



# Role of Regional Political Parties in Strengthening Indian Democracy

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## **Abstract:**

The regional political parties have been a significant determinant of Indian democracy, defining regional and linguistic identity, caste interests, ethnicity, regional economy, and state-specific developmental needs. The democratic system in India is formally national, but socially and politically very regional. Regional parties have turned into main stream players as a consequence of the end of one-party domination and the emergence of coalition politics in Parliament, state and federal negotiations. This paper takes a look at why regional political parties are playing a vital role in the reinforcement of democracy in India, which is given until the time of November 2025. It claims that regional parties serve democracy by enhancing representation, the concept of federalism, power redistribution and the role of providing representation for the marginalised communities, influencing coalition governments and connecting national policymaking decisions with the state realities. They also pose difficulties like political polarization, personality-based leadership, corruption, dynastic politics, caste mobilization, opportunistic alliances and coalition bargaining. As the Bharatiya Janata Party failed to get a clean sweep in the Lok Sabha election 2024 and had to seek allies like Telugu Desam Party and Janata Dal (United), the role of regional parties came to the fore. This indicated that regional parties continue to play a balancing role in India's parliamentary democracy. The paper concludes that regional parties are not a hindrance to national democracy but they become a force when they are democratic, responsible and function as a part of the plural, federal and representative political system of India.

The following day, the government of the State of Union of India and the regional parties held another round of talks aimed at establishing a new coalition government in the upper house. Next day, the Government of the State of Union of India met with regional parties again to form a new coalition government in the upper house.

**Keywords:** regional parties, Indian democracy, federalism, coalition politics, Lok Sabha, state parties, political representation.

## **Introduction**

India is one of the most diversified democracies of the world. Language, caste, religion, tribe, region, class, culture and economic development are the factors that have an impact on its political life. Such diversity cannot be captured in a single national political narrative. Regional political parties developed because many communities and states did not feel that the national political parties were able to represent their needs, identities and aspirations. These parties tend to be primarily state-based or intertwined between

neighbouring states but may be part of any national political process by forming coalition governments and through parliamentary bargaining.

Indian democracy is not only about the majority rule at the national level; it is also about the importance of regional parties. It's also the idea of accepting differences. Diversity in terms of regions, language, and social groups enriching decision making processes increases the strength of democracy in India. The more diverse regions, linguistic groups and social groups are able to play a role in decision-making, the stronger the democracy in India. Regional parties contribute to this by raising issues of concern at the state assemblies, Parliament and national policy making forums. These are represented by regional and social parties such as the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) of Tamil Nadu, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) of Andhra Pradesh, the Trinamool Congress of West Bengal, Biju Janata Dal of Odisha, the Samajwadi Party of Uttar Pradesh, Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and the Janata Dal (United) of Bihar, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) of Punjab, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) of Jharkhand and the National People's Party (NPP) of the North-East.

The 2024 Lok Sabha elections once again emphasized the significance of regional parties. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won 240 seats, which is less than half of the 272 needed to form the government for a single party, while the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) came to power with the help of allies. Association of regional parties like Telugu Desam Party and Janata Dal (United) was important. According to the information provided by PRS Legislative Research, during the 18th Lok Sabha, 41 parties won a total of 179 seats, representing approximately one-third of the Lok Sabha, and state-registered parties won 179 seats in the House (PRS Legislative Research, 2024a). It reflects the fact that India is still a multi-party democracy with regional parties still playing an active role in the national affairs.

This paper explores the contribution of regional political parties towards building Indian democracy. It attempts to answer three key questions. Why did the regional parties gain importance in Indian Politics? Secondly, how do they contribute to Indian democracy? Third, what problems do they pose, and how to solve them? It is suggested that regional parties do so by enhancing representation, strengthening federalism, averting centralisation and giving voice to local aspirations, thereby enriching the democracy. But their democratic role is limited by internal democracy, accountability, ethical leadership and responsible coalition behaviour.

