Political Process in India

Content

Syllabus

FYBA Semester II Political Science Major

Political Process in India भारतीय राजकीय प्रक्रिया
Total marks 100 Credits 4

Unit 1 REORGANIZATION OF INDIAN POLITICS भारतीय राजकारणाची पुनर्रचना

1.1 Reorganization of States घटक राज्यांची पुनर्रचना
1.2 Regional Disparities and sub regionalism विभागीय विषमता आणि उप-प्रादेशिकतावाद
1.3 Demands for statehood नवीन राज्यनिर्मीतीसाठीच्या मागण्या

Unit 2 POLITICAL PARTIES राजकीय पक्ष

2.1 Evolution and development of party system in India
    भारतातील पक्ष पद्धतीची उत्क्रांती आणि विकास
2.2 National parties and regional parties राष्ट्रीय आणि प्रादेशिक पक्ष
2.3 Coalition Politics आघाड्यांचे राजकारण

Unit 3 IDENTITY POLITICS अस्मितेचे राजकारण

3.1 Religion धर्म
3.2 Caste identity and caste mobilization जातीय अस्मिता आणि जातीवर आधारित राजकारण
3.3 Gender जेंडर आणि राजकारण

Unit 4 ELECTORAL POLITICS AND PROCESSES निवडणुकीचे राजकारण आणि प्रक्रिया

4.1 Election Commission and Electoral System निवडणुक आयोग आणि निवडणुकांची व्यवस्था
4.2 Overview of Lok Sabha Elections since Independence
    स्वातंत्र्यानंतरच्या लोकसभा निवडणुकांचे अवलोकन
4.3 Voting Behaviour and Emerging Trends
    मतदार वर्तन आणि त्यामधील नव्याने उदयाला येणारे प्रवाह

Questions

1. The reorganisation of states in India
2. Types of political parties according to ECI
3. Evolution of party system in India
4. Relationship between religion and politics in India
5. ECI - constitutional provisions, structure and functions
6. Short notes
   a. 2024 Lok Sabha elections
   b. Caste and politics in India
   c. Demand for separate state of Vidarbha

Question paper pattern

Total marks 60
Total questions 6
Answer any 4 questions (15 x 4 = 60)
Each question carries 15 marks
Sixth question - short notes - write any three out of four short notes - each short note carries 5 marks

Reorganisation of Indian States

India gained independence from British rule on August 15, 1947, and at that time, the country was a mix of British-administered provinces and princely states. The reorganization of states in India after independence has been a long and evolving process, primarily driven by linguistic, cultural, administrative, and political factors. Here's an overview of how India's states were reorganized from 1947 to March 21, 2025:

Early Post-Independence Period (1947–1950)

- **Integration of Princely States**: At independence, India had 565 princely states that were not directly governed by the British. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, India's first Home Minister, along with V.P. Menon, spearheaded the integration of these states into the Indian Union. By 1950, most princely states had merged with neighboring provinces or formed new unions (e.g., Saurashtra, PEPSU, Travancore-Cochin).
- **Constitution of India (1950)**: The Constitution, enacted on January 26, 1950, categorized states into three types:
    - **Part A**: Former British provinces (e.g., Madras, Bombay, Uttar Pradesh).
    - **Part B**: Former princely states or unions (e.g., Hyderabad, Mysore, Rajasthan).
    - **Part C**: Centrally administered territories (e.g., Delhi, Ajmer).

The Push for Linguistic Reorganization (1950s)

- **Demand for Linguistic States**: Post-independence, there was a growing demand to reorganize states based on linguistic identities, as language was a key marker of culture and identity in India.
- **Andhra State (1953)**: The first state created on linguistic lines was Andhra State, carved out of Madras State for Telugu-speaking people, following the death of Potti Sriramulu, who fasted for this cause.
- **States Reorganisation Commission (1953–1956)**: Due to widespread demands, the government set up the SRC under Fazal Ali. Its report led to the **States Reorganisation Act of 1956**, a landmark in India's state reorganization:
    - States were redrawn largely along linguistic lines.
    - The distinction between Part A, B, and C states was abolished, creating 14 states and 6 Union Territories.
    - Examples: Kerala (Malayalam), Karnataka (Kannada, then called Mysore), Tamil Nadu (Tamil, then called Madras).

Further Reorganizations (1960s–1980s)

- **Bombay Split (1960)**: Bombay State was divided into Maharashtra (Marathi-speaking) and Gujarat (Gujarati-speaking) on May 1, 1960, after agitations like the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement.
- **Punjab Reorganization (1966)**: Punjab was split into Punjab (Punjabi-speaking), Haryana (Hindi-speaking), and parts of Himachal Pradesh, following demands from the Sikh community and others.

- **North-Eastern States (1960s–1970s)**: The northeastern region saw significant reorganization to address ethnic and tribal diversity:
    - Nagaland (1963) separated from Assam.
    - Meghalaya (1972), Manipur, and Tripura became states, carved out of Assam.
    - Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram, initially Union Territories, became states in 1987.
- **Himachal Pradesh (1971)**: Transitioned from a Union Territory to a full state.
- **Sikkim (1975)**: Originally a monarchy, Sikkim joined India as a state after a referendum.

Late 20th Century Adjustments (1980s–2000)

- **Goa (1987)**: Goa, previously a Union Territory with Daman and Diu, became a state.
- **Creation of Smaller States (2000)**: At the turn of the century, three new states were formed from larger ones for better governance and regional aspirations:
    - **Chhattisgarh** (November 1, 2000) from Madhya Pradesh.
    - **Uttaranchal** (November 9, 2000, later renamed Uttarakhand) from Uttar Pradesh.
    - **Jharkhand** (November 15, 2000) from Bihar.

21st Century Changes (2014–2025)

- **Telangana (2014)**: After decades of agitation for a separate state by the Telangana movement, Telangana was carved out of Andhra Pradesh on June 2, 2014, becoming India's 29th state.
- **Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization (2019)**: On August 5, 2019, the Indian government revoked Article 370, which had granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir. The state was bifurcated into two Union Territories:
    - Jammu and Kashmir (with a legislature).
    - Ladakh (without a legislature).
- **No New States (2020–March 21, 2025)**: As of March 21, 2025, no additional states have been created since Telangana, though demands for statehood persist in regions like Vidarbha (Maharashtra), Gorkhaland (West Bengal), and Bodoland (Assam). These demands remain under discussion but have not materialized into new states.

Merger of Daman and Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli

The merger of Daman and Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli refers to the administrative unification of these two former Union Territories (UTs) into a single Union Territory in India. This process occurred in the early 21st century as part of an effort to streamline governance and reduce administrative costs. Here's a detailed overview based on the historical context and developments up to March 21, 2025:

Background

- **Daman and Diu**: This UT consisted of two geographically separate districts, Daman and Diu, located along the western coast of India near Gujarat. It was a remnant of

Portuguese colonial rule, liberated in December 1961 during Operation Vijay. Initially part of the UT of Goa, Daman and Diu, it became a separate UT in 1987 when Goa achieved statehood.

- **Dadra and Nagar Haveli**: This UT, located between Gujarat and Maharashtra, was also under Portuguese control until it was liberated by local residents on August 2, 1954. It formally joined India as a Union Territory in 1961 after being administered by a citizen's council (Varishta Panchayat) from 1954 to 1961.

