

# Background

## 2014 General Elections in Kashmir Valley: Incidents of Violence and its Impact

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### Summary

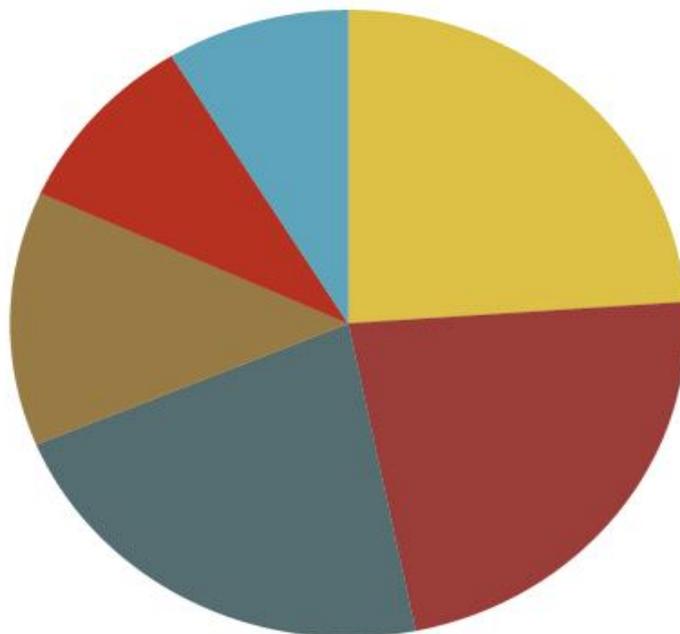
The background study looks at incidence of violence in the Kashmir Valley during the 2014 parliamentary elections and the correlation of violence to voter turnout. This study also lists out various actors responsible for violence and the trends in voting patterns from different regions of the Valley.

## INTRODUCTION

Elections in Jammu and Kashmir are observed with great interest as they are often regarded as a yardstick of normalcy in the state and acceptance of Indian democracy. The first elections in Jammu and Kashmir were held in 1951 where Sheikh Abdullah came to power riding a popular wave. However, subsequent elections were often marred by manipulation and alleged rigging (except for the 1977 elections which were largely deemed fair and returned National Conference to power). The massive fraud in the 1987 elections was one of the reasons for the start of insurgency in the state and as a result, the electoral process was suspended till 1996. However, subsequent elections were largely seen as fair with power alternating between the National Conference (NC) and People's Democratic Party (PDP) either independently or in alliance with Congress.

Elections and violence in Jammu and Kashmir are synonymous, although the level of violence has receded significantly in recent times. The 2002 elections saw approximately 250 civilian casualties in the two months preceding the elections. This dropped by 95% in the 2008 polls, which was the first to witness zero killings of political office bearers. However the Parliamentary polls of 2014 again witnessed many clashes and killings, and people of the state fear far more disruptions during the Assembly elections of this year.

## Voter Turnout in J&K

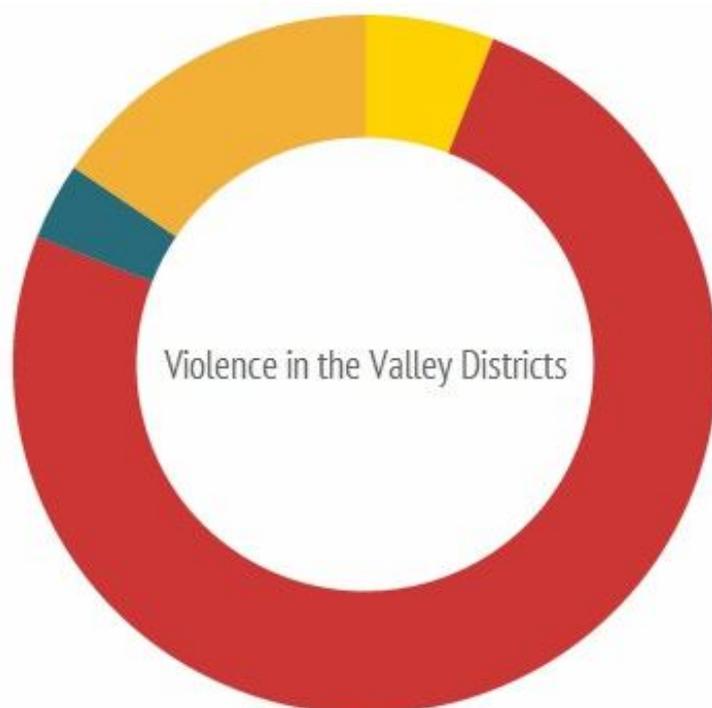


Udhampur 71%	Jammu 68%	Ladakh 65%	Baramulla 39%
Anantnag 28%	Srinagar 26%		

Despite the substantial level of violence recorded in the 2014 elections, it registered a turnout of 43%, an increase of 12% over the last elections. The Jammu constituency recorded an increase of 18 per cent, while Udhampur saw a 24 per cent increase from the last elections. Ladakh also saw a substantial voter turnout of 65 per cent despite a decrease of 7 per cent. Voting in these three constituencies was largely peaceful, far from the atmosphere in the Valley. While the Jammu and Ladakh regions witnessed a good voter turnout, the Valley saw boycott calls from separatist leadership and threats from militant outfits resulting in the elections being marred by low voter turnout and violence.

The separatists and militant outfits called on the people of the Valley to boycott the polling. Syed Ali Shah Geelani, ridiculed all political parties and the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) circulated more than 1,00,000 pamphlets in the Valley with pictures of Afzal Guru. Youth were mobilised for mass protests and stone pelting at polling locations. To keep people away from the polls, the militants resorted to putting up threatening posters and engaged in the selective killings of sarpanches. The United Jihad Council (UJC) chief Syed Salahudin on April 25th hailed the people of South Kashmir for observing boycott of *Lok Sabha* elections. He had also warned that with the passage of time, the militant outfits would intensify their strikes against security forces, stating that those who betray the movement will have to answer on the Day of Judgment.

