

## MANUFACTURED PUBLIC SUPPORT: THE USE OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES IN CIVILIAN DRESS TO SIMULATE MASS PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE EVENTS IN JAMMU & KASHMIR

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### ABSTRACT

*In democratic systems, public gatherings are widely used to demonstrate legitimacy, popularity, and citizen participation. However, concerns have emerged in Jammu & Kashmir regarding the alleged practice of mobilizing government employees in civilian dress to attend political and administrative events, thereby creating the impression of spontaneous public support. This paper examines the implications of this phenomenon through the lenses of political communication, bureaucratic neutrality, and democratic ethics. Drawing on theories of manufactured consent and symbolic politics, the study argues that such practices undermine institutional credibility, distort public perception, and weaken democratic accountability. The paper concludes by recommending legal safeguards, stronger oversight, and protections for public servants from coercive mobilization.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Manufactured consent, bureaucratic neutrality, political mobilization, democratic ethics, symbolic politics, Jammu & Kashmir, state legitimacy.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Public participation is a cornerstone of democratic governance. Political rallies, administrative outreach programs, and government functions are intended to reflect genuine citizen engagement. In recent years, however, allegations have surfaced that some political and administrative actors in Jammu & Kashmir have been directing government employees to attend events in civilian attire to simulate popular participation.

This practice raises important questions:

1. Is public support being artificially constructed?
2. Are government employees being pressured to participate?

### 3. What are the consequences for democracy and public trust?

The purpose of this paper is to critically analyze this emerging phenomenon and its broader implications.

## 2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Jammu & Kashmir occupies a unique position within the Indian political system due to its history of conflict, governance reforms, and heightened sensitivity around public sentiment.

Since the reorganization of the former state into the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh in 2019, public events involving administrative and political leaders have gained symbolic importance as indicators of normalcy and acceptance. The Government of India describes the constitutional changes under the Abrogation of Article 370 as measures intended to enhance integration and development.

Within this context, visible crowds can be interpreted as evidence of support, making incentives for orchestrated attendance more pronounced.

## 3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### 3.1 Manufactured Consent

Political theorists such as Walter Lippmann and Noam Chomsky describe how institutions shape perceptions of legitimacy by managing public narratives.

### 3.2 Symbolic Politics

Governments often use images and staged events to communicate authority and stability.

### 3.3 Bureaucratic Neutrality

The civil service is expected to remain politically impartial. The use of employees for partisan image-building blurs the boundary between administration and politics.

#### 4. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The central problem addressed in this study is:

**To what extent does the mobilization of government employees in civilian dress to attend political and administrative events constitute a form of manufactured public support, and what are its consequences for democratic legitimacy in Jammu & Kashmir?**

#### 5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the phenomenon of disguised bureaucratic mobilization.
2. To analyze its ethical and legal implications.
3. To assess its impact on public trust.
4. To propose institutional safeguards.

#### 6. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What motivates authorities to organize such gatherings?
2. Are employees compelled to participate?
3. How does this affect democratic norms?
4. What reforms can prevent misuse?

#### 7. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive approach based on:

- Review of literature on political communication and state legitimacy.
- Analysis of media reports and public discourse.
- Normative evaluation of governance ethics.

No individual-level allegations are independently verified; the paper examines the issue as a broader governance concern.

## 8. THE PRACTICE OF SIMULATED PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The alleged process typically involves:

1. Instructions to departments to ensure staff attendance.
2. Employees attending in plain clothes.
3. Photographs and videos portraying the crowd as ordinary citizens.
4. Official narratives presenting the event as evidence of public enthusiasm.

This transforms bureaucratic participation into a symbolic substitute for genuine citizen mobilization.

## 9. MOTIVATIONS BEHIND THE PRACTICE

### 9.1 Projection of Popularity

Crowds serve as visual indicators of support.

### 9.2 Administrative Performance Signaling

Officials may use large turnouts to signal effectiveness to superiors.

### 9.3 Narrative Construction

Events can be framed as proof of stability and acceptance.

### 9.4 Media Optics

Photographs and social media amplify the appearance of legitimacy.

## 10. ETHICAL AND LEGAL CONCERNS

### 10.1 Misrepresentation

Staged attendance may mislead observers.

### 10.2 Coercion

Employees may feel compelled to participate.

### 10.3 Misuse of Public Resources

Government time and transport may be used for image management.

### 10.4 Violation of Civil Service Neutrality

Political deployment of public servants undermines impartiality.

## 11. IMPACT ON DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

Dimension	Consequence
Public Trust	Erosion of confidence in institutions
Administrative Credibility	Reduced legitimacy
Employee Morale	Fear, resentment, disengagement
Media Integrity	Distorted public perception
Democracy	Weakening of authentic participation

## 12. THEORETICAL INTERPRETATION

The practice can be understood as a form of performative governance, where the appearance of legitimacy is prioritized over substantive citizen engagement.

## 13. COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Comparable practices have been documented in various countries where state employees are mobilized to create favorable optics at official events. Such strategies are generally criticized for undermining transparency and democratic accountability.

## 14. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Explicit prohibition on coercive attendance.
2. Written attendance orders subject to audit.

3. Whistleblower protection.
4. Independent monitoring by the Election Commission of India and oversight bodies.
5. Transparent disclosure when events involve official staff.

## 15. LIMITATIONS

- The study is conceptual and qualitative.
- It does not quantify the prevalence of the practice.
- Empirical interviews would strengthen future research.

## 16. CONCLUSION

The use of government employees in civilian dress to simulate public participation represents a troubling challenge to democratic ethics. Even where framed as routine administrative mobilization, such practices can blur the distinction between genuine citizen engagement and staged displays of support. In a politically sensitive region such as Jammu & Kashmir, preserving transparency and bureaucratic neutrality is essential for maintaining trust and democratic legitimacy.

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