Both UTs shared a colonial history, proximity to Gujarat, and cultural similarities, including the prominence of Gujarati and Hindi languages. However, they were administered separately, each with its own bureaucratic structure, despite their small size and population.

The Merger Process

- **Proposal and Rationale**: In July 2019, the Government of India, under the leadership of the Ministry of Home Affairs, proposed merging Daman and Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli into a single UT. The primary reasons were:
    - **Administrative Efficiency**: Maintaining two separate administrations for such small territories (Daman and Diu: 112 sq km; Dadra and Nagar Haveli: 491 sq km) led to duplication of efforts, inefficiency, and wasteful expenditure.
    - **Minimum Government, Maximum Governance**: This aligns with the government's policy to reduce bureaucratic overhead while improving service delivery.
    - **Resource Optimization**: The merger aimed to better utilize manpower and resources, given their small combined population (approximately 585,764 as per the 2011 census) and limited geographical area.
- **Legislative Action**: The **Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu (Merger of Union Territories) Bill, 2019** was introduced in the Lok Sabha on November 26, 2019, by Home Minister Amit Shah. It was passed by the Lok Sabha on November 27, 2019, and by the Rajya Sabha on December 3, 2019. The bill received presidential assent on December 9, 2019.
- **Implementation**: The merger took effect on January 26, 2020, coinciding with India's Republic Day. The central government notified this date as the "appointed day" under the Act, officially creating the new Union Territory of **Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu**.

Current Status (March 21, 2025)

- India has **28 states and 8 Union Territories**.
- The process of reorganization reflects India's efforts to balance linguistic diversity, administrative efficiency, and regional aspirations. While the major linguistic-based reorganization concluded by the 1960s, later changes have been driven by governance needs, ethnic identities, and political considerations.

Types of political parties according to ECI

According to the Election Commission of India (ECI), political parties in India are classified into three main types based on their recognition and performance in elections. These classifications determine the privileges a party receives, such as reserved election symbols, free broadcast time on state-run media, and input in electoral processes. Here's an overview of the types of political parties as defined by the ECI:

1. National Parties

- **Definition**: These are political parties with a significant presence across multiple states in India, recognized by the ECI based on specific performance criteria.
- **Criteria for Recognition**: A party is designated as a National Party if it fulfills **any one** of the following conditions:
    - It secures at least **6% of the total valid votes** polled in any four or more states during a general election to the Lok Sabha (India's lower house of Parliament) or State Legislative Assembly elections, **and** it wins at least **4 seats in the Lok Sabha** from any state(s).
    - It wins at least **2% of the total seats in the Lok Sabha** (i.e., 11 seats out of 543, as of current allocation) in a general election, with these seats coming from at least **3 different states**.
    - It is recognized as a **State Party in at least 4 states**.
- **Privileges**: National Parties receive a reserved party symbol for use across the country, free airtime on state-run television and radio, and up to 40 "star campaigners" during elections whose campaign expenses are not counted toward individual candidate limits.
- **Examples (as of March 21, 2025)**: Based on the latest available data up to this date, the recognized National Parties include:
    - Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)
    - Indian National Congress (INC)
    - Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)
    - Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)
    - Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M)
    - National People's Party (NPP)
    - (Note: The exact list may vary slightly based on ECI reviews post-2024 elections, but no major updates are confirmed as of this date.)

2. State Parties

- **Definition**: These are parties recognized by the ECI as having a strong presence in one or more specific states, based on their electoral performance within those states.
- **Criteria for Recognition**: A party is recognized as a State Party in a particular state if it meets **any one** of the following conditions:
    - It secures at least **6% of the total valid votes** polled in the state during a general election to the State Legislative Assembly **and** wins at least **2 seats** in that assembly.

- ○ It secures at least **6% of the total valid votes** polled in the state during a general election to the Lok Sabha **and** wins at least **1 seat** in the Lok Sabha from that state.
  - ○ It wins at least **3% of the total seats** in the State Legislative Assembly (or a minimum of 3 seats, whichever is higher) in a general election to that assembly.
  - ○ It wins at least **1 seat in the Lok Sabha** for every 25 seats (or any fraction thereof) allotted to that state.
  - ○ It secures at least **8% of the total valid votes** polled in the state during a general election to either the Lok Sabha or the State Legislative Assembly (a liberalized criterion added to account for vote share even without seat wins).
- **Privileges**: State Parties receive a reserved symbol for use within the state(s) where they are recognized, free broadcast time on state-run media, and up to 40 "star campaigners" during elections in that state.
- **Examples**: As of the latest ECI data (e.g., March 23, 2024, publication), there are 58 State Parties, such as:
  - ○ All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) in West Bengal
  - ○ Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Tamil Nadu
  - ○ Samajwadi Party (SP) in Uttar Pradesh
  - ○ (The number and list may adjust slightly by 2025 based on election outcomes and ECI reviews.)

3. Registered Unrecognized Parties

- **Definition**: These are political parties registered with the ECI under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, but which do not meet the criteria for recognition as either a National Party or a State Party.
- **Criteria**: Any group of Indian citizens can register a political party with the ECI by fulfilling basic requirements (e.g., submitting a party constitution, membership details, and a fee). However, they remain "unrecognized" unless they achieve the vote share or seat thresholds for National or State Party status.
- **Privileges**: These parties do not get a reserved symbol; instead, they must choose from a list of "free symbols" provided by the ECI for each election. They are allowed up to 20 "star campaigners" during elections, and their campaign expenses are subject to stricter scrutiny.
- **Scale**: As per the ECI's publication dated March 23, 2024, there were 2,763 Registered Unrecognized Parties. This number fluctuates as new parties register and others are delisted for inactivity or failure to comply with ECI rules (e.g., not contesting elections or submitting annual reports).
- **Examples**: Many small, local, or newly formed parties fall into this category, such as regional outfits or single-issue groups that lack widespread electoral success.

Key Notes

- **Dynamic Status**: The ECI periodically reviews the status of recognized parties after elections. A party can lose its National or State Party status if it fails to meet the criteria over consecutive elections (post-2016 amendment, reviewed after two elections rather than one).

- **Current Count (as of March 21, 2025)**: Based on the latest available data up to this date:
    - 6 National Parties
    - 58 State Parties (adjusted for mergers or splits, e.g., Rashtriya Lok Samata Party and People's Democratic Front merged with others by 2024)
    - 2,763 Registered Unrecognized Parties (subject to change with new registrations or delistings).
- **Symbol Allocation**: National Parties have exclusive symbols nationwide, State Parties have reserved symbols in their recognized states, and Unrecognized Parties use free symbols assigned per election.

This classification reflects India's multi-party system, balancing national reach with regional diversity.