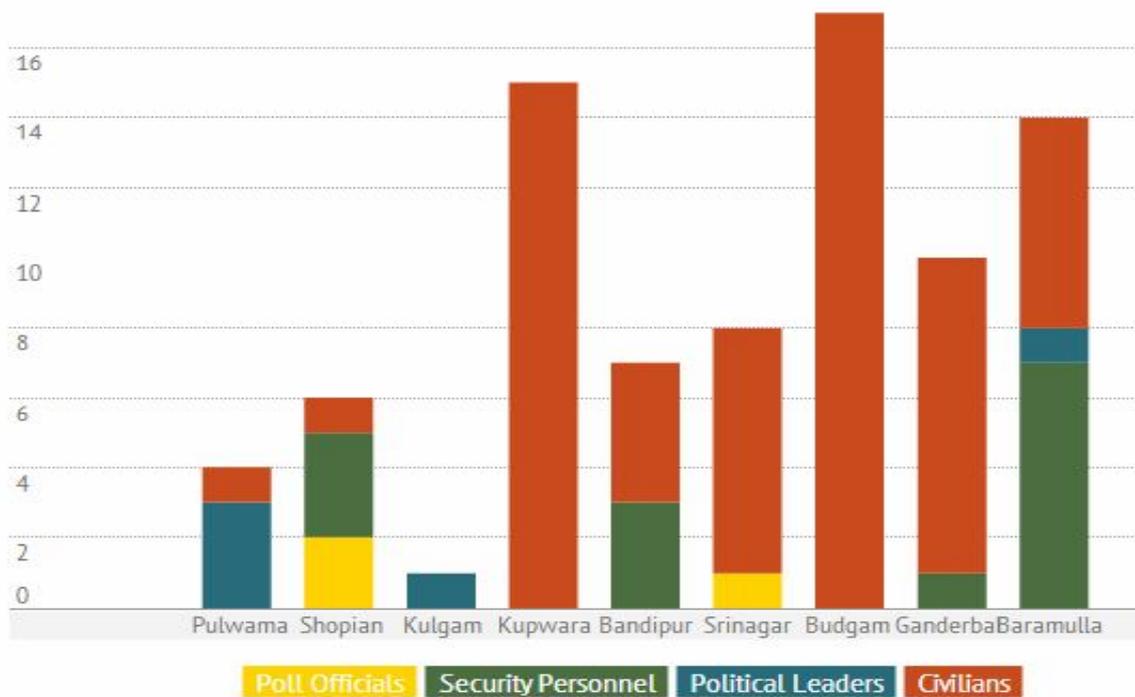
To counter the separatist threats as well as large scale protests, the state deployed 241 companies of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Border Security Force (BSF) and Sashastra Seema Bal, along with 15 battalions of Jammu Kashmir Armed Police (JKAP).



Political Leaders 5   Civilians 63   Poll Officials 3  
Security Personnel 13

The figures in the poll related violence include 63 civilians, 13 security personnel, 5 political leaders and 3 poll officials. The district wise casualty figures are given in the accompanying chart.

## Incidents of Violence in the Valley 2014 Elections

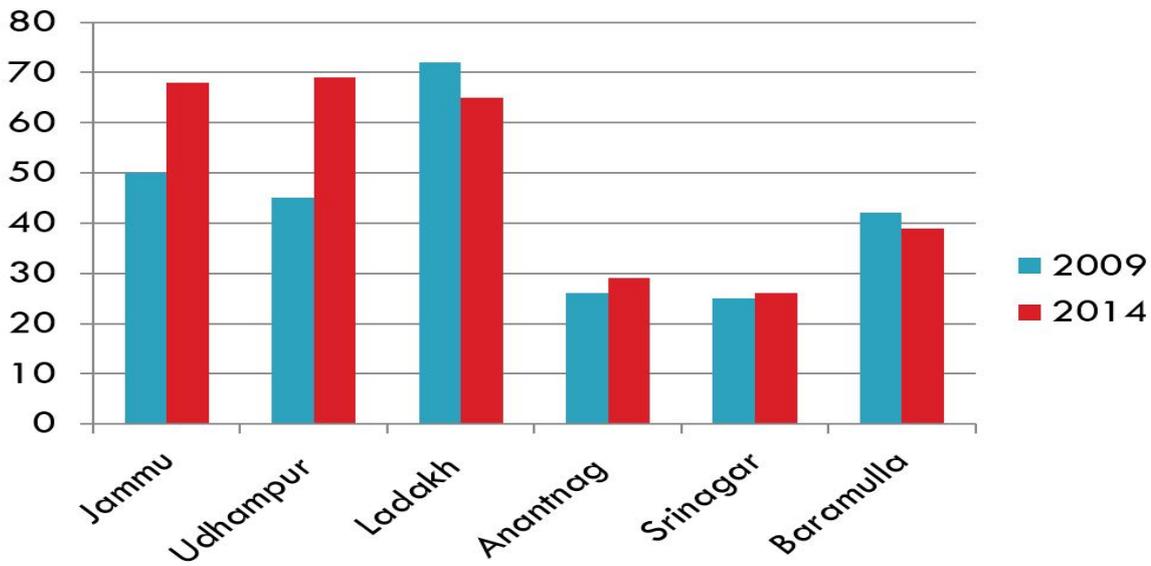


Elections in the Valley saw efforts by separatists, militant outfits and activists specifically the youth to scuttle the electoral process. Since the level of violence is significant the study analyses to what extent the violence perpetuated by different actors impacted voter turnout in the Lok Sabha elections. The research will also explore triggers and catalysts of violence during the elections. This issue is pertinent for analysing the factors that impinge on the democratic processes in the Valley and why? A study of this nature is important for understanding the causes for violence, and whether propaganda holds sway over genuine disapproval of the valley people in participating in an 'Indian democratic process'. To fully understand the Valley elections it is not only imperative to look at each of the three constituencies in the Valley but also explore the tensions witnessed at the district level.

