

# ROLE OF REGIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES IN INDIAN POLITICS AND IMPACT ON ECONOMY

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## Introduction

India as a democracy has the multi-party system in place, which means there are several political parties competing for power. Apart from the primary parties, each state has their own local political parties that rule and compete in their region it will effect on national and state economy.

## Political significance

The multi-party system in India has many political consequences. In the event of an election, the norm states that the party with the majority votes wins the election. However, in order to form a government, a party should have a certain number of votes. This need not happen, leading to problems. The majority party has to therefore join hands with a regional party in order to form government. This is where the importance of the smaller regional parties comes into play.

This situation is applicable not only to the center, but also to the state politics. If a party is unable to win the required number of seats, a coalition is the only option. This could mean two regional parties joining hands to form the government (an unlikely event!), or the majority parties joining hands with the regional party who are supportive or sympathetic towards them.

However, is this trend desirable? With small local parties sprouting on a regular basis, we must raise this question. Take the case of Tamil Nadu. The Dravida Munetra Kazhagam (DMK) started out as a party born out of certain political ideologies. But today there are half a dozen spin-offs, ranging from the AIADMK, MDMK, DMDK, PMK, VCK etc. Most of these other parties are a result of intra party feuds, and expulsions. Likewise, in the communist stronghold of Kerala, there are several communist parties.

Sometimes variety is the spice of life. But if we are spoiled for choice, it will only confuse us. An ideal government should work in the interest of the people, not go about creating parties to fulfill personal grudges or ambitions. When the voter has too many political parties on the ballot, she or he might just end up punching the button randomly. What is the easiest way to figure out that the candidate or party will work in the favor of the people? It is even more difficult to vote for a fairly new party, which has not had occasion to demonstrate their intentions.

On the other side of the coin, having a regional party in the center has benefits for the region. The state from which the supporting party hails will have greater representation in the center, and their issues will get a solid platform. Then again, this could be detrimental to other states.

It is a never-ending debate. We can continue to argue on both sides, and never reach a satisfactory conclusion. As of now, in the current situation, having the support of regional parties in the center will work in favor of the dominant parties. With the elections looming large, the verdict can be passed only over time.

Till 1967, there was only one party ruling the nation that was 'Congress'; but post 1967 a lot of other political parties came to the forefront along with power and started to play an imperative and persuasive role and also started participating in government decision making process. With the regional parties coming to the forefront the development of the state's

responsibility has gone to the regional parties as opposed to the central government taking care in the initial stages.

Regional parties are playing a major role in the Indian Politics and their influence is not just limited to particular religion or state but their decisions and thought process are important in the government planning processes and decisions. The occurrence of increasing number of regional parties has signified the various segmental personalities and interests. It has resulted into a huge gamut of culture and sub culture, caste and sub castes, philological and sub philological combinations and amalgamations on India's political background.

A common allegory about regional parties is that their upsurge has wrinkled the importance of national parties, but in reality, the after the early 1990's the competition in the election pattern has stabilized. When the central government is concocting policies it has to consider the regional parties point of views as well. Even though regional parties have executed with authority at the state level, jointly they get only 5 to 10% of the national vote in parliamentary elections. One of the biggest advantages of regional parties being formed is that personal attention is being given to the states and regions by their political parties for the purpose of growth and development. If there would have been just one national party taking care of the entire nation, it becomes difficult for each and every state to progress and prosper. The problems of the people of various states are dealt by their regional party. Another advantage of regional parties is that it is easy for the native people to approach a local political party leader rather than approaching higher officials in the national party.

Regional politics though play an important role in the Indian Politics. They are also equally involved and responsible to form the policies for not only the nation but also the state. The regional parties should genuinely concentrate on improving the prospects and living conditions of the local people and try to give them better facilities for their basic living. Although there is instability in terms of deciding on who should be the acting central government but the fact is that with the advent of regional parties the importance of each state has been formed and maintained.

Regional parties play a major role in the Indian politics. These parties get allied to any of the major parties to get a chief place in to the house of the parliament. The regional parties are a good vote bank, due to which they bear a chief importance for the major political parties contesting for the power.