Evolution of party system in India

The evolution of the party system in India reflects the country's complex socio-political fabric, shaped by colonial legacies, post-independence nation-building, linguistic diversity, and shifting voter priorities. From a dominant one-party system to a vibrant multi-party democracy, India's political landscape has undergone significant transformations since independence in 1947. Here's a detailed overview of this evolution up to March 21, 2025:

1. Pre-Independence Roots (Late 19th Century–1947)

- **Genesis of Political Parties**: The origins of India's party system lie in the anti-colonial struggle. The **Indian National Congress (INC)**, founded in 1885 by A.O. Hume and others, emerged as the first major political organization, initially a moderate platform for constitutional reforms but later a mass movement under leaders like Mahatma Gandhi.
- **Emergence of Alternatives**: As the freedom movement grew, ideological differences led to new parties:
    - **Muslim League (1906)**: Advocated for Muslim interests, eventually demanding Pakistan.
    - **Communist Party of India (CPI, 1925)**: Rooted in Marxist ideology, focused on workers and peasants.
    - **Hindu Mahasabha (1915)** and **Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS, 1925)**: Promoted Hindu nationalist ideas, influencing later parties like the Jana Sangh.
- **Nature**: Pre-independence parties were more movement-based than electoral entities, focused on independence rather than governance.

2. One-Party Dominance (1947–1967)

- **Congress Dominance**: Post-independence, the INC, led by Jawaharlal Nehru, dominated Indian politics due to its role in the freedom struggle, organizational strength, and broad appeal across castes, religions, and regions. It won landslide

victories in the 1951-52, 1957, and 1962 general elections, often securing over 70% of Lok Sabha seats with 40-45% vote share.
- **Opposition Fragmentation**: Opposition parties existed but were weak and fragmented:
    - **Socialist Parties**: Split from Congress (e.g., Praja Socialist Party, Samyukta Socialist Party) over ideological differences.
    - **Communist Party of India**: Gained traction in states like Kerala (forming the world's first democratically elected communist government in 1957) and West Bengal.
    - **Bharatiya Jana Sangh (1951)**: A Hindu nationalist party, precursor to the BJP, had limited influence.
- **System**: Political scientists like Rajni Kothari termed this the **"Congress System"**, a one-party dominance model with internal factionalism within Congress acting as a substitute for multi-party competition.

3. Emergence of Multi-Party Competition (1967–1989)

- **Decline of Congress**: The 1967 elections marked a turning point as Congress lost power in several states (e.g., Tamil Nadu, West Bengal) due to economic crises, factionalism, and the death of Nehru (1964) and Lal Bahadur Shastri (1966). Non-Congress coalitions emerged in states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.
- **Rise of Regional Parties**: Linguistic and regional identities fueled new parties:
    - **Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK, 1949)**: Dominated Tamil Nadu from 1967, ending Congress rule there.
    - **Akali Dal**: Grew in Punjab, advocating Sikh interests.
    - **Telugu Desam Party (TDP, 1982)**: Emerged in Andhra Pradesh under N.T. Rama Rao.
- **Coalition Experiments**: The 1977 election saw the first non-Congress central government under the **Janata Party**, a coalition of anti-Congress forces (including Jana Sangh, Socialists, and Congress dissidents) formed after the Emergency (1975-77). It collapsed by 1980 due to infighting, but it signaled the end of Congress monopoly.
- **System**: This period transitioned India into a **multi-party system** with a mix of national and state parties, though Congress regained power in 1980 and 1984 under Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, leveraging sympathy (e.g., Indira's assassination in 1984).

4. Coalition Era (1989–2014)

- **Fragmentation and Coalitions**: The 1989 election marked the start of consistent coalition governments at the center, as no single party secured a majority in the Lok Sabha until 2014. Key developments:
    - **National Front (1989-1991)**: Led by V.P. Singh, included regional parties like DMK and TDP, supported externally by BJP and Left.
    - **United Front (1996-1998)**: A coalition of 13 parties, including Janata Dal and regional players, backed by Congress.
- **Rise of BJP**: The **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)**, formed in 1980 from the Jana Sangh, grew rapidly in the 1990s due to the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, winning

161 seats in 1996 and leading the **National Democratic Alliance (NDA)** coalition from 1998-2004 under Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

- **Congress-Led UPA**: The **United Progressive Alliance (UPA)**, led by Congress, governed from 2004-2014 with support from regional parties like DMK, NCP, and Left (until 2008).
- **Regional Influence**: State parties like Samajwadi Party (SP), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), All India Trinamool Congress (TMC), and Biju Janata Dal (BJD) became kingmakers in coalition politics.
- **System**: A **competitive multi-party system** with coalition governments became the norm, reflecting India's federal diversity and voter fragmentation along caste, region, and ideology.

5. Return to Single-Party Majority with Multi-Party Dynamics (2014–2025)

- **BJP's Ascendance**: The 2014 election saw the BJP, under Narendra Modi, win a clear majority (282 seats), ending the coalition era temporarily. It repeated this in 2019 (303 seats), driven by Modi's charisma, Hindutva ideology, and development promises. The NDA coalition expanded its tally further (336 seats in 2019).
- **Congress Decline**: Congress was reduced to 44 seats in 2014 and 52 in 2019, losing its status as the sole national counterweight to BJP.
- **Regional Parties Persist**: Despite BJP's dominance, state parties remain strong in their regions:
  - TMC consolidated power in West Bengal.
  - AAP emerged as a national party by 2023, ruling Delhi and Punjab.
  - DMK, SP, and BJD retained state influence.
- **Opposition Alliances**: The **INDIA bloc (Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance)** formed in 2023 as a multi-party front against BJP for the 2024 elections, though its success remains debated as of March 2025 (post-election outcomes would clarify this, but no definitive shift is confirmed yet).
- **System**: A **dominant-party system** within a multi-party framework has emerged, with BJP as the central pole, yet regional parties and opposition coalitions keep the system dynamic.

Key Trends (Up to March 21, 2025)

- **From Ideological to Pragmatic**: Early parties were ideology-driven (socialism, communism, nationalism); modern parties blend ideology with populism and regionalism.
- **Federalization**: State parties have grown in number (58 recognized by ECI in 2024) and influence, reflecting India's federal structure.
- **Personalization**: Leaders like Modi (BJP), Mamata Banerjee (TMC), and Arvind Kejriwal (AAP) have made parties personality-centric.
- **Polarization**: Ideological divides (e.g., Hindutva vs. secularism) and caste/region-based voting persist, shaping party strategies.

Conclusion

India's party system evolved from a Congress-dominated structure to a competitive multi-party democracy, briefly reverting to single-party dominance under BJP while retaining multi-party vibrancy. As of March 21, 2025, it balances national giants (BJP, Congress) with a robust ecosystem of state parties, adapting to India's diverse electorate.

Relationship between religion and politics in India

The relationship between religion and politics in India is intricate, deeply historical, and dynamic, shaped by the country's diverse religious landscape, colonial past, constitutional framework, and evolving political ideologies. As a secular democracy with a population of over 1.4 billion, comprising Hindus (approximately 80%), Muslims (14%), Christians (2.3%), Sikhs (1.7%), Buddhists, Jains, and others, India's political sphere has often intersected with religious identities. Here's an exploration of this relationship from independence to March 21, 2025:

Historical Context

- **Pre-Independence Era**: Religion played a pivotal role in India's freedom struggle and political mobilization:
    - The **Indian National Congress (INC)**, while secular in outlook, used religious symbols (e.g., Gandhi's invocation of Ram Rajya) to unite diverse groups against British rule.
    - The **Muslim League**, formed in 1906, leveraged religious identity to demand a separate Muslim state, leading to the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947.
    - Hindu nationalist groups like the **Hindu Mahasabha** and **Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)**, founded in 1925, pushed for a Hindu-centric vision of India, influencing later political movements.
- **Partition's Legacy**: The violent partition along religious lines (Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan) left a lasting imprint, making religion a sensitive political fault line.