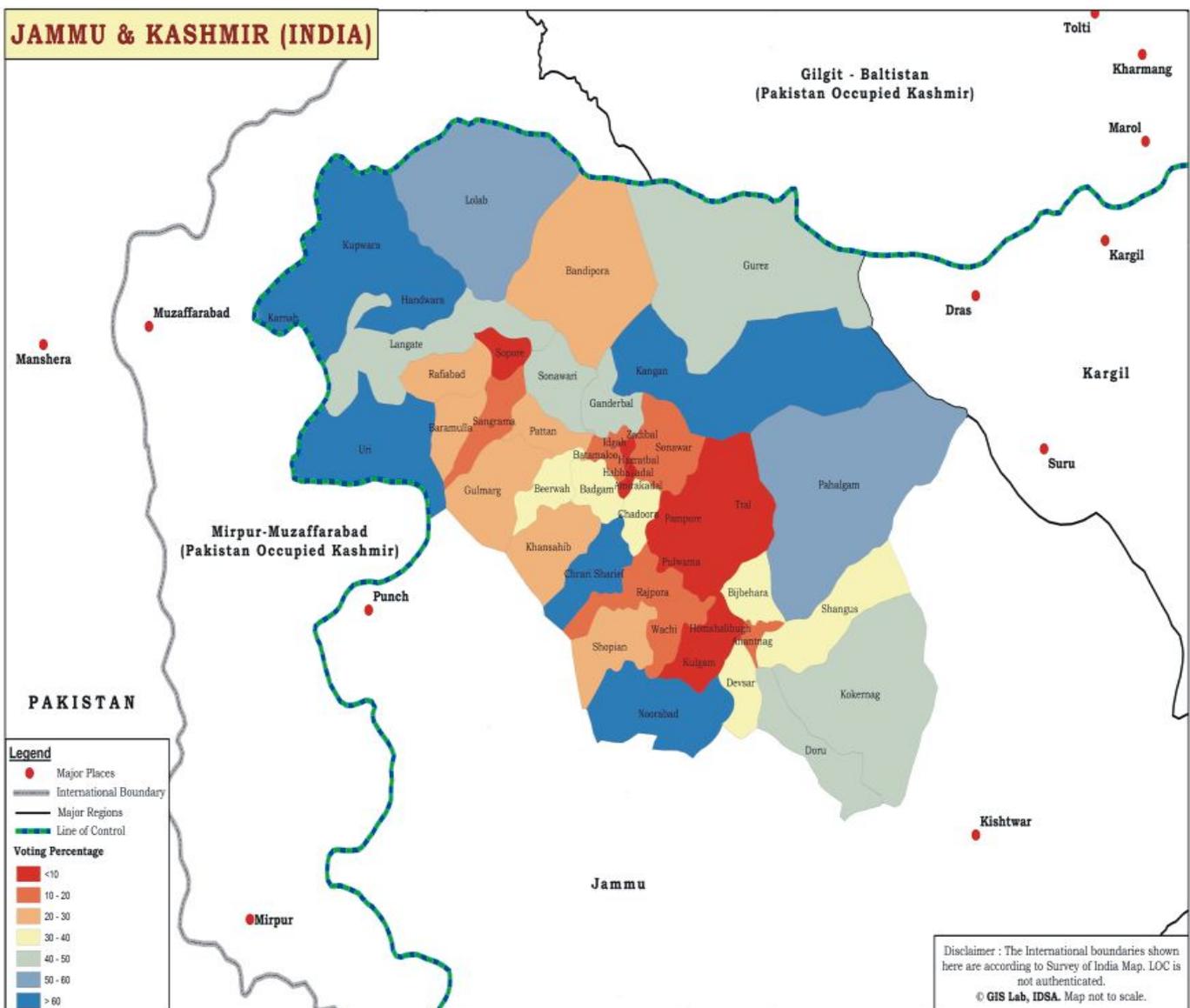
For the purposes of this research, data on voter turnout and incidents of violence have been analysed<sup>1</sup>. For a more comprehensive analysis, types of violence was divided into militant, separatist-influenced, political and spontaneous mob violence.

<sup>1</sup> Primary sources- figures on each segment/district were recorded from the Chief Election Commission Website.

Secondary sources- daily newspaper articles and terrorism portals: <http://www.kashmirwatch.com/>, <http://www.dailyexcelsior.com/>, <http://www.kashmirtimes.com/>, <http://www.preciouskashmir.com/>, <http://www.kashmirobsrver.net/>, <http://kashmirreader.com/>, <http://dailykashmirpost.com/index.php?date=2014-09-24>, <http://www.satp.org/>, <http://www.tribuneindia.com/>

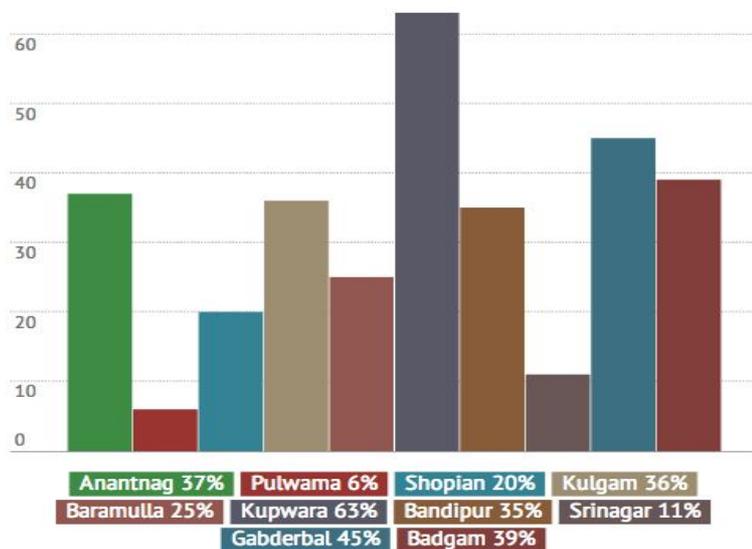


Comparative Voting Percentages (Constituency wise)



Voting pattern in the Valley

## Lok Sabha Elections 2014 Turnout



District wise voter turnout in the Valley

The state of Jammu and Kashmir comprises six parliamentary constituencies. Two of these are in the Jammu region- Jammu and Udhampur, and one in Ladakh- Leh and the remaining three are in the Kashmir Valley- Anantnag, Srinagar and Baramulla. These parliamentary constituencies are further divided into 87 assembly segments. However for this

research, the focus will be on the Valley constituencies covering 10 districts.