## **Methodology**

This research paper employs secondary sources of information and descriptive and qualitative research method. It is based on official election data, parliamentary analysis, academic literature, policy reports and media reports prior to November 2025. The Election Commission of India, PRS Legislative Research, reports on the Lok Sabha election 2024, scholarship on Indian federalism, party politics, regional parties and coalition politics are important sources.

There is no primary fieldwork carried out in the paper. Rather, it draws on the existing literature and data in order to analyse the role of the regional parties in the democracy. The study is national and state level politics. It illustrates the functioning of regional parties in the Parliamentary and Federal contexts using examples from the Lok Sabha Election 2024 and Bihar Assembly Election 2025.

## **Regional Political Parties – Conceptual Understanding.**

Typically, a regional political party is a party whose political base is in one specific state, region, linguistic community or identity group. The Election Commission of India classifies political parties as national

parties or state parties as per the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968. Election Commission of India (2024a) recognizes parties and grants them electoral advantages like reserved election symbols. Although not all state parties are of the regional type, most regional parties are state-based parties for they obtain their primary support from one state or region.

There are several reasons for regional parties to be formed. Some are based on language, for example, the Dravidian parties in Tamil Nadu. There are some based on regional development like Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh and Biju Janata Dal in Odisha. Some are caste and social justice oriented like Samajwadi Party, Rashtriya Janata Dal and Bahujan Samaj Party. Some are tribal and ethnic, like Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and the parties in North-East. Some are created in the context of state autonomy, cultural identity or resistance to central rule.

Regional parties should not be considered as anti-national parties. Regional representation is essential in the context of Federal Democracy for national integration. Democratisation of local identities reduces separatist and/or violent tendencies. The regional parties transform regional demands to constitutional politics. This is one of the most significant contributions to Indian Democracy.

## **Historical development of regional parties in India**

Indian politics during early decades after independence was dominated by Indian National Congress (INC). There was wide representation of both regional leaders and social groups in the Congress system. As socio-political diversity increased, however, so did regional aspirations. This was an important change for the Congress as it had lost power in many states and non-Congress coalitions had come up in some. This paved the way for emergence of regional political parties as meaningful actors in the state politics (Kothari, 1964; Yadav & Palshikar, 2009).

With the emergence of linguistic states, the groundwork was laid for regional parties. States were reorganized on linguistic grounds, allowing political legitimacy to the linguistic regional identity. The Dravidian movement transformed the state politics of Tamil Nadu, decreasing the influence of national parties. The DMK and the AIADMK, which emerged as major regional political players, were illustrative of the use of the language of linguistic pride and the language of social justice and welfare politics to establish lasting democratic support.

Regional parties also gained strength in the 1980s and 90s. The rise of the Mandal movement, the fall of Congress dominance, the rise of caste-based mobilisation, the rise of state-based leader and the rise of coalition governments at the Centre transformed Indian politics. A long coalition period began in 1989, when the general election was held. The formation of a government at the national level shifted into a more regional arena. The regional partners were required by the governments of the national front, the united front, the NDA and the UPA at different times.

The BJP secured single party majorities in 2014 and 2019 but regional parties did not vanish. In many states they continued to be strong. The regional parties have also proven themselves to be able to play a pivotal role in the formation of a national government again during the 2024 election. This is a statement of the fact that the Indian party system is not a permanent nationalising one; that it remains a balancing system between the national and regional.

**Table 1-Examples of Major Regional Parties and Their Political Base**

Regional party	Main state/region	Broad political base or issue
Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam	Tamil Nadu	Dravidian identity, social justice, federalism
All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam	Tamil Nadu	Dravidian politics, welfare, state identity
Telugu Desam Party	Andhra Pradesh	Telugu identity, regional development
Trinamool Congress	West Bengal	Bengali regional politics, anti-centralisation
Biju Janata Dal	Odisha	Odia identity, welfare, regional development
Samajwadi Party	Uttar Pradesh	OBC politics, social justice, secular politics
Rashtriya Janata Dal	Bihar	Social justice, caste mobilisation, minority support
Janata Dal (United)	Bihar	Governance, social coalition, regional development
Jharkhand Mukti Morcha	Jharkhand	Tribal identity, statehood, resource rights
National People's Party	North-East	Regional and tribal representation

### Regional Parties and Representation

Parties play the most significant role in democracy in the representation. There are communities in India that have interests which do not get the attention of the national parties in sufficient measure. These communities are represented politically by regional parties. They help to render democracy more inclusive, by introducing local demands into the formal political system.

