

# The Impact of Conflict on Young People in Azad Jammu and Kashmir

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Map of Jammu and Kashmir region

Courtesy: Kashmir Study Group

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## Disclaimer

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'AJK' is used for the Pakistani side of Kashmir, 'J&K' for the Indian side of Kashmir and 'Kashmir' for the whole of the state (Jammu and AJK).

*Any errors in this paper remain those of the author. This paper should not be taken to represent the views of Conciliation Resources.*

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## Executive summary

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Young people in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) are civically engaged and aware of their basic rights and duties. Although they associate themselves with the larger Kashmir conflict, they feel fortunate not to be directly involved in armed conflict. AJK is one of the most peaceful areas within Pakistan, so its youth live without fear of state suppression. AJK's democratic system, although fragile, helps people raise their voices, participate in the political process and gives them a sense of ownership. AJK also has its own institutions functioning under the AJK Interim Constitution Act of 1974. However, our study found that young people face many socio-political and constitutional issues as a result of the unresolved Kashmir conflict. These include:

- A large number of AJK's young people believe that their rights have been subjugated and that the Kashmir dispute has been used as a pretext. They believe the government of the state of AJK does not enjoy the autonomy promised in the 1949 United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) resolution, which talks of 'Local Authority'. They also believe that non-compliance has resulted in the failure to build a transparent and sustainable political system in AJK.
- Young people question the uneven and lopsided constitutional relationship between AJK and Pakistan. The AJK Interim Constitution Act of 1974 drew criticism - youth strongly believe it excludes the people of AJK from decision making because the "Azad Jammu and Kashmir Council" acts as a supra constitutional and paramount authority.
- Young people consider the relationship between AJK and Pakistan vague. They believe that it is neither a sovereign State nor a Province of Pakistan.
- They believe this vague status has a strong bearing upon the socio-economics of the State. AJK has no representation in the Council of Common Interest (CCI), National Economic Council (NEC), National Finance Commission (NFC) or the Indus River System Authority (IRSA), which is a denial of their rights.
- Many of the young people believe that the relationship of people of AJK with Pakistan is inalienable and natural. They also believe that strong and stable Pakistan is in the best interest of the people of Kashmir.

Those involved in our study spoke candidly of their distrust of AJK's political leaders. They repeatedly questioned recent political wrangling and described AJK as a politically misgoverned region. They

believe that inept political parties, corrupt and incompetent leadership, poor governance and family patronage, as well as the conflict, are major impediments to improving AJK's poor socio-economic conditions.

Most youth feel AJK's wealth is unevenly distributed and that the ruling elite exploits its resources.

- Despite expressing concern about politicians, young people show unflinching support for the democratic process because they believe it is the only way to bring about peaceful change.
- AJK's youth is civically engaged – the overwhelming majority vote, act as volunteers, and use electronic, print and social media (Facebook), radio, processions and rallies to express their voice.
- AJK's youth brain drain is a direct consequence of migratory push and pull factors. Migration is widespread in the subcontinent and the loss of talented and trained human capital has greatly affected AJK's socio-economic development. More positively, foreign remittances play a large role in improving the economic circumstances of AJK's people. The diaspora has now begun to invest in AJK, but youth consider such investment inadequate and merely symbolic.
- The standard of government-run educational institutions is considered below average and deteriorating, particularly up to intermediate level (Year 12). Yet while AJK tops the literacy rate for all provinces of Pakistan, which is a positive indicator for its future, hardly any of its state education institutions match the quality of those in Pakistan.
- Young people have serious concerns about Pakistan's unnecessary domination over the political and administrative setup of AJK, yet simultaneously laud its unflinching support and commitment to the issue of Kashmir. They also believe that AJK's socio-economic development is contingent upon Pakistan's fortunes.
- Although they show a strong attachment to Pakistan, AJK youth are unwilling to dilute their indigenous Kashmiri identity, which they strongly believe in retaining forever.
- Our research found youth were confused about the existing status of their identity, as they do not know whether they are legally or politically Kashmiris, or whether to call themselves Pakistani Kashmiri or just Pakistani.
- Wide support for a peaceful resolution of the Kashmir conflict was shared in focus group

discussions. Youth from all three divisions strongly favoured peace initiatives and showed visible disengagement from the armed movement. The recent emergence of a non-violent and peaceful movement on J&K has not only inspired AJK youth but also is widely appreciated and supported by them.

- Youth of AJK consider the conflict of Kashmir as a political issue and stressed that the human dimension of the conflict of Kashmir should not be ignored.
- Young people overwhelmingly support the revival of cross-Line of Control (LoC) 'people to people contact' and traditional trade routes. They ambitiously wish to promote initiatives such as cultural exchanges (dances, folk music, poetry, sports, religious tourism e.g. shrines), youth exchanges, joint youth parliaments, educational

endeavours, free movement for students, poets, writers, youth representatives and people living on both sides of the LoC.

- Young people from AJK want to combine cross-LoC trade with cultural activities, transforming the LoC into a '*Line of Culture and Communication*'. Despite cross-border movement being riddled with administrative hitches and constrained by procedural delays, they believe such initiatives will strengthen 'normalisation', build peace constituencies and have far-reaching impact.
- Youth believe the peace process should continue and that contact between people across the LoC can facilitate and strengthen it. They also believe that while trade and travel may not be the panacea, these can serve as a means to a logical end.

## Introduction

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The long-standing and intractable issue of Kashmir between Pakistan and India is of great importance for the young people of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). The costs of this deep-rooted conflict have become increasingly unbearable for Pakistan and India, and for the people of the erstwhile state of Kashmir in particular. Conflict and socio-political development are undisputedly interwoven; and AJK's development has been greatly affected by the conflict, resulting in persistent socio-economic deprivation.

The period of militancy between 1989 and 2008 had an unprecedented impact on Kashmiri society. The massive displacement of people across the Line of Control (LoC) demonstrates the conflict's profound humanitarian cost. An uncertain future has created an identity crisis and divided the youth along ideological and political lines. Continued conflict may militarise young Kashmiris, which can potentially constrain peace and give rise to future extremism. Economically weak, unemployed and vulnerable youth are a soft target; and religious

fundamentalism threatens to lead young people down a violent path that could derail the peace process. Conversely, the post 9/11 situation, particularly the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan under the broader narrative of the 'War on Terror', has transformed many young people's thinking towards pursuing non-violent means for resolving the conflict. Kashmiri youth in general oppose any sort of violence and understand the significance of the increasing transnational and trans-border connectivity of a globalising world. They increasingly realise the need to strengthen the peace process through use of confidence building measures.

The aim of this study is to identify the key economic, socio-political and educational issues that AJK's youth confront against the backdrop of the Kashmir conflict. A diverse group actively participated in the research and enriched the analysis with different views about the conflict's impact on their lives. This research will help increase understanding of the issues faced by young people in AJK, and their opinions on the Kashmir conflict.

## Methodology

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This research was carried out by the Centre for Peace, Development and Reforms (CPDR) in collaboration with Conciliation Resources, an international peacebuilding organisation that is based in the UK. The research covers all three divisions of AJK, namely Muzaffarabad, Mirpur and Poonch. The research design and instrument was developed in consultation with a wide range of

experts including academics, writers, researchers, conflict resolution experts, former judges, human rights activists and political figures. To measure youth opinion about the impact of the conflict on their lives, a comprehensive questionnaire was disseminated among 650 stakeholders in three divisions of AJK. Structured interviews were also carefully designed in consultation with research

experts. The researcher also conducted three focus group (FG) discussions / meetings in the three divisions in January and February 2010.

### Who are the youth?

The definition of youth varies from country to country. This research defines youth as ranging from 18 to 35-years-old. According to the 1998 population census, the state of AJK had a population of 2.973 million. The current population is estimated to be around 4.59 million.<sup>1</sup> The rural to urban ratio is 88:12. However, it is important to state that there is interconnectivity and movement between urban and rural areas in AJK and many youth travel from the villages to the cities to attend college or university. As such, the rural/urban divide is not as stark as it may be in other contexts. The literacy rate increased from 55 per cent in 1998 census to 64 per cent in 2009.<sup>2</sup> Over half of AJK population is under 35.

### Sampling

The researcher used non probability quota sampling<sup>3</sup> across the whole AJK region for

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1 'AJK at a Glance', Planning and Development Department, Azad Government of the State of Jammu and Kashmir (2011).

2 Department of Planning and Development, AJK; Department of Health AJK, 2011; AJK at a glance 2010; Social Infrastructure of AJK 2012 <http://www.ajk.gov.pk/index.php>

3 Non-probability quota sampling involves gathering samples in a process that does not give all the individuals in the population equal chances of being selected, while selecting people according to a fixed quota on the basis of pre-specified characteristics so that the total sample has the same distribution of characteristics assumed to exist in the population being studied.

questionnaires and for focus group (FG) meetings. FG discussions and structured interviews were carried out from 1 January to 28 February 2010. Fifty in-depth interviews were also carried out, 40 per cent of which were female respondents. Of the total three FG discussions, 45 participants were from Muzaffarabad, 40 were from Rawalakot and 25 from Mirpure. The participants were chosen according to their backgrounds (rural or urban), and sex (male or female), education, profession and identification with particular political parties. There was a 40:70 ratio of female to male participation in focus groups. FG discussions contained youth leaders, young lawyers, journalists, civil society activists, religious figures, and position-holding students. Overall, the 110 participants actively participated in three discussions held in all three divisions of AJK: Muzaffarabad, Mirpur and Rawalakot.

### Presentation of results

Around 650 questionnaires were disseminated across AJK on the basis of quota sampling. The researcher could not ensure a complete gender balance due to social constraints. The quota for each division was selected according to its population. A random selection procedure was used to select individual respondents for questionnaires. The whole survey gathered 520 responses out of a total of 650. Some respondents did not mention their age. Almost 30 per cent were female.

## Young people's views on socio-political issues

A political process that ensures participation, equity and inclusiveness is the hallmark of democratic governance. Good political governance provides stable micro and macro-economic development and promotes free competition. Participation can be made possible either directly or through legitimate intermediate institutions that represent young people's interests, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness and accountability.<sup>4</sup> Conflict and governance are interlinked. Young people in AJK believe that the Kashmir conflict has negatively affected governance in AJK. The unresolved Kashmir dispute between Pakistan and India is widely considered the main issue of concern; almost 95 per cent of AJK's youth considered it paramount in their lives. They believe their socio-economic deprivation derives from it. The people of AJK have

been politically aware and civically engaged since partition. The struggle for adult franchise and democratic space for the people of AJK is rooted in several political movements that begin in the early 1950's. People had to face state repression, hundreds of thousands were jailed, but they did not give up the struggle for their basic rights. Finally, a proper constitution was created and the right to vote was granted in 1970 by the government of Pakistan. According to Ershad Mahmud, "Kashmiri leadership's unanimous demand for democratic rule and change in Islamabad's approach finally bore fruit in 1970. A democratic set-up was established in AJK through the 1970 Act and Presidential Elections were held on 'one person one vote' democratic formula"<sup>5</sup>. Since then, electoral

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4 UNDP 1997. *Governance for sustainable human development*.