Constitutional Framework and Secularism

- **Secular Foundation (1950)**: India's Constitution, enacted on January 26, 1950, established a secular state:
    - Articles 25-28 guarantee freedom of religion, allowing individuals to profess, practice, and propagate their faith.
    - The state was designed to be neutral, with no official religion, unlike Pakistan's Islamic framework.
    - However, the term "secular" was not explicitly in the Constitution until the **42nd Amendment (1976)** added it to the Preamble, formalizing India's commitment to "Sarva Dharma Sambhava" (equal respect for all religions).
- **Unique Secularism**: Indian secularism differs from Western models (e.g., strict separation of church and state). It involves state engagement with religion—regulating religious institutions (e.g., temple trusts), providing subsidies

(e.g., Haj pilgrimage), and enacting religion-specific laws (e.g., Hindu Marriage Act, Muslim Personal Law)—to ensure equality and harmony.

Religion in Post-Independence Politics

1. Congress Era (1947–1980s): Secular Dominance with Religious Undertones

- **Nehru's Vision**: Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, championed a secular state, wary of religion's divisive potential post-partition. Congress avoided overt religious appeals, focusing on unity and development.
- **Exceptions**: Despite secular rhetoric, Congress occasionally navigated religious sentiments:
    - The 1951 reconstruction of the Somnath Temple, supported by some Congress leaders, hinted at Hindu symbolism.
    - Policies like retaining Muslim Personal Law appeased religious minorities, criticized by some as "pseudo-secularism."
- **Opposition**: Early opposition parties like the **Bharatiya Jana Sangh** (founded 1951, precursor to BJP) explicitly tied politics to Hindu identity, advocating for a "Hindu Rashtra" (Hindu nation), though their influence was limited until the 1980s.

2. Rise of Communal Politics (1980s–1990s)

- **Hindu Nationalism**: The **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)**, formed in 1980 from the Jana Sangh, capitalized on Hindu identity:
    - The **Ram Janmabhoomi Movement** (1980s-1990s), demanding a temple at Ayodhya's disputed site (claimed as Lord Ram's birthplace and occupied by the Babri Masjid), galvanized Hindu voters. The mosque's demolition in 1992 by Hindu activists, tacitly supported by BJP, marked a turning point, boosting the party's electoral fortunes (from 2 Lok Sabha seats in 1984 to 161 in 1996).
- **Congress's Response**: Under Rajiv Gandhi, Congress oscillated:
    - The 1985 Shah Bano case reversal (overruling a Supreme Court verdict on alimony for Muslim women via the Muslim Women Act) was seen as minority appeasement.
    - Allowing the 1989 shilanyas (foundation ceremony) at Ayodhya was a counter-move to appease Hindus, blurring Congress's secular stance.
- **Regional Dynamics**: Religion shaped state politics too:
    - In Punjab, the **Akali Dal** blended Sikh identity with political demands, peaking during the Khalistan movement (1980s).
    - In Tamil Nadu, Dravidian parties like DMK rejected Brahminical Hinduism, promoting rationalism but engaging with Tamil Hindu culture.

3. Coalition Era (1989–2014): Religion as a Bargaining Chip

- **BJP's Growth**: Leading the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), BJP governed from 1998-2004, moderating its Hindutva rhetoric for coalition partners but advancing policies like banning cow slaughter in some states.
- **UPA's Balancing Act**: The Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA, 2004-2014) emphasized secularism, introducing measures like the Sachar

Committee (2006) to address Muslim socio-economic backwardness, while facing accusations of "vote bank politics."
- **Riots and Polarization**: Communal violence (e.g., 2002 Gujarat riots under BJP-ruled state) deepened religious divides, influencing electoral outcomes.

4. BJP Dominance (2014–2025): Hindutva Mainstreamed

- **Modi Era**: The BJP's landslide victories in 2014 and 2019 under Narendra Modi marked a shift where Hindutva became a central political force:
  - **Policy Moves**: Laws like the **Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA, 2019)**, offering citizenship to non-Muslim refugees, and the **abrogation of Article 370 (2019)** in Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir were framed as protecting Hindu interests, though criticized as discriminatory.
  - **Ram Temple**: The Supreme Court's 2019 verdict favoring a Hindu temple at Ayodhya, followed by its consecration in January 2024, was a symbolic triumph for BJP, blending religion with national identity.
- **Opposition Critique**: Parties like Congress, TMC, and AAP accuse BJP of undermining secularism, while attempting to counter with inclusive narratives or regional religious appeals (e.g., TMC's Durga Puja celebrations).

Current Dynamics (March 21, 2025)

- **Polarization**: Religion remains a potent electoral tool. BJP's "Hindu-first" policies (e.g., Uniform Civil Code debates, anti-conversion laws) contrast with opposition efforts to rally minorities and secular voters, as seen in the **INDIA alliance** (formed 2023) for the 2024 elections.
- **State-Level Variations**: Religion's role varies:
  - In West Bengal, TMC balances Hindu and Muslim votes.
  - In Kerala, CPI(M) resists religious appeals, while Congress and IUML court Muslim and Christian communities.
- **Social Media**: Platforms amplify religious narratives, with BJP leveraging WhatsApp and X for Hindutva messaging, while opponents counter with secular or minority-focused campaigns.

Key Observations

- **Vote Bank Politics**: Parties often cater to religious communities (e.g., Muslims as a Congress base, Hindus for BJP), though caste and region intersect heavily.
- **Judiciary's Role**: Courts mediate disputes (e.g., Ayodhya, Sabarimala), balancing religious freedom with constitutional norms.
- **Tension with Secularism**: India's secular model—state engagement rather than separation—leads to debates over "pseudo-secularism" (favoring minorities) versus "majoritarianism" (favoring Hindus).

Conclusion

The relationship between religion and politics in India has evolved from a secular consensus under Congress to a contested space where religious identity, especially Hindutva, shapes

governance and elections. As of March 21, 2025, this interplay remains a defining feature, reflecting both India's diversity and its challenges in maintaining secular harmony.

ECI - constitutional provisions, structure and functions

The **Election Commission of India (ECI)** is an autonomous constitutional body responsible for conducting free and fair elections in India. Established under the Constitution of India, it oversees elections to the Lok Sabha (Parliament's lower house), Rajya Sabha (upper house), State Legislative Assemblies, and the offices of the President and Vice-President. Below is a detailed explanation of its constitutional provisions, structure, and functions as of March 21, 2025.

Constitutional Provisions

The ECI derives its authority and mandate from the Constitution of India, primarily under **Part XV (Articles 324-329)**, enacted on January 26, 1950. Key provisions include:

1. **Article 324: Superintendence, Direction, and Control of Elections**
   - Grants the ECI the power of superintendence, direction, and control over the preparation of electoral rolls and the conduct of all elections mentioned above.
   - It vests the ECI with wide-ranging authority, including rule-making powers, to ensure electoral integrity, subject to laws made by Parliament.
2. **Article 325: No Discrimination in Electoral Rolls**
   - Prohibits exclusion from electoral rolls based on religion, race, caste, or sex, ensuring a single, inclusive electorate.
3. **Article 326: Adult Suffrage**
   - Establishes elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies on the basis of universal adult suffrage (citizens above 18 years, reduced from 21 by the 61st Amendment in 1988).
4. **Article 327: Power of Parliament**
   - Allows Parliament to legislate on matters related to elections, including delimitation of constituencies and electoral rolls, in consultation with the ECI.
5. **Article 328: Power of State Legislatures**
   - Permits state legislatures to make laws on elections to their assemblies, subject to parliamentary laws and ECI oversight.
6. **Article 329: Bar to Interference by Courts**
   - Prohibits courts from interfering in electoral matters during the election process, except through election petitions post-election, ensuring the ECI's autonomy during polls.
   - Clause (a): Bars judicial challenges to electoral laws or delimitation.
   - Clause (b): Limits judicial intervention in ongoing elections, vesting final authority with the ECI.

