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**EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**



**APRIL 18**



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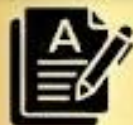
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# Why women's reservation cannot wait any longer

India stands at a curious democratic crossroads. It is one of the world's most vibrant democracies, marked by high voter participation and an increasingly engaged female electorate. Yet within its legislative institutions, women remain conspicuously underrepresented. This contradiction – between participation and representation – makes a compelling case for the immediate implementation of the Women's Reservation Bill.

This gap has been repeatedly highlighted. While Indian women have emerged as a decisive electoral force, their presence in law-making bodies remains disproportionately low. Nowhere is this imbalance more evident than in the stark difference between State and national representation.

Women constitute, on average, only about 9% of legislators in State Assemblies, while their representation in Parliament hovers around 14%-15%. This is far from reflecting women's share in the total population of the country, which is nearly 50%.

This disparity is not just numerical – it is structural. Over the past two decades, women in India have transformed from passive voters into active political participants. In several States, female voter turnout now equals or even surpasses that of men. This is a remarkable democratic achievement. It signals agency, awareness, and a growing sense of political ownership among women. However, this surge in participation has not translated into equivalent gains in representation.

## Structural faults

The reasons are deeply embedded in the functioning of India's political system. Political parties act as gatekeepers, and continue to nominate far fewer women candidates than men. Electoral politics is resource-intensive, requiring financial backing, networks, and social capital – areas where women often face systemic disadvantages. Cultural norms and safety concerns further discourage women from entering the political arena. The result is a cycle of exclusion that reproduces itself with each election. This is precisely why the Women's Reservation Bill is not just desirable but necessary. By mandating a fixed share of seats for women in legislatures, it directly addresses the structural barriers that prevent fair representation. Critics often argue that such



**Shamika Ravi**  
Member, EAC PM

quotas compromise merit or lead to tokenism. But this argument assumes that the current system is meritocratic, which it clearly is not. Access to political power in India is shaped as much by privilege and networks as by competence.

Evidence from India's own experience with reservation at the local level offers a powerful counterpoint. In the Panchayati Raj institutions, where seats have been reserved for women, the results have been transformative. Women leaders have not only participated effectively but have also shifted policy priorities toward issues such as health, education, water, and sanitation. These are not marginal concerns; they are central to human development and economic progress.

Moreover, representation has a ripple effect. When women occupy positions of authority, they challenge entrenched social norms. Young girls grow up seeing leadership as attainable. Families and communities begin to accept women's public roles more readily, and over time, this creates a pipeline of future leaders. Reservation, therefore, is not a permanent solution but a catalytic intervention; one that helps correct historical imbalances and sets the stage for a more equitable system.

## On State legislatures and Parliament

The comparison between State Assemblies and Parliament further underscores the urgency of the reform.

If representation is as low as 9% at the State level, it indicates that the problem is even more severe at the grassroots of legislative power. State governments play a critical role in shaping policies around healthcare, education, law and order, and local development, which directly affect citizens' daily lives. The near absence of women in these decision-making bodies means that half the population has a limited voice in shaping them.

At the national level, the slightly higher figure of 14%-15% in Parliament is often cited as progress. But this too falls short of global benchmarks and democratic ideals. A representative democracy must reflect the diversity of its people, not just in theory but in practice. The underrepresentation of women weakens the legitimacy and inclusiveness of India's democratic institutions.

Timing is another crucial factor. India is undergoing rapid social and economic

transformation. More women are entering higher education, joining the workforce, and asserting their rights. Their aspirations are evolving faster than the institutions meant to represent them. Delaying the implementation of the Women's Reservation Bill risks widening this gap, and will lead to frustration and disengagement.

Some argue that political parties should voluntarily field more women candidates instead of relying on legislative mandates. While this is a desirable goal, past experience suggests that voluntary measures have not been effective. Despite repeated promises, the proportion of women candidates has remained low. Structural problems require structural solutions, and reservation is one such solution.

## Deepening democracy

At its core, the argument for the Women's Reservation Bill is about deepening democracy. High turnout among women voters is a sign of democratic vitality, but true empowerment requires a seat at the decision-making table. Moving from participation to representation is the next logical step in India's democratic evolution.


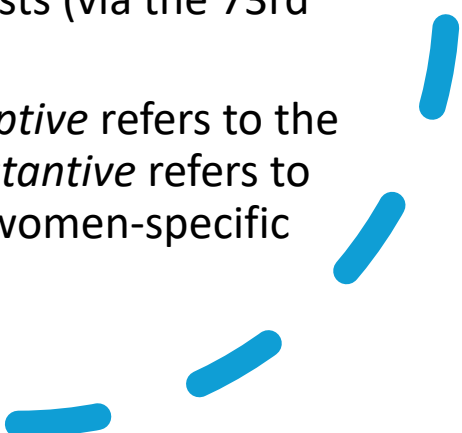
There is also a strong developmental argument. Research across countries shows that gender-inclusive governance leads to better outcomes – more equitable policies, improved social indicators, and sustainable growth. In a country as diverse and complex as India, excluding half the population from political leadership is not just unjust, it is inefficient.

India has already shown that institutional reform can drive social change. The success of reservation in local governance demonstrates that change is possible when there is political will. Extending this principle to State Assemblies and Parliament is not a radical step, it is a necessary progression. Ultimately, the question is not whether India is ready for the Women's Reservation Bill, it is whether its democracy can afford to wait any longer for women's reservation; the gap between participation and representation is too large to ignore.

India's democratic journey has been remarkable, but it remains incomplete.

Bridging this gap requires bold action. Implementing the Women's Reservation Bill immediately is not just about fairness – it is about building a more representative, responsive, and resilient democracy.

High turnout among women voters is a sign of democratic vitality, but true empowerment requires a seat at the decision-making table

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- **Key Terms and Explanations**
  - **Women's Reservation Bill (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam):** A legislative proposal to reserve 33% of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.
  - **Political Gatekeeping:** The process by which political party leadership (predominantly male) controls who gets "tickets" to contest elections.
  - **Tokenism:** The practice of making only a symbolic effort to be inclusive to members of minority or underrepresented groups, without granting actual power.
  - **Gender Gap in Turnout:** The difference between male and female voter participation rates. In India, this gap has narrowed and, in many states, reversed.
  - **Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs):** Local self-government bodies where 33% to 50% reservation for women already exists (via the 73rd and 74th Amendments).
  - **Descriptive vs. Substantive Representation:** *Descriptive* refers to the numbers (e.g., 15% women in Parliament), while *substantive* refers to whether those representatives actually advocate for women-specific interests and policies.
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- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **The Core Thesis**

- The central argument is that India's democracy is currently "incomplete." While women participate aggressively as voters (input), they are excluded from the legislative process (output). This structural failure necessitates immediate legislative intervention through the Women's Reservation Bill.

- **Supporting Evidence**

- **The 9% vs. 15% Reality:** Women hold only ~9% of seats in State Assemblies and ~15% in Parliament, despite being nearly 50% of the population.

- **The Grassroots Success:** Evidence from PRIs shows that women leaders prioritize "life-cycle" issues—water, sanitation, and education—which have higher developmental returns.

- **The "Silent Revolution":** Female voter turnout has surged, proving that the lack of representation is not due to a lack of political interest among women.

- **Counter-Arguments Addressed**

- **Meritocracy:** Critics argue quotas dilute merit. However, the current system is not merit-based but network-based (dynasty, money, and muscle power), which inherently favors men.

- **Voluntary Quotas:** Critics suggest parties should do this voluntarily. Historically, parties have failed to do so despite manifesto promises, proving that mandates are necessary.



- **Historical evolution of the issue**

- **Pre-Independence and early Independence**

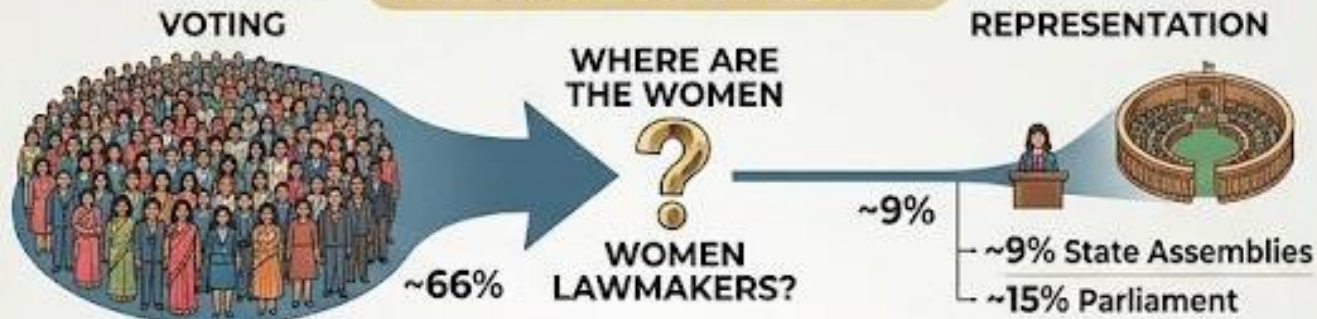
- Reformers like Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar supported women's public role; some princely States experimented with limited female participation.
- The Constitution guaranteed universal adult franchise from the outset, giving women equal voting rights—advanced for its time.
- Post-Independence to 1980s
- Women's representation in Lok Sabha remained around 4–8% in the first three decades.
- No legislative reservation for women at national or State levels; women's representation was confined largely to a few prominent leaders and dynastic politics.
- 73rd and 74th Amendments (early 1990s)
- Constitutional reservation of not less than one-third seats for women in PRIs and urban local bodies.
- Many States later increased this to 50%, creating a generation of grassroots women leaders.
- Attempts at Parliamentary-level reservation
- 1996, 1998, 1999, 2003: Multiple versions of the WRB introduced but lapsed due to lack of consensus, demands for sub-quotas, and political resistance.
- 2008: Bill introduced in Rajya Sabha; passed there in 2010 but lapsed with the dissolution of the 15th Lok Sabha in 2014.