Parties are linguistic groups that are represented regionally. The Dravidian parties of Tamil Nadu, for instance, voiced Tamil language, opposition to imposition of Hindi and regional cultural pride in the political arena. This enabled Tamil identity to be accommodated within the confines of Indian federalism and not beyond it. In the same way, the issue of regional rights, language and culture has come up frequently with the parties in Assam, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and the North-East.

There are also regional parties which are linked to caste based social justice movements. Politics of backward classes/dalits/marginalised groups gave birth to parties like Samajwadi Party, Rashtriya Janata Dal and Bahujan Samaj Party. They defied the political and administrative strongmen of the upper castes. These parties are, however, often faulted for their caste mobilization, but they have succeeded in expanding the role of democracy by placing previously marginalized groups in electoral politics (Yadav, 1999).

There are also regional parties which act as the representatives of the tribal and ethnic groups. The movement for the creation of a separate Jharkhand state was a driving force of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha.

The regional parties in North-East have stood for tribal identities, demands of autonomy and local governance issues. Elections turn identities into democratic bargaining by making them part of the game. In this way, elections transform identities into democratic bargaining by engaging them in the game.

## Parties and Federalism

Federalism forms an important component of the democracy of India. There is a very strong Centre in India but constitutionally defined powers of the States. Regional parties are important for the defense of state interests at the national level and thus contribute to strengthening federalism. They discuss topics of financial devolution, language policy, special category status, water disputes on river, development in the state, disaster relief, border issues, and local jobs.

Regional parties serve as an antidote to excessive centralisation. If one national party holds all the powers in the Centre, then regional parties can remind Parliament that India is a Union of States. They seek consultation, safeguard state autonomy, and are against policies that could affect the federal balance. This is particularly significant in a nation which has a wide variety of languages, culture, economy and social structure across its states.

For the first time in 2024 Lok Sabha elections, we saw a federal role of regional parties. The BJP lost power to form government and regional parties like TDP and JD(U) started to play a crucial role in forming government. TDP and JD(U) leveraged their power position to make demands for state funds, special status and cabinet representation, reported Reuters (2024). It demonstrates the regional parties' potential to introduce the needs of the state into national coalition political games.

It also enhances cooperative federalism through the regional parties. They are able to negotiate with Centre for infrastructure, welfare schemes, disaster relief and fiscal support. This depends however on the nature of the bargaining, if it is for a public interest or only for ministerial power. Regional parties who wield their influence for the development of their region reinforce democracy. Democracy is weakened by their use of it just for patronage.

**Table 2- Ways Regional Parties Strengthen Indian Democracy**

<b>Democratic contribution</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Representation of diversity	Regional parties represent linguistic, caste, tribal, ethnic and local interests
Strengthening federalism	They defend state rights and demand fair Centre-state relations
Decentralisation of power	They prevent excessive concentration of authority in national parties
Coalition accountability	They force national governments to negotiate and build consensus
Policy innovation	Many states ruled by regional parties create welfare and governance models
Political inclusion	They bring marginalised communities into formal politics
National integration	They channel regional demands through constitutional democracy

## **Regional parties and coalition politics**

One of the most evident roles played by regional parties in Indian democracy is Coalition politics. In a Parliamentary form of Government, it is necessary for any party to win majority in Lok Sabha to establish the Government. Coalition partners or outside supporters are regional parties when there is no clear national party majority. This puts them in a position of influence over national policy.

Coalition Politics is good and bad. The benefit of it is that it encourages consultation and consensus. Meeting the needs of states is not easy for a coalition government. It cannot only have to deal with allies and it must be able to take into account different points of view. This can help to make the policy-making process more democratic. The danger of authoritarian centralisation is also lessened by coalition politics, as no one party can control all decisions.

