

# Political Mobilization and Identity Politics in India

Prakash Ambali<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. Sangeeta<sup>2</sup>

1 Research Scholar, Sunrise University, Alwar, Rajasthan, India

prakashambali123@gmail.com

2 Professor, Department of Political Science, Sunrise University, Alwar, Rajasthan, India

**Abstract:** The Hindu majority in India is particularly susceptible to and has traditionally been mobilized along caste lines since caste is the most pervasive social institution in Indian society. Despite the constitutional system's clear condemnation of caste, caste mobilization in all its manifestations has dominated party politics. Even in India's political system, this has been going on for quite some time. The Bhakti Party of India (BJP) promotes a Hindu nationalist philosophy known as Hindutva. Hinduism is an ideology that advocates for the preservation and participation of Hindu culture in state life. Hindu fundamentalism is the inevitable outcome of Hindutva, a political philosophy in and of itself. The core tenet of Hindutva ideology is the idea that Hindus in India should be seen as a single country and regional entity. A Hindu state caliphate, as advocated for by the BJP party's head, would elevate Hindus to the position of dominant force in India. Another tenet of this philosophy is the idea that Hindutva has always been a part of Hindustani culture. This political philosophy seeks to convert India into a Hindu nation and legitimizes all forms of discrimination against marginalized communities. The abolition of this philosophy would amount to the destruction of Hindu civilization. A growing number of people are joining the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which currently has 180 million members—far more than the Congress Party's 20 million.

**Keywords:** political, mobilization, identity, politics, India

## INTRODUCTION

Various variables, including caste, religion, and regionalism, contribute to the intricate nature of identity-based political mobilization in India's democratic process. Despite its historical use as a means of amplifying oppressed populations, identity politics has the unintended consequence of fostering division and sectarianism. The changing nature of identity politics was on full display in the most recent elections, most notably the Lok Sabha elections of 2024. A rejection of majoritarian appeals was evident in the findings, showing that India's varied public does not always respond well to methods focused only on identity.

## Caste-based mobilization

From candidate choice to electoral coalitions, caste is still a major factor in India's politics.

- **A resurgence of caste arithmetic:** In the 2024 elections, caste-based considerations were prominent, particularly in the Hindi Belt, after a time when the BJP's "Hindutva" ideology seemed to go beyond caste differences.

- **The Samajwadi Party's success:** By appealing to Muslims, Dalits, and Yadavs, the opposition Samajwadi Party (SP) in Uttar Pradesh was able to successfully mobilize votes. A notable instance of this is the defeat that the BJP's religiously motivated campaign suffered in the unreserved Faizabad Lok Sabha seat, which is home to the Ram Temple, when the SP's Dalit candidate emerged victorious.
- **Growing demand for a caste census:** A major plank of the INDIA alliance's campaign platform was the need for a caste census on a national scale. Many voters from the Dalit and Other Backward Classes (OBC) cast ballots in the hopes that this pledge would alleviate their perception of economic marginalization and the lack of reservation benefits.
- **The Maratha reservation issue:** The ruling alliance in Maharashtra took a beating in the 2024 elections because to the prevalence of the Maratha community's demand for quota in areas where the movement was most prominent.

### Religious polarization

Intersecting with caste to form majority and minority voting blocs, religion is a powerful instrument for political mobilization.

- **The BJP's Hindu nationalist appeal:** The Hindutva rhetoric of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is not uniformly successful across the country, but it does make use of Hindu identity. Despite the BJP's best efforts, they were unable in winning the Faizabad constituency—where the Ram Temple in Ayodhya is located—during the 2024 election.
- **Competitive communalism:** Accusations of "competitive communalism" have been leveled against the BJP and the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal and other areas where they are seeking to strengthen their support bases.
- **Anti-Muslim rhetoric:** Claims that the BJP used anti-Muslim language, such as "vote jihad" to rally Hindu supporters, have dogged its electoral campaigns. The result can be counter-mobilization that benefits secular or regional parties in states where minority populations are large.

## Regional and linguistic identities

There is a significant role for regional and linguistic identities, which frequently conflict with national narratives.