5 Ershad Mahmud *Status of AJK in political Milieu* Institute of Policies Studies, Islamabad Pakistan.

politics is imbedded in the local society of AJK. Although AJK's political system emanated from a peaceful civil society movement, many youth describe the system as 'forged' and manipulated. A sizeable percentage of AJK's youth (in Muzaffarabad 46 per cent, Mirpur 53 per cent, and Rawalakot 49 per cent) strongly "do not believe" in the fairness of AJK's political system, which has been contingent upon Pakistan since its inception. They believe it serves only the interests of political elite whose survival is maintained by close family ties and connections with power holders in Islamabad. The majority of youth (in Muzaffarabad 87 per cent, in Mirpur 43 per cent, and in Rawalakot 40 per cent) strongly believe that Pakistan dominates AJK's political landscape and system.

Youth expressed the opinion that this dominance has given birth to a privileged political class in AJK buttressed by the religious belief of "Azadi" (freedom) used for their political goals. AJK has also seen that it's systemic and incremental socio-economic and political dependence on Pakistan, being viewed as an additional burden on the already fragile economy of Pakistan.

### Views on political governance

A fair and transparent political process is the hallmark of good governance. It gives stakeholders a sense of ownership and engenders a spirit of participatory governance. Although AJK's young people have concerns about the legitimacy and transparency of the broader political process, their continuous resolve and belief in AJK's own political process will have far-reaching impact.

*'I cannot get a party ticket because I'm not the daughter of a political leader, or bureaucrat, nor do I have the support of big clan (bradari) – and most of all I am a woman.'*

This survey found that many of AJK's youth participate in elections and are civically engaged. However, their opinions regarding AJK's existing political system are fragmented. Youth in Rawalakot (almost 65 per cent) displayed a comparatively high level of trust, yet almost 40 per cent of youth in Muzaffarabad and 45 per cent of youth in Mirpur do not trust the existing political system of AJK. They believe that it is marred with corrupt practices and revolves around few influential clans. Young people view AJK as a politically misgoverned and unstable entity. They associate it with inept political parties, corrupt political leadership, family patronage and excessive dependence on Pakistan's administrative setup, dominated by 'lent

officers' who assume all authority and leave AJK's political leaders little space. AJK's political parties are often considered the 'B' teams of political parties in Pakistan, providing minimal input into policymaking. Youth tend to believe that intra-party democracy, which mainly includes leadership and candidate selection, does not follow any fair and transparent process. Youth generally term political parties as 'family parties'. Most candidly display their mistrust of AJK's leaders and are disgruntled over the distribution of party tickets, which they believe are 'bought'. They think that the selection of candidates depends solely on ties with the political party heads in Pakistan. They also say that politicians do not have any respect for legal, ethical or social obligations towards people. Many AJK politicians over time are perceived to have put aside their party policies, agenda and vision and shifted loyalties between parties to gain material benefits. Lust for power and personal gain is regarded as having weakened the political system. Young people strongly feel that their political leaders lack a stake in AJK, given that many live in the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi, and send their children to study in the best educational institutions in Pakistan or abroad. One of the youth from Muzaffarabad highlighted that "they invest their money mostly in Pakistan or abroad and they promote family legacies in politics". During this study, more than 90 per cent of young people displayed open distrust of their political leaders. As one politically active youth commented,

*"The strings of political parties of AJK are tied with a knot that lies in Islamabad".*

The question of whether Pakistan's main political parties should operate in AJK and sponsor candidates in elections received a diverse and fragmented response. Fifty per cent of the youth surveyed believe that it just drags the people of Azad Kashmir into the quagmire and rhetoric of Pakistan's politics, in which Kashmiris' problems and aspirations have no place. They think it interferes with the Kashmiri people's right to make democratic choices according to their own assessments and priorities. Youth believe that AJK's people should not be the subject of political diktat of party heads and they criticise the frequent visits during election campaigns to AJK by Pakistan's Prime Minister and his Cabinet offering what they view as blandishments. Such activities fuel speculation that Pakistan wants Azad Kashmir legislators to favour the party in power in Islamabad.

Contrary to this, a significant number of youth surveyed (45 per cent) welcome mainstream parties

into the AJK political scene. They argue that it has highlighted AJK politics and helped AJK become more involved in the broader political process. In the 2011 elections, the resulting heavy media coverage from mainstream channels of Pakistan and public participation was considered productive by the youth in raising awareness about the broader issue of Kashmir, and informing people with more traditional attitudes. Seventy per cent of youth have faith that a strong and stable Pakistan is in the interest of the people of AJK and their socio economics is largely contingent upon Pakistan due to geographical proximity.

### Youth participation in politics

*Almost 90 per cent of AJK youth have previously enlisted their name on voter lists and almost 60 per cent of youth vote.*

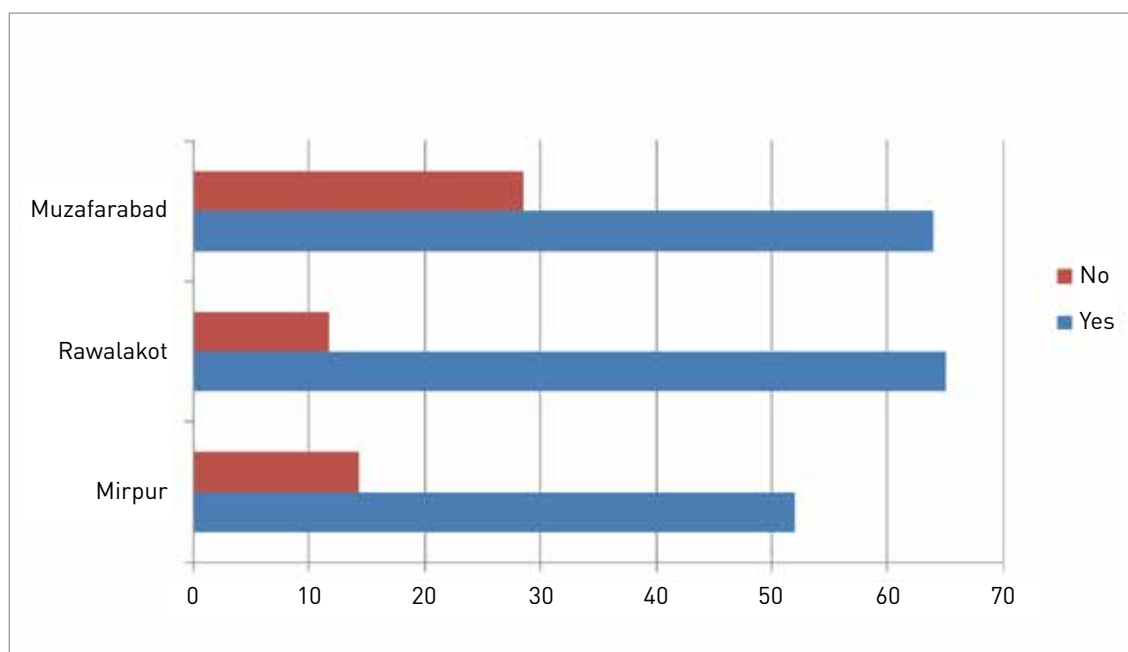
*More than 80 per cent also believe that their vote can bring change.*

Although young people voice concern over the lack of accountability and transparency in politics, their belief in the democratic process is encouraging. The majority of youth in all three AJK divisions vote. Muzaffarabad has the highest rate of young voters – almost 78 per cent. This is interesting given that more than 45 per cent do not trust AJK’s political system. This trend was found across AJK – although youth are disgruntled, their collective approach is geared towards functioning and bringing about change within the system’s boundaries. Almost

60 per cent of youth from Rawalakot, 50 per cent from Muzaffarabad and 35 per cent from Mirpur are associated with political parties or their student wings and there are high levels of political organisation in many parts of AJK. Almost 65 per cent youth from Rawalakot, 64 per cent from Muzaffarabad and 52 per cent from Mirpur believe that their vote can bring change.

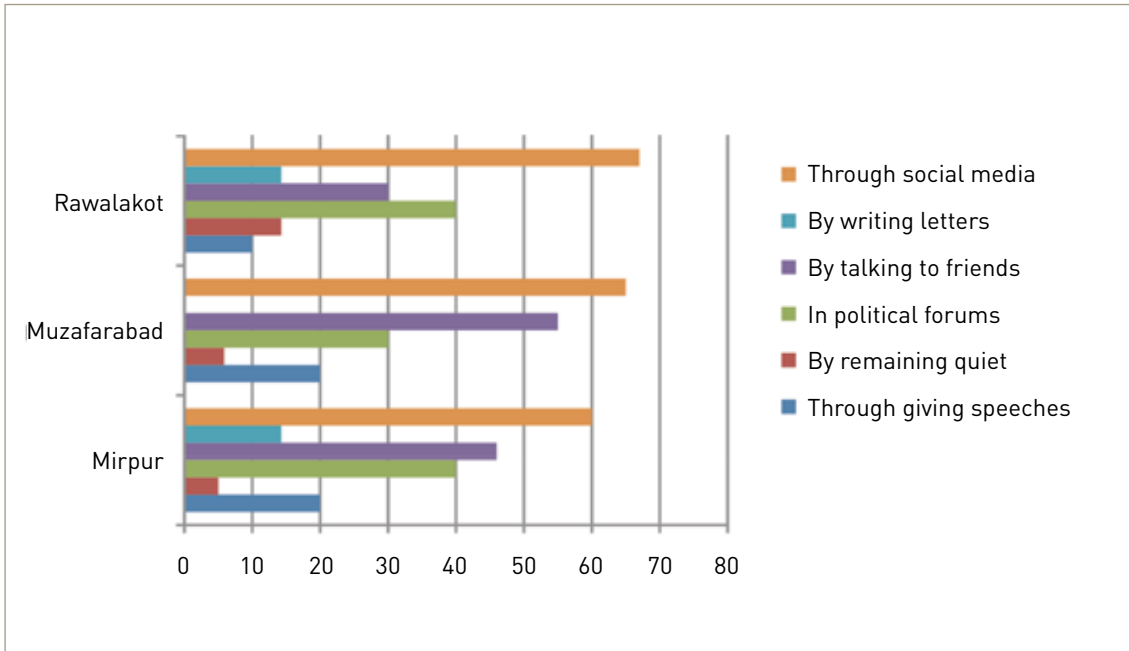
During research it was found that levels of civic participation among the youth in Muzaffarabad and Rawalakot is high compared with youth in Mirpur.