- **Recent developments**

- Civil society and women's groups kept the demand alive; PILs were filed seeking implementation.
- 2023: A new Constitutional (128th Amendment) Bill introduced to reserve one-third of seats for women in Lok Sabha, State Assemblies and Delhi Assembly; passage and implementation linked to future census and delimitation, sparking debate about “delayed justice.”
- 2024–26: Continued political contestation over timing, delimitation linkage, and opposition–government dynamics, with at least one attempt failing to secure the required two-thirds majority.

# AXIA ACADEMY'S ULTIMATE UPSC ANALYSIS: DEEPENING DEMOCRACY

## THE DEMOCRATIC PARADOX



## RESERVATION AS A CATALYST



## BUILDING A RESILIENT DEMOCRACY



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## Logical and philosophical base

### Democratic legitimacy and justice

- A system where half the population has only 10–15% seats in legislatures cannot claim full democratic legitimacy.
- The argument is anchored in **political equality**—each citizen's interests should have an equal chance of being represented.

### Substantive equality vs formal equality

- Formal equality: Every citizen can contest elections; there is no legal bar on women.
- Substantive equality: Recognizes that identical rules in an unequal society reproduce inequality; requires affirmative action to equalize real opportunities.

### Corrective justice / compensatory discrimination

- Reservation is seen as rectifying historical and structural discrimination rather than privileging a group.
- Philosophically close to Rawlsian “fair equality of opportunity” and Ambedkar’s defence of reservations for SC/STs as a means to real equality.

### Democracy as inclusive self-rule

- Democracy is not just majority rule; it is collective self-rule by all sections.
- Excluding women from decision-making violates the principle that those affected by decisions should have a voice in making them.

### Instrumentalist logic (development outcomes)

- Female representation is linked with better social sector outcomes—education, health, water, sanitation, welfare—thus improving human development.
- Hence there is both a rights-based and a utilitarian argument for women’s reservation.

### Critique of “merit” rhetoric

- The idea that reservation erodes merit ignores how merit is socially constructed, and how existing systems are already biased by money, lineage, and networks.
- Philosophically, it challenges the myth of a neutral, level playing field.

- **Multidimensional analysis**

- **Social dimension**

- Enhances gender equality, role-model effects, and challenges patriarchal norms.
  - Can improve attention to social issues that disproportionately impact women and children—nutrition, health, education, violence, water, sanitation.
  - Political dimension
    - Deepens democracy by making legislatures more representative and inclusive.
    - Alters intra-party power structures, potentially democratising candidate selection but also generating internal resistance.
    - May change political discourse, forcing parties to engage more seriously with gender issues.
  - Legal dimension
    - Involves constitutional amendment, interaction with Articles 14–16 and existing reservation provisions.
    - Raises questions about the appropriate duration and review of affirmative action.
    - Could spur broader reforms—party-level candidate quotas, campaign finance regulation, and anti-defection measures intersecting with gender.
  - Ethical dimension
    - Touches upon justice, fairness, and human dignity—whether it is acceptable for half the population to be largely missing from decision-making.
    - Raises debates between procedural equality (same rules for all) vs substantive equality (correcting historical disadvantages).
  - International dimension
    - India currently lags behind the global average of women in national parliaments, and behind many developing countries with quotas.
    - Implementing WRB would move India closer to global standards and commitments under SDG 5 and CEDAW, affecting its soft power as a champion of inclusive democracy.
  - Economic dimension
    - Gender-inclusive governance is linked with better human capital formation and more inclusive growth.
    - Policies shaped by women often emphasize social infrastructure, which in turn boosts productivity (e.g., childcare, health).
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- Linkages with NCERTs
  - **Class 6–8 Social and Political Life (Civics)**
    - Chapters on “Understanding Diversity”, “Key Elements of a Democratic Government”, “Role of Government in Health”, and “Women Change the World”.
    - They introduce basic ideas of equality, discrimination and citizens’ participation—background for understanding why women’s representation matters.
  - **Class 9 Democratic Politics I**
    - “Democracy in the Contemporary World”, “What is Democracy? Why Democracy?”, “Democratic Rights”.
    - Use these to connect the idea of democracy’s principles with the need for inclusive legislatures.
  - **Class 10 Democratic Politics II**
    - “Gender, Religion and Caste”, “Working of Institutions”, “Power Sharing”.
    - Directly relevant for: identity and inequality, functioning of Parliament and Assemblies, and power-sharing with marginalized groups.
  - **Class 11 Indian Constitution at Work**
    - “Constitution as a Living Document”, “Elections and Representation”, “Local Governments”.
    - Key to understanding constitutional amendments, reservation logic, and lessons from local bodies.
  - **Class 12 Politics in India Since Independence**
    - “Recent Developments in Indian Politics”, “Challenges of Nation Building”.
    - Use these to situate women’s representation as an ongoing challenge in India’s democratic evolution.



- **Linkages with UPSC CSE syllabus**

- **GS Paper I (Society)**

- “Salient features of Indian society”, “Role of women and women’s organisations” and “Population and associated issues”.
- Directly linked to gender relations, patriarchy, and social change.

- **GS Paper II (Polity and Governance)**

- “Indian Constitution—features, amendments, significant provisions”, “Parliament and State Legislatures—structure, functioning and conduct of business”, and “Representation of people’s Act”.
- “Issues relating to women, poverty and developmental issues” and “Role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations”.
- WRB debates go straight to the heart of these themes.

- **GS Paper III (Economy and Development)**

- “Inclusive growth and issues arising from it”, “Human resource and demographic dividend”.
- Gender-inclusive governance is a key driver of inclusive growth and human development.

- **GS Paper IV (Ethics)**

- Topics on “Ethics in public administration”, “Justice”, “Equality”, “Attitude”, “Social influence”.
- WRB is a rich case to discuss justice, equity, stereotypes, and ethical dimensions of affirmative action.

- *Way forward*

- *Immediate legal and constitutional steps*

- Ensure a clear, time-bound path for implementing women's reservation in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, not just on paper but in the next few election cycles.

- Build in review and sunset clauses (for example after 15–20 years) subject to parliamentary evaluation to address fears of permanence.

- **Party-level reforms**

- Mandate that parties field a minimum percentage of women candidates (for example through amendments to election law or incentives in public funding of parties).

- Introduce internal party democracy and transparent candidate selection to reduce gatekeeping and nepotism.

- **Capacity building and institutional support**

- National-level training programmes for women aspirants and elected representatives: legislative procedures, policy analysis, media handling, digital tools, financial literacy.

- Provide institutional support—research staff, creche facilities in legislatures, safe accommodation, and security.

- **Social and economic measures**

- Strengthen schemes that enhance women's education, economic independence, and mobility (hostels, safe public transport, digital literacy, access to credit).

- Address gender-based violence in politics through legal protections and fast-track mechanisms for complaints.

- **Design safeguards against tokenism**

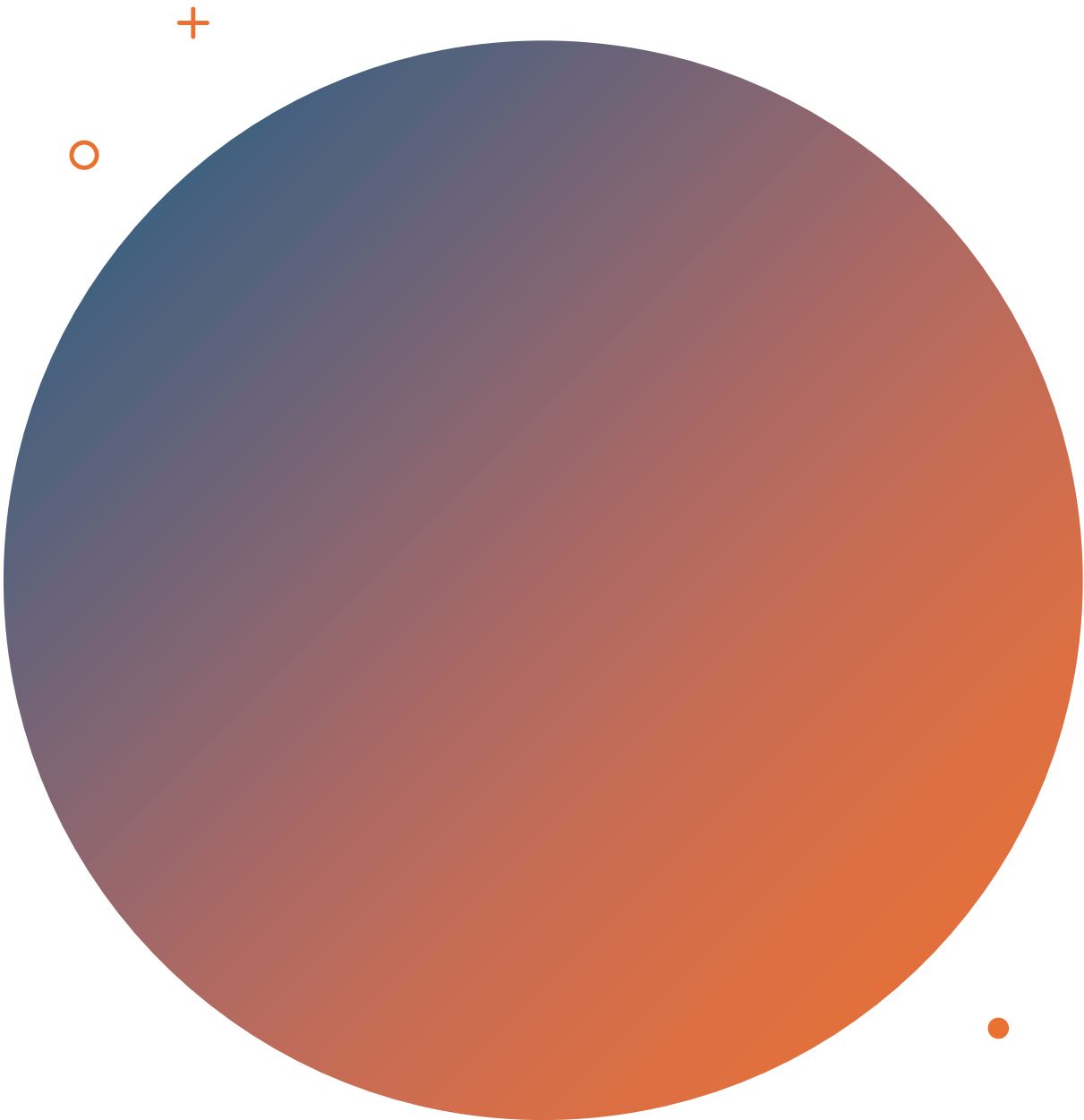
- Encourage cross-party women's caucuses to build solidarity across party lines on gender issues.