- **Dravidian identity in Tamil Nadu:** National parties like the BJP have traditionally had less support in Tamil Nadu due to the influence of regional pride and non-Brahmin culture held by parties such as the DMK.
- **Distinct regional identities:** Opposition regional parties in states like as Odisha and West Bengal are able to cling to power by appealing to voters' sense of language and culture.

## The most current tendencies in political activism

New strategies and instruments are utilized by contemporary political mobilization beyond particular identifiers.

- **Rise of social media and digital campaigning:** For real-time communication, targeted messaging, and support mobilization, political parties and candidates are increasingly depending on social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook. The 2014, 2019, and 2024 elections were marked by the prominence of digital campaigns.
- **The impact of misinformation:** The proliferation of false information, the development of online echo chambers, and the worsening of political polarization are all consequences of the widespread use of social media.
- **The growing influence of political consultancies:** In recent years, professional political strategists have been more common in Indian elections, impacting both the messaging and administration of candidates.
- **Emphasis on welfare populism:** Parties are combining identity appeals with development and welfare pledges at an increasing rate, despite the fact that identity politics is still potent. This is shown by the "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas" ("together with all, for the development of all") motto of the Bharatiya Janata Party ("BJP").
- **Hybrid approach:** According to experts, in the future, candidates will continue to employ a combination of identity cues and an emphasis on material problems to win

over voters. When faced with a real threat, voters have shown they can put identity appeals aside and focus on more serious matters, such as inflation and unemployment.

## OBJECTIVES

1. To study on Caste-based mobilization
2. To study on Recent trends in political mobilization

## RESEARCH METHOD

Literature reviews form the basis of this research's qualitative methodology. An explanation of a phenomena based on many pertinent literatures is the purpose of literature reviews. Journal articles, books, online articles, and online newspapers are examples of secondary sources that contribute to the body of knowledge on the subject at hand. Source triangulation is the method used to ensure the data is genuine. Triangulation of sources is achieved by checking many sources of information from literature reviews, including books, journals, and government websites. When new information is found, it will lead to various perspectives on the subject being examined. An expansion of understanding will result from this fresh perspective, which is useful for gathering trustworthy data. By checking the data utilized to get valid findings, we may get data validity.

Manuel Castells's idea of identity politics serves as the theoretical framework for this investigation. In essence, Castells' theory seeks to clarify why identity-based social movements emerge. According to Castells, people all over the world are participating in social movements because they want to be recognized and treated fairly in different areas. The ability of a social movement to alter societal norms and institutions is described by Castell as being "in victory and in defeat" in his work. There are three identities that matter to individuals, according to Castells: legitimizing, resistance, and project.

When people join social groups like churches, unions, or political parties, they are forming what is known as a legitimizing identity. When such a group exists and is able to impact government policymaking peacefully, we say that they are part of civil society. When people feel devalued and dominated by the current system, they may develop a sense of shared identity known as resistance identity. Opposition to oppressive situations frequently contradicts societal norms. At the same time, project identity is a state in which a person

reimagines his culturally-linked social position; the outcomes of this social reconstruction have the potential to alter the very fabric of society.

One way to look at Castell's ideas is as a theory on how people's perceptions of their social status shape their sense of shared identity. First, people recreate social facts; second, they interpret current reality; and last, they attempt to alter institutions that have not benefited them. When people engage in social reconstruction, they are incorporating societally enforced cultural and historical norms.

A politician's sense of political identity is crucial to their rise to prominence in the political arena. When one group uses identity politics to rally others who share their religious, ethnic, or racial views, they effectively form an identity coalition. Religious, cultural, and racial bonds often lead to the breakdown of nations. When it comes to elections, identity politics has the power to sway voters' political leanings and maybe affect the outcome of the race. Identity politics, in Porter's view, is an excessive attempt to politicize a common identity. Division and community strife can be caused by identity politics. Extreme religious-based organizations in several developing nations engage in human rights breaches, such as discrimination and violence, against minority groups, and identity politics leads government-run democratic regimes to devolve into anarchy. Extremist Hindu organizations frequently harass and assault minority Christian and Muslim populations, as occurred in India. Democracy in India is more of a pipe dream than a practical reality at this point.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Hindu Nationalism in India**