Youth use different means to express political views through speeches, debates and social networks. A significant number of youth use political forums to express their political views. In the context of AJK, political party meetings in towns and villages, political debates organised by student unions, informal meetings or gatherings of political workers during social events (marriages, religious congregations), political party’s offices, and colleges are widely used forums to express political views for young people in AJK. Sixty per cent of the youth surveyed from Rawalakot, 50 per cent from Muzaffarabad and 35 per cent from Mirpur are formally registered in student unions, and also volunteer. Many regularly donate money to social organisations or unions to keep them running. Print and electronic media is a great source for youth to find out about the government’s activities – almost half read newspapers about politics, while the same amount has also studied AJK’s constitution. They believe their participation in politics can bring about a healthy change in society. They are unhappy with their leaders, but optimistic that continuity in

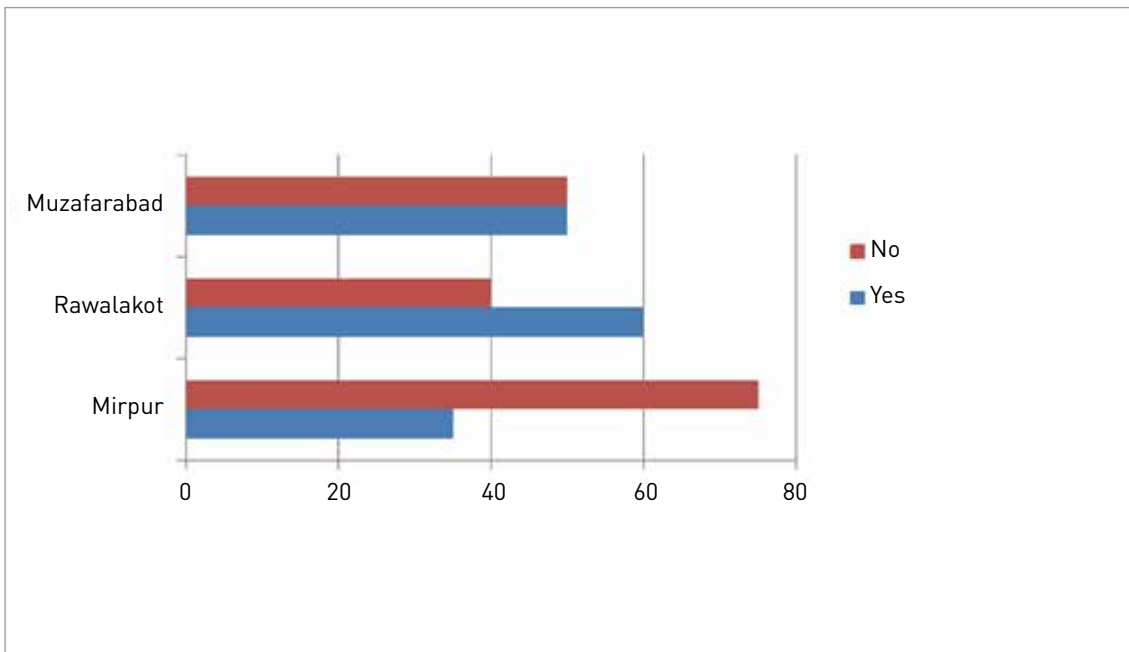


**Chart 1:**  
Do you think your vote can bring a change?

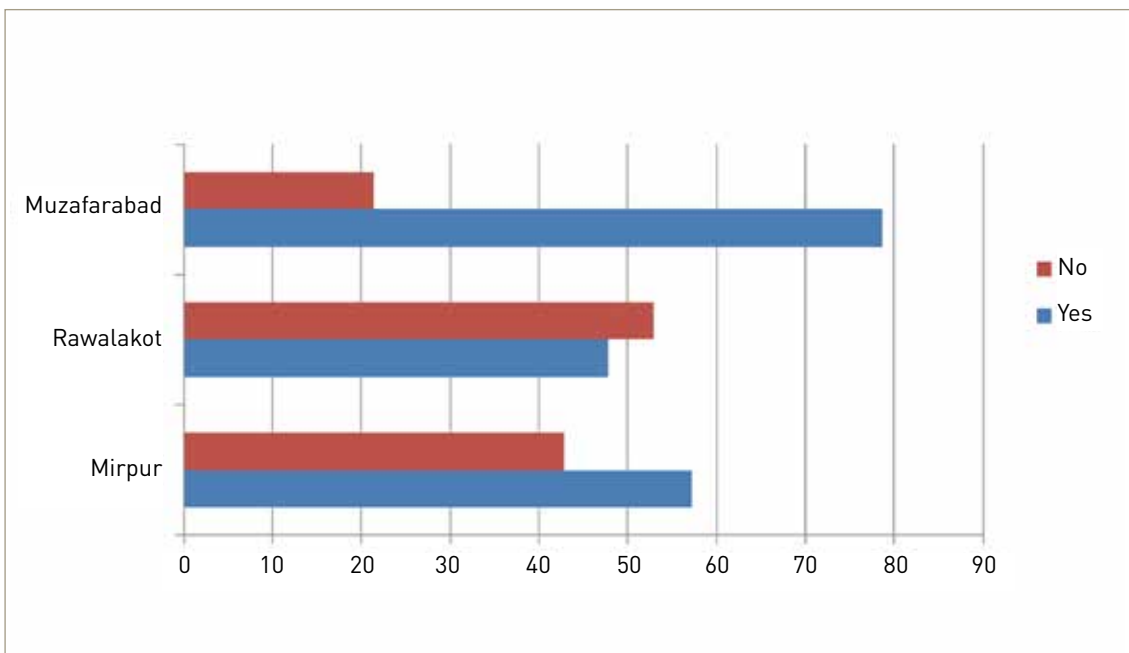




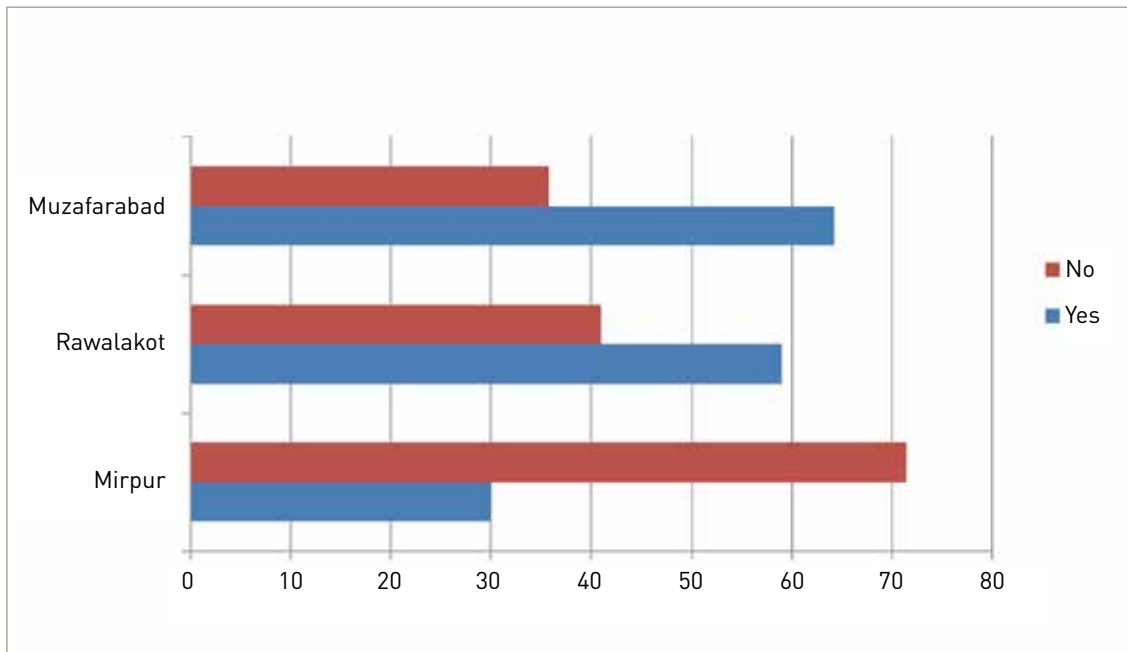
**Chart 2:**  
How do you express your political view?



**Chart 3:**  
Are you a registered member of a student union or political party?



**Chart 4:**  
Do you vote?



**Chart 5:**  
Do you actively take part in politics or political activities?

a political process and dialogue is the best way to ensure change.

### On constitutional rights

*Youth believe they should be the masters of their fate. One unemployed youth remarked: "My fate is at the mercy of those for whom I did not vote."*

Although most young people in AJK are civically engaged and aware of their basic rights and duties, they widely believe they do not enjoy the constitutional rights that citizens of a state should. They feel their rights have been denied on the pretext of war and that questioning the status quo has had unprecedented socio-political consequences. AJK's government and people do not enjoy autonomy and are deprived of the basic rights essential for building a democratic culture and political system.

Historically the relationship between Pakistan and AJK has remained undefined, though it has evolved over the years and passed through different transformational phases. Discussion of a constitutional relationship between Pakistan and AJK evoked strong criticism among the youth in the focus groups. The sanctity of AJK's Constitution (1974 Act) drew great criticism because youth feel strongly that it excludes AJK's citizens from decision-making. The excessive legislative and executive powers vested in the Kashmir Council are considered undemocratic. More than 45 per cent of those surveyed believe that such powers greatly impede decision-making

by AJK's government. This dependency is coupled by the appointment of secondees known as 'lent officers', nominated and posted by Pakistan's government. These include the Chief Secretary, Inspector General of Police, Auditor General, Health Secretary, Chief Election Commissioner and Home Secretary.<sup>6</sup> They ultimately act as a real authority within AJK, maintaining a strong check on AJK's elected government. Pakistan's Prime Minister also chairs the AJK Council, which exercises paramount authority over the AJK Legislative Assembly.<sup>7</sup> All executive powers are vested in the chairman, leaving AJK with little autonomy or status. Decisions by the Kashmir Council cannot be challenged. It is under the numerical control of the federal government in Islamabad. In addition to the Pakistani Prime Minister, it comprises of six federal ministers and six Azad Kashmir members, elected by the Legislative Assembly. The composition of the Council is not representative of AJK; it favours the federal government because the chairman and the six ministers all belong to the same political party and therefore are more capable of uniting within the Council, while the other six selected members from AJK are drawn from different parties. In practice, the role of these elected members in the presence of influential figures representing Pakistan's government is insignificant, particularly in levying taxes and legislating on the subjects under the AJK's Council remit. The Azad Jammu

<sup>6</sup> *An appraisal of constitutional financial and administrative arrangements between Government of Pakistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir*, Centre for Peace and Development Reforms.

