

# Populism in Indian Politics: An Analysis of Trends, Causes, and Consequences

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***Abstract: The rise of populism has become a prevailing force within the realm of Indian politics, resulting in a significant transformation of the country's political framework. This study paper offers a thorough examination of the dynamics of populism in the realm of Indian politics, with an analysis of its development, underlying factors, and extensive consequences. Utilising a multidisciplinary framework, our study incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. These include the examination of political discourse and election data via content analysis. Our aim is to investigate essential aspects of this phenomena. The current research begins by scrutinising the historical backdrop of populism in India, documenting its evolution from the period after independence to the contemporary day. The identification of various causes of populism involves an examination of economic, social, and cultural issues, with an analysis of the influence exerted by charismatic leaders and media in its dissemination. This study undertakes a critical analysis of the speech and communications tactics used by populist politicians, aiming to clarify their utilisation of emotive appeals and commitments to transformative reforms. Additionally, we explore the economic ramifications of populist measures and assess their viability over an extended period of time. In conclusion, this analysis contemplates the future trajectory of populism within the realm of Indian politics, providing a nuanced examination of its potential for continued dominance or adaptation in light of shifting conditions. This research study acts as a significant and informative resource for politicians, researchers, and people alike.***

## INTRODUCTION

The political phenomena of populism in India has garnered significant attention in recent decades. Populism has had a significant influence on India's political landscape by strategically appealing to the emotions of the general populace and positioning itself as a counterforce to the ruling class. This phenomenon surpasses conventional ideological boundaries, making it a noteworthy and enduring characteristic of Indian politics. The inception and duration of this phenomena have sparked intense arguments among scientists, politicians, and the general public, leading to a comprehensive

examination of its patterns, basic causes, and effects. The idea of populism lacks a universally accepted and all-encompassing definition. This phenomenon encompasses politicians who present themselves as advocates for marginalised people, therefore highlighting a noticeable contrast with a morally compromised or self-interested ruling class. In order to attain this objective, it is customary to use language that is designed to elicit intense emotions, such as appeals to patriotism and assurances of profound transformation. Populist leaders may construct their arguments based on the dichotomy between "the people" and "the establishment," using the former as a handy contrast to the latter. The emergence of populism in India's political realm may be attributed to a range of characteristics stemming from the nation's historical, economic, and societal contexts. Following India's attainment of independence, the Indian National Congress emerged as the preeminent political entity. Over the course of time, however, the establishment of this hegemonic dominance resulted in the emergence of a power vacuum that was subsequently filled by other political parties. The implementation of economic liberalisation measures in 1991 marked the beginning of a period characterised by robust economic progress. The presence of discontentment among certain demographics may be attributed to the emergence of disparities as an unintended consequence of this phenomenon. These disparities provided an opportunity for populist politicians to capitalise on them. The success of populism in India is influenced by several factors, including identity, caste, religion, and regionalism. The combination of several circumstances, including the emergence of mass media and the widespread use of social media, has provided populist leaders with unparalleled opportunities to engage with and rally their followers. The electorate in India exhibits a susceptibility to the allure of 'anti-establishment' personalities, hence contributing to the growing appeal of populist political movements.

Given the ongoing influence of populism on the landscape of Indian politics, it is crucial for policymakers, researchers, and people to get a comprehensive grasp of its multifaceted nature. The objective of this study is to provide a detailed and thorough examination of this intricate phenomena, therefore making a valuable contribution to the existing body of knowledge on the topic.