But coalition politics can also result in instability when parties pull out their support of a narrow interest. Can result in policy postponements, ministerial opportunism and pressure. Coalition politics is a democratic instrument, whose utility lies in the responsible use of the power by the coalition partners.

Post 2024 politics brought the need for coalition politics back to the fore. The NDA government relied on allies, of which the TDP and JD(U) were the most important. This resulted in regional parties having an influence on the national priorities. It also indicated that voters have the power to resist central rule by voting. In this way, regional parties served as democratic counterweights.

## **Innovation in the form of Regional Parties.**

Local parties have been responsible for many innovations in welfare services and governance at a local level. The Dravidian parties of Tamil Nadu established themselves as strong welfare parties, comprising mid-day meals, social justice policies, public distribution system and educational policies. Disaster management, women's self-help groups and women's welfare delivery became the hallmark of Odisha under Biju Janata Dal. The Aam Aadmi Party of Delhi, now a national party, came up from the politics at local level and focused on education, health and service delivery. However, after the formation of Telangana, it now Bharat Rashtra Samithi emphasized on the Statehood Movement and irrigation and welfare schemes.

The examples demonstrate that the regional parties can serve as laboratories of democracy. Experiments in state-level policies can shape national discussions. States introduce and implement welfare schemes, caste surveys, language policies, women empowerment programmes and local development models, which then shape national politics.

The significance of regional policy innovation is that it is India's states which have different problems. If a uniform country-wide policy applies, it may not be equally effective in each and every part of the country. Regional parties are better equipped to be responsive to local needs and create policies in line with state-specific needs. This enhances the democratic responsiveness.

## **Parties in the region and social justice**

Democracy has been promoted and deepened in many regional parties through social justice. Political parties on the basis of backward caste and Dalits altered the social mix of political parties. Political power traditionally held by elites. Space for OBCs, Dalits, minorities and rural communities were created by the regional and caste-based parties.

Parties like SP, RJD, JD(U) and BSP changed the political game-by making equality, reservation, dignity and representation central themes in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. They disrupted the social order, and

introduced new groups to government. While critics say that caste politics can make the society more divided, it also allows for a more representative democracy. Political organisation based on caste can be one of the means of democratic assertion in a caste-inequality-ridden society (Yadav, 1999).

Minority groups are also served by the regional parties. Many States make it a point to involve religious minorities in electoral coalitions and policy debates. This can enhance secular democracy if it is done in a non-communal way, but not through communal polarisation.

## Regional Parties and Statehood Movements

A few regional parties have been key in the statehood campaign. States created as Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand and Telangana were in response to the need for administrative recognition and development in the regions. Parties such as Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and Telangana Rashtra Samithi have proved to be great examples of regional parties that later became constitutional parties because of their ability to convert their regional aspirations into constitutional movements.

Statehood movements illustrate how regional parties can effectively avoid alienation by offering avenues for grievances in a democratic manner. They take their grievances to elections, legislatures and negotiations rather than letting them boil over to violence and separatism. This helps to make democracy flexible and responsive in India.

## The Lok Sabha Election 2024 and Regional Parties

The Lok Sabha poll of 2024 was significant because it demonstrated that the regional parties continue to play a pivotal role in the democratic equation in India. In the 18th Lok Sabha, there were 41 political parties that fielded candidates, while 36 parties had done so in 2019, according to PRS Legislative Research. The national parties bagged 346 seats and the state recognised parties 179 seats (PRS Legislative Research, 2024a). This means that even with a strong national campaign, regional and state-level parties are still strong.

The Samajwadi Party emerged as the third largest party in the Lok Sabha among the regional parties so far, winning 37 seats. Trinamool Congress has won 29 seats followed by DMK with 22 seats, TDP with 16 seats and JD(U) with 12 seats. These parties affected government and opposition politics. The result in Uttar Pradesh had a nationwide impact as it had weakened the BJP's hold in one most important state. TMC ensured the political distinctiveness of West Bengal. DMK remained active in debates at the national level representing Tamil Nadu. TDP and JD(U) emerged as key allies in the NDA.