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is presently in charge of India's political scene. Hindu nationalism, which seeks to establish a Hindu Indian state, is the political ideology of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The Congress Party's secular principles are vehemently rejected by the BJP. Secularism is defined as the view that religious institutions have no place in public policy and administration by the Cambridge Dictionary. Since secularism is shaped by liberal principles that originate in Western civilization, it is perceived as having the power to eradicate the holy traditions held by Hindus in India. In Indian society, the BJP government has enjoyed both benefits and drawbacks. Many Hindu-Muslim riots in India have been linked to this party's influence. Party members who disagree

with Modi's leadership are often urged to leave for Pakistan, and the leader is often believed to be plotting to force Muslims out of Hindu regions.

Prohibitions on killing cows, assaults on women who wear too much clothing, and harassment of couples celebrating Valentine's Day are all examples of government policies that undermine the status of Indian Muslims. Islamophobia has recently surfaced in India, with proponents arguing that Hinduism and Islam are incompatible faiths and must ultimately fight due to their lack of common ground. The arrest of a BJP youth leader for what was believed to be an anti-Muslim post set a standard for Islamophobic circumstances, which the BJP Party has used to its advantage. A move away from secularism is evident in the selection of Hindu extremists as chief ministers of India's biggest state. Beyond that, there have been other allegations of BJP involvement in violent incidents targeting minorities in India. Hence, this claim is inversely proportionate to the BJP Party's assertion that India is the world's largest democracy.

The passage of a new citizenship legislation in 2020 increased tensions between Hindus and Muslims in India, who felt the law was unfairly applied to Muslims. It is possible to withdraw Indian citizenship from Muslims, particularly those residing in border areas, if they do not possess proper credentials. The law ultimately resulted in the expulsion of anyone in possession of incomplete citizenship certificates from India. Since it offers citizenship only to non-Muslim migrants, India's citizenship legislation has been controversial for a long time and is even considered anti-Muslim. Further, in 2022, extremist Hindus in the Indian state of Madya Pradesh destroyed scores of Muslim-owned stores, demonstrating that hostilities between the two communities persisted. Worse, in 2022, anti-Muslim chants were chanted in many mosques in India by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Bajrang Dal, as reported by Human Rights Watch.

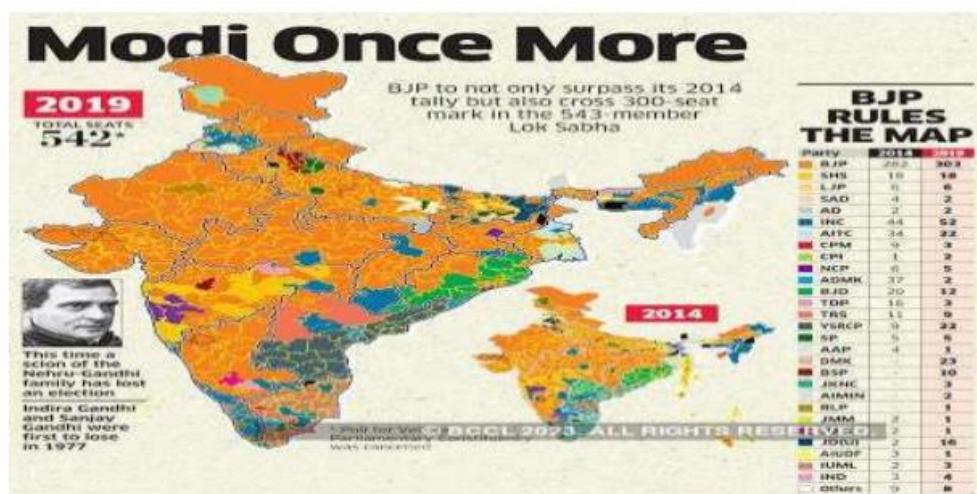
The history of the extreme RSS organization is inseparable with the religious extremism that happens in India. The establishment of a Hindu state is the goal of this violent organization. A number of prominent Indians, notably Prime Minister Narendra Modi, have volunteered with the RSS. Even more outrageously, RSS groups assert that Modi is theirs and demand that the government's policies mirror their desires. Some have compared the connection between the RSS and the BJP to that of a father and child. Modi is only one of several prominent Indian politicians who have their roots in the RSS. It is impossible to disentangle the BJP Party's philosophy from the success it has achieved over the years.