### HYPOTHESIS

The prevalence and longevity of populism in Indian politics may be ascribed to a multifaceted interaction between socio-economic inequality, mobilisation based on identity, leadership characterised by charisma, and the influence of media and technology. This study posits that the emergence of populism in the realm of Indian politics may be attributed to a convergence of historical circumstances, economic difficulties, and appeals based on identity. These variables, when combined, play a significant role in the sustained allure and electoral triumph of populist leaders. Moreover, it is anticipated that the ramifications of populism would materialise via alterations in policy agendas, transformations in party structures, and the possible polarisation of society based on identity divisions. In order to examine the aforementioned hypotheses, this research utilises a mixed-methods methodology, incorporating content analysis of political discourse, quantitative analysis of electoral data, and qualitative investigation of socio-economic and identity-related factors. The objective is to offer a comprehensive comprehension of the impact of populism on the political landscape of India.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

- “Populism in India” by *Narendra Subramanian*<sup>1</sup>

This journal says conveys that populism in Indian politics has been debated academically. Scholars argue that populism has shaped the country's politics. Populist forces include the Indian National Congress under Indira Gandhi in the late 1960s and 1970s. This approach shows how populist movements and parties have targeted various socioeconomic segments and

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<sup>1</sup> Subramanian, Narendra. “Populism in India.” *The SAIS Review of International Affairs*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2007, pp. 81–91. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26999347>. Accessed 12 Oct. 2023.

pursued different goals. It recognises that populism's influence on Indian democracy differs per populist organisation. One side of this discussion claims Indira Gandhi's populism hurt Indian democracy. Her populist ideas undermined democracy by instituting authoritarianism. Populism is seen as a disruptive force that may undermine democracy. The opposing side of the argument is that populism in the shape of language and caste parties enhanced Indian democracy. Populists used language and mobilisation strategies that resonated with marginalised populations, giving them a voice in politics. Populism made India's democracy more inclusive by meeting their demands. Literature agrees that populism would prevail in Indian politics. Populism is especially effective in mobilising lower castes, demonstrating its continued popularity and relevance in tackling social and economic inequities. The literature study shows a lively discussion on populism in Indian politics. It emphasises the need of examining populists' different historical circumstances, policy methods, and socioeconomic groups addressed when analysing their influence on democracy. Indian politics revolves on whether populism promotes democracy or decays it.

- “Populism and Patronage” by *Economic and Political Weekly*<sup>2</sup>

The examination of "Populism and Patronage" in the Indian political landscape, as presented in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, initiates a stimulating discourse among academics and readers. The journal paper highlights the possible drawbacks of populism, specifically in relation to the practise of patronage politics. This observation highlights the tendency of populist politicians to use patronage, such as distributing freebies and implementing specific social programmes, as a strategy to garner political support. Critics contend that this phenomenon has the potential to foster a culture of dependence, whereby individuals develop a reliance on governmental assistance, so compromising their ability to be self-reliant and impeding sustainable economic progress. On the contrary, advocates of the viewpoint presented in the article place significant

<sup>2</sup> “Populism and Patronage.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 44, no. 37, 2009, pp. 5–6. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25663528>. Accessed 12 Oct. 2023.

emphasis on the need of acquiring a sophisticated comprehension. The authors contend that within a nation as heterogeneous and economically divided as India, the implementation of populist policies may prove to be the most efficacious approach in tackling pressing issues, particularly for marginalised and economically susceptible demographics.

- “THE RISE OF THE RIGHT: Populism and Authoritarianism in Southeast Asian Politics” by Kanishka Jayasuriya<sup>3</sup>

Kanishka Jayasuriya's scholarly contribution titled "The Rise of the Right: Populism and Authoritarianism in Southeast Asian Politics" has sparked a thought-provoking discourse among academics and readers on the complex interplay between populism and authoritarianism within the realm of Southeast Asian politics. Jayasuriya's study highlights the concerning phenomenon of the increasing prevalence of right-wing populism and its propensity to erode democratic institutions. Critics contend that this particular approach may excessively prioritise the authoritarian elements while neglecting the multifaceted nature of the political scene in the area. Advocates of Jayasuriya's perspective underscore the need of maintaining a state of alertness with regards to the expansion of right-wing populism and its capacity to undermine democratic principles. The authors argue that via the identification and examination of authoritarian tendencies, the study offers a timely cautionary message that is of utmost importance in safeguarding democratic principles. Conversely, the discourse highlights the significance of recognising the unique historical, cultural, and political circumstances of Southeast Asian countries. Critics contend that using a uniform methodology may result in an oversimplification of the intricate dynamics involved. It is argued that the emergence of right-wing populism might potentially be a reaction to particular localised difficulties, hence requiring a more nuanced assessment of its implications for democratic systems.