7. **Article 103(2) and 192(2)**: Advisory Role
   ○ The ECI advises the President and Governors on disqualification of MPs and MLAs, respectively, due to defection or other breaches (e.g., under the Tenth Schedule).
8. **Independence Safeguards**
   ○ The Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) enjoys security of tenure similar to a Supreme Court judge (Article 324(5)), removable only by impeachment.
   ○ Conditions of service for Election Commissioners cannot be altered to their disadvantage post-appointment.

Structure of the ECI

The ECI operates as a multi-member body (since 1993), evolving from a single-member entity to enhance decision-making and workload management.

1. **Composition**:
   ○ **Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)**: The head of the ECI, appointed by the President of India.
   ○ **Election Commissioners (ECs)**: Two additional commissioners, also appointed by the President, bringing the total to three members (since October 1993, following the expansion during T.N. Seshan's tenure).
   ○ As of March 21, 2025, this three-member structure persists, with Rajiv Kumar as CEC (appointed May 2022) and two ECs (names subject to change post-2024 retirements or appointments).
2. **Appointment Process**:
   ○ Historically, the President appointed commissioners on the advice of the Prime Minister, without a formal law.
   ○ The **Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023**, enacted in December 2023, formalized this:
      ■ A **selection committee** comprising the Prime Minister (chair), the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha (or leader of the largest opposition party), and a Union Cabinet Minister nominates candidates.
      ■ A **search committee**, headed by the Cabinet Secretary, shortlists candidates for the selection committee.
      ■ This law faced criticism from opposition parties for giving the government undue influence, but it governs appointments as of 2025.
3. **Tenure and Conditions**:
   ○ CEC and ECs serve a term of **6 years** or until age **65**, whichever is earlier.
   ○ Salaries are equivalent to a Supreme Court judge (funded from the Consolidated Fund of India), ensuring financial independence.
4. **Support Structure**:
   ○ The ECI is supported by a secretariat in New Delhi, headed by a Director General.
   ○ At the state level, **Chief Electoral Officers (CEOs)** (IAS officers) oversee elections, reporting to the ECI.

- ○ District Election Officers (typically District Magistrates) manage polling at the grassroots.

Functions of the ECI

The ECI's functions span the entire electoral process, ensuring democratic integrity. They can be categorized as administrative, regulatory, advisory, and quasi-judicial:

1. **Administrative Functions**:
   - ○ **Preparation of Electoral Rolls**: Updates and maintains voter lists for all elections, ensuring accuracy and inclusivity (e.g., over 96 crore voters registered for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls).
   - ○ **Conduct of Elections**: Organizes polling for Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, State Assemblies, and Presidential/Vice-Presidential elections, including scheduling, booth management, and vote counting.
   - ○ **Delimitation Supervision**: Advises on the delimitation of constituencies (though executed by a separate Delimitation Commission, last completed in 2008; next due post-2031 census per 2024 constitutional amendment).
2. **Regulatory Functions**:
   - ○ **Model Code of Conduct (MCC)**: Enforces this voluntary code during elections to ensure fair play, curbing misuse of power, hate speech, or voter inducement (e.g., enforced strictly in 2024 polls).
   - ○ **Party Registration**: Registers political parties under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, and classifies them as National or State Parties based on performance criteria (e.g., 6 National, 58 State Parties as of 2024).
   - ○ **Symbol Allotment**: Assigns reserved symbols to recognized parties and free symbols to unrecognized ones.
3. **Advisory Functions**:
   - ○ Advises the President/Governors on disqualifications of legislators (e.g., anti-defection cases).
   - ○ Recommends repolls or countermanding elections in cases of booth capturing or irregularities (e.g., rare instances in 2019 and 2024).
4. **Quasi-Judicial Functions**:
   - ○ Resolves disputes related to party recognition, symbol allocation, or splits/mergers (e.g., adjudicated Shiv Sena and NCP splits in 2023-2024).
   - ○ Issues binding orders during elections, subject to judicial review only post-process.
5. **Innovations and Reforms**:
   - ○ Oversees **Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs)** and **Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT)** systems, introduced in 1998 and 2013, respectively, to enhance transparency (fully implemented by 2019).
   - ○ Manages voter education via the **SVEEP** (Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation) program, boosting turnout (e.g., 67% in 2024 Lok Sabha polls).

Key Features and Challenges (as of March 21, 2025)

- **Independence**: The ECI's autonomy is constitutionally protected, though debates persist over appointment processes post-2023 Act, with calls for a more collegium-like system.
- **Achievements**: Successfully conducted 18 Lok Sabha elections (most recently 2024) and numerous state polls, earning global acclaim for managing the world's largest democracy.
- **Challenges**:
    - Rising election expenses and black money (despite ECI caps at ₹95 lakh per Lok Sabha candidate in 2024).
    - Allegations of bias or inaction (e.g., opposition claims during 2019 and 2024 polls).
    - Technological disputes over EVM reliability, though upheld by courts.

Conclusion

The ECI, rooted in Articles 324-329, is a cornerstone of India's democracy, structured as a three-member body with expansive powers to ensure electoral fairness. Its functions—spanning voter registration to dispute resolution—reflect its critical role in upholding democratic principles. As of March 21, 2025, it continues to adapt to India's evolving political landscape, balancing tradition with technological and legal reforms.

Short notes

2024 Lok Sabha elections

Overview

The **2024 Lok Sabha Elections**, held between **April 19 and June 1, 2024**, were the 18th general elections to elect members of India's Lok Sabha, the lower house of Parliament. Conducted in **seven phases** across 543 constituencies (plus one uncontested seat in Surat), this election was the largest democratic exercise in history, involving **968.8 million registered voters**, of whom **642 million** cast their ballots—a turnout of **66.3%**. Overseen by the **Election Commission of India (ECI)** under Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar, the polls concluded with results announced on **June 4, 2024**, shaping India's political landscape for the next five years.

Electoral Scale and Logistics

- **Voter Base**: The electorate grew by 6% since 2019, with 970 million eligible voters (including 1.8 million first-time voters aged 18-19 and 19.7 million aged 20-29). Notably, **312 million women** voted, surpassing male turnout in several states, reflecting the ECI's push for gender parity via the SVEEP program.
- **Polling Infrastructure**: Over **1.05 million polling stations** were set up, staffed by 15 million personnel. The ECI deployed **5.5 million Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs)** with Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) units, ensuring transparency.
- **Phased Schedule**: The seven-phase structure (April 19, April 26, May 7, May 13, May 20, May 25, June 1) accommodated India's vast geography and security needs, with voting spread over 44 days—the longest since 1951-52. Phase 1 covered 102 seats, while Phase 7 included 57 seats, notably Punjab and Uttar Pradesh's final tranche.
- **Innovations**: The ECI introduced **home voting** for voters above 85 and those with over 40% disability (benefiting 1.5 million), alongside **13,000+ monitoring teams** to enforce the Model Code of Conduct (MCC).