- Promote performance-based evaluation of representatives, showcasing successful women leaders at all levels.

- **Data, monitoring and public debate**

- Regular public reports on women's representation at all levels, including party tickets and internal leadership positions.

- Encourage media and civil society to focus on policy contributions of women leaders rather than stereotypes.



- UPSC CSE – Mains
- **GS I – 2013:** Discuss the status of women’s representation in India’s political institutions and the need for reservations for women.
- **GS I – 2014:** “Women empowerment in India needs gender budgeting along with gender mainstreaming.” Comment.
- **GS II – 2013:** Critically evaluate the working of the Panchayati Raj system with special reference to women’s participation and empowerment.
- **GS II – 2015:** Discuss the importance of local self-government in democratic governance with reference to reservation for women.
- **GS II – 2017:** Examine the role of women in local governance in India in the context of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments.
- **GS II – 2018:** “Despite increased participation of women in the electoral process, their representation in legislatures remains low.” Examine the causes and suggest measures.
- **GS II – 2020:** Do you think that reservation of seats for women in Parliament and State Assemblies is necessary for women empowerment? Justify your answer.
- **Essay Paper – various years:** Topics on women, democracy, social justice, and empowerment where WRB is an important sub-theme.
- UPSC CSE – Prelims
- Questions on:
  - 73rd/74th Amendments, composition and reservation in PRIs and ULBs
  - CEDAW, SDGs, gender-related schemes
  - Features of Representation of the People Act and electoral reforms

# A political setback for government, a democratic opening for Opposition

**T**HE DEFEAT of the Constitution (One Hundred and Thirty-First Amendment) Bill, 2026, is an embarrassment for the government, a reminder of the potential of a united Opposition, and most importantly, a reprieve for a proper conversation over the Constitution.

The introduction of the Bill had all the hallmarks of the BJP's governing style. This was yet another attempt to further a sense of what this column had described as a permanent revolution. The governing style of permanent revolution is to destroy the power of all countervailing institutions, break all restraints, and consolidate executive power. The manner of introducing this Bill signified this. A far-reaching constitutional amendment, which would have deep implications for all constitutional bodies, the power of the Rajya Sabha, the constitutional status of the delimitation process, the transformation of federalism, and the character of the Lok Sabha, was introduced in a throwaway manner. It duplicitously linked delimitation and women's reservation. The second feature of the permanent revolution is wresting personal ownership and credit for issues on which there is a wider political consensus.

The one constant feature of Narendra Modi's career as Prime Minister is that he has politically weaponised the issues of gender and sought to claim the moral and political high ground on those issues. In some areas of welfare and legal reform, these have yielded dividends. But these have also been accompanied by the normalisation of mis-

ogyny by the BJP. But these contradictions don't matter to the permanent revolution. It wants to own every issue and use it as a weapon when needed.

The third hallmark of the permanent revolution is the constant need for mobilisation, in victory or defeat. In this case, as in so many others, a combination of hubris and unpreparedness led to defeat. But we also know in the past, for instance, in the moment of demonetisation, they can even turn hubris and incompetence into a rallying cry for mobilisation. One of the challenges for the Opposition is going to be to prevent the BJP from doing what it does best — play the aggrieved and hurt party, which casts the Opposition as obstructionist. And the final feature of the permanent revolution is institutional price discovery. Keep pushing the boundaries of what we think is possible within the current constitutional framework and see what you can get away with.

Indeed, the most sinister aspect of this moment is how much the BJP's experiments in Assam and Bengal, with delimitation and the SIR, respectively, were part of this template. They have created a precedent for how much havoc can be caused to voters through different forms of institutional gerrymandering. In Bengal, it may backfire politically. But these are attempts to experiment with and acquire instruments that could be used to shape, control and manipulate elections. Like demonetisation, they impose the greatest cost on the poorest of citizens in the name of abstract national inter-



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

**Our constitutional discussion seems to be producing anomaly upon anomaly, and not facing up to the internal tensions that arise out of the way we think of representation**

est: Tens of thousands having to rush to their home states from long distances to preserve their citizenship status. The courts did not put a stop to some of these measures. It is some relief that at least the Opposition was able to show the BJP that there are still limits to the project of permanent revolution.

This defeat allows a more sober reconsideration of important institutional and constitutional questions. But it has to be said, our constitutional discussion seems to be producing anomaly upon anomaly, and not facing up to the internal tensions that arise out of the way we think of representation. For years, political parties have been trying to find pretexts for avoiding implementing their own commitments on reservation. This may be yet one more attempt to complicate matters. But the constitutional anomaly of trying to produce semi-proportional outcomes from a first-past-the-post system and the deepening of the rotation of reserved constituencies does put a strain on other principles of representation, including the rights of voters not to have their choices restricted by the identity of the candidate.

Other ways of achieving this objective that would have displayed a more consistent logic — multi-member districts or party lists — were summarily thrown out. The anomaly of accepting the principle of caste reservation in one part of the political system while denying it in another, the tension between federal balance and the principle of the equal value of the vote, are all complex issues. The

integrity of the delimitation process needs to be protected at all costs. They need to be dealt with by building consensus.

On balance, given India's history and sensitivities, the federalism question and the balance of power between the Centre and the states have to be dealt with through consensus. But even here, three things have to be said. First, while linguistic position must be resisted and regional fairness in representation ensured, reducing the debate to regional antagonism risks legitimising the very ugly politics we ought to resist. The cultural trope of north versus south is dangerous and analytically unfounded. Second, at least on constitutional issues, considerations cannot be governed by which political party benefits in the short run. We need more principled arguments. And third, at all levels of government — state legislatures, panchayats, urban local bodies, Parliament's functioning and procedures — we need to take a long, hard look at what form a genuine representative process should take.

The Opposition has won an opening. But if it is to continue the momentum on behalf of democracy, it will have to go into constant mobilisation and convince citizens that it stands for genuine democratic empowerment and institutional integrity. Discussions of democracy and institutions must now be rescued from the taint of opportunism and bad faith. The permanent revolution has been thwarted. But democracy is still in peril.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express



- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Constitutional Amendment (Article 368):** The formal process of modifying the Constitution. Amendments like the 131st Amendment often require a "special majority" (2/3rds of those present and voting) and sometimes ratification by state legislatures.

- **Delimitation:** The act of redrawing boundaries of Lok Sabha and State Assembly seats to represent changes in population.

- *Example:* If a city's population doubles while a rural area stays the same, delimitation adjusts seat counts to ensure "one person, one vote" remains equitable.

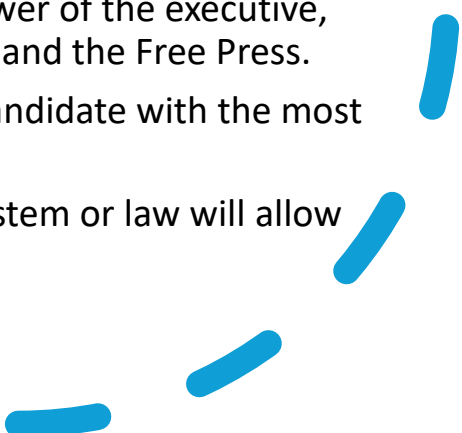
- **Permanent Revolution (Political Context):** A governing style characterized by constant mobilization, the dismantling of institutional restraints, and the consolidation of executive power to keep the opposition perpetually off-balance.

- **Institutional Gerrymandering:** Manipulating the boundaries or rules of institutions (like electoral districts or reservation quotas) to give an advantage to one party.

- **Countervailing Institutions:** Bodies designed to check the power of the executive, such as the Judiciary, the Election Commission, the Rajya Sabha, and the Free Press.

- **First-Past-The-Post (FPTP):** The electoral system where the candidate with the most votes wins, even if they don't have an absolute majority (50%+).

- **Price Discovery (Institutional):** Testing the limits of what a system or law will allow before it breaks or meets significant resistance.





- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **The Core Thesis**

- The defeat of major constitutional legislation in Parliament serves as a critical "check" on executive overreach, signaling a shift from unilateral "permanent revolution" toward a more deliberative democracy.

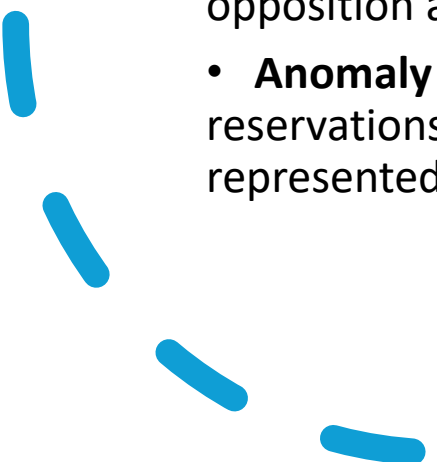
- **Key Points**

- **Tactical Linking of Issues:** The government often links popular mandates (like Women's Reservation) with controversial structural changes (like Delimitation) to force the opposition's hand.

- **The Federalism Tension:** Changes to representation create a "North-South" divide. States that successfully controlled population growth fear losing political weight to states with higher growth rates.

- **The "Aggrieved" Strategy:** The ruling party often uses legislative defeat to play the victim, painting the opposition as "obstructionist" to mobilize its voter base.