Another form of identity politics practiced by the BJP Party is the assertion of Aryan ancestry. A racial grouping of Indo-European ancestry known as the Aryans arose between the beginning of the nineteenth century and the middle of the twentieth. Many people believe that the Aryan race is both superhuman and the ancestor of Indian civilisation. The term "ubermensch," coined by Hitler, refers to the Aryan race and its status as the superior race on Earth. The BJP Party's enormous growth in membership is based on the party's assertion of Aryan ethnicity. A Hindutva Hindu caliphate ruled by Hindus is something the BJP is pushing for. Religious fanaticism and the eventual decimation of India's non-Hindu and secular populations are outcomes of this philosophy. The BJP Party was able to retain its dominance in India by enlisting the support of prominent Hindu personalities. A Hindutva Hindu state, with its roots in Hindu culture and vital to Hindustani society, must be established, and they must exert intellectual influence over society to make this happen.

Democracies in India are under danger from a new kind of fascism called Hindutva, which is reminiscent of Nazi Germany. One political party that runs the government according to Hindutva philosophy is the BJP. Recruiting large numbers of members from extreme Hindu organizations in India is a political tactic employed by the BJP Party to ensure its continued dominance. After facing challenges from rival groups, the BJP turned to this extreme faction for support, even going so far as to appoint a prominent Hindu extremist, Yogi Adityanath, to ensure the party's continued dominance in the Uttar Pradesh region. Yogi Adityanath is the head of state of Uttar Pradesh and a revered Hindu figure in India. Many see him as the world's embodiment of divine wisdom and rebirth. A growth in extreme politics and a propensity to perpetrate violence (extremism) against Muslims are two sociopolitical repercussions of Hindutva ideology.

The policies enacted by ruling regimes are occasionally based on a political ideology that is deeply rooted in Hindutva thought. The current administration in India has come to terms with the fact that religious tools are necessary for preserving political dominance. This theological tool has a significant role in shaping the political philosophy of a society. The majority of Indians adhere to Hinduism. That is why powerful people in politics will resort to whatever means necessary, including the exploitation of religious symbols, to secure their support. As a result of its repeated victories in elections for the Lok Sabha (People's Council), the BJP Party maintains a steady grip on power throughout its leadership terms. A party's political clout in India is measured by its success in the Lok Sabha. In 2019, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was able to secure the office of prime minister on the following political map.

Figure 1 shows how the BJP Party is the most powerful political party in many parts of India. With the help of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Prime Minister Narendra Modi was able to take over Lok Sabha seats held by the Congress Party in 2019. The results of the Lok Sabha elections also show that the Nehru-Gandhi family's political clout is declining. The political landscape of India is inextricably bound up with the people's cultural and historical heritage. To this day, Hindu nationalist ideology might find a home inside the framework of the Indian state's ideology. Eliminating this idea will need a radical shift in Indian culture.



**Figure 1. The 2019 Lok Sabha and the Predominance of the BJP Party**

There is no easy way to end the rivalry between the two major political parties in India. In certain key regions of India, the BJP and Congress parties are perpetually in a race to the finish line. Jawaharlal Nehru, a former prime minister, is one of several notable cadres who have contributed to the Congress Party's long history of prominence. The Congress Party stands for liberalism, anti-colonialism, and the elevation of secular ideals to the position of political priority. Yet, the Congress Party's domination was short-lived, and the Hindu nationalist BJP Party quickly took its place. The following graphic depicts the 2019 election campaign between the two major political parties, the BJP and the Congress.

Election Results 2019: Trends at 2 pm



**Figure 2. Election Results for City Council Seats Held by the BJP and the Congress Parties**

The results of the 2019 elections for the City Council seats won by the BJP and the Congress Parties are shown in Figure 2 above. More than half of the City Council seats are held by members of the BJP Party, according to these numbers, suggesting that a significant section of the BJP Party nominated a member of their party for prime minister. A political party's nominee for prime minister is guaranteed election if that party has the majority of votes cast in the City Council. A number of pieces of political propaganda produced by the BJP Party have helped them gain a firm grip on power in India's parliament. Concerning Hindu principles that are discriminatory toward minority groups in India, the major topic that is typically used as a weapon of influence by the BJP Party is this very matter. When voters are picking a prime minister, the BJP Party's propaganda has a significant impact on their political inclinations.