<sup>7</sup> According to section 21 of the 1974 Act, the prime minister or chief executive of Pakistan shall be chairman of the AJK Council dated June 2011.

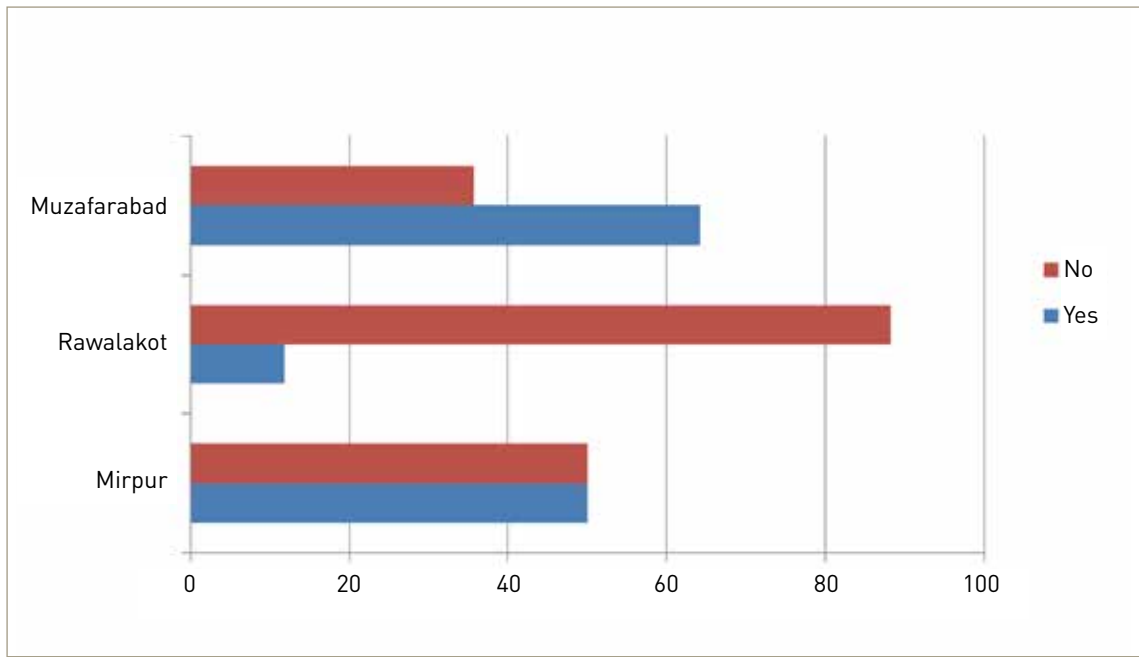


Chart 6: Have you read the constitution of Azad Jammu and Kashmir?

and Kashmir Interim Constitution Act of 1974 lists 52 subjects<sup>8</sup> – virtually everything of importance – under the jurisdiction of the AJK Council. Potential sectors like hydropower, banking, tourism, oil and gas, industries, telecommunication, media, trading corporations are under its control, leaving AJK’s government with no authority to decide upon such issues. Tax collection – a major source of revenue – is controlled by the AJK Council, rendering AJK financially dependent. The AJK Council has been described as the ‘supra power’ by the AJK High Court, because Section 56 of the Interim Constitution Act gives Pakistan’s government the right to dismiss AJK’s elected parliament. This goes against the spirit of Article 257, which says, “When the people of the State of Kashmir decide to accede to Pakistan, the relationship between Pakistan and that State shall be determined in accordance with the wishes of the people of that State”.<sup>9</sup> Some defects are inherent in the AJK Council. The exclusive authority to decide on the 52 subjects pertaining to AJK, including the appointment and removal of Superior Court Judges and the Auditor General, is vested in the Chairman, the Prime Minister of Pakistan. The elected and nominated members of the AJK Council barely play a role in these matters.

When asked, the majority of the youth stressed the need to revisit these arrangements and asserted that a larger consensus exists in AJK for redefining the relationship between Pakistan and AJK, to make it inclusive of all political parties

to promote empowerment and local rule. Youth believe that since the process of political devolution has started in Pakistan, with the approval of the 18th amendment transferring federal powers to the provinces, this should also be extended symbolically to AJK by devolving the AJK Council’s undemocratic powers.

Youth also believe that seats reserved for the Kashmiri refugees in Pakistan are another face of the dependent and conditional relationship between AJK and Pakistan. The AJK Legislative Assembly consists of 49 members. Of these, 41 are directly and eight indirectly elected, with 12 seats reserved for the Kashmiri refugees settled in Pakistan. Most of the youth of AJK describe that these 12 refugee seats play a key role in forming the government in AJK. They believe that holding elections throughout Pakistan to elect AJK Assembly members is unwieldy and entails great effort and expense. Youth across AJK are unhappy about the lack of transparency and impartiality of holding elections for these seats. They believe a large portion of the electoral lists are fake or bogus because many non-state subjects have been enrolled as state subjects.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, since the AJK Election Commission does not supervise these elections, the mechanism of holding elections under provincial governments cannot ensure impartiality – thus marring the system’s credibility. If the very basis of democracy, the electoral process, is called into question,

8 The AJK Interim Constitution Act, 1974 Third schedule [see section 31 (2)] council legislative list.

9 Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973.

10 ‘State subject’ refers to the people of erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir; but some non-Kashmiris in Pakistan are also reported to have taken fake state subject certificates, which gives them the right to vote in the AJK Assembly elections.

then the whole edifice created from that exercise becomes dubious, as in the case of refugee seats. There is a general perception found among youth that the ruling government in Islamabad uses refugee seats as a tool for manipulation, as does the Punjab government, with almost eight and a half seats falling within its territorial jurisdiction. Successive federal governments have gifted these seats to allies, using their leverage to ensure their allies' victory. Additionally, a large number of non-Kashmiris are registered voters.

Many youth demand that refugee voters' lists be revised to help ensure free and fair elections on refugee seats. Youth have a diverse opinion on the fairness of political process in AJK. Almost 55 per cent of youth surveyed from Rawalakot, and Muzaffarabad and 50 per cent from Mirpur, challenged the very foundation of the political process as having fundamental questions to answer, such as sections 21 (6) and 23 (1) of AJK's Interim Constitution Act, regarding the prerequisite for members of legislative assembly or council, which demands the compliance with accession of AJK with Pakistan. At the same time, youth that participated in focus group discussions believe that the above-mentioned sections of the AJK Interim Constitution Act do not give a good impression to the outside world and can be misleading. Youth believe that the legal obligation to sign an affidavit of allegiance to Kashmir's accession to Pakistan, particularly for contesting election, should be abolished and that it is contrary to basic human rights. Though this section is also a prerequisite to obtain government jobs, that a number of nationalists<sup>11</sup> serve in various government departments shows this law remains on the statute book only. Yet it is also contrary to Pakistan's own Constitution: Article 257 holds that the 'people of Kashmir will define their relationship with Pakistan after obtaining freedom'. It can also compromise Pakistan's proclaimed commitment to the right of self-determination and its demand to

11 By nationalist in the context of AJK I refer to any person who believes that Jammu and Kashmir should be an independent country that is neither part of Pakistan nor India.

implement the UNSC resolutions on Kashmir. One of the student leaders from the National Student Federation (NSF) describes it as being against the spirit of democracy, given that noncompliance results in disqualification of any potential candidate who contests elections in AJK. Youth during focus group discussions and specifically from Rawalakot and Muzaffarabad also urge the revival of AJK's 1970 Constitution,<sup>12</sup> which they say lays down fundamental rights for AJK's citizens. It gave AJK powers that, in practice, provided for a President elected directly by Kashmiris living in AJK and vested with executive powers, along with the corresponding legislative powers vested in the Assembly. Importantly, foreign trade and foreign aid were included under the legislative and executive authority of the AJK government. Youth who participated in focus groups widely believe that the 1970 Constitution would empower and strengthen AJK's internal autonomy and thus capture the spirit of the 1948 UNCIP resolution.

The majority of the young people in this study expressed great reservations about the role of the Kashmir Council in contributing to the poor socio-economic conditions in AJK.

Almost 60 per cent of youth surveyed from Rawalakot, 55 per cent from Muzaffarabad and 51 per cent from Mirpur believe that the AJK council does not have a legitimate mandate to govern AJK. Its supra status is considered exploitative and symptomatic of the strong contingent relationship with the political party in government in Islamabad. This not only breeds poor economic conditions but also promotes political wrangling in AJK. Youth told stories about their constituencies and believe powerful finance or money is used for winning seats in the Council. They concluded that excessive financial dependence on Pakistan due to the Council, coupled with administrative authority, results in the unconditional submission of AJK's political leadership.

12 Amended in 1971.

## Young people's civic engagement

Civically engaged and active youth can be agents of change. Involving young people in the political process can be an effective tool for solving their issues. Civic engagement helps in ensuring social accountability and enhances a sense of ownership among stakeholders.

The main components of civic engagement, such as 'voice', 'vote', and 'volunteerism', were gauged

in our youth survey. The research revealed that most of AJK's youth use multiple mediums of information, such as newspapers, internet and television. Almost 72 per cent of youth surveyed from Muzaffarabad, 53 per cent from Rawalakot and 25 per cent from Mirpur prefer to read about international affairs, while 49 per cent in Muzaffarabad, 42 per cent in Rawalakot and 25 per cent in Mirpur prefer to read about local politics.

