



“CHALLENGES OF REGIONAL PARTIES TO COMPETE THE NATIONAL PARTIES IN INDIA”

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Abstract

In a democracy, political parties provide an agency for society to express diverse views and present them to the government. They bring representatives together to form a responsible government and provide mechanisms to support or restrain it, make policies, and justify or oppose them. India has adopted a parliamentary form of government wherein political parties play a significant role within a multi-party system.

A political party may be defined as a group of people with similar political goals and opinions, or as an organization subscribing to a particular ideology and seeking political power through representation in government. As India is a pluralist society, it accommodates numerous political parties categorized as national, regional, and sub-regional parties based on their role and electoral presence.

National parties face the challenge of managing diverse ideologies, interests, and regional aspirations within their organization. Balancing these differences and ensuring party unity during decision-making and policy formulation is often complex. On the other hand, regional parties generally possess stronger grassroots connections and localized influence, posing significant competition to national parties, particularly in state-level elections. According to the latest records of the Election Commission of India (May 2023), there are 6 national parties, 54 state parties, and 2,597 unrecognized parties in the country.

Keywords: National political parties, Regional political parties, Social and cultural factors, Election Commission of India.

Introduction

“Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.” Democracy is the modern form of government in which political parties are essential in every democratic country. In earlier times, autocratic governments held absolute power in the state, where a single person ruled the country. In such autocratic and tyrannical systems, no importance was given to the participation of people in governance.

However, the idea of democracy can be traced back to ancient Greek political philosophy and was further developed in the 18th century in Western countries. Modern nations began to concentrate on the representation of people to safeguard the spirit of democracy. The Republic of India also believed that a representative parliamentary democracy was the form of government most suited to its culture, history, and needs. The vision was that all adult citizens should participate equally in the political process without discrimination.

The author aims to focus on the importance of political parties in the present scenario and the challenges faced by regional parties in becoming or competing with national parties, while also reflecting on the historical evolution of political organizations in India. Following the arrival of European explorers in India, the autocratic system was completely altered, and a new form of government was gradually introduced. The earliest political party in British India was the Indian



National Congress (INC), founded in 1885, which played a significant role in shaping the political consciousness and democratic traditions of modern India.

Need for the Study

1. Changing Political Landscape in the regional political parties in India.
2. Decentralization of Power in the regional political parties in India.
3. Impact on National Politics in the regional political parties in India.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the evolution and role of regional political parties in India.
2. To analyze the major challenges regional parties face in attaining national status.
3. To explore the role of the Election Commission in regulating and recognizing political parties.

Methodology

This research paper is descriptive and analytical in nature. It is based primarily on secondary sources of data, including books, scholarly journals, official publications of the Election Commission of India, and credible online articles. The study relies on qualitative analysis to interpret trends, challenges, and developments concerning regional and national political parties in India. Comparative insights are drawn from historical and contemporary examples to highlight the evolving dynamics of party competition in the Indian federal political system.

Criteria Needed To Be a National Party in India

According to the Election Commission of India, a political party can attain the status of a national party by fulfilling any one of the following key criteria:

1. **Securing at least** 2% of seats in the Lok Sabha from a minimum of three different states, **or**
2. **Polling a minimum of** 6% of valid votes in Lok Sabha or State Legislative Assembly **elections across at least** four states, and in addition, winning four seats in the Lok Sabha, **or**
3. **Being recognized as a** state party in at least four states.

Recognition as a national party offers several institutional and electoral privileges, including the exclusive use of a common election symbol across the country, the right to field candidates in all states, the appointment of up to 40 star campaigners whose expenses are exempt from campaign limits, allocation of government land for party headquarters, and access to free copies of electoral rolls.

However, these criteria also highlight the major challenges faced by regional parties in competing with national parties. India's vast geographical spread, linguistic diversity, and socio-economic variations make it extremely difficult for regional parties—whose influence is often confined to specific states or communities—to expand their base across multiple states. Establishing a national-level organization, mobilizing financial and human resources, and formulating broad-based policy agendas that appeal beyond regional interests are significant hurdles. Thus, while recognition as a national party provides wider political influence and visibility, achieving and maintaining that status remains a formidable challenge for most regional parties in India's competitive democratic landscape. (Source: "Criteria to be Recognized as a National Party," Vajiram & Ravi, 2024).

Evolution of Political Parties in India since Independence

The philosophy and vision established by the founding fathers of a political party form its foundation. Political parties are organized groups that seek to translate their ideology into policies and actions aimed at promoting public welfare. They actively participate in elections at the national, state, and



local levels, thereby shaping the democratic process. India has adopted a multi-party system, where numerous political parties operate simultaneously. Based on specific criteria and performance standards, the Election Commission of India recognizes political parties as either national or state (regional) parties.