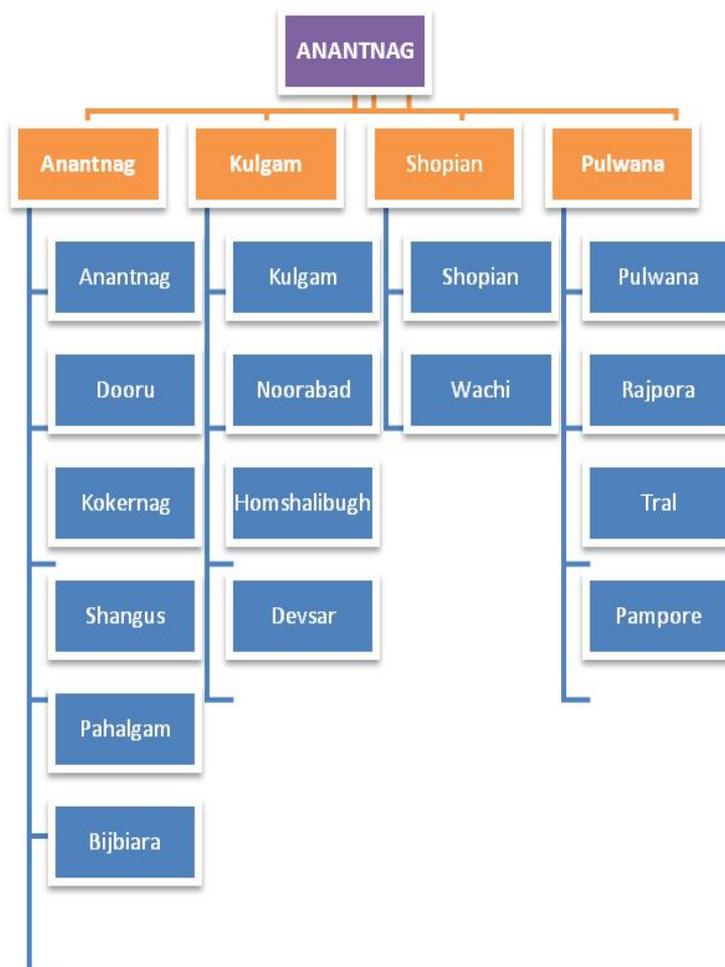
### ANANTNAG CONSTITUENCY

Polling Date – 24<sup>th</sup> April, Total Voter Turnout – 28%

Districts in the Anantnag constituency – Anantnag, Kulgam, Shopian and Pulwama

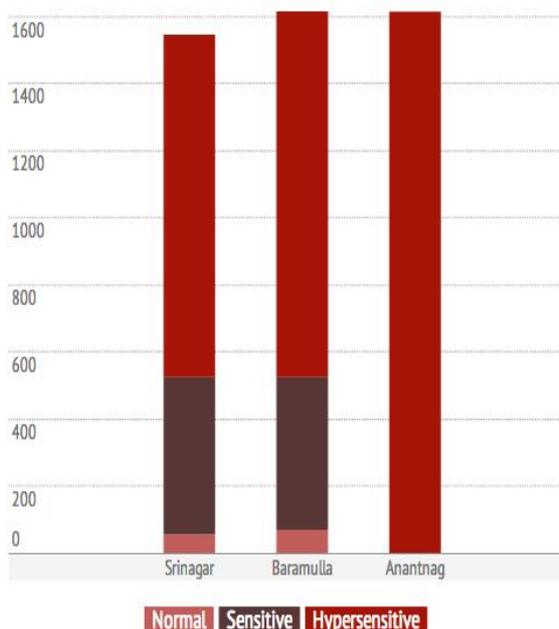
Elections in Anantnag were marred by violence and militant attacks preceding the elections. There was a low voter turnout due to complete poll boycott in the areas of violence and killings of *sarpanches* by militants especially in the Pulwama district. The election officials also attributed the low voter turnout to the targeted killings.

Just before the polls in the South Kashmir region, about



200 youth were arrested and held under preventive detention to curb instances of stone pelting and mob violence<sup>2</sup>. The Anantnag constituency also witnessed heavy deployment of security forces near the polling booths, intended to facilitate voters. Yet despite such measures, violent clashes, stone pelting and poll boycotts were reported across the constituency when Polling began on 24<sup>th</sup> April. The youth were seen as a resilient force of resistance, both by the security forces and the political parties.

## Polling Booths in the Valley constituencies



In the month of April, four elected village heads (*sarpanches*) were killed in the constituency. As a result, 25 *sarpanches* in South Kashmir resigned publicly and others threatened mass resignation. Since political leaders from both the leading parties (NC and PDP) were targeted, the security officials ruled out any political involvement and attributed the killings to local terrorists.

Despite a low voter turnout the PDP President Mehbooba Mufi emerged victorious in the constituency with a substantial number of votes.

Given below is a detailed categorisation of the type of violence witnessed during the polls.

### MILITANT VIOLENCE

A week before polling, militants began targeting *sarpanches*. A PDP *sarpanch*, Muhammad Amin Pandit was shot in **Pulwama district** and this incident spread a wave of fear. A mere four days later the militants targeted a Congress affiliated *sarpanch*, this time in the Tral area. Many threatening posters were also reported across this district in South Kashmir, ranging from a simple request to stay away from polls to paying the price for being an 'Indian traitor'.

