



# People and Governance

A Mood Study on Perceptions of People

Jammu Region

*Peoples Pulse*

**Hyderabad**

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## **1.1 Introduction**

This study was undertaken to ascertain the people's opinions and perceptions on the current political scenario as well as their future choices. As part of the study and as a backgrounder to the people's opinions, their economic, social and political status as well as perceived problems were also collected.

## **1.2 Methodology of the Study**

The study was based on an unstructured free-wheeling conversation with respondents to elicit their views on a host of issues interspersed with the questions related to the specific study. The respondents were chosen randomly from more than twenty villages keeping in view the highest possible representativeness of them. More than two hundred respondents covered represent a wide variety of the cross section of people, including ordinary men on the street, farmers, daily wage labourers, political activists, former or current leaders of Panchayat Raj institutions, dalits, professionals like tailors, carpenters, drivers, teachers, advocates, ex-servicemen and those in services, and journalists. While a small sample comes from urban centres, the rest of the large sample is from interior villages on Jammu – Kathua, Jammu – Rajauri and Jammu Udhampur roads.

## **2.1 Economic Indicators**

During the long interactions with respondents, several economic indicators like roads and communications, levels of poverty, employment and livelihood, power supply, drinking water availability, price rise, Public Distribution System, welfare measures and compensation for acquired lands have come up for discussion and the views are summed up hereunder.

## **2.2 Roads and Communications**

Except the national or state highways, all the other roads in Jammu are kachcha dirt roads. State transport was minimal or non-existent with private operators plying their over-loaded vehicles dangerously and making profits. Though OFC cable indicators were seen at some places, the telecommunication facilities, except mobile phones, in general are not proper. Even the mobile telecommunication networks do not function properly, may be because of sensitive defence requirements.

## **2.3 Poverty, employment and livelihood**

There was visible poverty in the region with agriculture in distress and industry almost non-existent. The rain-fed agriculture provides work for about three-four months and the

remaining time people engage themselves in minor livelihood works like basket making or look out for dhehadi (casual wage labour) or alms from the government or others. The MGNREGA seems to be successful in providing some help but there are several complaints against it. The complaints include use of machinery, favouritism, corruption, fudging accounts, delayed payments, etc. The poor have got houses under Indira Awas Yojana a couple of decades ago and thus have a shelter to live with or without food. Private money lending, with exorbitant rates to the extent of 120 per cent, is prevalent with institutional lending not meeting the requirements. People generally think that unemployment is their fate.

#### **2.4 Power supply**

Power shortage and inadequate power supply was a common complaint of a number of people in the entire region. The study team itself witnessed several power outages both in urban and rural areas during their tour. Long hours of power cuts, unpredictable and irregular power supply were quite visible. Some informed respondents said though there was a huge potential for hydro electricity in the region, it was never realised.

#### **2.5 Drinking water availability**

Drinking water is a severe problem affecting people across all sections in the entire region. In some of the villages the water is released for one hour in four days. One village got two hand pumps after a lot of persuasion but both of them are not functioning and the drinking water scarcity remained same. Most villagers wanted regular assured drinking water supply either in the form of water tankers or pipelines from the perennial rivers that flow in the region.

#### **2.6 Price rise**

Price rise is an issue that worries people across all the social, economic and political lines. Most people put it on the top of their list of problems and there was none who did not refer to this problem at least once. People think that it is the Central government that is responsible for the price rise. Some respondents recollected that the price rise was not as painful under Vajpayee government.

#### **2.7 Public Distribution System**

Most respondents said they have ration cards and receive monthly rations. But in the same vein they have a number of complaints against the PDS. Some respondents said even the dead are listed on the ration cards and get regular provisions whereas the living and needy do not get. There are complaints against ration shop keepers and dealers on their misappropriation and fraudulent measures.

#### **2.8 Welfare measures**

Respondents normally expressed satisfaction with regard to some welfare measures like pensions given to old-aged, handicapped and widows under the Integrated Social Security Scheme, and the Village Health, Nutrition, Sanitation Scheme. Mid-Day meals scheme is also generally approved, despite protests on some irregularities.

## **2.9 Compensation for acquired lands**

There was a specific peculiar problem raised by some respondents. During tension build-up on the border, lands of farmers are acquired by army for preparations and setting up bunkers. Some respondents said that adequate compensation is not being paid for such acquisition and some said it was under Vajpayee government alone they got good compensation.

## **3.1 Social Indicators**

The conversations also yielded views of the people on social indicators like education and healthcare.

### **3.2 Education**

There are a lot of schools with huge playgrounds in Jammu region. But people complain that the government schools do not impart quality education due to lack of sufficient faculty strength, disinterest among teachers, delayed distribution of textbooks, etc. Educating children up to high school level is going on somewhat smoothly but post-matriculation education is out of reach to many rural poor families. In one of the villages though the army had donated some computers to a school, they are going waste due to shortage of a teacher.

### **3.3 Healthcare**

There are no hospitals in the vicinity, even if there is a hospital doctors and medicines are not available, said several respondents. The hospitals are there for only namesake and they are not coming to the rescue of the needy. Though the hospitals have ambulances to help the needy poor, they are never used for the poor. They are cornered by rich and powerful.

## **4.1 Political Indicators**

Since the major thrust of the study was on political perceptions of the respondents, the conversations veered round politics and the respondents participated enthusiastically. The respondents' views are noted here under four different sub-heads: Political participation, regional aspirations, perceptions on politicians, and ideas on future.