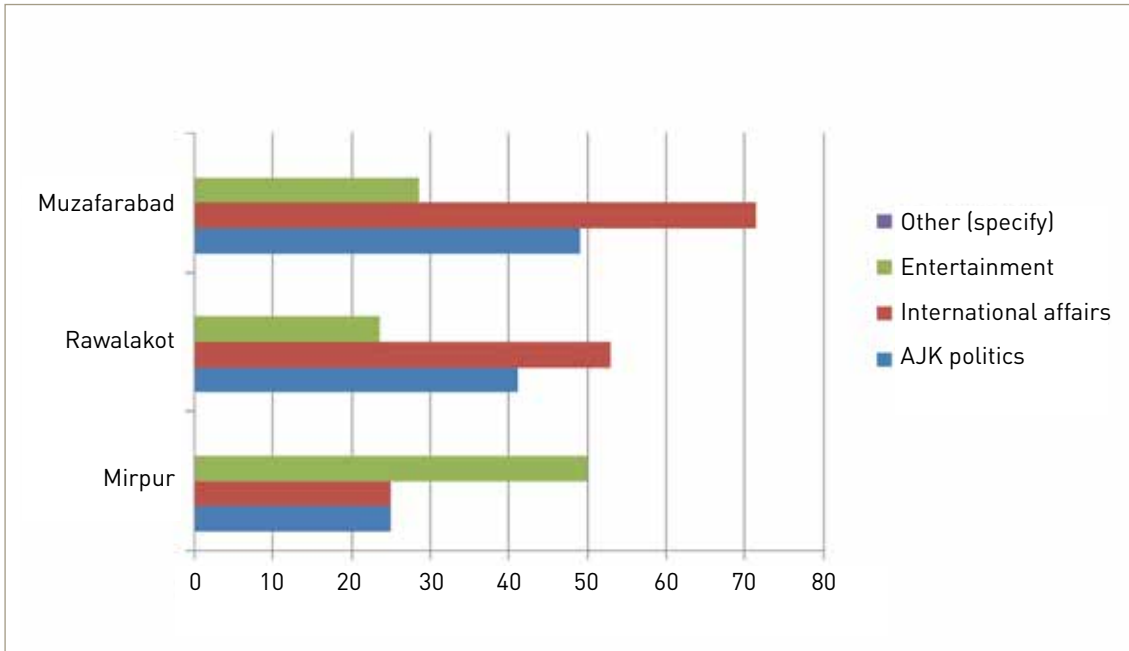


Chart 7: What type of news do you tend to read?to read?

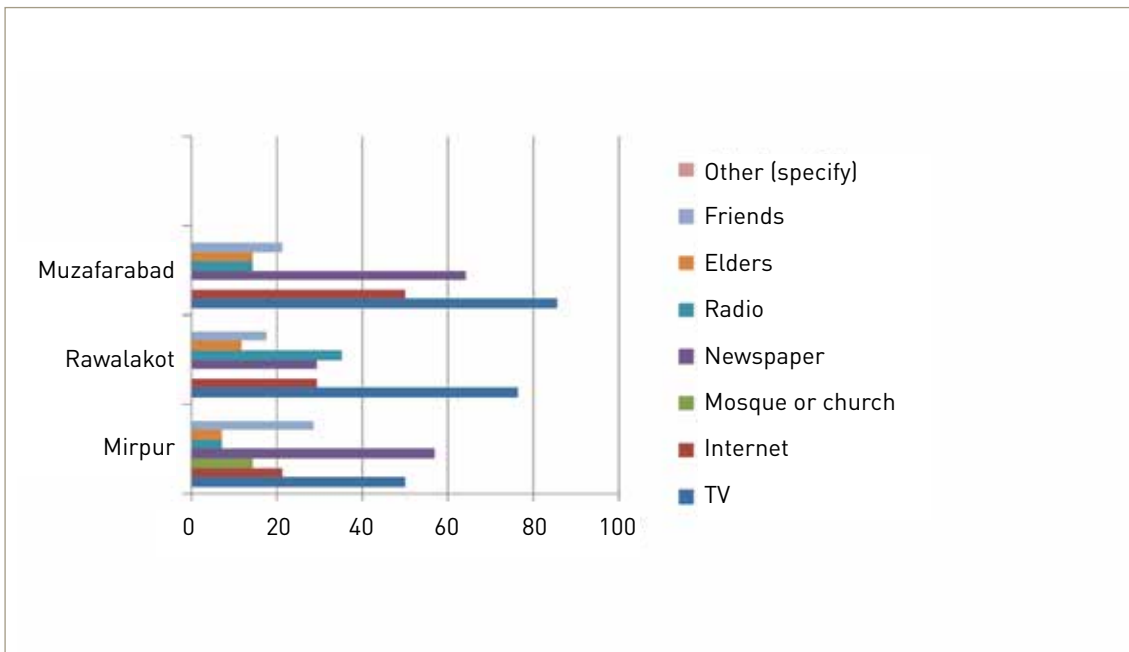


Chart 8: Where do you get your information from?

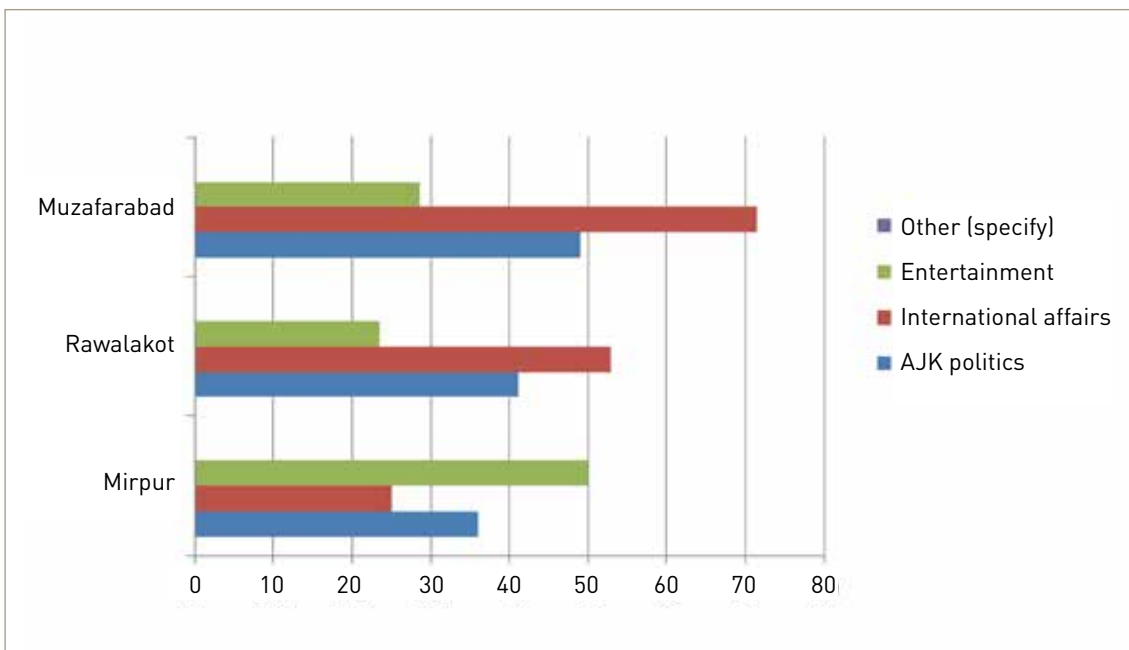


Chart 9: What type of news do you tend to read?

A significant percentage of young people (45 per cent) have read the Constitution and know their basic rights. The overwhelming majority are not only registered in voter lists but do also vote – an indication of their participation in the political process. Their strong belief in bringing change through voting and expressing their ideas with friends and communities makes them civically active and responsive. Almost 89 per cent of youth from Rawalakot, 86 per cent from Muzaffarabad and 70 per cent from Mirpur wish to volunteer their services for social organisations. Most young people however have not studied AJK's youth policy, which, according to a student from Rawalakot "is imported from Islamabad".

Extremist tendencies are thought to be on the rise among the youth in AJK. Most participants in the research believed this to be the case, with

some strongly believing it to be so (Mirpur 26 per cent, Rawalakot 37 per cent, Muzaffarabad 50 per cent), and others somewhat agreeing with this (46 per cent in Mirpur, 43 per cent in Rawalakot, and 18 per cent in Muzaffarabad). Only a few (18 per cent in Mirpur, 6 per cent in Rawalakot, and 13 per cent in Muzaffarabad) strongly disagree that this is the case.

The role of young people in combating terrorism is recognised and supported widely across AJK. A large section of the youth (73 per cent in Mirpur, 56 per cent in Rawalakot, and 81 per cent in Muzaffarabad) strongly agree that youth can play a positive role in combating terrorism while others (43 per cent in Rawalakot, 18 per cent in Muzaffarabad) partly agree. Only 20 per cent of youth in Mirpur had no opinion and 6 per cent slightly disagree on the youth's positive role.

## Economic issues

Unemployment is of prime concern to AJK's youth, who see economic issues as strongly linked to the conflict. Economic activity generates revenue and creates job opportunities. AJK is a landlocked territory and directly depends on the markets of adjacent areas of Islamabad and parts of Punjab. Areas for potential economic growth such as tourism, hydropower, forestry and minerals all fall under the direct jurisdiction of the AJK Council which is directly controlled by the federal government. The AJK government is not allowed to initiate any project on 52 subjects without the Council's prior consent, which involves a lengthy process.

In today's globalised world, the dream of economic prosperity cannot be realised without international investment. AJK is an industrially underdeveloped state with almost no foreign investment. Since 1980, more than 500 industrial units were established, but now these have been reduced to less than 100. A leading businessman from AJK, Zulfiqar Abbasi, estimates that, in the last 10 years, almost 30,000 people have lost their jobs in AJK. He believes that poor regulatory frameworks, inconsistent policies of government and non-cooperation of the banking sector are the major reasons for the collapse of industries in AJK.

The President of AJK Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mian Khalid Rafique, opined that "we are facing several problems such as lack of infrastructure, poor responses from the government and above all a lack of expertise and skills. Hardly any industrial units in AJK have formal links with any engineering or research institutes to resolve technical problems".

Dedicated gas connections and an uninterrupted supply of electricity are also seen as major requirements for economic growth. A businessman from Mirpur said, "our industry is not being run on the cheap gas which is available to industries in Punjab or other provinces of Pakistan. What is more, without dedicated electricity for industrial areas how can we compete in an open market?"

During focus groups discussions, young people from Rawalakot and Muzaffarabad tended to agree that Kashmir's uncertain future and social insecurity impedes foreign investment. They believe their resources are exploited and that the population is left to suffer. Many respondents expressed reservations about the issue of Mangla Dam<sup>13</sup> royalty, which is not paid on an equal basis to AJK's government as it is being paid to other provinces.

