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TWO INDIAS: FEDERALISM, REGIONALIZATION, AND THE 2024 GENERAL ELECTIONS

Abstract

This paper explores the profound social, cultural, and political divisions between Northern and Southern India, with a particular focus on their impact on the outcomes of the 2024 general elections. Starting from the hypothesis that the North-South divide in India – rooted in linguistic, religious, economic, and cultural differences – directly shapes political dynamics, the paper analyses how these differences have become institutionalized through the party system and regional political organization. The North, dominated by the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, stands in contrast to the South, where regional parties and a more liberal political discourse are gaining strength. This contrast contributes to the deepening of a dual-party or dual-coalition system and further intensifies political polarization. The paper also

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considers the historical context, including the legacy of colonialism, religious and cultural identities, and economic disparities that fuel regional tensions. The research finds that India's federal framework is increasingly challenged by rising political and cultural-identity polarization, which ultimately carries far-reaching consequences for the stability and integration of the state.

Keywords: India, political polarization, regionalism, federalism, Bharatiya Janata Party, general elections

INTRODUCTION

The division of India into North and South is not a recent phenomenon, but the 2024 general elections have helped crystallize this divide – perhaps for the first time since the formation of the modern Indian state – into a clearly institutionalized political reality. The historical and political context of this divide emerges as a consequence of complex socio-cultural differences between the two regions: varying degrees of colonial influence, linguistic divisions (Hindi *versus* Dravidian languages), religious tensions (among secularism, Islam, Hinduism, and Hindutva), economic inequalities (with the South being significantly more developed), differing political traditions (Southern regionalism versus Northern centralism), as well as other important cultural and political factors. In this study, Northern India refers to the federal units of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Delhi, Punjab, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, and Haryana. On the other hand, Southern India includes Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Kerala. Symbolically, this paper will often denote this division through the dichotomy of *Bharat: Dravida*, as two opposing visions of India: on the one hand, the concept of *Bharat* or *Bharatavarsha*, driven by Hinduism and centered around the idea of civilizational-cultural dominance over the South and Southeast Asia; on the other, the concept of *Dravida* or *Dravida Nadu*, referring to a vision of India based on pluralism, soft secularism, multiculturalism, and equality. The ideological father of Dravida Nadu is E.V. Ramasamy (*E.V. Ramasamy,* popularly known as *Periyar*), leader of the *Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam* movement (Dravidian Progressive Party).

The guiding research question of this paper is: do the deep cultural, linguistic, and religious differences between Northern and Southern India shape electoral outcomes and fuel political polarization and regionalization in the country? In line with this question, the paper will test three hypotheses: (1) the North-South divide in India, grounded in cultural, linguistic, economic, and political differences, significantly influences the political landscape, reinforces regional identities, and promotes political polarization; (2) Northern India is more inclined toward aligning with parties that promote Hindu nationalism; (3) Southern India demonstrates stronger support for regional parties and resistance to the dominance of leading national parties.

The academic and societal relevance of this research stems from five closely related elements: (1) the significance of the 2024 general elections as a precedent that exposed an intensifying regional division and challenged the idea of one India under one party; (2) the exposure of the limits of Hindu-nationalist hegemony; (3) the importance of understanding the rise of regionalism; (4) the need to assess potential threats to India's federal character; and (5) the analysis of regional and internal stability in India as a multi-national state.

From a methodological standpoint, the paper employs a multi-method approach, including historical analysis (origins of cultural and political differences), political geography (India's electoral map and regional voting patterns), electoral results analysis (seats and vote shares per party), ideological discourse analysis (programs of key political parties), and comparative method (comparison of Northern and Southern states).

Structurally, the second chapter examines the social and political context that led to the emergence and development of the *Bharat–Dravida* divide, presenting the core theoretical framework and the genesis of the regional split along its key dimensions (historical, economic, religious, linguistic, etc.). The third chapter brings these insights into the context of the 2024 general elections, focusing on the observed social and political patterns and trends. The fourth and final chapter provides a synthesis of the previous findings, tests the hypotheses, presents conclusions, and opens up new research questions that extend beyond the scope of this study and deserve further academic attention.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE DIVIDE: *BHARAT* VS. *DRAVIDA*

To analyze the impact of growing regionalism on the 2024 general elections in India, it is necessary to outline the basic theoretical framework and to highlight the context in which this regional polarization has emerged and evolved. Following the hypothetical framework, the aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that the North-South divide in India is not merely geographic, but also deeply rooted in identity, history, and institutional structures, and has been further deepened by economic, demographic, and cultural differences. Although emphasizing the *Bharat*/*Dravida* dichotomy may seem ambitious – or even pretentious – the intention is to provide well-grounded arguments not only for the existence of this divide but also for its rapid intensification and expansion in the past decade. This dichotomy, in which the first element refers to territorial and ideological continuity with the Hindu nationalist project, and the second to the vision of South India as a distinct, secular, and inclusive community, is not merely a rhetorical construction – it reflects a real dichotomy in political culture that is highly relevant in contemporary India. Therefore, the aim is to highlight the necessity of understanding how this divide operates to grasp electoral patterns more thoroughly.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: POLARIZED SOCIETIES AND FEDERALISM

At the very beginning, it is important to pose rhetorical questions: What does it actually mean to say that India is a *good example of a divided society*, and where, within theoretical frameworks, can we find arguments supporting this claim? In delving deeper into political science theories and approaches, it is necessary to present key concepts related to divided and polarized societies, the idea of *formative rifts*, the notion of pernicious polarization, and the role of federalism in understanding contemporary political developments in India.