Political Context and Key Players

The election was a high-stakes battle between two major coalitions, reflecting India's polarized polity:

1. **National Democratic Alliance (NDA)**:
   - **Leader**: Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, seeking a third consecutive term.
   - **Allies**: Included Telugu Desam Party (TDP), Janata Dal (United) (JD(U)), Shiv Sena (Eknath Shinde faction), Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas), and others, totaling over 30 parties.
   - **Campaign**: Anchored on "Abki Baar 400 Paar" (This Time, Beyond 400), emphasizing Modi's leadership, economic growth, Hindutva (e.g., Ram Temple consecration in January 2024), and welfare schemes like PM-KISAN and Ayushman Bharat.
   - **Strength**: Dominance since 2014 (282 seats) and 2019 (353 seats, with BJP at 303).
2. **Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA)**:
   - **Leader**: Indian National Congress (INC), led by Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi.
   - **Allies**: A coalition of 26+ parties, including Samajwadi Party (SP), All India Trinamool Congress (TMC), Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Nationalist Congress Party (Sharad Pawar faction), and Left parties (CPI, CPI(M)).
   - **Campaign**: Focused on "Nyay" (justice), promising caste census, jobs (30 lakh government posts), MSP guarantees for farmers, and ₹1 lakh annually to poor women, while accusing BJP of authoritarianism and economic mismanagement.

- ○ **Context**: Formed in mid-2023 to counter BJP, though weakened by seat-sharing disputes and defections (e.g., Nitish Kumar's JD(U) rejoined NDA in January 2024).
3. **Other Players**:
    - ○ Regional heavyweights like Biju Janata Dal (BJD) in Odisha, YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) in Andhra Pradesh, and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Uttar Pradesh contested independently, influencing vote splits.

Campaign Highlights

- **BJP's Narrative**: Modi held over 200 rallies, leveraging the Ram Temple, national security (e.g., Balakot airstrike legacy), and "Viksit Bharat 2047" (Developed India by 2047). Slogans like "Modi Ki Guarantee" dominated airwaves.
- **INDIA's Pushback**: Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra (January-March 2024) spanned 6,700 km, attacking BJP on unemployment (8.4% per CMIE data), inflation, and alleged misuse of agencies like ED and CBI against opposition leaders (e.g., Arvind Kejriwal's arrest in March 2024).
- **Controversies**:
    - ○ **Electoral Bonds**: A Supreme Court ruling in February 2024 struck down the scheme as unconstitutional, revealing BJP as the largest recipient (₹6,060 crore since 2019), fueling opposition claims of cronyism.
    - ○ **Hate Speech**: The ECI issued notices to Modi and Rahul Gandhi for MCC violations (e.g., Modi's "infiltrators" remark in Rajasthan), though enforcement remained contentious.
- **Digital War**: Social media, with 500 million X posts and WhatsApp campaigns, amplified narratives, from BJP's Hindutva clips to INDIA's "Save Constitution" messaging.

Results (Announced June 4, 2024)

- **NDA Victory, BJP Short of Majority**:
    - ○ Total Seats: **293** (down from 353 in 2019).
    - ○ BJP: **240 seats** (down from 303), losing its standalone majority (272 required).
    - ○ Allies: TDP (16), JD(U) (12), Shiv Sena (Shinde) (7), LJP (5), and others bolstered the coalition.
- **INDIA's Resurgence**:
    - ○ Total Seats: **234** (up from 91 for UPA in 2019).
    - ○ INC: **99 seats** (up from 52), its best since 2014.
    - ○ Allies: SP (37), DMK (22), TMC (29), AAP (3), Shiv Sena (UBT) (9), NCP (Sharad) (8).
- **Others**: BJD (0), YSRCP (4), BSP (0), and independents (7) saw diminished returns.
- **State Highlights**:

- **Uttar Pradesh (80 seats)**: BJP slipped to 33 (from 62), SP surged to 37, reflecting a caste coalition revival.
- **Maharashtra (48 seats)**: INDIA won 30 (INC 13, SS-UBT 9, NCP-SP 8), NDA got 17, hit by Maratha and OBC discontent.
- **West Bengal (42 seats)**: TMC took 29, BJP 12, INC 1, defying BJP's expansion hopes.
- **Kerala (20 seats)**: BJP won its first seat (Thrissur), INC-led UDF took 18.
- **Andhra Pradesh (25 seats)**: NDA swept with 21 (BJP 3, TDP 16, JSP 2), ousting YSRCP (4).
- **Odisha (21 seats)**: BJP won 20, ending BJD's 24-year reign (0 seats).
- **Surprise**: BJP lost Faizabad (Ayodhya) to SP, despite the Ram Temple narrative.

Analysis and Implications

1. **Voter Turnout**: At 66.3%, slightly below 2019's 67.4%, turnout varied—highest in Assam (81.6%), lowest in Bihar (56%). Women outvoted men in 21 states, signaling gender shifts.
2. **Coalition Revival**: BJP's reliance on TDP and JD(U) marked India's return to coalition politics after a decade of single-party rule, with allies securing key ministries (e.g., Nitish Kumar's influence on railways).
3. **Opposition Gains**: INDIA's performance revived Congress and regional players, though internal cohesion remains fragile (e.g., TMC's independent stance).
4. **Regional Dynamics**: BJP's losses in Hindi heartland (UP, Rajasthan) and gains in Odisha and South (Kerala, Andhra) showed a shifting electoral map.
5. **Controversies**: EVM reliability debates persisted, with opposition alleging manipulation (dismissed by ECI and courts), while MCC enforcement faced scrutiny.

Post-Election Developments (June 2024–March 2025)

- **Government Formation**: Modi was sworn in on **June 9, 2024**, heading a 72-member NDA ministry, balancing coalition demands (e.g., TDP's Chandrababu Naidu as a key player).
- **Policy Shifts**: The coalition tempered BJP's agenda—Uniform Civil Code and contentious reforms took a backseat, with focus on infrastructure and welfare continuity.
- **Opposition Role**: Rahul Gandhi became Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, leveraging INDIA's numbers to challenge NDA in Parliament (e.g., Budget Session 2024 debates).

Conclusion

The 2024 Lok Sabha Elections underscored India's democratic resilience, blending continuity (Modi's third term) with change (coalition governance). The NDA's narrower victory, INDIA's revival, and regional flux signal a competitive multi-party future. As of March 21, 2025, the election's legacy shapes India's polity, testing the NDA's stability and the opposition's unity amid economic and social challenges.

Caste and politics in India

The relationship between **caste and politics in India** is a defining feature of the country's democratic system, deeply rooted in its social structure, historical inequalities, and post-independence policies. Caste, a hierarchical system of social stratification unique to India, has evolved from a traditional social order into a powerful political force, influencing voting patterns, party formation, and governance. Below is an extensive exploration of this dynamic, spanning from independence to March 21, 2025.