- **Anomaly in Representation:** India's system creates a "semi-proportional" outcome through caste reservations while maintaining a majoritarian FPTP system, leading to internal tensions in how voters are represented.



- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **1950–1970s (The Nehruvian Era):** Dominance of the Congress party; constitutional amendments were frequent but often sought to address immediate social hurdles (like land reform).
- **1975–1977 (The Emergency):** The peak of executive consolidation, leading to the 42nd Amendment, which significantly weakened judicial review and federal balance.
- **1990s (Coalition Era):** A period of "consensus-based" politics where no single party could bypass the Rajya Sabha or states.
- **2014–Present (New Dominant Party System):** The return of a single-party majority, leading to "high-speed" legislation (e.g., Article 370, Farm Laws, CAA) and the testing of constitutional boundaries.



# COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS: CONSTITUTIONAL DEBATES, FEDERALISM, & THE WAY FORWARD FOR INDIAN DEMOCRACY

## AXIA EXPERT INSIGHT: THE PERMANENT REVOLUTION & INSTITUTIONAL CHECKS



**PRATAP BHANU MEHTA**



The concept of 'Permanent Revolution' in governance



Opposition's role as a democratic check



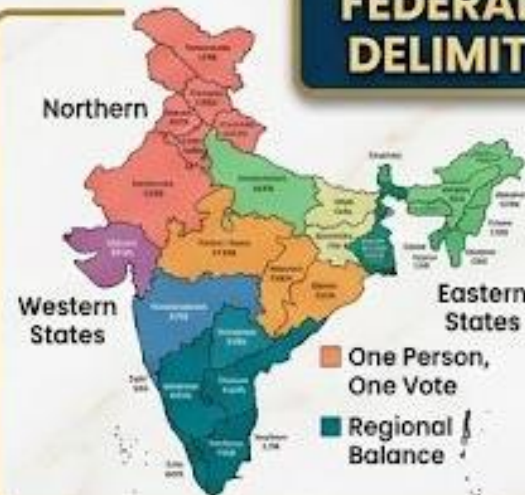
Institutional Price Discovery

## UPSC SYLLABUS & PREVIOUS YEARS' QUESTIONS



- **UPSC Relevance:** GS-II (Indian Constitution, Federalism, Parliament), Essay
- **PYQ Examples:** (e.g., '10th Schedule anti-defection law').

## FEDERAL DYNAMICS & THE DELIMITATION DEADLOCK



Understanding North-South Rorthern Representational Challenges



Preserving consensus in federal balance

## AXIA STRATEGIC WAY FORWARD

Revitalize Inter-State Council

Enhance Legislative Scrutiny

Strengthen Standing Committees

Decouple Social Reform and Structural Changes

Sustainable and Consensus-Based Federalism

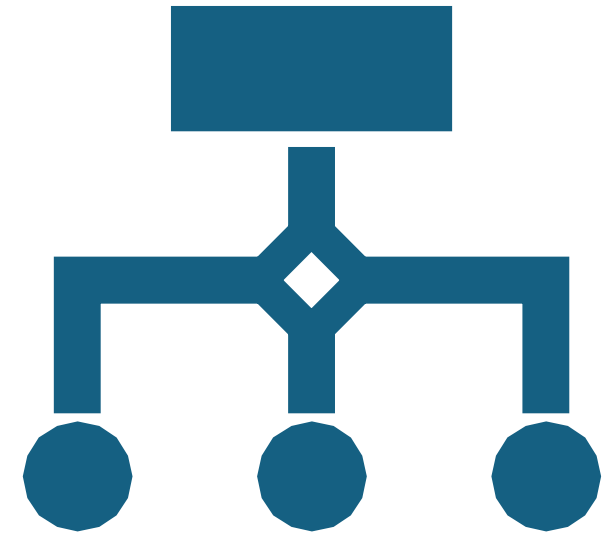
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- Logical and Philosophical Base
  - 4.1 Logic of the Critique
  - The core logical moves are:
    - Any large constitutional amendment affecting representation and federalism must be scrutinized for intent (public good vs partisan advantage).
    - Representation is not merely a technical question of numbers; it is normative—who gets voice and how much.
    - Using noble causes (like women’s reservation) as a cover for controversial changes undermines trust in constitutional politics.
  - 4.2 Philosophical Foundations
  - **Democratic theory:** Emphasizes equal value of each vote, meaningful choice, and fair aggregation of preferences.
  - **Republicanism:** Highlights non-domination—no group (region/party) should be able to arbitrarily dominate others via institutional design.
  - **Constitutionalism:** Stresses limits on power, respect for procedures, and protection of pluralism.
  - 4.3 Assumptions
  - That concentration of power in the executive is inherently dangerous for liberal democracy.
  - That constitutional change must be driven by broad consensus, especially when it touches foundational issues like representation, federalism, and citizenship status.
  - That opposition has a legitimate role as a guardian of constitutional values, not simply as an electoral rival.

- **Multidimensional Analysis**

- **8.1 Social Dimension**

- Women's reservation engages questions of gender justice, political empowerment, and social norms.
- Delimitation reshapes which communities—rural/urban, caste groups, linguistic minorities—gain or lose voice, affecting social cohesion.
- **8.2 Political Dimension**
- Seats reallocation can change the national party system, coalition politics, and regional party bargaining power.
- “Permanent revolution” politics can keep the system in a constant state of campaign mode, weakening routine governance.
- **8.3 Legal Dimension**
- Interplay of Articles dealing with representation, federalism, reservations, basic structure, and amendment procedure.
- Role of Supreme Court in potentially reviewing the constitutionality of such far-reaching amendments.
- **8.4 Ethical Dimension**
- Issues of fairness between states that followed national population policies vs those that did not.
- Integrity in legislative intent: whether women's rights and federal reforms are being pursued sincerely or strategically.
- **8.5 International Dimension**
- Many democracies wrestle with malapportionment (unequal representation), gerrymandering, and debates over FPTP vs PR.
- India's choices on delimitation and reservation will be watched as examples of managing diversity, demographic change, and gender justice in a mega-democracy.
- **8.6 Economic Dimension**
- Representation affects fiscal federalism: states with more MPs can influence resource transfers, grants, and policy priorities.
- Resentment in high-performing states (economic and demographic) could influence investment climate, migration policies, and state–centre bargaining.

- Linkages with NCERTs
- **Political Science, Class 11 – “Constitution: Why and How?”, “Rights in the Indian Constitution”, “Election and Representation”**
  - Concepts of constitutional amendment, representation, election systems, basic structure.
- **Political Science, Class 11 – “Federalism”**
  - Centre–state relations, allocation of powers, importance of Rajya Sabha and states’ voice.
- **Political Science, Class 12 – “Challenges to Democracy”, “Politics of Planned Development”, “Recent Developments in Indian Politics”**
  - Institutional erosion, centralisation, coalition politics, regional parties, and democratic deepening.
- **Social and Political Life (Class 8) – “Understanding Our Criminal Justice System”, “Understanding Secularism”, “The Indian Constitution”**
  - Basic ideas of fairness, rule of law, state power, and citizens’ rights—helpful for ethics framing and foundational understanding.



- **Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus**

- **GS Paper 1**

- Indian Society: role of women and women's organisations; social empowerment.
- Post-independence consolidation and reorganisation: linguistic states, federal evolution.
- GS Paper 2
- Indian Constitution:
  - Salient features, amendments, basic structure.
  - Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure.
  - Representation of people, electoral reforms, role of Delimitation Commission and Election Commission.
- Parliament and State Legislatures: structure, functioning, issues of representation and legislative procedures.
- Pressure groups, political parties, and their role in the political process.
- GS Paper 3
- Not central, but touches on:
  - Issues relating to growth, development, and regional imbalances (through the federal/devolution lens).
- GS Paper 4 (Ethics)
- Integrity of public institutions.
- Ethical issues in governance, accountability, and probity in public life.
- Case studies on conflict of interest (using women's reservation as a cover for partisan constitutional changes).

- **Way Forward**

- **12.1 Process-Oriented Reforms**

- Build genuine all-party consultation mechanisms before introducing major constitutional amendments on representation and federalism.
- Create a high-level expert-citizen commission to propose a holistic package on delimitation, representation, and women's reservation, with a transparent white paper.
- **12.2 Substantive Design Choices**
  - Decouple women's reservation from contentious delimitation issues; implement reservation within existing seat structure and then negotiate delimitation separately.
  - Explore mixed electoral systems (FPTP + proportional list) or multi-member constituencies to improve representation of women, minorities, and smaller parties without massively disrupting federal balance.
- **12.3 Protecting Federal Balance**
  - Consider caps or balancing mechanisms so that high-performing states (in population control and economic performance) are not structurally disadvantaged.
  - Strengthen institutional autonomy of Delimitation Commission, ensure clear, justiciable criteria and transparent public consultations.
- **12.4 Ethical and Institutional Safeguards**
  - Embed principles of constitutional morality in political party practice:
    - No surprise amendments with inadequate scrutiny.
    - Pre-legislative consultation and public release of draft proposals.
  - Encourage parliamentary committees to examine all constitutional amendment proposals affecting representation and federalism, with cross-party leadership.



- UPSC CSE Mains
- GS2 (Constitution & Polity):
  - Questions on federalism, Centre–state relations, Finance Commission, devolution.
  - Questions on electoral reforms, criminalisation of politics, inner-party democracy, and role of Election Commission.
  - Questions on women’s reservation, representation of weaker sections, and reservation policy debates.
- Essay:
  - Topics on “Indian democracy”, “balancing equality and diversity”, “federalism”, “role of constitutional morality”.
- UPSC CSE Prelims
- Questions on features of federalism, powers of Delimitation Commission, procedures for constitutional amendments, provisions on reservation of seats.