These regional parties get tie-up with the major parties to complete their number of seats and win the majority in the house. In such a type of hung parliament, the major seat holding parties have to bow down to these smaller regional parties. They indirectly come into the situation that without the support of the regional parties, they'll lose the power and the parliament can be dissolved any time. This type of insecurity in the most leading power of the country creates a big jolt on the economic status of the country and the share market.

With respect to the state, these parties can perform the good governance. They can take up the problems of the state to the vision of the center and get a resolution for the same. But that requires the dedication towards the state and the citizens who have trusted these parties to take them to power. If this dedication is shown by the candidates contesting elections, then there is the possibility of the candidate getting full people support to form the government on majority, and these smaller regional parties will eventually lose their charm and power.

The "rise" of regional political parties seems to be an eternal theme on the Indian political scene. Indeed, it has become a standard trope of Indian political analysis to deluge readers with excited descriptions of India's fragmented party system and the multiplicity of local parties that appear to crop up like weeds after a monsoon rain. Observers also like to note the continued decline of India's two genuinely national parties, the Indian National Congress and the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP).

There is, of course, a kernel of truth to these claims. Many of the leading power brokers in contemporary Indian politics hail from regional parties—such as former chief ministers of Uttar Pradesh Mulayam Singh Yadav and Mayawati as well as Chief Minister of West Bengal Mamata Banerjee. Looking at them, it is not hard to believe that times have changed.

There is plenty of hard data to back up this sentiment. The exponential increase in the number of parties contesting elections, particularly over the past two decades, and the shrinking margins of victory in parliamentary elections are direct

results of the emergence of new regional power centers. At last count, the fifteenth Lok Sabha, the lower house of parliament, boasted 38 parties, all but two of which are largely ethnic, regional, or sub regional enterprises.

The rise of regional parties has indisputably transformed the very nature of electoral politics in India. For the foreseeable future, it is unimaginable that a single party could form the government in New Delhi—a testament enough to this tectonic shift.

But whether regional parties will be able to wrest greater control over the shape of governance in the capital and in India's states remains an open question. There is an unfortunate, unswerving progression to the conventional narrative, which treats regional parties as constantly on the rise, acquiring greater political space. In fact, there are a number of trends that indicate regional parties may not be the juggernauts many observers make them out to be.

Democracies everywhere, but perhaps nowhere more so than in India, present a complex scenario of tensions between constraints and liberty, unfreedom and freedom, the imperatives of the modern national security state and the aspirations of a free citizenry. The very fact that India has repeatedly been able to mount general elections since it gained its freedom from British rule in 1947, and on a scale never before witnessed in history, is adduced as evidence of the strength of Indian democracy -- an accomplishment that seems all the more remarkable given the precarious state of democracy in most of the world. Indeed, assumptions about the robustness of democracy in India always take as their implied referent the contrast that comes to mind with Pakistan and many other states in the global South. Pakistan has been under military rulers for 32 of its sixty years of its existence, and even its civilian rulers have always governed with the apprehension that a coup might summarily remove them from office – as the constant tussle between Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, each removed from office more than once to pave the way for the other, amply suggests. [See also on MANAS, Pakistan: A Select Political Chronology, 1947-2008.] In Africa, democratic states have had at least as fragile an existence, and military dictatorships, despotisms, and authoritarian democracies have indisputably been the norm.

So just what is it that accounts for the resilience and endurance of Indian democracy? Why has it flourished in India when it has failed in other states? And why has it done so even though India's mass poverty, widespread illiteracy, slow economic growth, a large bureaucracy clearly indifferent to norms of efficiency, a culture of permissive corruption, and unrivaled heterogeneity were all, according to classical accounts, supposed to militate against the growth of democracy? The rhetoric of the state was redistributive, but in practice substantial redistribution was abandoned.

Some considerations quickly come to mind, and are offered here as an aid to rumination, and with the hope that researchers will find these suggestions of sufficient intellectual interest to pursue them at greater length:

### **Economic impacts:**

1. The Congress, for all its authoritarian tendencies and its close identification with the Nehru-Gandhi family, furnished a considerable element of stability. In 1985, the Congress completed 100 years of its existence, and only a few Western democracies have had political parties which have similarly stood the test of time. To be sure, the Congress of Indira Gandhi, and even more so of contemporary times, may not bear much of a resemblance with the Indian National Congress during the time of Beasant, Tilak, Gandhi and later, but nonetheless the very presence of the Congress signifies certain continuities.