### **4.2 Political participation**

In general, people's participation in politics is satisfactory, in the sense that everybody knows about politics and blames politicians for their problems. All the people have been casting their votes regularly. Almost all the respondents were vocal and categorical in their views on politics. However, most people could not immediately recall their respective MLA's name or the party he is affiliated to.

#### **4.3 Regional Aspirations**

Almost all the people interviewed gave strong sentiments on regional aspirations and from a dalit in remote village to a lawyer in Kathua to a senior journalist in Jammu, everybody complained of discrimination against Jammu region. It is Kashmir-based, Srinagar-based governance which does not care for people of Jammu is a general comment. Each person gave a different example of this discrimination or *bhedbhaav* in his own way. A taxi-driver thinks that there are at least three gateways to Pakistan in Jammu and all of them could be made tourist attractions like Wagah. Suchetgarh is nearest to Jammu city and could be included in a tourist circuit. But just because they are in Jammu there is discrimination. A retired academician cites the example of quantum of funds allocated to Dal Lake in Srinagar and Mansar-Survisar lakes in Jammu. A lawyer in Kathua and a former Sarpanch in Kriminchi cite the disproportionate number of MLAs in Jammu and Valley as an example of discrimination.

The discrimination perceived by several respondents is about the inequality and inconsistency in the number of MLAs in both regions. The delimitation was decided in order to put Jammu MLAs at a continuous loss, they said. Articulate respondents with some political knowledge say that Jammu region with more area, population and tax revenue has less representation in assembly, and less fund allocation. While Valley has one representative for 40,000 people, in Jammu it is 65,000 people. Since next delimitation is scheduled for 2026, this discriminatory position is not going to be changed for the next 15 years, they say.

Those who came to settle in Jammu after partition, more than 2 lakh people are denied their fundamental rights because of this discriminatory politics, said some respondents.

Some of the government schemes and measures are seen with suspicion as discriminatory. For example Sher-e-Kashmir Employment Scheme is taken up as a rehabilitation measure for militants in Kashmir, resettlement bill for evacuee properties in Jammu is being delayed and disqualification bill that denies married girls' right in Jammu is being pushed.

#### **4.4 Perceptions on Politicians**

There is a widespread resentment against corruption of government officials and politicians. It is a common refrain from people that one cannot get anything from a government office

without bribing. In fact, people are almost resigned to corruption saying that if we don't bribe they make us run from pillar to post several times. To avoid that delay and transport costs, it would be better to bribe and get things done immediately. In this regard, it is pertinent to note that Anna Hazare's name is known and referred with respect even in remote places.

Politicians are interested in power and votes but not concerned with people's plight, observed several respondents. Politicians have their own interests but not people's interests. Nobody serves people. No political party ever keeps promises, said some respondents.

Politicians of all hues are engaged in allegations and counter allegations but not in doing positive and constructive work, said some respondents. Auronpe iljaam lagaanaa, apnaa kaam nahi karna has become the politicians' regular activity.

Some respondents say that the present government has something good and something bad.

Devolution of powers announced by the present government was criticised by some respondents saying that they are neither full-fledged nor sincere. While the local self government in J&K is in four tiers, the recently announced devolution did not take all these tiers into consideration. While it called devolution of powers and functions, some respondents think it is only devolution of functions but not powers. A sarpanch of a village even described the devolution as a fraud. There is a conflict of interests in devolution of powers between MLAs and village PRIs. As the MLAs are illiterate and not well-versed with laws, it is the bureaucrats who are actually ruling the roost. It is a kind of commensalism and parasitism but the only difference here is both host and parasite are beneficial.

People know that the constituency development fund allotted to MLAs is raised from Rs 1 crore to Rs 1.5 crore, but they are unanimous in saying that the MLAs never spend the amounts for public purposes and use it in their own vote bank development.

The entire administration in J&K is seen as malfunctioning by some respondents. There is no worth mentioning performance of the government.

Despite the popularity and acceptability of Omar Abdullah as a young and enthusiastic politician, the respondents think that he does not have required political maturity and many a time he is turning to be a puppet in the hands of Congress. Some respondents said the chief minister who talks a lot about enhancing Panchayat powers, had diverted the funds allocated to Panchayat elections. In comparison some respondents observed that Gulam Nabi Azad government could do something for the region and the poor, but he was not allowed to rule for more than three years.

#### **4.5 Ideas on Future**



People's perceptions in this regard are mixed and ambiguous. Their choice of future leaders and their ideas on better governance are nuanced and mostly influenced by media, when it comes to leaders from outside J&K while categorical and based on their own experience regarding leaders from J&K. Some people said people like Jagmohan and Narendra Modi would make good leaders and the country as well as Jammu would prosper with that kind of leaders. However, the views are based on the media images and some respondents referred to Anna Hazare's positive comments on Modi. But at least in two villages respondents expressed suspicion on Modi and even one said his rise will lead to 1947 partition situation. Some others said Rahul Gandhi would be a better leader given his young and dynamic nature.

Political empowerment of Jammu is the only solution to the problems of Jammu, some respondents said.

There is no system to express people's grievances and there is no way government or politicians come to know of these grievances.

If the political and administrative atmosphere continues to be same, NC-Congress will have to face the wrath of people and in 2014 elections PDP's victory will be assured.

## **5.1 Conclusion**

To sum up, an independent observation on the political scenario in Jammu could only be that of bad omen for the present dispensation. Elections may be too far, but even if the current discontent, frustration and anger sustain, if not grow, it will be a doom for the incumbent government. It is not only an anti-incumbency, but also a general distrust in the ability of the political class in offering solutions to people's problems and implementing them. The people's problems are complex, historical, economic, social and political. People expect the governments show their willingness to address those problems.