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<sup>3</sup> Jayasuriya, Kanishka. “THE RISE OF THE RIGHT: Populism and Authoritarianism in Southeast Asian Politics.” *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 2020, pp. 43–56. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26938883>. Accessed 12 Oct. 2023.

- Economic Reforms, Populism And Party Politics In India by V. Bijukumar<sup>4</sup>

The journal elucidates a crucial matter in present-day democratic politics, presenting a discourse on the intricate dynamics between economic rationalism and political populism in the context of India. Within the realm of this discourse, academics contend that the endeavour to achieve economic rationality often comes into conflict with the objectives of political rationality. The argument posits that the pursuit of fiscal discipline may face challenges due to the influence of political populism, which employs policies and programmes to gain electoral support from various segments of society. Critics contend that the use of populism serves as a crucial mechanism for political mobilisation, particularly within the context of a heterogeneous democracy such as India. By prioritising the pressing requirements of marginalised communities, it is possible to contribute to the development of a more inclusive political environment. On the other hand, advocates of economic rationality place significant emphasis on the need of maintaining budgetary discipline and practising responsible governance. The authors contend that unregulated populism has the potential to result in financially unsustainable costs and impede the prospects of long-term economic success. This approach emphasises the need of maintaining a balance between populism and sound economic policy in order to safeguard the general welfare of the country. In summary, the discourse arising from the abstract of the study highlights the complex dilemma encountered by democratic systems, specifically in the context of India, as they strive to strike a careful balance between economic considerations and political dynamics. Although populism has the potential to effectively mobilise political support, it gives rise to concerns over the long-term viability of maintaining budgetary restraint. The study presented in the essay offers a significant contribution by shedding light on the changing dynamics of populism and economic reforms within the framework of India's developmental state. This prompts a

<sup>4</sup> Bijukumar, V. “ECONOMIC REFORMS, POPULISM AND PARTY POLITICS IN INDIA.” *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 65, no. 2, 2004, pp. 161–80. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41855807>. Accessed 12 Oct. 2023.

sophisticated examination of the potential for successfully harnessing political populism while safeguarding the economic prosperity of the country.

- 'POPULISM': A brief Biography by J. B. Allcock<sup>5</sup>

This journal talks about incorporation of the word 'populism' into the vocabulary of political sociology during the last ten years has ignited a spirited discourse among academics. Advocates of this notion contend that it has significantly enhanced the analytical lexicon and is necessary for comprehending the intricacies of modern-day politics. The authors argue that the concept of 'populism' offers a theoretical framework through which one can analyse the attractiveness and tactics used by charismatic leaders who rally public support by addressing the grievances of the general populace. This approach acknowledges the value in the widespread use of the word, emphasising its capacity to provide insight into intricate political events. In contrast, opponents raise concerns about the extensive embrace of 'populism' as a notion with logical consistency. The authors contend that the definition of the concept in question exhibits significant variation, resulting in a state of perplexity and ultimately leaving it unsuitable for rigorous academic investigation. This camp places significant emphasis on the need of a well-defined and widely acknowledged theoretical framework to effectively guide the examination of political advancements within peasant communities. The discourse also raises inquiries about the categorization of 'populism' as either a discrete political phenomena or a frequently used word that encompasses several political movements in a broad manner.

#### ANALYSIS

Populism's growth in Indian politics has transformed the nation's democracy. Because populism appeals to people's baser impulses and wants. An extensive review of the research shows the phenomenon's complexity and the need for a nuanced interpretation that takes into account India's many historical, cultural, and regional contexts. This is because a thorough review of existing studies illuminates the phenomenon's diversity. Because India is so huge, a

