is precisely where a legitimacy deficit shows up.

The electricity point is the sharpest one

A population protesting the cost of electricity in a territory that itself generates substantial hydropower is articulating a specific structural complaint: that the territory's resources are being administered for someone else's benefit. This is a resource-**federalism** argument, and it is one of the most durable forms of political grievance precisely because it is verifiable against the physical facts of generation and transmission.

What this does to Pakistan's international position

Pakistan's positioning on Jammu and Kashmir internationally has rested substantially on claims about popular will. Sustained, locally-generated, materially-grounded protest against the administration Pakistan itself installed is evidence running directly against that premise, and it is evidence generated by the population Pakistan claims to speak for, which makes it considerably harder to characterise as externally manufactured.

The caution that a careful analyst should retain

Protests over tariffs and subsidies occur across South Asia without carrying implications for **sovereignty**, and the people raising these demands are framing them as demands about cost of living and political rights. There is a real risk, both analytical and ethical, in subsuming those demands into an external territorial argument they are not themselves making. The stronger course, and the one more likely to be effective internationally, is to support the demands on the terms in which they are raised, as questions of human rights and democratic representation, which requires no reinterpretation at all.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

Distinguish what evidence establishes from what it merely makes harder to deny. Governance failure in a territory does not by itself resolve a sovereignty question, which turns on legal instruments and historical facts. What it does is undermine a specific argument, the claim that the current administration reflects popular will, that one party has built its position on. Being precise about which claim the evidence actually damages produces a stronger analysis than treating all adverse evidence as establishing one's preferred overall conclusion.

THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

Picture two separate structures. The first is a legal foundation: the Instrument of Accession of 1947, and the parliamentary reaffirmations that follow from it, on which India's position that the entire territory is Indian rests. The second is a rhetorical scaffold Pakistan has built alongside it, resting on the claim that its administration of the occupied portion reflects what the people there want. The protests do not touch the first structure, which was never **contingent** on them. They pull directly at the scaffold, and they do so from the inside.

WAY FORWARD

- ① **Raise the human-rights and representation dimension in international forums**, supporting the demands on the terms in which they are actually being made.
- ② **Document the resource-benefit asymmetry**, particularly around the Mangla Dam and wider power generation and transmission, since it is verifiable and speaks directly to how the territory is administered.

- ③ **Maintain consistency in terminology and position**, reflecting India's settled stand that Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir is Indian territory under illegal occupation.
- ④ **Avoid instrumentalising the protesters' demands**, which would both weaken India's credibility and expose those raising them to the charge of acting for an external actor.
- ⑤ **Continue development and governance investment in Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh**, since the contrast in governance outcomes across the Line of Control is itself the most persuasive available argument.

PYQ LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

UPSC regularly tests India-Pakistan relations, the constitutional and legal position on Jammu and Kashmir, and India's approach in [multilateral](#) forums; this development provides a current, evidence-based hook for what is otherwise a heavily-covered perennial topic.

Practice question: "Governance failure in a territory does not settle a question of sovereignty, but it can dismantle the legitimacy claim built upon it." Examine this claim with reference to sustained public agitation in Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir. (250 words, 15 marks)

Interview angle: India's position is that Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir is Indian territory under illegal occupation. How should India [calibrate](#) its public support for the rights of people in PoJK so that it strengthens rather than complicates the position of those raising demands on the ground?

Sources: Hindustan Times, Ministry of External Affairs, Parliament of India

Source: The Ground Speaks: PoJK Protests and the Unravelling of Pakistan's Kashmir Narrative — Ujjyari.com |
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● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

Sustained public agitation across Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir over electricity tariffs, subsidy withdrawal, elite privilege and the denial of representative political rights is a governance failure that directly undermines Pakistan's central international claim about the territory, namely that its administration reflects the will of its people.



SUPPORTING

- The grievances raised are notably material and civic rather than communal or externally directed: electricity pricing when the territory hosts substantial hydropower generation, subsidy withdrawal, privileges enjoyed by an administrative elite, and the absence of genuine representative rights, all of which are claims about how the territory is governed.
- Pakistan's international positioning on Jammu and Kashmir rests substantially on an assertion about popular will; sustained, locally-generated protest against the administration Pakistan itself installed is therefore evidence directly contrary to the premise of that positioning.
- The territory's constitutional status under Pakistan, neither a province with full representation nor an independent entity, produces exactly the representation deficit protesters articulate, meaning the grievance is structural rather than the product of any particular administration.



COUNTER

Protest over tariffs and subsidies is a common feature of governance across South Asia and does not by itself establish a claim about sovereignty; treating economic agitation as primarily a statement about territorial status risks reading more into it than the protesters themselves are asserting, and can appear to instrumentalise their material grievances for an external argument.



WAY FORWARD

India's response should centre on the human-rights and representation dimension in international forums, supporting the legitimacy of the demands being raised on their own

terms, while maintaining that Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir is Indian territory under illegal occupation, a position India has held consistently and reaffirmed through Parliament.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK
QUESTION

Examine what sustained public agitation in Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir reveals about the governance and legitimacy basis of Pakistan's administration of the territory, and its implications for India's position. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

Sustained public agitation across Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir through 2026 over electricity tariffs, subsidy withdrawal, elite privileges and the denial of representative political rights has exposed a governance and legitimacy deficit in Pakistan's administration of territory that is, in India's consistently held and parliamentarily reaffirmed position, an integral part of India under illegal occupation.

BODY

The character of the grievances matters analytically. They are material and civic: protesters have raised electricity pricing in a territory that itself hosts substantial hydropower generation whose output largely flows elsewhere, the withdrawal of subsidies on essential goods, the privileges enjoyed by an administrative and political elite, and the absence of genuine representative institutions.

These are claims about how the territory is governed and who benefits from its resources, which is precisely the register in which a legitimacy deficit becomes visible. Pakistan's international positioning on Jammu and Kashmir has long rested on an assertion about popular will, and sustained, locally-generated protest directed at the administration Pakistan itself established constitutes evidence running directly against that assertion.

The structural dimension deepens the point: the territory's status under Pakistan, neither a province with full constitutional representation nor a genuinely autonomous entity, generates by design the representation deficit protesters articulate, meaning the grievance is not attributable to any single administration's failings but to the arrangement itself. The considered counter-view is that tariff and subsidy protests occur throughout South Asia without implying anything about sovereignty, and that reading a territorial argument into what protesters frame as a cost-of-living and rights argument risks instrumentalising their demands.

CONCLUSION

India's most effective response is to press the human-rights and democratic-representation dimension in international forums, supporting the demands on their own terms rather than subsuming them into a territorial argument, while continuing to maintain the position India has consistently held that Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir is Indian territory under illegal Pakistani occupation.

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