*'The royalty of the Mangla Dam should be paid to AJK in the same way that royalties are paid for Tarbela and other Dams.'*

Industry in Mirpur experienced an initial indication of good growth in the 1990s, but this was not sustained. Due to governmental neglect and dismal policies, its economy has now virtually collapsed. This economic depletion has led to the brain drain of Mirpur youth in recent years. AJK's private sector has yet to contribute to improving development. Some youth who participated in focus groups suggested that

<sup>13</sup> Mangla dam was built in 1967 on the Jhelum River and is located in Mirpur District of AJK. According to Water and Power Authority Pakistan, the dam has the capacity to generate 1000 MW of electricity while AJK's power demand is less than 400 MW.

an important strategy for the state's economic development would be to engage the private sector to identify potential areas for investment, followed by an integrated course of action by AJK's government and the AJK Council to achieve sustainable development. Suggested areas are hydropower minerals and tourism. The Government of Pakistan has also allocated quotas (reserved seats for students of AJK) in certain fields, such as medicine, engineering, and agriculture. Most of these meritorious students do not find job opportunities in AJK due to an absence of the private sector and oversaturation of government departments. AJK has a high ratio of government employees with a large proportion of the budget spent on the salaries of public servants. The development budget is far lower than the non-development budget. For the fiscal year 2010-2011 total Budget (Recurring + Development) is Rs 47.332 billion for the fiscal year 2010-11 wherein the development budget is only Rs 11.1749 billion.<sup>14</sup> Some young people (10 per cent from Rawalakot) felt that various economic issues are consequences of deliberate negligence by the community. For example, some even reported a belief that agricultural land is left uncultivated because owners prefer to buy things from markets. "My forefathers used to cultivate the same land and were self-sufficient in production, but today my same land is barren and uncultivated due to my own negligence and carelessness," said one participant.

AJK is abundant with untapped natural resources including water, minerals, and forest, as well as resources for agriculture and horticulture. According to the statistics provided by the government of AJK, there is a large quantity of proven mineral reserves in AJK. Due to a lack of expertise in resource exploitation and poor scientific management of government, people are unable to benefit from these natural resources. Seventy per cent of the youth surveyed believe that the government is least serious about the economic empowerment of the people of AJK. One of the youth from Muzaffarabad stated that, "Government has never accorded priority to the economic development of the people of AJK and they have never heard of economic policy in AJK". Contrary to this, one of the members of the AJK legislative assembly believe that the AJK government has no role in exploring resources like minerals, oil, gas or water or investment in tourism, banking, insurance, future markets, trading corporations, planning for economic coordination or development of industries. According to him these subjects lie under the jurisdiction of the AJK council.

During research it was found that there is a need for technical education for people involved in resource exploitation and management. This would teach those carrying out these activities how to ensure minimum wastage of resources. Political leadership in AJK, policy makers and stakeholders need to give priority to resource exploitation in AJK. This could attract investment to the respective areas, which would subsequently help in creating employment and socio economic development for the people of AJK.

### **Unemployment and its impact**

Unemployment breeds frustration among AJK's youth. Almost 66 per cent from Muzaffarabad, 60 per cent from Rawalakot and 58 per cent from Mirpur, strongly believe that economic deprivation is strongly linked to the conflict. Almost every respondent in the focus group discussions directly and indirectly related the unemployment situation to the conflict. Due to lack of industry, poor economic development and limited jobs, some young people prefer to move to the most available markets within and outside Pakistan, resulting in 'brain drain' to Middle Eastern and European countries. Moreover, due to the landlocked nature of AJK, economic activity is highly dependent upon the two provinces of Pakistan, namely Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Punjab. Hence, 80 per cent of the youth surveyed regard the economic prosperity and stability of Pakistan as imperative and an ultimate guarantee of AJK's prosperity. During this study, unemployment was identified as the most striking cause of migration by AJK youth, especially from Rawalakot and Muzaffarabad to European countries. Youth from Mirpur prefer to migrate to the UK due to the large Mirpuri community there.

Eight-two per cent of the youth surveyed from Muzaffarabad, 73 per cent from Mirpur and 50 per cent from Rawalakot identify unemployment as the major cause of migration of youth of AJK.

Unemployment also has social implications such as the issue of forced marriages and 'marriages of convenience'. British citizens of AJK origin tend to prefer their daughters to marry in Mirpur because of their cultural values and norms. In focus group discussions, it was said that the uneducated and unemployed male youth in AJK (Mirpur) view this as a route to prosperity.

*Unemployment is breeding the phenomenon of social dilemmas like forced marriages and marriages of convenience, particularly in Mirpur.*

14 [www.ajk.gov.pk](http://www.ajk.gov.pk)

Table 1

NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO WENT ABROAD FOR EMPLOYMENT REGISTERED BY BUREAU OF EMIGRATION AND OVERSEAS EMPLOYMENT DURING THE PERIOD 2006 – 2010. (DISTRICT – WISE) FROM AZAD JAMMU & KASHMIR							
S.#.	District	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total
1	Muzaffarabad	2259	4296	4881	5077	3579	20092
2	Poonch	2491	3901	7258	6662	4993	25305
3	Mirpur	1719	2181	1352	1408	1242	7902
4	Kotli	2147	3135	7438	7084	4845	24649
5	Bagh	1522	2315	4987	5043	3058	16925
6	Bhimber	1119	2220	4131	4455	3712	15637
7	Sudnuti	719	1468	1834	1600	1106	6727
<b>Total</b>		<b>11976</b>	<b>19516</b>	<b>31881</b>	<b>31329</b>	<b>22535</b>	<b>117237</b>

Note: These statistics are only applicable to those who travelled on a working visa through the emigration department. Those travelling on student or visit visas are not included.

Marriages between British females of Mirpur-origin and AJK males generated much debate among youth. There is a perception among youth in Mirpur division only that most marriages in the British Mirpuri community are between first cousins. One of the youth from Mirpur opined that "Parents marry their children to the children of their own siblings from back home in Mirpur". Many new spouses from Mirpur cannot speak English and are unfamiliar with English culture. Almost 30 per cent of the youth surveyed in Mirpur reported a belief that marrying a British girl is the easiest way to get a UK visa and citizenship for illiterate and unemployed youth, but that some of these marriages are forced marriages, as the girl only agrees under family duress. These marriages are labelled "marriages of convenience" and it is believed that often the female divorces the male upon his reaching the UK, and the male gets citizenship in return. Contrary to this, almost 25 per cent of the youth surveyed in Mirpur believe that now the trend towards such marriages has changed and that marriages of convenience are an old phenomenon. They emphasise that marriages between cousins or marriages between distant relatives are to revive and reinforce existing family ties, and bind communities together through such obligatory relations.

The dream of socio-economic development cannot come true through capital investment alone. Socio-economic uplift heavily depends on investment in education, which in turn produces skilled workers, technicians, technologists, engineers and research scientists to support and sustain their development and economy, helping to eradicate poverty. Building technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is one plan that builds human capital or assets, particularly for those who are unable to

attain higher education. Unfortunately, enrolment in TVET is only two per cent in AJK, out of a population of 4 million.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, the government needs to convince local as well as international investors to invest in small-scale industries including fruit processing, livestock, agriculture, forestry, farming and tourism. This will help in generating revenue and create job opportunities for the unemployed youth.

### Mass outward movement – from brain drain to brain gain

AJK's lack of economic development has caused a dramatic rise in 'brain drain'. According to renowned geographer Ernst Georg Ravenstein<sup>16</sup>, migration occurs in steps and is mostly from rural to urban areas. Most notably he found that push and pull factors trigger migration. Pull factors include job opportunities, better living and health conditions, political and religious freedom, education and healthcare. Push factors responsible for migrants leaving the country include a lack of employment, political fear, unavailability of basic facilities such as health and education, poor justice systems, pollution and slavery. Migration of AJK youth appears to result from both push and pull factors.

Although migration is a widely accepted phenomenon in the subcontinent, the loss of talented and trained human capital has an adverse

15 *Boosting Enrolment in Technical and Vocational Education and Training: Strategies for Popularization in Pakistan Administered State of Azad Jammu and Kashmir*, discussion paper No 2 by United Nation Educational Scientific Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

16 "The Laws of Migration." *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, Vol. 48, No. 2. (June, 1885), pp. 167-235.



effect on a nation's socio-economic development. The brain drain of one nation becomes 'brain gain' for the recipient country. During this research, most youth explained their outward movement was due to push factors such as unemployment, the troubled economy and the political system. Statistics of AJK

residents moving abroad on work visas through Pakistan's Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment are shown in Table 1.

In five years, almost 117,237 people migrated from AJK due to economic reasons.

## Gender issues

Most young people believe gender empowerment and equality are neglected issues in AJK, with women's contributions toward AJK's development underutilised. The opinion was carefully monitored based on the gender of participants. Almost 80 per cent of the female youth surveyed believe that they do not have equal opportunities to men, while this view was supported during focus group discussions by almost 65 per cent of the male youth in Mirpur, 45 per cent in Rawalakot and 40 per cent in Muzaffarabad.

Employment and business opportunities are limited; the education sector is the only viable option for educated women. One respondent said, "As a female I am encountering numerous problems constraining my capacity, such as societal norms, poor infrastructure and gender discrimination."

Another explained how precarious employment was for young women: "I was selected at an

administrative post of grade 17 in Neelum Valley and I had to abandon it as government provided me neither accommodation or social security." Another added that, "Even if I manage to get a job in other district I will be at the mercy of circumstances". A visibly upset MSc Gold medallist woman from Rawalakot spoke of her despair at the lack of opportunities despite her education, "I spend my whole time in house chores, washing clothes and utensils."

Moreover, standards of female education face serious problems because faculty staff rarely receives on-the-job training. Opportunities for higher education are scarce and many of the youth interviewed believe that the role of female teachers is crucial. However their mobility is limited by government provision of facilities, which is basic when compared with those given to male counterparts.

## Educational issues

AJK's literacy rate is estimated at 65 per cent, which is higher than Pakistan's national average of 55 per cent. Of the illiterate population, males constitute 77 per cent and females 53 per cent, according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.<sup>17</sup>

Quantitatively, the education sector has flourished. There are now nearly 8,000 institutions (over 6,000 public sector and over 2,000 private sector institutions) as compared with 291 in 1947, 2,085 in 1977 and 4,567 in 1988.<sup>18</sup> There has been an impressive increase in private sector education over the past 7 to 10 years. There are 1,761 private institutions from primary to inter-college and higher secondary level, alongside 48 vocational training institutions and 473 Madaris equivalent to high school level. Moreover, the private education sector has seen an increase in higher education institutions i.e. 13 degree colleges and two universities. Almost

4,967 students are enrolled at the University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir while almost 3,500 students were also enrolled in Mirpur University of Science and Technology (AJK) until 2010.

Yet 73 per cent of young people surveyed believe that quantity has not resulted in quality. They passionately want access to quality education in AJK. Limited quality educational opportunities are encouraging a mass exodus of youth to European countries, especially the UK. There were diverse opinions about this mass outward movement. Some (35 per cent) were of the view that it is by choice, while most (55 per cent) blamed it on the quality of educational institutions. Statistically, AJK has only two government universities – the University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir and University of Poonch Rawalakot – for a population of nearly 4.59 million. The University of Engineering in Mirpur is its only engineering college. Candidates from AJK, despite excellent academic performance in examinations, fail to secure admissions in Pakistan's medical and engineering colleges due to limited seats available under the 'quota system'. Since the educational systems of AJK and Pakistan are only slightly

17 Bureau of Statistics, Islamabad. Also see, Basher Ahmad Ch, Chief Stat, Planning and Development Department, Azad Government of the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

18 Nisar Hmaadani, Raja Mohammad Khursheed and Naheem Ahmad Abbassi. 'An Overview of Education in AJK', a joint working paper by panelists.

comparable, options for youth to compete in open merit are rarely fruitful.