On the evening of 24<sup>th</sup>, the officials were returning with the Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) in **Shopian** district when a group of militants attacked the vehicle, killing

<sup>2</sup> "Clashes on Voting Day in Kashmir's Anantnag," *Kashmir Dispatch*, 24<sup>th</sup> April 2014, <<http://www.kashmirdispatch.com/story-in-pictures/240422446-live-blog-clashes-on-voting-day-in-kashmir-s-anantnag-seat.htm>> (Accessed on 7th May 2014)

Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq, a poll officer from Shopian. Five people suffered injuries during the attack including another poll officer, two CRPF personnel, one head constable from the police and the bus driver. Both the NC and PDP condemned the killing of the poll officer and sympathised with his family.

Weeks after the elections, militants in the **Kulgam** area began targeting *sarpanches* and local leaders. An NC worker and village head, Gul Mohammad Bhat was killed at the Wanpoh area in Kulgam marking the fourth death in a series of political assassinations in the South Kashmir constituency of Anantnag. This killing was followed by two separate attacks on local leaders in the district. The first attack was at All India Forward Block State Chief, Asif Jeelani's residence, followed by an attack on PDP *Sarpanch*, Feroz Ahmad's house.

### SEPARATIST INFLUENCED VIOLENCE

On polling day, clashes between violent protestors and the police made it very difficult for voters to exercise their franchise in Shopian District. While many people admitted to the media that they are boycotting polls following the separatist's calls, some claimed it was the heavy deployment of security forces that was discouraging them. Residents alleged that men from the security columns broke windowpanes, and added to the tensions on the ground.

### SPONTANEOUS MOB VIOLENCE

Stone pelting began the day polls were conducted. As noon arrived, youth began pelting stones as pro-freedom songs played on loud speakers. The protestors smashed the windowpanes of a bus that was being used for poll duty, creating chaos on the streets. In a polling booth at **Pulwama**, angry youth sang pro-freedom slogans and continued with stone pelting. A similar atmosphere was created by the violent mobs in other areas of Pulwama district. The mob grew aggressive in many areas attacking polling staff and the police, ultimately leading to retaliatory shots fired by the police to disperse the angry crowds. Even dignitaries faced protestor's anger as Parliament member G.N. Ratanpuri's convoy was attacked with stones.

Two days before polling, protests and slogans were being raised on the streets of **Shopian** demanding not boycott but the release of 12 youths arrested during nocturnal raids. The town observed a complete shutdown.

The day of the polling saw heavy stone pelting by youth in **Anantnag** town and nearby areas in the district. The security forces used tear gas shells to disperse the violent mob a while 'we want freedom' slogans were echoing from demonstrators assaulting polling booths.

Several clashes erupted across the **Kulgam** district as polling was underway. Villages

witnessed stone pelting by youth against the security forces deployed in the area. An agitated mob also resorted to hurling stones at polling booths in the Khodwani and Bugam area of the district. The security forces retaliated by teargas shelling and firing shots in the air to ward off the furious crowd. Many security personnel also sustained injuries due to these clashes in the district.

### IMPACT ON VOTER TURNOUT

The militant attacks in South Kashmir directly impacted voting in Tral and Pulwama regions in terms of voter turnout. While **Pulwama** district recorded an overall voter turnout of 6%, the Tral Assembly segment recorded the lowest voter turnout of 1.4% as it witnessed a significant impact of militant threats. The voter turnout in Pulwama district decreased significantly from 10 percent in 2009 to 6 percent in 2014. **Shopian** district also recorded a low voter turnout of 20% due to violent clashes following youth arrests.

In **Anantnag** district a 37% turnout was recorded and residents in many segments across the district stated that the need for development doesn't override the need for freedom, in certain areas people did come out to vote in substantial numbers despite agitations.



The polling fervour was better in Kokernag, Shangus and Pahalgam, as enthusiastic voters cheered on, waiting their turn to vote. **Kulgam** recorded a 36% turnout, amidst agitations.

### BARAMULLA CONSTITUENCY

Polling Date- 7<sup>th</sup> May, Voter Turnout- 39%

Districts in the Baramulla Consituency- Kupwara, Baramulla and Bandipur

Tensions were rising in Baramulla weeks before polling took place and pro-boycott posters were a common sight across the constituency. This hardened not just the anti-national sentiment amongst the would-be voters but also the security forces' stance on ensuring successful completion of the polls. Three Jammu Kashmir

Liberation Front (JKLF) workers were arrested in North Kashmir for pasting pro-boycott posters across the region. Separatist leaders were also arrested weeks before, to curb any violent backlash. However, on April 12<sup>th</sup>, intense clashes occurred between the police and the youth as Hurriyat Conference leader, Syed Ali Shah Geelani, called for a daylong strike against the arrests.

This constituency saw a large number of youth, irate and clashing with the security forces, locking down polling booths in the name of freedom. On 7<sup>th</sup> May scores of youth came out with stones in hand. In Baramulla, the authorities, expressing concern on the escalating situation, shifted several polling booths to the safer civil lines area, across the Jhelum River. Clashes lasted the whole day, injuring both police personnel and those among the mob.

PDP party leader Muzaffar Hussain Baig won the Baramulla Parliamentary seat with a margin of 29219 votes. After his win, PDP's Muzaffar Hussain Baig clearly stated to the press that the NC had indeed enforced boycott by mobilising youth for stone pelting.

It is important to note that while some areas of Baramulla joined in the boycott calls, ultimately resulting in low turnouts in those areas, voters in the frontier regions of the constituency particularly Uri, Kupwara, Gurez and Tangdhar voted in large numbers. The demographic pattern of the border areas is different from the Valley and many speculate that people residing there do not feel as strongly about the pro-freedom sentiment and the separatist viewpoint as the residents in the interiors.

### **MILITANT VIOLENCE**

A day before the polling, a booth located inside a government school was the target of an explosive blast in Watergram, **Baramulla** district. While no casualties were reported, voting percentage came down as fear gripped many people in the area. Grenade attacks also took place in the district in the Pattan area. The militant outfit, Hizb-ul-Mujahdeen (HM) claimed responsibility for the grenade attacks.