Historical Context

- **Pre-Independence**: Caste shaped social life under the varna system (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras) and thousands of jatis (sub-castes), with Dalits (formerly "untouchables") at the margins. Colonial rule politicized caste through censuses (e.g., 1871), which categorized communities, and policies like separate electorates (e.g., 1909 Morley-Minto Reforms), amplifying group identities.
- **Freedom Struggle**: The Indian National Congress (INC), under Gandhi, sought to unite castes but faced challenges:
  - Gandhi's Harijan upliftment clashed with B.R. Ambedkar's demand for Dalit autonomy, culminating in the **Poona Pact (1932)**, which reserved seats for Scheduled Castes (SCs) in a joint electorate.
  - Regional caste movements, like the Justice Party in Madras (1916), opposed Brahmin dominance, laying groundwork for later politics.

Post-Independence: Caste as a Political Tool

1. Constitutional Framework and Reservations (1950s)

- **Constitutional Provisions**: The Constitution abolished untouchability (Article 17) and introduced reservations to address caste inequalities:
  - **Scheduled Castes (SCs)** and **Scheduled Tribes (STs)** received reserved seats in legislatures (Articles 330, 332) and jobs/education (Article 16(4)).
  - Later, **Other Backward Classes (OBCs)** were included under affirmative action following the Mandal Commission (1980).
- **Impact**: Reservations politicized caste identities, making them a basis for mobilization rather than erasure, as Nehru's secular-modernist vision had hoped.

2. Congress Dominance and Caste Accommodation (1947–1967)

- **Congress System**: The INC, under Nehru, built a broad coalition across castes, co-opting upper-caste leaders (Brahmins, Rajputs) while appealing to lower castes via land reforms and welfare.
- **Patronage Politics**: Congress used its dominance to distribute resources (e.g., party tickets, ministerial posts) to caste groups, balancing Brahmin-Kshatriya elites with emerging Dalit and intermediate caste voices.
- **Opposition**: Early caste-based parties were limited—e.g., the Republican Party of India (RPI, 1956) for Dalits—but regional caste movements (e.g., Dravidian parties in Tamil Nadu) began challenging Congress.

3. Rise of Caste-Based Politics (1967–1989)

- **Decline of Congress**: The 1967 elections saw Congress lose state power to caste-centric parties:
    - **Uttar Pradesh**: Charan Singh's Lok Dal mobilized Jats and intermediate castes (e.g., Yadavs, Kurmis).
    - **Tamil Nadu**: The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) consolidated non-Brahmin OBCs, ending Brahmin-Congress dominance.
- **Green Revolution**: Economic shifts empowered rural intermediate castes (e.g., Yadavs, Patels), who demanded political power, weakening upper-caste hegemony.
- **Mandal Moment (1990)**: V.P. Singh's implementation of the Mandal Commission report, reserving 27% of government jobs for OBCs, was a watershed:
    - Sparked upper-caste protests but entrenched OBC identity in politics.
    - Parties like Samajwadi Party (SP, 1992) and Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD, 1997) emerged as Yadav-led OBC champions in UP and Bihar.

4. Caste in Coalition Era (1989–2014)

- **Fragmentation**: The decline of Congress's umbrella coalition led to a proliferation of caste-based parties:
    - **Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)**: Founded in 1984 by Kanshi Ram, it mobilized Dalits under Mayawati, winning UP in 2007 with a "Sarvajan" (all-caste) strategy.
    - **Janata Dal Variants**: JD(U) (Kurmis, Bihar), RJD (Yadavs, Bihar), and SP (Yadavs, UP) leveraged OBC votes.
    - **Regional Players**: Parties like Apna Dal (Kurmis), PMK (Vanniyars, Tamil Nadu), and LJSP (Dalits, Bihar) gained traction.
- **Vote Banks**: Parties aligned with specific castes—e.g., BJP with upper castes, SP with Yadavs-Muslims, BSP with Dalits—while forging alliances to broaden appeal (e.g., SP-BSP in 1993).
- **Mandal vs. Kamandal**: The BJP countered Mandal's caste mobilization with "Kamandal" (Hindutva), uniting Hindus across castes, though it initially relied on Brahmin-Bania support.

5. BJP Dominance and Caste Realignment (2014–2025)

- **Modi Era**: The BJP, under Narendra Modi (an OBC himself), expanded its caste base beyond upper castes:
  - **OBC Outreach**: Policies like 10% EWS reservation (2019) for upper castes and OBC sub-categorization (e.g., Rohini Commission) balanced diverse caste interests.
  - **Dalit Appeal**: Symbolism (e.g., Ambedkar memorials) and welfare (e.g., Stand-Up India) targeted SCs, though BSP's decline aided this shift.
  - **2024 Elections**: BJP won 240 seats, retaining upper-caste support (e.g., Rajputs) while making inroads into OBCs (e.g., Kurmis in UP) and some Dalit sub-groups, despite losses in UP's caste-heavy politics.
- **Opposition Response**: The INDIA alliance (2024) revived caste coalitions:
  - SP's Akhilesh Yadav allied with smaller caste parties (e.g., SBSP for Rajbhars), winning 37 seats in UP.
  - Congress pushed a caste census promise, gaining traction among OBCs and Dalits (99 seats).

Key Dynamics

1. **Caste as Vote Bank**:
   - Voting often follows caste lines, reinforced by endogamy and community networks. E.g., Yadavs back SP/RJD, Jats support RLD, and Dalits historically BSP.
   - Parties tailor manifestos—e.g., BJP's "double engine" development for all castes vs. SP's OBC-specific quotas.
2. **Reservation Politics**:
   - Demands for quota expansion (e.g., Marathas in Maharashtra, Patels in Gujarat) have spurred agitations and influenced elections (e.g., 2019 Maharashtra polls).
   - The 103rd Amendment (2019) for EWS quotas diluted caste exclusivity, benefiting BJP's upper-caste base.
3. **Intersection with Religion**:
   - Hindutva unites castes under a Hindu identity (e.g., BJP's Ram Temple push), but caste rivalries persist—e.g., Dalit-OBC tensions in UP.
   - Muslim vote consolidation (e.g., with SP) counters Hindu caste blocs.
4. **Regional Variations**:
   - **North India (UP, Bihar)**: Caste is overt, with parties like SP, BSP, and RJD thriving on OBC/Dalit votes.
   - **South India (Tamil Nadu, Andhra)**: Dravidian parties blend caste (OBCs) with anti-Brahminism, while Andhra's TDP/YSRCP target Kammas and Reddys.
   - **West (Maharashtra, Gujarat)**: Maratha and Patel mobilizations shape state politics.

Current Trends (March 21, 2025)

- **2024 Elections**: Caste remained pivotal:
    - BJP's UP losses (33 seats vs. 62 in 2019) reflected OBC-Dalit shifts to SP-BSP alliances.
    - Maharashtra's INDIA success (30 seats) stemmed from Maratha-OBC discontent with BJP-Shinde Sena.
- **Caste Census Debate**: INDIA's push for a nationwide caste census (last conducted 1931) gained traction post-2024, pressuring NDA to address OBC demands.
- **Fragmentation**: Smaller caste parties (e.g., Apna Dal, SBSP) wield disproportionate influence in coalitions, as seen in NDA's 2024 reliance on TDP and JD(U).