The first general elections in independent India were held in 1952, marking a new era in democratic governance. However, even before independence, during British rule, the Indian National Congress (INC) played a prominent role in political mobilization and representation. As the name implies, a national party functions on a broader scale, extending its influence across multiple states and regions, unlike a regional party, whose presence is often confined to a particular state or area.

While being recognized as a national party is associated with greater stature and visibility, it does not automatically guarantee nationwide political dominance. To be truly national, a party must maintain ideological coherence and appeal across diverse linguistic, cultural, and social groups. Given India's pluralistic nature, political parties with inconsistent or region-specific agendas often find it difficult to gain widespread acceptance.

Forming a unified and consistent ideology that resonates with citizens across different regions is a challenging task that requires careful balancing of national and regional interests. Aspiring national parties also face intense competition from well-established regional parties, which command loyal voter bases within their respective states. Convincing voters to shift their support from familiar regional parties to emerging or expanding national ones remains one of the most formidable challenges in India's political landscape. (Sources: "National and State Parties," Drishti IAS, 2022; "Political Parties in India: Types, Roles, Importance & More," Testbook, 2025).

The Perplexing Emergence of India's Regional Parties

The Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) was renamed as the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) a few months ago, nearly two decades after its formation by K. Chandrasekhar Rao (KCR) to spearhead the Telangana statehood movement. The transformation of TRS into BRS represents an ambitious attempt to expand the party's reach beyond Telangana and establish a presence in national politics by projecting the "Telangana model of development" as a blueprint for other states.

BRS has sought to extend its influence by recruiting leaders from neighboring states such as Andhra Pradesh and Odisha within a short span of time. Although its long-term objective is to play a decisive role in national politics, the party's immediate focus remains on consolidating its power in Telangana—its core political base. The 2024 Lok Sabha elections were identified as a key milestone in the BRS's national aspirations.

However, political analysts observe that the BRS has come under increasing pressure due to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) emerging as a formidable challenger in Telangana. Following BJP's victories in two key Assembly by-elections—Dubbak (2020) and Huzurabad (2021)—and its strong performance in the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) elections, the BRS faces heightened competition. Political analyst K. Nageshwar remarked that while the BRS initially anticipated little resistance due to the weakening of the Congress, it now faces a "new and strong adversary" in the BJP.

KCR, who achieved the long-cherished goal of Telangana statehood by securing a popular mandate in 2014, led the TRS to win 63 of the 119 Assembly seats in the first state elections. Strengthening his political base, KCR consolidated the TRS further by inducting legislators and leaders from opposition



parties. In 2018, the TRS expanded its majority, winning 88 seats, and later persuaded around a dozen Congress MLAs to join, raising the party's strength to 103 in the Assembly.

While this consolidation strengthened the TRS, political analysts argue that by marginalizing the Congress, KCR inadvertently allowed the BJP to occupy the political space once dominated by the Congress. Nevertheless, the BRS leadership remains confident. KCR maintains that the party continues to enjoy strong public support, citing favorable internal surveys. K.T. Rama Rao (KTR), the party's working president, has also expressed optimism about securing a third consecutive term in the upcoming Assembly elections. Despite this confidence, internal differences have surfaced in certain districts. However, KTR dismissed these as signs of an active and vibrant party organization rather than divisions. He further asserted that the opposition remains weak and fragmented, with neither the Congress nor the BJP able to mount a strong challenge across constituencies.

Still, with elections approaching, emerging alliances and political shifts may reshape Telangana's electoral landscape. The BRS continues to face criticism from rival parties over issues such as unfulfilled promises, allegations of family dominance, corruption, and the state's increasing debt burden. These challenges could create significant hurdles for the BRS as it seeks to maintain power in Telangana while simultaneously striving to establish itself as a credible national political force. (Sources: Apparasu, S. R. (2022, June 20). "Confusion looms over KCR's new national party structure." Hindustan Times; "TRS is now BRS, party set to approach EC, says decision unanimous." The Indian Express, October 5, 2022.)

Challenges to Political Parties to Be National Parties

It is a tremendous task to become a major political party, and it takes a lot of time, money, and careful planning. The following are some of the main challenges that parties could encounter on their path to national recognition. Urban and rural areas, as well as other regions with distinct demographics and interests, must all be covered by a national party's presence and support. It might be particularly difficult to get support in places where the party has previously performed poorly.

A national party has to build a large and varied voter base. It can be difficult to persuade voters from various views and backgrounds to support the party's values and policies. It may already be difficult for new parties to compete because established national parties may already have a stronghold in some regions. The established parties may have established networks and political infrastructure, making it difficult for newcomers to succeed. Several parties with national aspirations may already exist in nations with multi-party systems. It might be difficult when there are numerous parties vying for the same voter base. Victory depends on having an effective party constitution and strong leadership. A party's chances of rising to national prominence might be hampered by rivalry, internal strife, and a lack of a defined plan of action.