# Andhra Pradesh deferred to Delhi Darbar — and therein lies a tale



SANJAYA BARU

**T**HE POLITICAL capitulation of the leadership of the major political parties in Andhra Pradesh — Chandrababu Naidu, Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy and Pawan Kalyan — to the Bharatiya Janata Party on a Constitution amendment bill, putting company with fellow states of south India, points to a deeper crisis of political legitimacy of Andhra's power elites. Accused of various acts of omission and commission, the ideologically bankrupt leadership of the Telugu Desam Party, Jana Sena Party and YSR Congress Party find themselves on the same side as supplicants in the Delhi Darbar.

Since the Lok Sabha elections of 2004, in which the BJP lost its majority in Parliament and became dependent on the support of allies, all three Andhra parties have been willing supporters of the BJP on a variety of issues. However, their decision to part company with other southern states on a proposal aimed at tilting the balance of parliamentary power against the demographically and economically better-performing southern states is an act of political servility.

Ironically, both the TDP and the YSRCP came into being on the foundation of Telugu self-respect and pride — *atmakavaranam*. The TDP's founder, the late NT Rama Rao, coined the famous phrase that "the Centre is a conceptual myth". He challenged Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's model of centralisation of power and forced her to appoint the Justice Sarkaria Commission on Centre-state relations. Reddy formed his party in protest against the manner in which a Delhi-based caste elite within Congress treated him and his mother after his father's death.

For politicians rooted in this idea of *atmakavaranam*, it must be truly demeaning to find themselves being blackmailed into submission to the leadership of a political party of no consequence among the Telugus. Their willingness to supplicate in pursuit of political relevance and power points to a deeper crisis of political leadership in new Andhra Pradesh.

Consider first the manner in which the



ILLUSTRATION: CHANDRABABU

two dominant political parties of Telangana responded to the Constitution amendment issue. Both the Bharatiya Janata Samithi (BRS, originally Telangana Bahima Samithi) and Congress joined forces with other southern states, pointing to an interesting turn in Congress politics. Being a regional party, the BRS quite tender and shy remained loyal to the region's cause. Interestingly, Congress in Karnataka and Telangana, under the leadership of powerful state-level leaders, also espoused solidarity with their southern neighbours, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has never missed an opportunity to project his image as a regional leader, not allowing the BRS to monopolise that platform. The commitment shown to Telangana's development by the leadership of both the BRS and Congress has enabled them to marginalise the BJP in the state's politics. After a critical burst of Biddu activism in the state, the BJP has been reduced to an also-ran.

What then is the crisis in new AP? First and foremost, it is a crisis of governance due to excessive corruption by successive leaderships. New AP has the distinction that both its chief ministers — Naidu and Reddy — served a jail term. As serious as the problem of corruption is in traditional cas-

tration. The three dominant political parties represent three dominant castes — TDP is dominated by the Kamra caste, YSRCP by Reddys and Jana Sena by the Kapu community. Casteism is rampant in Andhra administration, politics and business, especially in real estate.

The problems of the state have been made worse by its dismal fiscal condition. It was evident from the very beginning that after bifurcation AP would become dependent on the Union government for fiscal assistance. After all, in the erstwhile united AP, state finances were kept afloat by Telangana's fiscal surplus, a byproduct of Hyderabad's growth. With Hyderabad denied, new AP began its life with a fiscal handicap.

Such governance challenges have been made more difficult by Andhra politics. Naidu returned to power dependent on an ambitious Kalyan, with an even more ambitious son, Nara Lokesh, snatching at his father's heels. The politics of generational transition within the TDP, with NT Rama Rao's family still nursing a grievance against Naidu for the manner in which he betrayed his father-in-law, and now how that Lokesh should quickly inherit the mantle, has further complicated governance in the state.

Naidu's obsession with building a new state capital at Amaravati has

diverted much political and administrative attention away from the more pressing challenge of new urban development, including the hard infrastructure and soft superstructure of urbanisation. Andhra's business elites were expected to migrate from Hyderabad to the Andhra region after the erstwhile state's bifurcation. They had been accused by Telangana leadership of neglecting the region's development while cornering the benefits of Hyderabad's growth.

However, the clever decision of TRS leader KT Rama Rao not to alienate Andhra business and professional elites after the state's bifurcation has helped retain both capital and talent within Hyderabad, contributing to the relentless growth of the metropolis. Andhra's Kamra and Reddy elites are either invested in Hyderabad or overseas, mostly the United States. Few have as yet returned to the state to invest in its growth. With neither the BJP nor the Congress party able to pose any major challenge to Naidu and Reddy, the state's politics and development are caught in a vicious cycle of personal aggrandisement and caste politics.

After the petering out of the first separate Telangana and separate Andhra agitations of 1969-72, Hyderabad witnessed sustained development under successive governments. Naidu became the darling of Indian business but his two successors as chief ministers in Hyderabad, Y S Rajasekhara Reddy and K Chandrababai Rao, continued to pre-empt the city's development.

Consequently, over three decades, from 1960 to 2005, Andhra capital and elites made Hyderabad their home. New AP's fiscal dependence on Delhi, the hold of investigative agencies on the state's leadership and the Andhra elite's continued attachment to Hyderabad have combined to weaken AP's political leadership, making them beholden to the Delhi Darbar.

If a growing Hyderabad remains the magnet that continues to attract Andhra elites, cities like Visakhapatnam, Vijaya-wada and Tirupati will be slow to develop as modern urban and cultural spaces. Having established itself as a separate state, AP has to revitalise local business, educational and cultural hubs around existing cities rather than hope that a money-guzzling capital at Amaravati can become a magic magnet.

Baru is a writer and former editor, The Financial Express

**First and foremost, it is a crisis of governance due to excessive corruption by successive leaderships. New AP has the distinction that both its chief ministers — Chandrababu Naidu and Jagan Mohan Reddy — served a jail term**

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Delhi Darbar:** A metaphorical term used to describe the centralization of power in the Union Government (Delhi). Historically, it refers to the grand assemblies held during the British Raj; in modern politics, it signifies regional leaders seeking approval or assistance from the central leadership.

- **Atmagauravam (Self-Respect):** A political philosophy rooted in regional pride and autonomy. In the context of Andhra politics, it was the foundational slogan used by N.T. Rama Rao to challenge the perceived high-handedness of the central Congress leadership in the 1980s.

- **Bifurcation:** The legal and administrative splitting of a state into two. Here, it refers to the **Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014**, which created Telangana and a residual Andhra Pradesh.

- **Fiscal Surplus/Deficit:** A surplus occurs when a government's income exceeds its spending (as seen in post-bifurcation Telangana due to Hyderabad's revenue). A deficit occurs when spending exceeds income (as seen in residual Andhra Pradesh).

- **Casteism in Politics:** The mobilization of political support based on caste identities. In Andhra Pradesh, this is often viewed through the lens of dominant castes like the **Kammas, Reddys, and Kapus**.

- **Constitutional Amendment (Parity of Power):** Refers to legislative attempts to balance parliamentary representation between the demographically larger Northern states and the economically better-performing Southern states.



- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **The Crisis of Political Legitimacy**

- The core thesis suggests that the major political parties of Andhra Pradesh (TDP, YSRCP, and JSP) have undergone a "political capitulation." Despite being founded on the principle of regional pride, they are increasingly seen as "supplicants" to the Union government to maintain political relevance or seek protection from legal scrutiny.

- **The Divergence of Telugu States**

- There is a sharp contrast in how Telangana and Andhra Pradesh interact with the Centre.

- **Telangana:** Successfully projected a regionalist stance, with leaders (from both BRS and Congress) joining forces with other Southern states to protect regional interests and fiscal autonomy.

- **Andhra Pradesh:** Its leadership has largely broken away from the "Southern Bloc" on key issues, such as the debate over tilting parliamentary power toward the North.

- **The "Hyderabad Magnet" and the Capital Conundrum**

- A significant argument is that the elite of Andhra Pradesh (business and professional classes) remained tethered to Hyderabad even after bifurcation. This "continued attachment" has drained the residual state of investment and political focus, leading to the failure of the **Amaravati** project to become a self-sustaining urban magnet.



- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **1953:** Creation of Andhra State (the first linguistic state) following the sacrifice of Potti Sriramulu.
- **1956:** Formation of United Andhra Pradesh by merging Andhra State with the Telangana region of the former Hyderabad State.
- **1969–1972:** Violent agitations for a separate Telangana and later a "Jai Andhra" movement, highlighting deep-seated regional imbalances.
- **1980s:** Rise of N.T. Rama Rao and the TDP, marking a shift toward regional "Self-Respect" and challenging the Congress "High Command" culture.
- **1990s–2000s:** Era of "Cyberabad" under Chandrababu Naidu, where Hyderabad became a global IT hub, further centralizing the state's wealth in one city.
- **2014:** Formal bifurcation. Telangana inherits the revenue-rich Hyderabad; Andhra Pradesh enters a period of fiscal instability and the search for a new capital.
- **2024–Present:** The transition of regional parties into allies of the dominant national party (BJP), signaling a move away from traditional regionalist defiance.



# CRISIS OF POLITICAL LEGITIMACY: AN ANALYSIS OF AP & TELANGANA POLITICS



**AXIA**  
IAS ACADEMY  
RISE ABOVE THE REST

AXIA COMPETITIVE EXAM CENTRE

## POLITICAL CAPITULATION

- Major parties (TDP, YSRCP, JSP) capitulate to national ruling party on key issues, seen as 'suppliants' for legal and political protection.