Conclusion

Caste and politics in India are inseparable, evolving from a social hierarchy into a cornerstone of electoral strategy and governance. While Congress once subsumed caste under a broad tent, post-1967 fragmentation birthed caste-specific parties, with BJP now blending Hindutva with caste inclusivity. As of March 21, 2025, caste continues to shape India's multi-party democracy, intersecting with class, religion, and region, ensuring its enduring relevance in power dynamics.

Demand for separate state of Vidarbha

The demand for a separate state of Vidarbha in India is a long-standing movement rooted in historical, economic, cultural, and political grievances. Vidarbha, the eastern region of Maharashtra, comprises 11 districts across the Nagpur and Amravati divisions, covering 31.6% of Maharashtra's area and 21.3% of its population (approximately 23 million as per the 2011 census). With Nagpur as its largest city and historical capital, the region's call for statehood reflects perceived neglect and underdevelopment within the larger Maharashtra framework. Below is a comprehensive examination of this demand as of March 21, 2025.

Historical Background

- **Pre-Independence**: Vidarbha was an independent kingdom under the Bhonsle dynasty until its annexation by the British in 1817. It later became part of the Central Provinces and Berar, with Nagpur as the capital. The demand for a separate Vidarbha dates back over a century, with the Central Provinces legislature passing a resolution for a "Mahavidarbha" state on October 1, 1938—over two decades before Maharashtra's formation.
- **Nagpur Pact (1953)**: After the States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) was set up in 1953, Vidarbha leaders like M.S. Aney and Brijlal Biyani advocated for a separate state. However, the 1953 Nagpur Pact merged Vidarbha into the proposed Marathi-speaking Maharashtra state, promising equitable development, annual assembly sessions in Nagpur, and resource allocation proportional to population.

Nagpur lost its capital status to Bombay (now Mumbai), a decision still rued by Vidarbha advocates.
- **SRC Recommendation (1956)**: The Fazal Ali-led SRC favored a separate Vidarbha state, citing its economic viability and distinct identity, but the central government prioritized the "one language, one state" principle, merging Vidarbha into Maharashtra on May 1, 1960.

Reasons for the Demand

The movement for a separate Vidarbha stems from multiple grievances:

1. **Economic Disparity**:
   - **Resource Rich, Development Poor**: Vidarbha boasts over half of Maharashtra's mineral wealth, three-quarters of its forest resources, and surplus electricity from thermal plants. Yet, it lags in industrial growth, infrastructure, and per capita income compared to western Maharashtra (Mumbai, Pune).
   - **Farmer Suicides**: The region, especially districts like Amravati and Yavatmal, has been infamous for high farmer suicide rates due to agrarian distress, inadequate irrigation (only 15% of farmland irrigated vs. 40% statewide), and poor fund utilization. An estimated economic backlog of ₹2 lakh crore is often cited.
   - **Fund Allocation**: Critics argue that Mumbai and Pune siphon development funds, leaving Vidarbha neglected despite its contributions (e.g., cotton, rice).
2. **Administrative Neglect**:
   - The Nagpur Pact's promises—six-week annual assembly sessions in Nagpur and equitable resource distribution—have been inconsistently honored, fueling perceptions of Western Maharashtra dominance.
   - Nagpur's loss of capital status and lack of top-tier educational institutions (most are concentrated in Pune/Mumbai) exacerbate brain drain and unemployment.
3. **Cultural and Regional Identity**:
   - Vidarbha has a distinct cultural blend—Marathi Varhadi and Zadi dialects, alongside influences from neighboring Hindi-speaking and tribal regions (e.g., Gondi speakers). Its central Indian location contrasts with coastal Maharashtra's identity.
   - Historical pride as a former kingdom and capital adds emotional weight to the demand.
4. **Political Marginalization**:
   - Vidarbha leaders feel sidelined in Maharashtra's Mumbai-centric politics, dominated by parties like Shiv Sena and NCP, which prioritize western interests.

Evolution of the Movement

- **Early Advocacy**: Post-1960, the Vidarbha movement persisted through sporadic protests and resolutions, often led by local leaders like Bapuji Aney and Ramrao Deshmukh.
- **Post-Telangana Boost (2009-2014)**: The creation of Telangana in 2014 reignited Vidarbha statehood demands, with groups like the Vidarbha Rajya Andolan Samiti (VRAS) and Vidarbha Joint Action Committee (VJAC) intensifying agitations. In 2013, VJAC planned protests in Delhi, citing Telangana as precedent.
- **Political Support**:
  - **BJP**: Historically supportive, with its 1992 national executive resolution backing Vidarbha statehood. Leaders like Nitin Gadkari and Devendra Fadnavis (both from Nagpur) have voiced support, though action stalled post-2014 when BJP assumed power in Maharashtra.
  - **Congress**: Local leaders (e.g., Vilas Muttemwar) have backed the demand, but the party nationally remains non-committal. A Pranab Mukherjee-led committee in the 2000s studied the issue, but findings were never publicized.
  - **Opposition**: Shiv Sena staunchly opposes Vidarbha's separation, viewing it as a betrayal of Maharashtra's unity and the legacy of 105 martyrs of the Samyukta Maharashtra movement.
- **Recent Fizzle**: By 2019-2024, momentum waned. The 2014 promise by BJP faded under Fadnavis's Chief Ministership, with focus shifting to development within Maharashtra (e.g., Gadkari's ₹80,000 crore projects cited by Shiv Sena in 2019).

Arguments For and Against

Pros:

- **Administrative Efficiency**: A smaller state (larger than several like Goa or Sikkim) could enable focused governance, better fund utilization, and quicker responses to local issues (e.g., Naxalism in Gadchiroli).
- **Economic Potential**: Vidarbha's resource wealth could drive self-sustained growth, reducing dependence on Mumbai's tax revenue.
- **Precedent**: Successful bifurcations like Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand bolster the case.

Cons:

- **Economic Risks**: Loss of Mumbai's fiscal contributions could strain Vidarbha's budget, with interstate trade taxes adding costs.
- **Unity Concerns**: Critics (e.g., Shiv Sena) argue it fragments Marathi identity, risking cultural and political discord.
- **Feasibility**: No broad consensus exists, and the central government has shown reluctance (e.g., MoS Home Nityanand Rai's 2021 Lok Sabha statement: "No proposal under consideration").

Current Status (March 21, 2025)

- **2024 Elections**: Vidarbha statehood was a non-issue in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, with NDA (293 seats, BJP 240) and INDIA (234 seats) focusing on development and caste rather than reorganization. BJP's losses in Vidarbha (e.g., 5/10 seats in 2024 vs. 9/10 in 2019) were tied to agrarian discontent, not statehood.
- **Public Sentiment**: Posts on X (e.g., March 2025) suggest fading momentum, with some arguing resistance for funds within Maharashtra is more practical than separation. Others, however, highlight ongoing neglect (e.g., lack of industries, farmer woes).
- **Political Stance**: The NDA coalition government, reliant on allies like Shiv Sena, has sidelined Vidarbha statehood. Fadnavis, now Deputy CM, emphasizes united Maharashtra, calling it a central decision.

Conclusion

The demand for a separate Vidarbha state, though historically justified and intermittently vocal, lacks the sustained grassroots push or political will needed for realization as of March 21, 2025. Economic disparities and administrative neglect persist, yet the movement has lost steam amid BJP's development focus and opposition unity concerns. Without a Telangana-like tipping point or broad consensus, Vidarbha remains a latent aspiration rather than an imminent reality.