The 2024 election thus proved that regional parties can play three roles: as coalition partners in government, as formidable opposition parties and as state-based actors who can champion the interests of their regions. This helps to make democracy more robust, avoiding the monopoly of one party.

**Table 3- Selected Regional Parties in the 18th Lok Sabha**

Party	Main state	Seats won in 2024 Lok Sabha
Samajwadi Party	Uttar Pradesh	37
All India Trinamool Congress	West Bengal	29
Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam	Tamil Nadu	22

Telugu Desam Party	Andhra Pradesh	16
Janata Dal (United)	Bihar	12
Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray)	Maharashtra	9
Nationalist Congress Party–Sharadchandra Pawar	Maharashtra	8
Shiv Sena	Maharashtra	7
Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas)	Bihar	5

**Note.** Data compiled from 2024 Lok Sabha results reported by PRS Legislative Research and Election Commission sources.

**Graph 1- Party Type Representation in the 18th Lok Sabha**

Party type	Seats
National parties	346
State-recognised parties	179
Unrecognised parties	11
Independents	7

Interpretation: The graph shows that state-recognised parties won about one-third of Lok Sabha seats in 2024. This affirms that regional parties are still structurally significant in national politics.

**Bihar 2025 and Regional Party Politics.**

The 2025 Bihar Assembly election further showed the importance of regional parties in Indian democracy. PRS claimed that the NDA secured 202 seats in the Assembly of 243 members. In this outcome, BJP secured 89 seats and JD(U) secured 85 seats and JD(U) is a significant regional party that is just behind the BJP (PRS Legislative Research, 2025). Rashtriya Janata Dal won 25 seats, while Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) won 19 seats. This outcome demonstrates that despite the strength of national parties, state politics are still influenced by regional leadership, caste alliances, local welfare policies and identities. The case of Bihar is helpful, as it demonstrates that regional parties may endure with the help of social coalitions and networks of leaders. The politics of Bihar has been influenced by JD(U), RJD, LJP and minor parties on the basis of caste, governance, welfare, youth, migration and development. The state shows that Indian democracy could not be comprehended solely on the basis of national parties.

**Regional Party-made challenges.**

Regional parties enhance democracy, yet they pose challenges. Fragmentation is one of the obstacles. The number of parties may be too many to form governments and may result in unstable coalitions. Fragmentation can also separate votes and result in governments that have small vote share. The second obstacle is dynastic politics. Many regional parties are dominated by families or charismatic leaders. Leadership is usually transferred between generations. This undermines internal democracy and curtails the chances of common party workers.

A third challenge is opportunistic alliance-making. Parties in the region change alliances rapidly, joining or abandoning national coalitions depending on short-term gains. This kind of behaviour can mislead the electorate and undermine ideological responsibility.

Fourth is corruption and patronage. Certain regional parties establish networks of local contractors, caste leaders and patronage groups. Democracy is hurt when party loyalty is taken at the expense of the common good by using state resources.

Narrow identity politics is a fifth challenge. In some cases, regional parties mobilise voters on exclusionary caste, language, religion or ethnicity basis. Although identity representation is democratic, identity polarisation may be detrimental to social harmony.

The sixth challenge is poor internal democracy. Organisational elections are not transparent in many parties. Top leaders usually dictate the process of candidate selection. This goes against the ideals of democracy even in instances where parties purport to represent the people.

**Table 4- Challenges and Corrective Measures**

Challenge	Democratic risk	Corrective measure
Dynastic leadership	Limits internal democracy	Mandatory internal party elections
Opportunistic alliances	Weakens voter trust	Pre-poll alliance transparency
Corruption and patronage	Reduces public accountability	Stronger audit and political finance transparency
Narrow identity politics	Increases social polarisation	Inclusive manifestos and constitutional safeguards
Coalition instability	Creates policy uncertainty	Clear coalition agreements
Weak candidate selection	Reduces grassroots participation	Transparent candidate selection rules

**Image Suggestions**

**Image 1: Indian Parliament with multiple party representatives**



**Image 1:** Indian Parliament with multiple party representatives

**Caption:** Regional parties strengthen Indian democracy by bringing diverse state-level voices into national parliamentary debate.