## THE FISCAL CHALLENGE



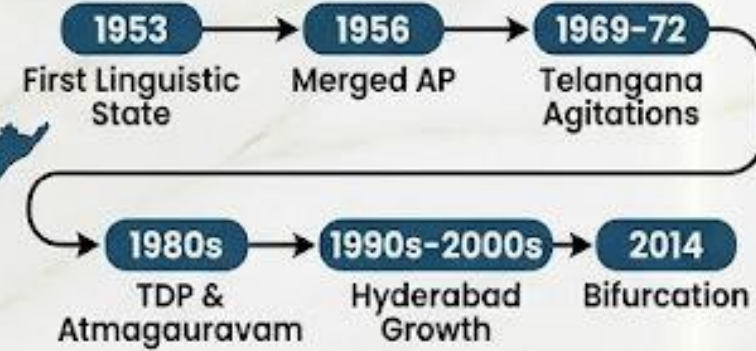
- Economic dependence on the Centre
- Hyderabad as a revenue magnet, rattle of inostands in Centre rajomier.
- Migration of AP elite and roiesn chagnet migration on the Centre

## DIVERGENCE OF TELUGU STATES

Telangana (Regionalist stance)	Andhra Pradesh (Centralised dependency)
 KCR BRS Congress	 Naidu Jagan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Align with Southern issues as Southern consensus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Isolated on key Southern issues like demography, &amp; delimitation</li> </ul>



## HISTORICAL EVOLUTION



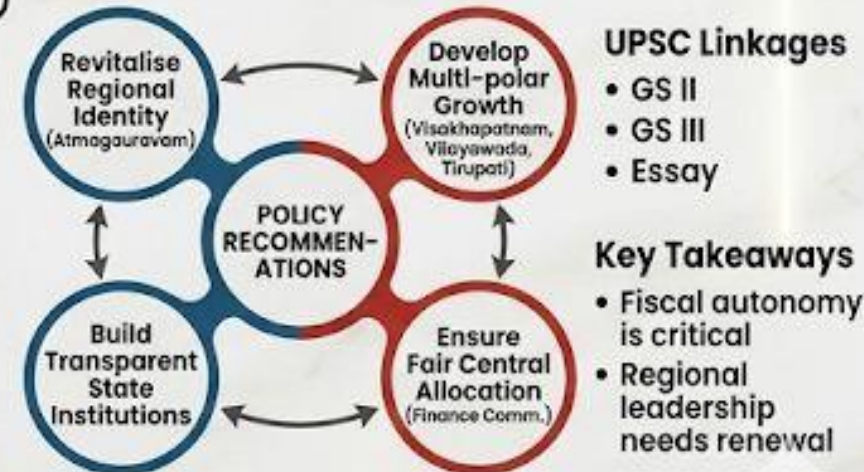
## CASTEISM & GEN\_TRANSITION



Kamma, Kullio, Reddy, and Kapu dominant castes on hrritorial bampathues and their materans as historical dominance

Linkang caste to political aggrandizement for political comities

## WAY FORWARD & KEY INSIGHTS



- **Logical and Philosophical Base**

- **Federalism vs. Unitary Bias:** The situation tests the **Principle of Subsidiarity** (that decisions should be made at the lowest possible level). The increasing fiscal and political centralization contradicts the **Cooperative Federalism** envisioned in the Constitution. Philosophically, it raises the question: Can a state be truly sovereign in its sphere if it is fiscally prostrate?

- **Rational Choice Theory:** The article suggests that the behavior of Andhra leaders (Naidu, Jagan) is not based on ideology (Atmagauravam) but on **Rational Self-Preservation**. Facing jail time (CBI/ED cases) and fiscal collapse, the "rational" choice for these actors is to align with Delhi, even at the cost of regional dignity and long-term political capital. This is a classic case of **Short-term Gain vs. Long-term Pain**.

- **Utilitarianism vs. Distributive Justice:** The debate over Delimitation and Finance Commission allocations touches on **John Rawls' Theory of Justice**.

- **Utilitarian View:** More population = More seats/More funds (Greatest good for greatest number).

- **Distributive Justice View:** States that have implemented population control and achieved better human development indicators (like the South) should not be penalized for their success. Penalizing them is philosophically unjust and creates a **Moral Hazard** (incentivizing population growth).

- **Legitimacy Crisis (Habermas):** The article alludes to a crisis where the public perceives the political elite as serving private/caste interests rather than the public good, eroding the very legitimacy of the state government.

- **Multidimensional Analysis**

- **Social Dimension:**

- **Caste as Political Capital:** Political parties function as **Caste Federations** rather than ideological vehicles. This leads to **Patronage Politics** where state resources are distributed along caste lines, alienating Dalits and OBCs who do not belong to the dominant castes.

- **Political Dimension:**

- **The Kingmaker's Curse:** Being a coalition partner with a slim majority (NDA post-2024) gives TDP leverage over the Central Government but also makes it a **Hostage**. The Centre cannot afford to let TDP leave, but TDP cannot afford to face the consequences of leaving (ED cases). This is a **Nash Equilibrium** where both sides cooperate due to mutual weakness, not strength.

- **Legal Dimension:**

- **Article 3 of the Constitution:** The *Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014* is the legal instrument of bifurcation. The failure to fully implement assurances (like Special Status, steel plant in Vizag, Polavaram funding) has been a constant source of legal and political conflict.

- **Ethical Dimension:**

- **Integrity vs. Compromise:** The article highlights the ethical dilemma of "Atmagauravam" (Self-Respect). Is it ethical for a leader to compromise on the long-term interests of the state's representation in Parliament (Delimitation) to secure short-term personal/political safety from legal prosecution?

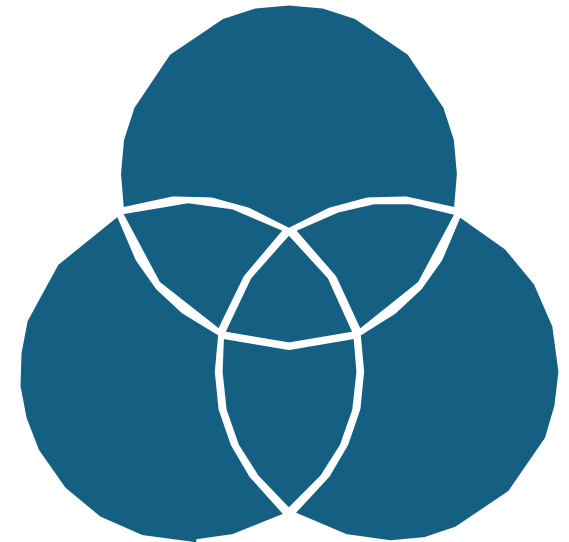
- **International Dimension:**

- **Diaspora Linkages:** A significant portion of Andhra's Kamma and Reddy elites are in the **United States** (IT sector, medicine). Their remittances and investment potential are crucial. However, they prefer investing in **Hyderabad real estate** (stable returns) over **Amaravati** (speculative). This transnational capital flow shapes domestic urban development.

- **Economic Dimension:**

- **Loss of the Multiplier Effect:** Hyderabad's IT sector created a service economy (restaurants, transport, retail) with a high **Multiplier Effect**. This is absent in the new capital region, which is largely driven by construction and government spending (which has low multiplier effect).

- **Linkages with NCERTs**
- **Class 10 Political Science (Democratic Politics II):**
  - **Chapter 2: Federalism:** The analysis is a perfect case study of "**How is Federalism practiced?**" (Actual working vs. Constitutional provisions). It illustrates **Linguistic States, Centre-State Relations, and Decentralization in India.**
- **Class 12 Political Science (Politics in India Since Independence):**
  - **Chapter 1: Challenges of Nation Building:** Discusses the formation of linguistic states and the fears of regionalism.
  - **Chapter 9: Recent Developments in Indian Politics:** Essential for understanding the **Era of Coalitions** and the rise of **Regional Parties** and the concept of "**Mandal vs. Kamandal**" (Caste vs. Religion) which defines AP politics.
- **Class 12 Economics (Introductory Macroeconomics):**
  - **Chapter 5: Government Budget and Economy:** Concepts of **Revenue Deficit, Fiscal Deficit, and Public Debt** can be mapped directly to AP's fiscal crisis post-bifurcation.



## Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus

### GS Paper 1:

- **Salient features of Indian Society:** Casteism, Regionalism, Linguistic Diversity.
- **Post-independence consolidation and reorganization:** Linguistic reorganisation of states (1953-2014).

### GS Paper 2 (Strongest Linkage):

- **Indian Constitution:** Federal Structure, Union-State Relations, Functions of Governor, Dispute Redressal Mechanisms (Article 262, Interstate Councils).
- **Parliament and State Legislatures:** Delimitation Act, Women's Reservation.
- **Pressure Groups & Political Parties:** Regional Parties vs National Parties; Caste in Politics.
- **Issues and Challenges Pertaining to Federal Structure:** Fiscal Federalism, Role of Finance Commission, Misuse of CBI/ED.

### GS Paper 3:

- **Indian Economy and Planning:** Mobilization of Resources, Inclusive Growth, Regional Disparities.
- **Infrastructure:** Urbanization and new capital cities (Amaravati).

### GS Paper 4 (Ethics):

- **Ethics in Public Administration:** Corruption, Political Neutrality, Conflict of Interest.
- **Moral Thinkers:** John Rawls (Justice), Machiavelli (Political Survival vs. Morality).
- **Aptitude:** Integrity, Impartiality, Self-Respect vs. Servility.

- **Way Forward**
- **Fiscal Consolidation and Revenue Augmentation:**
  - **Shift from Grants to Growth:** Focus on **Port-led Industrialization** (Visakhapatnam-Chennai Industrial Corridor) to create manufacturing jobs and generate GST revenue internally.
  - **Agri-Tech and Aqua-Exports:** Leverage the long coastline and fertile deltas for high-value aquaculture and food processing, reducing dependence on MSP-driven paddy cultivation.
- **Strategic Urban Policy (Polycentric Development):**
  - **Abandon the "Greenfield Obsession":** Instead of sinking all resources into Amaravati, develop a **Tri-City Corridor: Visakhapatnam (Executive Capital/Port Hub) – Amaravati (Legislative Hub) – Kurnool (Judicial/Agri Hub)** .
  - This distributes development pressure, reduces land speculation, and addresses the **Rayalaseema backwardness** grievance.
- **Political Realignment:**
  - **South-South Cooperation:** AP must rejoin the platform of Southern States on Delimitation. It is a **prisoner's dilemma** where short-term defection (supporting BJP) leads to long-term collective punishment for all southern states.
  - **Federal Front Pressure:** Use the Rajya Sabha and platforms like the **Inter-State Council** to demand a **Fixed Ratio of Parliamentary Seats** for the South, delinking it from pure population metrics.
- **Restoring Institutional Integrity:**
  - Demand a **Judicially Managed SIT** for corruption cases instead of political use of ED/CBI. This neutralizes the "blackmail" aspect while ensuring accountability.