nuanced perspective is needed. As the study has developed, the biggest challenge has been defining "populism" consistently. This illustrates how versatile the term is in Indian politics. Populism's multifaceted nature is seen by its many interpretations. This shows that populism may take numerous forms, hence a comprehensive theoretical framework is needed. The impact of populism on India's democratic system has been and will continue to be a contentious issue in academics. This argument is ongoing. Some academics believe populism, especially when led by authoritarian or charismatic leaders, can undermine democratic institutions and processes, weakening the democratic values that underpin a society. Authoritarian or charismatic populist leaders like Donald Trump have this attitude. This is especially true when populism is led by authoritarians. Recent political popularity of populism supports this idea. Language and caste-based political parties have made Indian democracy more inclusive and responsive to underrepresented groups, according to one opinion. Language and caste-based political parties have increased the inclusiveness of Indian democracy, according to another opinion. The previous session illuminated populism's flexible and sometimes conflicting effect on India's political system. This emphasises the need for a contextual understanding of the political phenomena, including its pros and downsides. This kind of inquiry is necessary since it emphasises its importance. The economic and financial effects have been extensively studied. The prevalent belief that populist tactics are only beneficial in the short term raises concerns about their long-term economic viability. The persistent conflict between political expediency and economic prudence in Indian politics is unclear. This war is a dilemma since both aims contradict. These two aims are irreconcilable and cannot be attained simultaneously. To understand populism, one must consider India's vast geographical and cultural variety. This is because India has many ethnicities and religions. Populist movements may utilise different methods based on state and local obstacles and possibilities. This is because populism is widespread in many states and towns. To comprehend populism and its effects, apply a method that is tailored to the current situation. Variety adds complication to the inquiry. Populism's

<sup>5</sup> Allcock, J. B. "POPULISM': A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY." *Sociology*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1971, pp. 371-87. *JSTOR*,

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/42851097>. Accessed 12 Oct. 2023.

role in decreasing social and economic inequality is also extensively debated. Populist leaders may rally lower-caste and poorer populations, giving them a forum to express their political views. In order to address persistent injustices and socioeconomic inequities, Indian democracy is aiming to improve. Inclusion is frequently regarded a crucial aspect of this evolution. This project is tackling these issues. Academic literature has highlighted the absence of an integrated theoretical framework to understand populism in India. One of the major points raised. One problem is that this topic has been raised in scholarly publications. Without a systematic framework, in-depth evaluations and effective policies are difficult. These jobs may be difficult. Thus, there is general agreement that well-defined and robust theoretical frameworks are needed to explain populism's role in Indian politics. This is because well-defined and rigorous theoretical frameworks are needed. The importance of this necessity is well-known. To conclude, populism in Indian politics is always changing and may be examined from several aspects. This is true. Due to this, a method that takes into consideration the specific conditions and the need for more exact definitions and theoretical frameworks is needed to conduct meaningful analysis and establish successful policies.

#### CONCLUSION

Indian populism is a multifaceted and dynamic force that significantly influences the functioning of democracy in the country. A comprehensive examination of the existing literature reveals that the concept of 'populism' is multifaceted. Academics and analysts articulately advocate for and critique populism within the context of Indian democracy. The phenomenon of populism has detrimental effects on the democratic system in India. The empowerment of marginalised groups via linguistic and caste-based political parties may be seen, but, it is important to acknowledge that the rise of populism, particularly under the leadership of charismatic figures, poses a potential danger to democratic systems. This debate underscores the need of adopting a nuanced and contextually grounded understanding of India's complex political landscape. Populist arguments are mostly centred on economic and financial matters. The implementation of populist measures poses a significant risk to fiscal discipline and the long-term sustainability of the economy. The Indian political landscape exhibits a delicate equilibrium between

economic measures and political gains. The geographical and cultural variety of India presents challenges to the implementation of populism, since it leads to variations in strategies and outcomes at the state and municipal levels. Populist movements exhibit variations in response to the socio-political context, thereby emphasising the need of localised analysis. The phenomenon of populism in India is characterised by its intricate and ever-evolving nature. There are divergent viewpoints about the delineation, ramifications, and resultant consequences. According to this research, a comprehensive examination of populism in the world's greatest democracy necessitates an analysis that takes into account contextual factors, employs precise and unequivocal terminology, and utilises theoretical frameworks.