2. India had, from the colonial period, a relatively centralized state – and, at the same time, some machinery for local elections and political representation. Though center-state relations have not been without deep difficulties, India has achieved a not insignificant balance between Federal/center and the states. The creation of linguistic states was in itself an important accommodation in this regard. It is important to issue a caveat here about supposing that the colonial legacy was all-important: the British in India, for example, resisted universal franchise, and only after independence did this become a reality.

3. India inherited and retained a well-oiled civil service. India had what is called “a bourgeois revolution”; the demand for Pakistan, by contrast, was led by landed aristocrats. This might also explain why land reforms have been less far-reaching in Pakistan and why that country is still said to be governed more by feudal norms.

4. Notwithstanding full adult franchise from the outset, participation has been gradual and more easily assailable without disturbing the center excessively. Linguistic communities; mobilization of low caste communities and of OBCs; the emergence of regional parties (which counted more on the 'backward castes' to whom the Congress had paid insufficient attention); and the advent even of Hindu nationalists: all this happened incrementally, as it were, and allowed absorption of these various constituencies into the national mainstream. Reservations allowed middling and lower castes a political voice.

5. India retained civil society & state institutions that have provided stability. Two that come to mind are the Supreme Court and the Electoral Commission. The same Supreme Court that sentenced Mohammed Afzal to death, notwithstanding the failure of the state to produce decisive evidence against the condemned man, also acquitted other men for want of evidence.

6. Strong people's and grassroots movements – Dalit, ecological, women's movements, among others – have persisted and flourished.

7. A strong and, on the whole, independent press has characterized the history of independent India, though doubtless there are many stories to be told about the capitulation and subservience of the press to the state and more recently to corporate interests. Even if the press has often been a bulwark of support to élites, the vigilance of the English-language press during the anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat in 2002, to take one example, cannot be denied.

8. One should not understate important legislative gains for ordinary people, including the passage of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, the Forest People's Land Rights Bill, the Right to Information Act, and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act. One can argue this even while conceding that progressive legislation, for example on the practice of dowry, can coexist alongside a resolute determination to prevent its implementation. The law can obfuscate problems as much as it can help to relieve them, an outcome all but assured when the state has no substantive commitment to the idea of an open society and distributive equality. One can also identify other problems with such legislation: it has been said that something like 90 percent of the requests filed under the Right to Information Act emanate from institutions and employees of the state, and more often than not such interests stem from nothing more substantial than the attempt of an employee to find out the salaries of other employees. Ultimately, however, arguments against legislation that in principle is progressive are not easily sustained.

9. In the wisdom of the Indian people is the first source of India's renewal. Time after time the illiterate electorates of India have shown better judgment than the educated. The poor are more committed to the ballot box in India than the elites; in the modern West, such as the US, it is the other way around. The ruling party was thrown out in 1977, 1980, and in several elections since then, including the election of 2004.

10. The Constitution of India remains, despite attempts to subvert its emancipatory provisions, a document and a vision that continues to hold out the promise of equality, justice, and opportunity. It has survived the wreckage of an authoritarian executive and will outlive the Supreme Court's present disposition to allow massive land grabs in the name of progress and development.

In thinking about Indian democracy and its future prospects, commentators have lavished far too much attention on "politics" in the narrowest conception of the term. There is much speculation, for example, on whether India might move towards a two-party system or some variation of it, with the Congress and the left parties constituting one bloc and the other bloc being constituted by BJP and its allies. But this kind of scenario has little room for parties such as the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Samajwadi Party (SP), which together dominate politics in Uttar Pradesh, where efforts by the Congress to reinvent itself do not hold much promise of success. In the General Elections of 2004, the Left Front won 60 seats and came to hold the decisive swing vote. While so far, the left has shown little inclination to revolt, and West Bengal is rapidly retooling itself to become attractive to the corporate world and foreign investors, the possibility of genuine and irreconcilable differences developing between the Congress and the Left Front can never be entirely ignored.

Certainly, if the persistent invocations of the "new India", the roaring economy, and the entrepreneurial and aggressively capitalist spirit of India are any guide, at least the Indian middle classes have signified their assent to the idea that an economic rather than a political conception of democracy will drive the Indian future.



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