- **Mains GS2:**

- **2022:** Discuss the role of the Finance Commission in addressing vertical and horizontal imbalances. (Relates to AP's fiscal dependence).
- **2021:** Explain the constitutional provisions under which Legislative Councils are created or abolished. Discuss the arguments for and against their continuation. (AP Legislative Council has been a point of contention).
- **2020:** The role of the Governor has been a contentious issue between the Union and the States. Examine the recent issues.
- **2019:** On what grounds can a national emergency be proclaimed in a state under Article 356? What are the implications of its frequent use? (NTR's dismissal in the 80s is the historical context for Atmagauravam).
- **2018:** Whether the Supreme Court judgment in the S.R. Bommai vs Union of India case has helped in preserving the federal structure of the Indian polity? Discuss.
- **2017:** Critically examine the issues arising out of the distribution of powers between the Union and States under the Indian Constitution. Is the Indian model leaning towards a 'Quasi-Federal' structure?
- **2014:** The concept of cooperative federalism has been increasingly emphasized in recent years. Highlight the drawbacks in the existing structure and the extent to which cooperative federalism would answer the shortcomings.

- **Mains GS4 (Ethics):**

- **2023:** What do you understand by the term 'Ethical Fading'? Explain with examples how political leaders sometimes justify their actions which are otherwise considered unethical. (Directly applies to the "Capitulation to Delhi" argument).
- **2020:** Discuss the role of ethics and values in enhancing the legitimacy of public administration.

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# Conservatism's paradox: Abiding internationalism

The concern behind this stance is the perceived global advance of progressivism, which US vice-president JD Vance described as an ideology that deems western civilisation illegitimate

A week ago, US vice-president JD Vance travelled to Hungary to rally Viktor Orban's supporters, an appearance that included his dialling President Donald Trump, who delivered laudatory remarks over speakerphone. This striking intervention in European politics was quickly overshadowed by intense media coverage of the vice-president's visit to Pakistan. But the scale of Orban's subsequent defeat, with his opponent Peter Magyar winning a supermajority, has turned the spotlight back on Vance's visit to Budapest.

The ensuing commentary has focused on the electoral outcome, which critics have been keen to portray as a decisive repudiation of the "populist nationalism" championed by Orban and Trump. But what we really ought to ponder is the irony in the vice-president travelling to Budapest to tell Hungarians that "we want you to make a decision about your future with no outside forces telling you what to do". This statement captures a deep tension in conservatism: It valorises national sovereignty yet feels compelled to intervene in politics abroad. It is vital to unpack this paradoxical stance because it will shape international relations in the years ahead.

Vance's appearance in Budapest did not come out of the blue. A distinctive feature of the Trump administration has been its concerted efforts to rally like-minded parties around the world. It has, for instance, backed Javier Milei in Argentina and Nayib Bukele in El Salvador and endorsed Sanae Takaichi in Japan. These cases pale, however, beside its activism in Europe, with Trump (or his confederates such as Elon

Musk and Steve Bannon) frequently expressing support for Reform in the UK, AfD in Germany, and the National Rally in France. This stance was formalised in the 2025 National Security Strategy (NSS), which was published last December. It declared that restoring Europe's "civilisational self-confidence and western identity" was a "core" American interest, and lauded "the growing influence of patriotic European parties" as a "cause for great optimism".

The impulse behind this declaration is the perceived global advance of progressivism, which Vance described as an ideology that deems Western civilisation "illegitimate". As the vice president summarised in Budapest: "In western history, they don't see a proud tradition. They see only injustice. In our borders, they see exclusion and racism. In Christianity, they see not liberation, but oppression. And in the family, they see constraints".

In Europe, which figures like Vance regard as the place where progressivism has made the greatest inroads, this ideology is seen as empowering "faceless bureaucrats" in media, entertainment, academia, and regulatory agencies to enact policies on migration and speech that are transforming the continent's demography and culture. In this telling, the ultimate consequence is that Europe now confronts the "real and stark prospect of civilisational erasure".

This is a cause of grave concern for America, the NSS argues, because the "character" of a country shapes its performance and worldview: "It is more than plausible that within a few decades at the latest, certain Nato members will become majority non-European. As such, it is an open question whether they will view their place in the world, or their alliance with the United States, in the same way as those who signed the Nato charter."

This is the logic that brought Vance to Hungary. And though Orban's defeat will be seen as a painful setback, the NSS and Vance's Budapest address suggest that the Trump administration has deep and abiding reasons to persist in its effort to "help Europe correct its current trajec-



Vance's appearance in Budapest did not come out of the blue. A distinctive feature of the Trump administration has been its efforts to rally like-minded parties around the world.

tory". The question to ponder, then, is whether these efforts are likely to produce the desired outcome.

There are two reasons to be doubtful. First, there is a fundamental asymmetry in the effort required to export progressivism as opposed to conservatism. A philosophy that challenges authority will always travel more easily than one that praises authority, because the former needs only to persuade individuals to challenge collective norms, whereas the latter must persuade societies to bind themselves. This is why Vance reportedly had to promise his audience in Budapest that "I come here not in the spirit of telling you what to do", lest he be seen as trespassing on the very sovereignty he was urging them to uphold more vigorously against the EU.

Second, there is also a fundamental asymmetry in the effort required to import progressivism as opposed to conservatism. A philosophy that advances individual freedom is embraced more easily than a philosophy that demands living up to social obligations. The challenge can be seen in Vance's exhortation to Hungarians to "hold on to the civilisational goods that make a country worth living in the first place — sovereignty, prosperity, history, a sense of national community, the redemptive nature of bringing new life and new families into the world". Hungarian voters evidently cared more about their country's declining economy, which has seen their consumption levels dip to among the lowest in the EU.

These asymmetries do not mean progressivism is destined to triumph. Rather, they suggest that its perceived excesses can only be challenged by a collective awakening as to the value

of inherited institutions and ways of life. Conservatives like Vance instinctively grasp this fact: they recognise that as outsiders they can do little to convince Europeans to "restore their former greatness". And yet they feel compelled to lecture Europe because conservatism leads them to fear that collective awakenings usually come too late.

At the core of progressivism is the idea that individuals should be subject to no authority but their own. The expectation is that, by applying reason, individuals can acquire the knowledge and desire to govern themselves responsibly. Conservatism denies this. It values traditions precisely because they embody received wisdom, because they contain lessons accumulated through experience that individual reason can not easily reach. In a nutshell, a conservative fears that a progressive will realise their mistakes too late — if they realise them at all. This is the intuition behind the well-known aphorism, "if you are not a liberal at twenty, you have no heart; if you are not a conservative at forty, you have no head".

But what may be a rite of passage for an individual is less amusing when it involves entire societies. This is why Vance concluded on a dark note in Budapest, cautioning his audience that "what's been built over generations can be undone in a single lifespan". This statement recalls Edmund Burke's salutary warning to the French in the wake of their Revolution — and, for the reasons given here, may prove no more effective.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Populist Nationalism:** A political ideology that claims to represent "the people" against a "corrupt elite." It often emphasizes national identity, traditional values, and skepticism toward international organizations (like the EU).
- **Supermajority:** A requirement for a proposal to gain a specified level of support which is greater than a simple majority (e.g., two-thirds). In Hungary, Peter Magyar's victory gave him the power to change the constitution.
- **Sovereignty:** The supreme authority of a state to govern itself without interference from outside bodies.
- **Civilisational Self-Confidence:** A concept from the 2025 U.S. NSS suggesting that Western nations must regain pride in their historical and cultural roots to remain strong.
- **Progressivism:** In this context, it refers to a political philosophy focusing on social reform, individual rights, and globalism, often critiqued by conservatives as undermining traditional structures like the family or the church.
- **Burkean Conservatism:** Derived from Edmund Burke, it argues that society is a contract between the dead, the living, and those yet to be born. It favors gradual change over radical revolution to preserve "inherited wisdom."





- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **The Paradox of Sovereignty:** The core irony lies in U.S. leaders traveling abroad to tell other nations to reject "outside forces." This creates a tension where conservative movements intervene internationally to promote a doctrine of non-intervention.


- **The Civilisational Argument:** The 2025 NSS posits that the demographic and cultural "character" of a nation determines its foreign policy. It suggests that if Europe loses its "Western identity," its alliance with the U.S. (NATO) may collapse.

- **The Asymmetry of "Exporting" Ideology:**

- **Exporting Progressivism:** Easier, as it encourages individuals to challenge authority and seek personal freedom.

- **Exporting Conservatism:** Harder, as it requires persuading a society to bind itself to collective traditions and obligations—a task that is inherently internal.

- **Economic Reality vs. Cultural Identity:** Despite the focus on "civilisational goods" (family, history), Hungarian voters prioritized immediate economic concerns (declining consumption and mismanagement), showing that cultural rhetoric often fails when basic material needs are unmet.