**Caption:** Regional parties strengthen Indian democracy by bringing diverse state-level voices into national parliamentary debate.

**Image 2: State assembly session or regional party campaign meeting**



**Image 2: State assembly session or regional party campaign meeting**

**Caption:** Regional parties connect local political demands with formal democratic institutions.

**Caption:** Regional parties connect local political demands with formal democratic institutions.

**Image 3: Federalism and coalition politics illustration**



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**Caption:** Coalition politics gives regional parties an important role in balancing national power and protecting state interests.

**Caption:** Coalition politics gives regional parties an important role in balancing national power and protecting state interests.

**Discussion**

There should be a balanced understanding of the role of regional parties in Indian democracy. They have nothing to do with being a democratic hero or a simply disruptive actor. Their role is context-dependent, in terms of leadership and institutional behaviour. Regional parties can be a positive force for democracy

at best when they are able to speak for populations that have little voice otherwise. They support federalism, highlight local issues to the national agenda and avoid over-centralisation. When in their worse state they can be dynastic, corrupt, opportunistic and narrow.

Regional parties have played a positive role in the democratic sphere during the 2024 Lok Sabha election. Elections were used by voters to curb single-party sway and reinstate coalition bargaining. This isn't necessarily a sign that coalition isn't better than majority government. It is living healthier when power is balanced and multiple voices are heard when democracy is working well.

Indian democracy is socially unequal so is the importance of regional parties. The marginalised groups first entered into the political arena through regional or caste-based parties. If these parties had not existed, national politics could have continued to be played by the elite groups. Hence, regional parties are a part of the democratisation process of Indian society.

But the regional parties have to change themselves as well. They can't call for democracy from national parties if they are not democratic internally. They have to be more transparent, less dynastic, more women-led, free from hate politics and have a stronger policy-based politics.

## Recommendations

To begin with, regional parties need to improve their internal democracy. They should conduct regular elections within their organisations and publish membership information and have clear candidate selection systems. Second, transparency in political finance should be equally extended to national and regional parties. The figures of donations, expenditure and assets should be made public. Thirdly, women and youth should be encouraged in the lead roles in regional parties. The mass base of most regional parties has been good, with few women in leadership positions.

Fourthly, coalition agreements need to be more transparent. Voter's ought to be aware of the policy commitments of regional parties that are forming government. Fifthly, there is a need to put in place policy research arms of regional parties, so that their demands are founded on data and on public interest. Sixth, the EC should remain involved in the regulation of inactive and non-compliant parties, but not cause harm to legitimate small regional parties. Seventh, regional parties should go beyond the narrow identity politics to establish inclusive agendas of welfare, development, and rights.

## Conclusion

Political parties in the region are playing a vital role in making Indian democracy strong. They embody diversity, they are a defence of federalism, political power is decentralised, social justice is promoted and local issues become national issues. The growth of their power mirrors a strengthening of democracy outside of elite nation-state institutions. The Lok Sabha election held in 2024, and the upcoming Bihar Assembly election in 2025, indicated that regional parties have a significant role in the national and state politics.

But there are also major problems that regional parties have to deal with, including dynastic control, corruption, poor internal democracy, opportunistic alliances and a narrow identity mobilization. These are not inherent to regional parties that threaten the democracy system. Instead, they demonstrate the need to increase the accountability and internal democracy of regional parties.

The strength of India's democracy lies in its inclusiveness and the ability for a multitude of voices to be heard. This pluralism depends on the regional parties. India is too big and too diverse to be controlled through the centralized politics of the nation. It needs to be represented at a regional level, with some

negotiations and coalition-building at the federal level. So, a party that is responsible and democratic, is not a barrier to Indian democracy rather it is one of the strongest pillars of it.

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