### **SPONTANEOUS MOB VIOLENCE**

Clashes were taking place in the district even before the polling day. There was a cycle of protests and arrests in Baramulla town and Sopore. The Police retaliated by lathi-charge and tear gas shelling to disperse the angry mob. Many areas also saw clashes prior to the polling in response to the arrest and detention of a youth by the army.

On polling day, clashes also broke out in the old town of **Baramulla** between the youth and security forces where 12 persons including six policemen were injured. A village headman, Abdul Majid Lone, was also attacked while on his way to the polling booth.

Sopore witnessed the most violent clashes in the region, followed by nocturnal arrests and several demonstrations condemning the arrests.

Protestors also attacked polling booths across the district and newspaper reports stated that two polling stations were completely locked down by a mob ultimately forcing the authorities to rescue the polling officials and relocate the booths.

Polling in **Kupwara** was conducted without any major clashes or protests, and only one minor incident of stone pelting was reported.

However voters of this district soon paid the price of taking part in the electoral process, by suffering assault at the hands of Pro-Azadi vigilantes from Sopore and Baramulla, who singled out voters travelling to their areas, thrashing and stripping them for being traitors. Many voters were singled out and thrashed after identifying the ink mark on their fingers. The officials found it difficult to take action after the incident as many of the youths were wearing masks. The residents of Kupwara avenged these attacks by closing shops and business establishments of Baramulla and Sopore residents in the area.

In the district of **Bandipur**, clashes occurred in a few areas. Strong protests erupted in the Neberpora area of the district and heavy tear gas shelling took place to control the violent protesters. During the clashes, a tear gas shell gravely injured a teenager. In clashes across the district a total of six people, were injured. At one polling station a few miles from Bandipur, about 200 people were stopped from casting their votes and the youth further ransacked homes and property of those who did cast their vote and exercise their democratic right.

## POLITICAL VIOLENCE

While incidents of violence were limited during polling, **Kupwara** district saw clashes following results of the Baramulla Constituency. On 16<sup>th</sup> May, the winning party was celebrating in Kalaroos village when the rival party engaged them in a verbal spat. Both party members attacked each other with stones and axes. About 15 people were injured during this incident and one of the workers was critically wounded and moved to the hospital. On May 25<sup>th</sup> the injured worker passed away, and a curfew had to be imposed at Kalaroos, and a large number of security forces were deployed to avert any clashes in the area.

## IMPACT ON VOTER TURNOUT

**Baramulla** recorded a turnout of 25% while most segments of the district recorded voter turnout between 10-30% except for Sopore. Being the hometown of Afzal Guru, where anger was brimming, Sopore also saw the lowest voter turnout of 1.02% in the district. An exception was witnessed in Uri. Resting on the border, this segment recorded a heavy turnout of 65%, with little to no protests around the elections.

**Kupwara** District along the border also recorded a substantial turnout of 63% with only one incident of stone pelting. Despite boycott calls, enthusiastic voters made for large

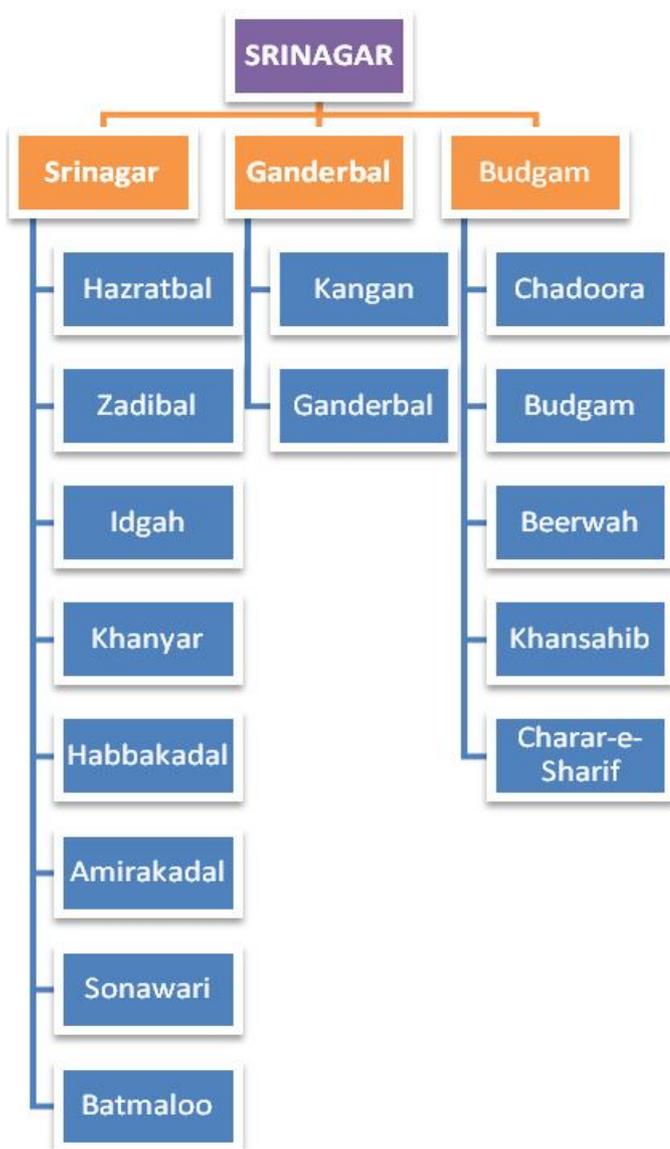
queues in Kupwara and Handwara assembly segments. Brisk polling was witnessed in all assembly segments. The highest turnout of 71% was recorded in Karnah segment, and all other segments had a turnout upwards of 55%.

The district of **Bandipur**, which recorded 35% turnout, saw voters coming out to vote in substantial numbers, especially in the Gurez and Sonawari segments that recorded voting upwards of 50%.