- Historical evolution of the issue
- **Post-1945 and Cold War**
  - The US framed its foreign policy as defending “the free world” against communism; ideology and security were strongly intertwined.
  - NATO emerged as a security alliance of Western democracies, and cultural affinity (“the West”) underpinned strategic commitments.
  - Yet, national sovereignty was also emphasised, particularly against Soviet domination in Eastern Europe.
- **Post-Cold War and EU integration**
  - EU deepening and widening foregrounded **supranational governance**, pooled sovereignty, and liberal norms (human rights, free movement, minority protections).
  - Some European conservatives began to resent EU institutions as undermining national parliaments, cultural traditions, and migration control.
- **Post-9/11 and the War on Terror**
  - Civilisational language re-entered discourse (“clash of civilisations”) as debates emerged about Islam, terrorism, and Western identity.
  - Immigration and integration became politicised across Europe, with right-wing parties questioning multiculturalism.
- **Rise of populist nationalism (2010s onwards)**
  - Financial crisis, Eurozone turmoil, refugee crises, and deindustrialisation fuelled discontent.
  - Populist parties portrayed EU elites, globalisation, and progressive values as threats to national identity and economic security.
- **First Trump term (2017–2021)**
  - Explicit scepticism toward multilateralism, praise for Brexit and some European nationalist leaders, criticism of NATO allies.
  - Early attempts to build ties with like-minded right-wing parties signalled a more ideological, populist foreign policy.
- **Second Trump term and 2025 NSS**
  - The 2025 NSS formalised a **civilisational framing**: restoring Europe’s civilisational self-confidence and Western identity as a “core” American interest; support for “patriotic European parties”.
  - The document linked demographic change to alliance reliability, warning of “civilisational erasure”.
- **Contemporary phase**
  - Direct involvement by US leaders in European elections, strong endorsements of particular parties and leaders, and open criticism of EU institutions.
  - Simultaneously, some European nationalists have begun distancing themselves from US actions they consider destabilising (e.g., wars), illustrating the limits of such transnational alliances.

# GLOBAL CONSERVATIVE PARADOX: THE BUDAPEST VISIT & ITS IMPLICATIONS



## THE INTERVENTION PARADOX

U.S. VP VISITS HUNGARY. DECLARES  
NON-INTERVENTION ('No outside forces')  
DEEPENING A POLITICAL ALLIANCE.

A DEEP TENSION: NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY  
VS. GLOBAL POLITICAL SUPPORT.



## U.S. 2025 NSS: A CIVILISATIONAL IMPERATIVE

DEFINES DEFENSE OF 'WESTERN IDENTITY' &  
'CIVILISATIONAL SELF-CONFIDENCE' AS CORE U.S.  
INTEREST. SUPPORTS 'PATRIOTIC EUROPEAN PARTIES'.  
LINKING AN ALLY'S INTERNAL CULTURE TO ALLIANCE  
VIABILITY (NATO).



## THE ASYMMETRY PRINCIPLE: EXPORTING CONSERVATISM

PROGRESSIVISM  
(BREAKING RULES)

EASY

CONSERVATISM  
(SOCIETIES BINDING  
THEMSELVES)

HARD

A PHILOSOPHY CHALLENGING AUTHORITY TRAVELS  
EASIER THAN ONE VALORISING AUTHORITY.  
PERSUADING SOCIETIES VS. INDIVIDUALS.



## MATERIAL REALITY VS. IDEOLOGICAL RHETORIC



HUNGARIAN VOTERS PRIORITISED DECLINING  
CONSUMPTION OVER CIVILISATIONAL GOODS.  
ELECTORAL DEFEAT: 'POCKETBOOK ISSUES' SUPREME.

- **Logical and philosophical base**

- **Assumptions behind conservative civilisationalism**

- Civilisations are coherent entities with relatively stable identities.
- Demography strongly shapes culture; if demographic composition changes, values and strategic preferences will also change.
- Traditions encode wisdom and cannot be easily reconstructed once destroyed.

- **Assumptions behind progressivism (as understood here)**

- Individuals can use reason to emancipate themselves from oppressive structures.
- Authority is legitimate only if continuously justified, not simply inherited.
- History is a site of power relations; exposing injustice is necessary for genuine progress.

- **The paradox of conservative internationalism**

- Conservatism valorises sovereignty and non-interference, yet fears that foreign societies' choices (e.g., their migration or cultural policies) will have systemic consequences for its own security.
- To prevent long-term harm, conservatives rationalise intervention as “fraternal guidance” or “civilisational defence” rather than interference.

- **Burkean logic vs revolutionary logic**

- Burke: Society is a contract between past, present, and future; radical breaks risk unleashing forces we cannot control.
- Progressive-revolutionary logic: Past institutions are often tools of domination; breaking them may be necessary for justice.
- The piece leans on Burkean scepticism about the ability of reason alone to design better orders and emphasises the fragility of institutions built over generations.

- **Moral psychology: freedom vs obligation**

- The essay assumes that humans are naturally attracted to promises of freedom and sceptical of calls to duty, making progressivism easier to “sell” internationally than conservatism.
- This raises a deeper question: can an ethics of obligation and restraint be voluntarily adopted in an age of global consumer culture?

- **Multidimensional analysis**

- **Social dimension**

- Intensification of identity politics: framing politics as a civilisational struggle sharpens “us vs them” divides.
- Impact on minorities: debates around “demographic change” and “civilisational erasure” can stigmatise migrants and minorities, affecting social cohesion.

- **Political dimension**

- Party realignments: mainstream right may be pushed to adopt more nationalist rhetoric, while the centre-left defends progressive norms.
- Polarisation: foreign endorsements can become domestic flashpoints, with opponents accusing each other of being “agents” of outside powers.
- Institutional stress: EU, NATO, and multilateral frameworks may come under strain as civilisational politics pit national sovereignty against supranational commitments.

- **Legal dimension**

- Electoral law concerns about foreign influence, funding, and campaigning.
- Questions about the compatibility of speech regulations, migration laws, and identity policies with constitutional guarantees and international human rights standards.

- **Ethical dimension**

- Duties to future generations vs rights of present ones: Should present societies accept limits (e.g., on migration or cultural change) to preserve a certain civilisational identity?

- **International dimension**

- Alliance management: cultural-civilisational framing adds a new layer to alliance cohesion beyond military and economic interests.
- Competing civilisational projects: Other powers (Russia, China, political Islam, etc.) can advance alternative civilisational narratives, complicating global order.
- South-South perceptions: Global South may view these debates as Euro-American introspection with limited concern for broader global justice.

- **Economic dimension**

- Economic distress can undermine ideological projects; voters often punish incumbents for poor material outcomes regardless of civilisational rhetoric.
- Globalisation vs protectionism: Conservative civilisational politics often pairs with economic protectionism, which can reshape trade patterns and global value chains.
- Demography and labour markets: Restrictive migration policies have implications for ageing societies’ labour shortages and welfare models.

- Linkages with NCERTs
- **Political Science – Class 11 (“Political Theory”)**
  - Chapters on **Political Ideologies, Freedom, Equality, and Rights** help unpack progressivism vs conservatism, individual autonomy vs social obligation.
- **Political Science – Class 12 (“Contemporary World Politics”)**
  - Chapters on **US Hegemony, Alternative Centres of Power, Globalisation, and Security in the Contemporary World** directly connect to debates on US foreign policy, alliances, and security doctrines.
- **Sociology – Class 11 and 12**
  - Topics on **Culture and Socialisation, Social Change and Development, and Globalisation and Social Change** illuminate how ideas travel, how identities are constructed, and how global norms interact with local traditions.
- **History – Classes 9–12**
  - Nationalism in Europe, World Wars, Cold War — background to civilisational discourse, rise of nationalism, and ideological struggles.
- **Economics – Class 12 (Macroeconomics and Indian Economic Development)**
  - Though India-centric, chapters on globalisation, development, and economic policy help contrast material drivers (economy, inequality) with ideological narratives.

## Linkages with UPSC CSE syllabus

### GS Paper 1

- Society: **Salient features of world's population**, globalisation and social empowerment, communalism, regionalism, secularism — relevant to demographic anxieties and identity politics.
- History of world events: World Wars, Cold War, and their impact on world politics, particularly civilisational narratives and alliances.

### GS Paper 2

- International Relations: **India and its neighbourhood, bilateral, regional and global groupings**, global institutions, and policies of developed countries affecting India's interests.
- Comparative politics and foreign policy doctrines (though not explicit, questions often touch US hegemony, NATO, strategic doctrines).

### GS Paper 3

- Internal security and its external dimensions: ideological influences from abroad, transnational networks affecting domestic politics.
- Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.

### GS Paper 4 (Ethics)

- Ethics in international relations; role of ethical considerations in foreign policy, human values vs national interests.
- Conflict between **ends and means**, and between **duties to one's own society and obligations to others**.



## Way forward

### Re-balancing sovereignty and norms

- Recognise that states have an interest in the values of allies but must temper this with respect for democratic processes and autonomy.
- Prefer long-term societal engagement (education, cultural exchange) over direct partisan campaigning.

### Addressing material and cultural anxieties together

- Ideological polarisation often feeds on economic distress; policies that strengthen social safety nets, inclusive growth, and local communities can reduce vulnerability to fear-based narratives.

### Pluralistic conception of civilisation

- Acknowledge that civilisations are internally diverse and evolving; avoid rigid, essentialist definitions that exclude minorities.
- Encourage narratives that integrate both historical achievements and injustices, rather than choosing one side exclusively.

### Strengthening democratic resilience

- Transparent rules against foreign interference in elections, combined with open debate about ideas regardless of origin.
- Building media literacy and critical thinking so citizens can evaluate ideological imports autonomously.

### Ethical foreign policy frameworks

- Develop criteria that justify when, if ever, it is acceptable to advocate value changes abroad (e.g., genocide, massive rights abuses) and when restraint is ethically preferable.

## UPSC CSE

### GS-2

- 2019: “Do you agree with the view that protectionism is a threat to liberal economic order?” (globalisation vs nationalism).
- 2018: Questions on “**US withdrawing from multilateral agreements**” and implications for global order (US foreign policy shifts).
- 2017: “The growing role of regional organisations in international politics.”

### GS-1 / Essay

- Essay themes (various years) on nationalism, globalisation, and identity (e.g., “Near jobless growth: in India, an anomaly or consequence of economic reforms?”, “Has globalisation led to the dilution of cultural identities?”, etc.).
- GS-1 questions on globalisation’s impact on culture and society.

### GS-4

- Repeated case-study style questions around conflict of values, ethical foreign policy, and global justice (though not explicitly named this way, many case studies can be mapped to such dilemmas).



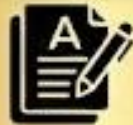
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