A long-term project is establishing a national party. To establish the party's existence and importance over several election cycles, continuous effort and dedication are needed. Overall, overcoming these difficulties calls for a well-thought-out plan, solid leadership, and the capacity to relate to voters on a national scale. Any party hoping to become a major political force at the national level must also possess the qualities of tolerance, perseverance, and adaptability.

Following are the Challenges to Political Parties to Be National Parties

The article from K. T. Rama Rao ("KTR") by the news service IANS (via Great Andhra):

1. **Regional Variety:** Significant regional and cultural variety is a common feature of nations. A party needs support from voters from diverse areas and racial backgrounds in order to gain



national traction. This necessitates comprehending and resolving the particular worries and goals of many groups across the nation.

2. **Organizational Structure:** A well-organized and effective organization is necessary to take party operations to a national level. A strong presence must be established throughout numerous states or regions, which calls for ample resources, capable leadership, and efficient communication methods.
3. **Resource Mobilization:** Parties must step up their fundraising initiatives as they try to reach a wider audience. Large financial resources are needed to run campaigns on a national level to pay for outreach, infrastructure, and advertising.
4. **Electoral Laws and Regulations:** Different nations have different election rules and procedures, which can provide challenges for parties aiming to establish themselves as national entities. It might be challenging to comply with these legal standards while negotiating intricate election systems.
5. **Voter Turnout and Participation:** In many democracies, raising voter turnout and political participation is a major concern. National parties must motivate and inspire voters to actively engage in the election process.

Role of Election Commission

India has been an anomaly in the majority of democratic democracies where the first-past-the-post method is used to elect representatives. This is partly due to the fact that its expansive federal structure and diversity have encouraged the emergence of a number of regional parties that are now prominent in their separate States.

In this context, the Aam Aadmi Party's recognition as a national party by the Election Commission of India (ECI) there are currently six such parties is a commendable accomplishment for a force that arose from a well-liked civil society movement under the administration of the United Progressive Alliance. The party has developed as an electoral option in Gujarat and Goa, notching respectable vote numbers there as well. It has also won in Delhi and Punjab. The party has developed as an electoral option in various States where the Congress is weak, in addition to achieving respectable vote shares in Gujarat and Goa. It has now achieved the "national party" recognition standard imposed by the ECI as a result of this.

Despite this, the AAP's record in Delhi, where its municipal work has earned it some recognition as a party focused on governance, continues to be its defining characteristic as a political force. However, the lack of a consistent ideology limits it, allowing it to occasionally shift to the left of the Congress or to the right of the Bharatiya Janata Party while its positions on domestic and global issues are, at best, hazy and its commitment to secularism is, at best, tokenistic.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the challenges faced by regional political parties to compete with national parties in India are complex and multifaceted. India's vast diversity in terms of language, culture, economy, and regional aspirations places a significant responsibility on regional parties that seek to gain national prominence. While regional parties often possess strong grassroots connections and effectively address local issues, expanding beyond their home states requires strategic planning, ideological clarity, and organizational strength.

Competing with established national parties, mobilizing large-scale financial resources, and maintaining visibility across multiple regions continue to be major obstacles. However, the gradual



rise of several regional parties to national relevance demonstrates that this transformation is both achievable and beneficial. The increasing participation of regional parties at the national level enriches democratic competition, ensures the representation of regional interests in national policymaking, and strengthens India's federal structure. Therefore, though the journey of regional parties toward national recognition is challenging, it is vital for promoting inclusive development, balanced representation, and a more vibrant and participatory democracy in India.

Suggestions

To effectively compete with national parties and emerge as strong contenders, regional parties must strengthen their organizational presence across multiple states and develop capable leadership structures to manage large-scale political operations. They should articulate a clear and inclusive ideology that resonates with diverse sections of society while retaining their regional identity and commitment to local issues.

Delivering good governance, fulfilling electoral promises, and implementing people-centric policies can significantly enhance their credibility among broader voter groups. Building alliances and coalitions with like-minded parties can help them enter new political arenas and expand their influence. Adopting modern campaigning strategies—such as technology-based outreach, digital communication, and social media engagement—will help regional parties connect effectively with younger and urban voters. Ensuring financial transparency and implementing efficient fundraising mechanisms are equally essential for sustaining national-level activities.

Furthermore, encouraging internal democracy, minimizing factional divisions, and promoting youth, women, and marginalized group participation will enhance organizational strength and public trust. By following these strategic measures, regional parties can gradually expand their reach, enhance their political competitiveness, and emerge as credible national alternatives in India's democratic landscape.

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