

Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council- Leh (India), How autonomous and how democratic?

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This case study analyses the extent and nature of democracy seen in the example of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (Leh). Born of a demand over several decades, the status of an autonomous region within the state of Jammu and Kashmir was achieved by Ladakh in 1995 through legislative enactment. This status has benefited the region in a number of ways. But it has also been severely constrained because the relevant legislation granted limited administrative, financial and legal powers to the Council, continued domination by the state government, and inadequate use of even the limited powers that the Council had by its own members. Additionally, issues of what kind of development would be appropriate have been weakly focused on, with some notable exceptions.

This view of the external aspects of Ladakh's democratic status (i.e. autonomy in relation to the state and central governments) has been complemented by an examination of the internal aspects, i.e. how democratic is the Council vis-à-vis the region's people. Here too, while there are some positive aspects, the study found fundamental weaknesses and faults.

During the period of the study, the status of Ladakh changed dramatically from being a pair of districts to becoming a Union Territory. Since the new status has come without its own legislative assembly and without any extra powers under the Constitution, there is concern that autonomy will be further eroded, though depending on the disposition of the central government, it could also be strengthened. This report looks only briefly at the implications of the new status, as this happened during the latter part of the study.

Based on an analysis of four crucial aspects of a successful democracy – rights, capacity, forums, and maturity – as relevant to Ladakh, the study concludes with some suggestions and indications of steps that could help in strengthening democracy in the region.

You can access this study here:

https://www.academia.edu/42840926/LADAKH_AUTONOMOUS_HILL_DEVELOPMENT_COUNCIL_-LEH_INDIA_How_autonomous_how_democratic