## SRINAGAR CONSTITUENCY

Polling Date- 30<sup>th</sup> April, Voter Turnout- 26%

Districts in the Srinagar Constituency- Srinagar, Ganderbal and Budgam



Leading to the elections in the Srinagar Constituency, there were some preventive detentions and heavy deployment of security forces. *Greater Kashmir* reported that about 400 local youth, previously charged with stone pelting, were detained to ensure smooth polling in the region<sup>3</sup>. This was followed by the arrest of several influential separatist leaders like Syed Geelani, Umar Farooq and Yasin Malik, to curb boycott and shutdown calls.

Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) spokesperson stated to the press that arrests were made and will continue to be affected to instil confidence among the voters and to ensure that they were not intimidated.

This move was followed by heavy deployment of security forces in the Srinagar-Budgam constituency where 241 companies of

<sup>3</sup> "Ahead of polling, over 600 youth held", *Greater Kashmir*, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2014, <<http://jammu.greaterkashmir.com/news/2014/Apr/29/ahead-of-polling-over-600-youth-held-55.asp> > (Accessed on 5th May 2014)

Paramilitary forces were deployed across the three districts of Srinagar, Budgam and Ganderbal. Taking a cue from the violence in South Kashmir, the security was beefed up at key installations in several parts of the region. Mobile bunkers were also placed in vulnerable and sensitive pockets.

An interesting trend that emerged during the study of this constituency is that areas around Srinagar witnessed low voter turnout, whereas exteriors saw reasonably high voting. Segments like Zadibal, Habbakadal, Amirakaddal and Khanyar saw less than 10 per cent turnout, due to separatist influence and militant threat. All these areas lie in the centre of the constituency, huddled around the hub-Srinagar, the city known to have a strong separatist presence with several leaders and their headquarters stationed here.

Tariq Hamid Karra, of PDP, emerged victorious beating the NC president Farooq Abdullah from the Srinagar constituency.

### SEPARATIST INFLUENCED VIOLENCE

While there is no proof of direct attribution to the separatists for violence caused by separatists in **Srinagar**, the arrests of the separatist leaders by the police, fuelled the anger among residents in the region, who then resorted to stone-pelting and protests against the elections.

### MILITANT VIOLENCE

HM posters were displayed across walls and posts in the in the old city area, warning the population to stay away from the poll booths. Just two days before polls a poster warned PDP and NC workers to desist from participating in these elections, as this 'conscienceless' behaviour would not be tolerated.

In **Srinagar** district, a grenade was thrown during an NC rally. The grenade exploded in the compound, but no casualties were reported.

In the district of **Budgam**, a huge grenade blast took place near the bus stand in Magam, where 17 persons were injured. Budgam witnessed violence of this magnitude after a long time and the attackers were able to create an atmosphere of panic. Soon after the blast, HM took responsibility and warned the populace to stay away from polling.

### SPONTANEOUS MOB VIOLENCE

A few incidents were reported in the **Srinagar** district just before the polls. A poll official was attacked by youth with stones and security forces resorted to firing in the air to disperse stone pelting youths at various polling stations across the district. A PDP youth leader and his personal security officer were also injured during the attack.

After the polling closed massive violence and protests erupted in the Idgah segment. The polling staff, escorted by CRPF personnel, was leaving a poll booth when a gang of boys intercepted them and began throwing stones at the vehicles. Under the heavy barrage of stones the CRPF personnel opened fire in retaliation. During the clashes, a 14-year-old boy was killed. Two other protestors were reportedly injured during the clashes. As the news of the youth's death spread across the district, there were widespread protests the following day and curfew had to be imposed in parts of Srinagar district with partial shutdown in the Valley. Four people were injured in separate incidents and clashes that erupted in the district.

In Soibugh, **Budgam**, the village of Syed Sallahudin, HM Chief and United Jihad Council Chairman, clashes and minor stone pelting had begun ahead of the polls, however, the security forces dispersed protestors with tear gas shells and secured the booths. At another area in the district, angry residents boycotted the elections due to the Tosamaidan row<sup>4</sup> and frustration at NC's apathy. The Tosamaidan Bachao Front announced the call for boycott.

On the day of polling, stone pelting and clashes were recorded at Tulmulla, Barsoo, Saloor, Mancho, Kralpora and Khurhama areas of **Ganderbal** district. Many youth were engaging in stone pelting to enforce boycott in the region. However, the security personnel quickly dispersed the angry crowds before an untoward situation could occur.

## POLITICAL VIOLENCE

In **Ganderbal** district, a scuffle between NC activists and PDP supporters at Lar, a week preceding the elections, resulted in injuries to nine people. Tensions were seen rising between members of both parties.

## IMPACT ON VOTER TURNOUT

**Srinagar** district recorded a turnout of 11% in the polls with the interior segments near the city like Habbakadal, Khanyar, Amirakadal and Zadibal recording below 10% turnout. These regions also reported a boycott of elections along with complete to partial shutdown. Some segments like Khanyar, which witnessed a grenade blast by a militant outfit, recorded a 10% turnout. While there were a few incidents of stone pelting, the mob violence was not as much a deterrent to high voter turnout as the militant threat and separatist calls were.

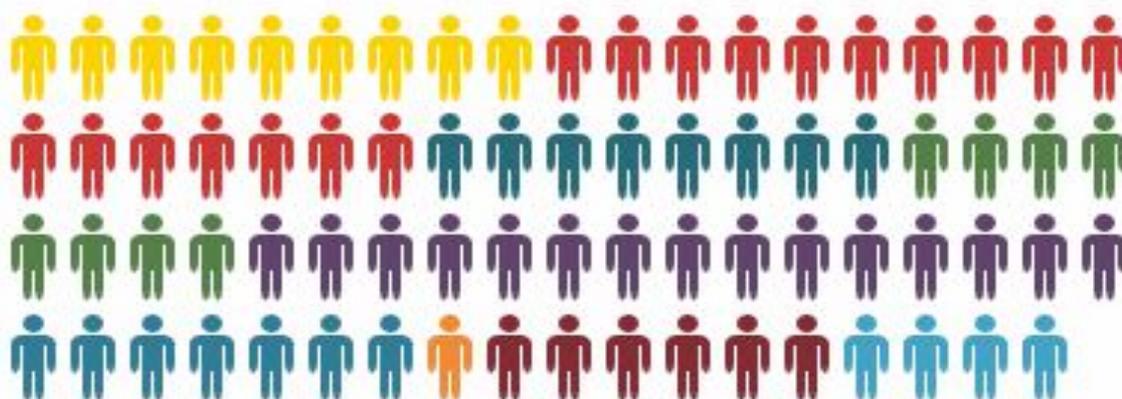
In the **Budgam** district, polling was conducted peacefully except for the Magam blast preceding the polls. However this incident did not affect the turnout to a great degree