### **Hindu Symbols as a Tool for Identity Politics**

One of India's most powerful political parties, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has risen to prominence by capitalizing on Hindu religious symbols. One political tactic that incorporates caste politics is that of the BJP party. The BJP Party's caste politics aim to include all Indian castes. The BJP Party is aiming its rhetoric to both lower and higher castes. The goal of these caste politics in India is to strengthen the position of Hindus overall. Discrimination against non-Hindu communities is a common way this caste politics is put into practice.

The belief that all Hindus in India are part of a single country and should band together to form a Hindu caliphate state is central to the Hindutva ideology that the BJP Party employs. The

BJP Party's groundbreaking initiatives, including the cow protection policy, illustrate Hindutva philosophy. Hindus in India hold cows in the highest regard. Some in India see the cow protection policy as an attempt to cast Muslims in a negative light. The Modi government's long-term plans to eradicate democratic liberties, including repressing rallies and opposition from India's Muslim minority, are also linked to the manifestation of Hindutva ideology. Also, the BJP Party campaigned in India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, on a platform that included a vow to ban the practice of crossing rivers contaminated with the blood of animals such as cows, oxen, and buffalo. Also, slaughterhouses, which were primarily controlled by Muslims, were subject to severe regulations and prohibitions by the government. Acts of violence against those who continue to consume or kill beef do occur, in addition to the imposition of bans on the practice. Some people committed this violent deed in the guise of a Hindu group.

As an example of radical subtleties in identity politics, consider the attempts of certain groups to articulate the Hindu cultural ethos. Prohibitions against corruption and alcohol usage reflect Hindu cultural ethos yet go against Hindu morals. Political parties frequently employ religiously-motivated symbols as a means of courting particular demographics. In India, politics revolve around caste insignia, cow protection, the ban on loose clothes, Muslim prejudice, and the ban on celebrating Valentine's Day. The vast majority of India's population, or almost 80%, identifies as Hindu. Catholics and Muslims make up the remainder. Hindu extreme organizations and Muslims in India occasionally clash, and this tension will likely persist so long as the government continues to pass policies that marginalize Hindus and Muslims both.

The situation in India may be seen via the lens of Castells' legitimizing identity notions. These concepts describe how political institutions, like parties, shape and institutionalize people's identities. As far as the BJP is concerned, it is an ideological Hindutva organisation. This political faction is fiercely opposed to liberal ideas that originate in the West and asserts itself as the protector of Hindu culture in India. Government actions that promote Hindus in India reflect this entrenched identity. Prohibiting beef consumption, shutting slaughterhouses, harassing Indians for their clothing choices, and engaging in anarchic acts against minority groups were all ways these policies were put into action. The level of leadership in government is greatly affected by extreme identity politics. When it comes to running the country, a government will be more concerned with its own personal ideals than with maintaining

objectivity. Certain groups will be subject to discrimination as a result of subjective leadership that is based on common ethnic, religious, or group identities.

Parties in India's political system are engaging in identity politics, which has the potential to inflame tensions between different faiths and cultures. According to Samuel Huntington's "The Clash of Civilization and The Remaking of World Order" (a book on international relations), the degree to which two nations share commonalities in history, culture, and religion dictates the trajectory of international relations. Several presumptions put out by Huntington's thesis originate from Western scientists who saw Islam through a hostile and aggressive lens (violence and threats) Other than that, he claimed that a universal liberal worldview will supersede communism following the Cold War. Here we are talking about democracy, a liberal philosophy that places an emphasis on freedom and human rights. Western, Islamic, Hindu, Chinese, Latin American, Japanese, Buddhist, and Orthodox Christian civilizations were the nine global civilizations that Huntington outlined. According to Huntington, cultural and religious aspects of civilization form the bedrock of international relations. The deeply divergent historical roots of Hindu and Islamic civilizations are the root cause of the conflict with religious subtleties. When people don't genuinely try to understand and appreciate one another's cultural backgrounds, the resulting contrasts in viewpoints, ideas, and lifestyles can quickly devolve into anarchy.