The standard of both primary and secondary state education institutions is below average. For example, colleges across AJK tend not to have equal facilities and do not match the quality of education of colleges in the cities in Pakistan. Moreover, a segmented or class-based education system further worsens opportunities for AJK youth. Parents with money prefer to send their children to private institutions. Everyone else remains at the mercy of a mismanaged, retrogressive government education system. The children of AJK's politicians prefer to study at the elite schools of Pakistan. Likewise, wealthy young people from AJK studying in Pakistan's institutions occupy the limited seats allotted to AJK candidates. Sixty five per cent of young people interviewed strongly condemned the exploitation of the quota system. Those aspiring for doctorates in social sciences, medical sciences, arts, humanities, and linguistics opt for Pakistani institutions or institutions abroad due to the lack of universities in AJK. A lack of job opportunities leads most educated young people to settle in Pakistan or abroad and thus contribute little toward the progress of AJK.

## Youth views on the Kashmir issue

Youth across the board consider the 'Kashmir issue' as a conflict and most (83 per cent) consider it the most important issue in their lives. They are dissatisfied with their political leaders for failing to adequately 'internationalise' the Kashmir issue. They hold them responsible for maintaining the status quo and diminishing the identity of the Kashmiri nation.

The subject of conflict resolution over Kashmir prompted diverse opinion. Youth unanimously agreed on the United Nations resolutions but shared widespread disillusionment about their implementation. One respondent, when asked about the UN and the international community's role in solving the issue said with great emotion that:

*'It's my problem and I will sort it out myself without any assistance from the world as I trust in my potential.'*

Many encouraged out-of-the box initiatives such as Pakistan's former President Musharraf's formula of self-governance and demilitarisation in Kashmir. They hold India responsible for hampering the pace of such initiatives, although a

### On an optimistic note

Despite the absence of foreign investment, one promising development is the investment by local residents in private educational infrastructure, which is a key source of employment for educated youth. AJK has almost 1,157 private educational institutions in three divisions, namely Mirpur, Rawalakot and Muzaffarabad.<sup>19</sup>

Youth also report highly valuing the contribution of National Rural Support Program Pakistan (NRSP), which introduced grassroots level public participation and is working for AJK's socio-economic development. NRSP is the only widespread organisation, with offices in Rawalakot, Abbaspur, Hajira, Bagh, Forward Kahuta NRSP Field Unit, Forward Kahuta, Dhirkot, Muzaffarabad, Patika, Neelam, Kotli, Sehensa, Pallandri, Nakyal, Khui Ratta, and Charoi. Youth in general laud the role played by NRSP in community development, education, rehabilitation, livestock and agriculture. However, they consider these initiatives ineffective, and also lacking the government's political and financial support.

19 Reconstruction And Rehabilitation Strategy, education sector, Government of Pakistan (GoP). Earthquake Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Authority (ERRA) 2006.

few also doubt Pakistan's intentions. India's effort to deem Kashmir an integral part of India is seen as negating the UN resolutions and was forcefully criticised by all participants.

Participants strongly feel the absence of any meaningful UN intervention. They expected result-oriented efforts from the UN, starting with the organisation listening to the real voice of Kashmir's people. They do not approve of any US intervention or active US role but believe its support for the oppressed Kashmiri people could help bring positive change. The majority (80 per cent) of the young people taking part in this research believe that the human aspect of conflict in Kashmir should not be ignored and they regard it as a humanitarian crisis where the suffering of the people of J&K go unabated. They believe that the Kashmir conflict should not be seen as a territorial dispute, rather it is an issue of the political rights of the people of Kashmir, where millions wait for these rights to be granted.

Almost 70 per cent of the youth surveyed believe the role of Pakistan has been central and that Pakistan has suffered due to this conflict. Although some are critical about the unnecessary domination of

Pakistan over AJK's political and administrative setup, they recognise Pakistan's efforts for a peaceful settlement of the issue. AJK's young people remain unwilling to lose their political identity, but they express a strong emotional attachment to Pakistan, and most believe Pakistan has always supported the struggle of the people of Kashmir for their fundamental rights with 'heart and soul'.

*Pakistan's unflinching support to the issue of Kashmir has no comparison and is widely accepted, and deeply regarded among youth*

### Views on the armed movement

Historically, Kashmir has been an abode of saints and sages who were from both Hindu and Muslim communities. They preached peace, brotherhood, love and affection among the people irrespective of their religious beliefs. Against this backdrop, young people in AJK are largely peaceful in the sense that the youth of all three AJK divisions (55 per cent) strongly favour peace initiatives and show visible disengagement from the armed movement. However, many do believe that the armed movement has brought the issue of Kashmir into the limelight; the sacrifices of Kashmiris have gained international attention and prevented it from being deemed as India's internal issue.

*Sacrifices glorified the issue of Kashmir but this changed after 9/11.*

Youth-led civil society movements in J&K are widely appreciated and supported by young people in AJK. One of the student leaders from Muzaffarabad believes that the armed movement did not garner much support; and that it exploits youth capacities and energies. Most of the youth who participated in focus group discussions from Rawalakot believe the creation of different armed groups resulted in a distraction from the main cause and that the armed movement encouraged sectarianism in AJK. Despite such views, they fear prolonging the status quo on J&K may lure AJK's youth back into 1990s-style violence. Almost 86 per cent of the youth surveyed strongly criticised the international community for not paying heed to civilian killings in J&K. There is a perception that the weak response of the international community to the peaceful movement of Kashmiri youth may give an impression that violence is the only means to attract world attention, which would be disastrous for the peace of the whole region. They also strongly criticised AJK's government, which almost 60 per cent of the

youth surveyed believe focuses on local petty issues rather than supporting the peace process. They believe that the government of AJK should promote and facilitate Cross LoC peace initiatives. One of the youth from Rawalakot said that "the government of AJK seems least interested in finding out ways of collaboration and cooperation between the two parts of Kashmir and more efforts are required at a governmental level to sustain the peace process."

### 'Once united, now divided' identity crisis

*'I am Kashmiri with 5000 years of history, how come even I think of diluting my identity?'*

*A youth from Rawalakot*

Identity emerged as another key issue confronting AJK's youth. One of the youth from Neelum valley stated that "I feel we are surrounded and caught between the devil and the deep blue sea".

Youth surveyed expressed confusion about their identity as *Kashmiris*, *Pakistani Kashmiris* or just *Pakistanis*. At the same time, they strongly subscribed to their indigenous identity as politically *Kashmiris*. Most (65 per cent) preferred to keep their identity as 'Kashmiri' whatever relationship might evolve with Pakistan or India, while 30 per cent want to be called Pakistani Kashmiri. Comparatively in Muzaffarabad and Rawalakot youth were very strong on the question of their identity; almost 80 per cent and 60 per cent of youth in these regions respectively consider themselves solely 'Kashmiri', while 53 per cent youth surveyed in Mirpur call themselves Kashmiris.

Most young people feel their identity is diminishing. Almost sixty five per cent of the youth surveyed believe that Kashmiri youth suffers from identity crises. They believe the division of Kashmir has resulted in the colossal wreckage of Kashmir's heritage (*Kashmiriyat*). The younger school-going generation is likely to suffer because they are neither taught nor told about Kashmir's history. During focus group discussions, almost 60 per cent of youth considered themselves victims of this intractable conflict and said they repeatedly ask their political leadership questions about their unknown and undecided future. The resulting identity crisis plagues AJK's youth. They tend to consider Kashmir's turbulent history and the role of its political actors responsible for widening, rather than resolving, the contradictions of identity in society. The younger generation is still searching for answers that previous generations of Kashmiris have failed to provide. Neither textbooks, nor any other reference materials answer fundamental

questions about identity except that which fits within a Pakistani 'national interest', which may be counterproductive or infuse children with ideologies that promote hate and intolerance. One of the youth leaders from Muzaffarabad said that history is twisted to suit petty interests. One youth

remarked that "we are a confused people, regarding identity we know nothing about our ideology, rich culture and religion and our destination". Sixty per cent of youth consider it a collective failure of a society that could not define its basic parameters and standards.

## Cross-Line of Control initiatives

*The cross-LoC ventures will help in the reintegration of a "once-united-now-divided" land*

### Past, present and future

AJK's youth feel an urgent need for reunification of the once united but now fragmented land of Kashmir. There is a general perception found among the youth that Kashmiris have been deliberately divided by the political forces of India and Pakistan, and AJK in particular, and that this has resulted in socio-political and economic disintegration. Families across the divide suffer. Due to armed conflict, more than seven thousands families have migrated from different areas of J&K to AJK by crossing the LoC after 1990<sup>20</sup>. "I have my relatives, and land over there, under which law I am not allowed to see my relatives", complained a 30-year-old shopkeeper from Muzaffarabad.

Youth are aware of cross-LoC initiatives and believe intra-Kashmir trade has massive potential to change people's lives. They feel these peace-

building initiatives have created an environment with high hopes for resolving the Kashmir issue. Easing of visa restrictions and exchanges via the bus, train and air services between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad, Lahore and Delhi can help increase contact between people. Seventy per cent of the youth surveyed believe that initiatives like trade, travel, and cross-border ventures will help strengthen and normalise the peace process and build peace constituencies, with far-reaching, socio-political impacts. They want to supplement cross-LoC trade with cultural activities and communication. Ambitiously, youth want to promote initiatives like cultural exchanges (dances, folk music, poetry, sports, religious tourism e.g. shrines, indigenous traditions on special occasions, like marriages) youth exchanges, joint youth parliaments, educational endeavours,<sup>21</sup> free movement for students, poets, writers, youth representatives and the public living either side of the LoC (especially migrants post 1990 migrants). Such cross-LoC initiatives would help reintegrate

20 Board of Revenue, Relief and Rehabilitations Commissionerate AJK.

21 For example, university student exchanges, sending PhD or Masters theses in the universities across the LoC, university student exchange programmes, scholarships, joint academic writings, cross-Loc research, university sports exchanges, debates, and joint research.