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<sup>4</sup> Tosamaidan is a meadow that was leased to the army in 1964 to use as a firing range. With the lease ending in 2014, the locals are agitating its extension to the army. The row saw massive protests and demonstrations until the government decided against an extension.

and the district recorded an almost 40% turnout. Though the district observed a complete shutdown on the day of polling, brisk voting was noticed across several segments. Newspapers reported eager voters in the assembly segments, many of whom included youth, which was a change from the scenario in other parts of the valley<sup>5</sup>. Similar eagerness was witnessed in the Charar-e-Sharif segment that recorded 65% turnout, as residents were anxiously pinning their hopes on a worthy candidate, with an objective to bring development in the area.

**Ganderbal** district recorded the maximum turnout in the constituency at 45% despite complete to partial shutdowns across many assembly segments and scarce vehicular movement. Despite some clashes in the area, the Kangan segment recorded a 65% turnout, the highest in the entire Srinagar Constituency, matching Charar-e-Sharif.



Casualty figures District wise

**CONCLUSION**

Analysis of the elections, suggests that there is a definite correlation between violence and voter turnout. However, the militant threat, had only limited fallout. South Kashmir, with the killings of *sarpanches* and attacks on political leaders, along with parts of Srinagar district which saw terrorist blasts, seem to have been the only areas to see an impact on

<sup>5</sup> Asem Mohiuddin "In Budgam people vote to seek accountability," Rising Kashmir, April 30<sup>th</sup> 2014, <<http://www.risingkashmir.com/in-budgam-people-vote-to-see-accountability/>> (Accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2014)

voting percentages due to threats and violence. Pulwama, Tral and Pampore constituencies were badly affected by the militant attacks. However, the other regions did not witness low voter turnout specifically due to militant threats, but for other reasons. For instance the Srinagar district witnessed low voter turnout (as low as 4%) in many segments despite no presence of militant violence or mob clashes.

The separatist narrative was strongest in the constituencies lying in the interior districts and around Srinagar, and this resulted in low turnout. Persistent boycott calls, and pressure from local separatist leaders was easier in these regions due to their existing establishment and set-up in Srinagar. Moreover, the comparatively fewer clashes show that the underlying reason for the low voter turnout was more ideological than forced by circumstances.

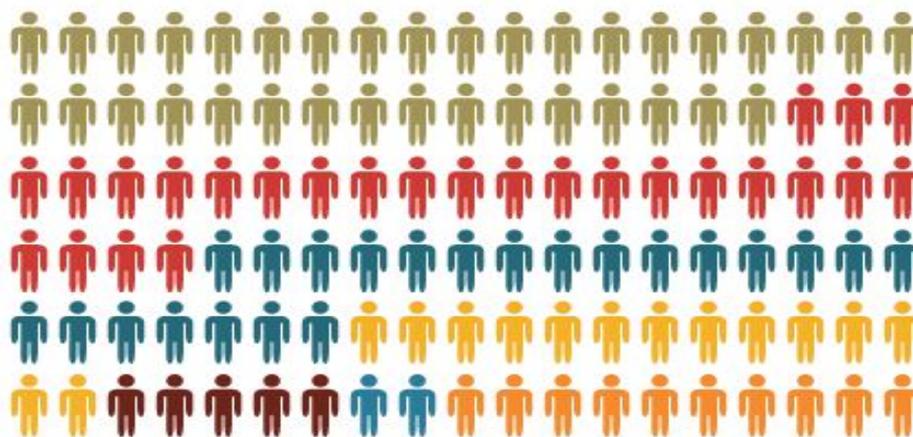
There was little impact of boycott calls and separatist influence in the frontier regions of the valley, specifically the segments of Uri, Handwara, Kupwara and Karnah of the Baramulla constituency. These areas witnessed a heavy voter turnout. It can also be speculated that since the border regions require more urgent development in comparison to interior regions, as political leaders confine their activities to the big urban centres only, there is a greater need for a responsible electoral process among the populace. This can ensure that the elected politician can bring the requisite progress to the area. It can also be so because people in these areas have suffered more due to militancy due to their isolated positions.

A factor that significantly affected voter turnout, was the youth that was at the forefront of most of the protests and this was true especially in the Northern constituency of Baramulla and parts of Srinagar constituency. The five bridges of Baramulla witnessed heavy deployment of security personnel. Cement Bridge, Azad Gunj Bridge, Khanpora Bridge, Gulnar Park and SRTC foot bridges, were covered by cops to ensure protest-free polling. Spools of razor wire were also reportedly laid to restrict civilian movement in the area.

The youth also suffered the most, as there were heavy arrests and massive crackdowns on them. Hundreds are still locked up post elections, many youth organisations pressed NC leader Farooq Abdullah to chalk out an amnesty plan for the youth booked under charges like stone pelting. Minister of State for Home Affairs Sajad Ahmed Kichloo, told the press of a committee headed by IGP Kashmir to review cases of youth involved in stone pelting with leniency.

This study of the Lok Sabha elections gives us pointers on what to expect in the forthcoming Assembly elections later in the year. It is critical that various groups engage the youth so that they do not succumb to exploitation. If they can be kept off the streets, most violence can be controlled.

# Youth Arrested in the Valley During Elections



120 continue in detention even after elections

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