Questions of political morality are frequently entangled with identity politics as well. Political candidates' narratives and messages during campaigns also impact the legitimacy of the power structure that politicians and state officials use. When fighting injustice, oppressed communities often turn to identity politics. Similarities in gender, race, religion, and ethnicity will bring these oppressed groups together. Systemic oppression and judgment of particular communities is another possible source of identity politics. The concept of identity politics is not without its good and bad points. The interests of oppressed communities can be safeguarded through positive identity politics. At the same time, the nation will fall apart due to destructive identity politics. Discord, a breakdown in international cooperation, and ultimately violent anarchy will result from this country's collapse. Questions of race, religion, and ethnicity are intrinsic to India's political landscape. If you want to know how to influence people's actions, this is the tool you need. Program-based politics is frequently defeated by racism-based politics. Racism in politics shapes people's political beliefs and their decision-making process, particularly during election seasons.

"The End of India" is Khushwant Singh's account of the political upheaval in India caused by racist politics. According to Singh's predictions in the book, the future of India is grim and the end of the world is on the horizon. Anger and violence emanating from Hindu extremism in India are on the rise. Radical ideology-based political parties, racist party leaders, and policies that demonize minority communities are all signs of India's political downfall. In India, violent incidents targeting Muslims are occasionally orchestrated by political parties. Even though it is often hailed as one of Asia's most democratic nations, India is progressively failing to instill democratic principles in its citizens' daily lives. As religiously extreme groups like those seeking to establish a Hindu state caliphate seek to eradicate and deport people of diverse backgrounds, the ideals of freedom and fairness erode. Democracy, state secularism, and justice were cherished under the Congress Party's rule. But after the BJP took over, they disregarded any and all political moral principles. The government's inconsistent adherence to democratic principles is another indicator of political deterioration in India.

The fight for power between India's two main political parties, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress Party (Congress), is only one of many ongoing polemics in the country's political dynamics. In contrast to the liberal stance taken by the Congress Party, the Hindu nationalist BJP Party holds a far more centrist view of politics. Lyengar and Vecchi argue that ideology and identity-based social divides, fueled by power struggles for control of scarce resources, are a potential source of political polarization. The Indian government's leadership style and policy choices are significantly impacted by these ideological divisions. As the current government party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is highly active in enforcing Hindu nationalist policies, which frequently target religious minorities in India, particularly Muslims and Christians. There is an express commitment to egalitarianism in the Indian constitution, which means that everyone in the country is considered equal. Another value that the Indian government must follow is secularism, which means that religious issues cannot be brought into political debates. During their tenures in office, Gandhi and Nehru led the Congress Party in a forceful rejection of religious discrimination and a strong defense of democratic principles. Even if the Modi government has started safeguarding victims of religious extremism in an effort to improve its leadership's reputation, pressure from different interest groups still manages to topple the current government. The stated goal of the strategy appears to be the expulsion of minority populations from India. Despite its reputation as a democratic powerhouse, India seems unable to bring its citizens the freedom, justice, and equality that are fundamental to democracy.

## CONCLUSION

Hindu nationalism is the philosophy upon which the present political style in India rests, and it is built on concerns of race, religion, intergroup relations, and tribalism. The goal of Hindu nationalist ideology is to preserve Hindu culture in India by establishing a Hindu state caliphate. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is India's leading political party, and its leaders have always run their country according to Hindu principles. The extreme Hindu organizations have been pushed out of power by this party, which is using identity concerns as a weapon. The goal of Hindutva philosophy is to defend Hindu culture against the many forms of Western liberalism that threaten it. Policy initiatives put forth by the Indian government frequently undermine marginalized communities by appealing to Hindu identity politics. Other political philosophies are regarded as subpar in comparison to identity politics, which is rooted on Hindu nationalist philosophy. During elections, political parties in India leverage this Hindu ideology to help their elites cement their control.

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