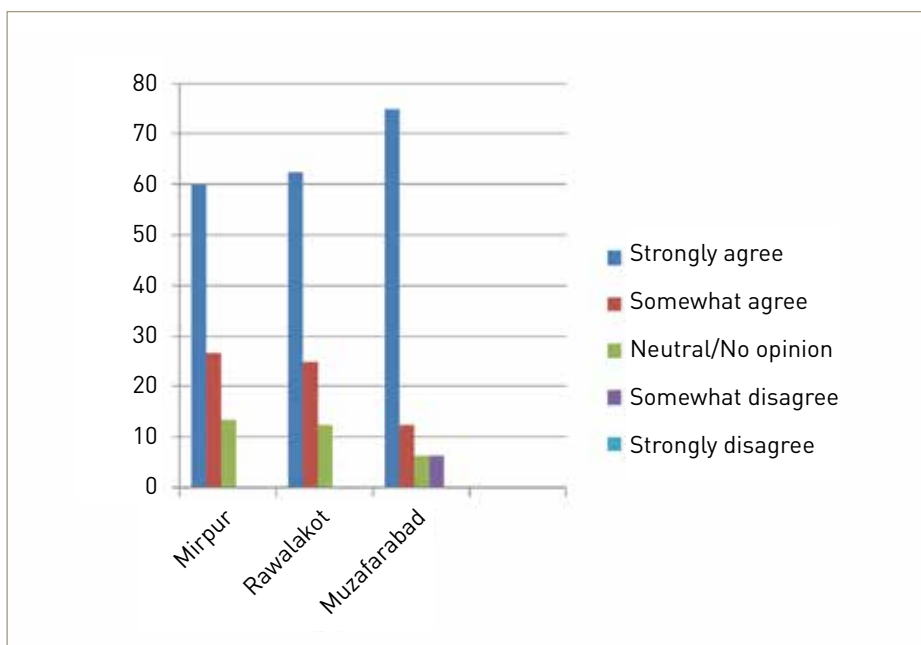


Chart 10: You think Kashmiri youth suffer from identity crises?

Kashmiris who were once united but are now divided. The actual spirit of shaping the LoC as a *Line of Culture*, instead of a Line of Control, is to help reunify the people who have suffered the most and seen their values, traditions and indigenous culture diminished due to the separation of Kashmiris since 1947. Youth surveyed stated that families divided by the LoC are the most deserving and need special consideration from Pakistan and India's governments. Seventy five per cent of the youth surveyed felt that AJK's civil society should work to promote joint ventures – currently its role in cross-LoC ventures is "lamentable".

Almost 65 per cent of those surveyed feel a great need for a more effective and efficient civil society in AJK. They favour and support cross-border initiatives and urged civil society involvement in both AJK and J&K to develop a sense of ownership among people. Initiatives like trade are considered limited and people at the grassroots level do not benefit as intended. They also believe the benefits of cross-LoC initiatives should be transferred to the grassroots to increase public support.

### Views on impediments and cross-LoC ventures

Cross-LoC movement in Kashmir is filled with administrative hitches because the legal process for travelling across LoC is highly centralised. The five foot-crossing points (Nauseri-Tithwal, Chakoti-Uri, Hajipur-Uri, Rawalakot-Poonch, and Tattapani-Mendhar) are considered inadequate as movement across these points relies on a centralised administrative setup. The parameters and procedures agreed for the Muzaffarabad-Srinagar bus service are used for these additional crossing points, which directly depend on the will of both Islamabad and Delhi. This centralisation results in procedural delays in acquiring and processing entry and travel permits, and clearance from the intelligence agencies. Dr. Shaheen, Professor from the National Defence University (NDU) Islamabad, believes that "the processing of entry permits has been made so difficult due to clearance from various intelligence agencies that only a few people can make it and that is only after long delays".<sup>22</sup> These difficulties have benefitted a small number of people in apparently productive

ventures. The bus services remain underused, with thousands of applicants on a waiting list. A decentralised mechanism or special treatment could help minimise the misery of divided families. Given the region's potential, trade between both parts of Kashmir should be wide open. The revival of indigenous industries, tapping into new areas with private sector help, opening intra-Kashmir routes, and developing infrastructure would all not only boost the state economy, but also create jobs.

Seventy per cent of the youth surveyed has supported cross-LoC trade but had great reservations about the beneficiaries, who they say are not the actual stakeholders. Overall 50 per cent felt neglected by cross-LoC initiatives - they too wish to interact and exchange their views with young people on the other side of Kashmir. No solid platform exists for this. Neglecting youth in decision making and confidence building measures (CBMs) may lead to their disengagement from the peace process. The isolation of a huge portion of the population from the peace process is not healthy and can trigger negative sentiments.

*Young people are unhappy with their political leaders and highly confused about their culture, identity and indigenous values.*

They strongly favour and support reunification and the revival of their centuries-old-but-now-disintegrated culture, traditions and identity, of which they are proud. Ershad Mahmud, a leading Kashmir expert from AJK, believes that the political dimension of the issue of Kashmir should not be neglected and these links should help and enable us to generate a shared analysis of the conflict. Seventy per cent of young people surveyed responded positively to specific CBMs and believe these initiatives will lead to economic development and business opportunities. Issues of transparency and accountability were highlighted - Youth who participated in focus groups from Muzaffarabad and Rawalakot voiced concern that the elite class hijacks trade and that traders from India and Pakistan, based on their economic strength, are profiting at the expense of locals. "Not a single item on the trading list is produced in AJK, signifying a direct trade between J&K and Islamabad," said a student leader from Rawalakot. Youth say potential trade areas should benefit the people of AJK. Overall, 66 per cent of the youth surveyed say that India and Pakistan should solve their problems amicably and work for a single currency of trade to help economically empower the region and ensure regional stability.

22 'Expanding cross-LoC interactions: a conflict transformation approach to Kashmir', Dr Shaheen Akhtar, January 2012.

\*According to a report published by Conciliation Resources: from 2005 until 24 February 2012, 6270 visitors from AJK came to Jammu and Kashmir Valley via Poonch route while 4608 travellers used Uri-Muzaffarabad route, whereas just 487 visitors used Teetwal LoC route during this period. Nearly 3624 visitors from this side went to AJK via Chakkan-Da-Bagh, 2674 via Uri-Kaman Post whereas just 856 via Teetwal. Again, the number of AJK visitors is higher (11,494) as compared with residents of Jammu and Kashmir Valley whose number until February 2012 was just 7288.

## Desire to link education and identity

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*Curricula should impart knowledge about, culture, identity, history, indigenous traditions, and values of Kashmir.*

*(Focus Group Discussion)*

The educational syllabus is key for retaining the identity and culture of a nation or community. Overall 60 per cent young people interviewed from all three divisions of AJK sense an urgent need for a syllabus that imparts AJK culture, teaches about indigenous customs, history, cultural heritage, national identity, geography, economy and environment. Language plays a vital role in bringing cultural harmony, retaining indigenous culture, traditions and identity. Unfortunately, formal education in AJK is taught in English and Urdu. In all provinces of Pakistan however, educational syllabi are introduced in the local languages like Pashto, Sindhi, Punjabi or Balochi. AJK's youth has no option except English or Urdu, which diminishes their potential comprehension of the dynamics of local issues, values and culture.

Almost 50 per cent of the youth surveyed want to see English as a medium of instruction in schools and colleges. More than 65.5 per cent of them believe that the Kashmiri language should be taught in the educational institutions of AJK, despite it not being the native language of the majority of people in AJK.

Currently, the Punjab Textbook Board is supposed to provide syllabi for AJK's state institutions. The content of the existing syllabi was also challenged. Overall 55 per cent of the youth surveyed felt that it should be based on modern values of peace, non-violence, patriotism and dialogue". "Cross-cultural communication and leadership development, if taught, could help build a harmonious society", said Professor Zafar Hussain, a well-known educationist from District Rawalakot. Youth lamented that

*Kashmiriyat* (history of Kashmir) is neither taught nor introduced in AJK's syllabi and urged that it be made a compulsory subject since it is essential for the transmission of cultural identity. The most emerging trend during this research was the lack of formal knowledge about the history of Kashmir and Kashmiri identity, culminating in the issue of identity crises.

Youth viewed the current education syllabus as ill-equipped for modern times and present day needs, since it does not give them the skills or technical training they need in the job market. They generally believe the syllabus is not compatible with modern and high-tech industry requirements, and poor in matching global and local developments.

A Business Administration student from the University of AJK said that there is widening gap between academia and industry and students are unable to get jobs after the completion of education.

Besides a practical focus on industry, it is very important that education gives focus and attention to societal dynamics as well. Imparting peace education is necessary for a society like AJK which is suffering from conflict. Teaching peace-building and conflict resolution to children from early ages can be very helpful for creating and building a durable infrastructure for peace. One of the Professors from the University of AJK Muzaffarabad said that, 'We should teach peace education to our students from middle level (8th grade) in social studies'.

He believes peace education will enable young people to think critically about the Kashmir conflict and will transform them to play a constructive role in society. One of the civil society activists from Rawalakot said that peace education, if taught, will help in building bridges of support among communities and will create social networks to bring about positive and lasting change.

## List of abbreviations

<b>AJK</b>	Azad Jammu & Kashmir	<b>SERRA</b>	State Earthquake Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Authority
<b>ADB</b>	Asian Development Bank	<b>SME</b>	Small & Medium Enterprises
<b>CBMs</b>	Confidence Building Measures	<b>SSC</b>	Secondary School Certificate
<b>J&amp;K</b>	Jammu & Kashmir	<b>TVET</b>	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
<b>KPK</b>	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	<b>UNCIP</b>	United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan
<b>LoC</b>	Line of Control	<b>UNDP</b>	United Nation Development Programme
<b>MC</b>	Muslim Conference	<b>WB</b>	World Bank
<b>NRSP</b>	National Rural Support Program		
<b>PPP</b>	Public Private Partnership		

*The long-standing and intractable issue of Kashmir between Pakistan and India is of great importance for the young people of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK).*

*The costs of this deep-rooted conflict have become increasingly difficult for Pakistan and India, and for the people of the erstwhile state of Kashmir in particular.*

*The aim of this study is to identify the key economic, socio-political and educational issues that confront AJK's youth against the backdrop of the Kashmir conflict.*



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## About Conciliation Resources

We're an independent organisation working with people in conflict to prevent violence and build peace. Conciliation Resources provides advice, support and practical resources to our local partners and conflict-affected communities. In addition, we take what we learn to government decision-makers and others working to end violent conflict, to improve policies and practice worldwide.

Our programme work focuses on seven conflict-affected regions around the world, including Kashmir, and we take a further in-depth look at specific conflict contexts and peacebuilding themes through our Accord publication series: [www.c-r.org/accord](http://www.c-r.org/accord)

Conciliation Resources promote participation by Kashmiris in the India-Pakistan peace process. We work in all of the regions of the disputed area including Pakistan-administered Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan, and in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir. We also work with the diasporas. Together, we can find peaceful alternatives to violence.

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