The first step toward understanding the degree of polarization in Indian society is recognizing the elements of pernicious polarization in contemporary India. In this context, one can speak of an increasingly dominant "*us* versus *them*" narrative, a rise in polarizing strategies among political actors – often grounded in identity politics – as well as the formation of polarization around deep formative rifts, most notably

in Hindu (or Hindutva) – Muslim relations, but also in the context of increasingly pronounced tensions between northern and southern India. This also entails the consolidation of interests and identities around a single axis of division, the formation of political demands and interests based on cultural or religious identities, and many other elements of political polarization (see: McCoy and Somer 2019, 234–247).

In this context, identity politics has proven to be one of the primary mechanisms fueling political polarization in India and the broader South Asian region (Đogatović 2025b, 74–90). Language, caste, and religion are significant social stratification areas (Shilpa 2021, 37). Some authors argue that the rise of dominant parties in India is rooted in the successful use of identity politics, with a particular curiosity being that the rise of regional parties in the southern parts of the country is also a consequence of such identity-based strategies (Shilpa 2021, 38). India is not an isolated case – there have been studies for years with clear evidence of shared patterns and a set of dynamic features characteristic of severe political and social polarization in various global contexts, especially those that result in serious consequences for democracy itself (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018, 16).

The consequences of deep political divisions are also reflected in the institutional system, where they can be associated with both democratic empowerment and democratic erosion (McCoy and Somer 2019, 234). In this context, the aforementioned authors particularly highlight the significance of the nature of the electoral system, the powers available to the executive branch, and the capacity and effectiveness of political accountability (McCoy and Somer 2019, 261). One of the direct consequences of political polarization is the growing animosity between opposing social and/or political camps, making voters more willing to accept undemocratic measures against the opposing side (Arbatli and Rosenberg 2020, 1). Higher levels of political polarization are associated with a lack of free and fair elections, increased media censorship, and attacks by the government on judicial integrity (Arbatli and Rosenberg 2020, 8).

India's complex social diversity – in terms of religion, ethnicity, language, and caste – contributes to the constant generation of new lines of division and conflict. The specific focus of this study lies in examining the formation of regional polarization, i.e., the increasingly pronounced rift between the federal units of the north, west, east, and center, on one side, and the south of the country, on the other. This process, which

will be treated as a regional form of polarization, represents a new and significant form of Indian regionalism.

The impact of this regional division on the Indian political landscape, with special emphasis on the 2024 general elections, will be the subject of analysis in the following chapter. It will examine the political preferences of the population within the *Bharat* and *Dravida* regions, as well as the role and future of federalism in the world's most populous country. Given the constitutional obligation of the Indian government to undertake a *delimitation* process after each census – where the boundaries of electoral constituencies are redrawn and the total number of parliamentary seats recalculated – the outcomes and conclusions are bound to be both important and intriguing (Jain 2025). Although this practice was frozen from 1976 to 2026, the moment of its revival is approaching, almost certainly to the detriment of the southern and to the benefit of the northern federal units (Tharoor 2025). According to some estimates, the number of members in the lower house could rise to 753, or even 888 (Tharoor 2025).

SOCIO-CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC DIFFERENCES BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH

After establishing the theoretical foundation of this academic approach, the following section analyzes the key socio-political catalysts that have deepened the divide between North and South India. This includes the influence of historical and cultural development, the significance of language and identity, the role of religious and cultural factors, and the impact of economic and demographic differences.

Researchers who study the historical-cultural divide often base their argument on the notion that this is a long-standing internal process. Over time, North and South India have developed two distinct socio-political trajectories, which today exist within the same state framework but are subject to growing tensions. Historically, the South was the realm of Dravidian empires (*Chola*, *Pandya*, *Vijayanagar*, and others), while the North came under the influence of Hindu and Islamic dynasties. Moreover, the derogatory term *madrasi* (or *madrassi*), used by northerners to describe their southern compatriots, has not disappeared from informal discourse. It was precisely in the Madras region (The Madras Presidency or Madras Province, officially the Presidency of Fort St. George until 1937) that the Dravidian movement (Dravidar

Kazhagam; Dravidian Association) was born, laying the foundations for the contemporary liberal and secular political culture of the southern region (Naveen 2024).

Sharma (*Arvind Kumar Sharma*) goes so far as to claim that there are two distinct visions of India – one secular, a homeland for Indians of all religions and national backgrounds that respects Gandhi's legacy and historical role, rejects the caste system, permits beef consumption, and views English proficiency as a major asset; and the other, Hindu nationalist, a homeland only for Hindu Indians, which questions Gandhi's efforts to integrate Indian Muslims, upholds the necessity of the caste system, bans beef consumption, and deems the use of any language other than Hindi undesirable (Sharma 2020, 44–46). However, it is important to note that, although it is true that the organizations representing the "first vision of India" have largely inherited an apology for the caste system since their inception, it can generally be said that there is no consensus on the acceptability of such a social system, given the increasingly vocal advocates of abolishing or radically revising the caste system, such as the current head of the RSS, Mohan Bhagwat (see The Hindu 2022).

The administrative division into the Bombay, Madras, and Bengal presidencies further deepened regional differences during British colonial rule. Simultaneously, the North was shaped by Brahmanical Hinduism, while the South has a long tradition of resistance to the caste system, exemplified by movements like Dravidar Kazhagam led by Periyar (a title given to Ramasamy meaning "respected/elder" in Tamil). The Dravidian movement is founded on the idea that the people of South India – speakers of the Dravidian language group, including Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam[1] – constitute a distinct and clearly demarcated nation that must be freed from northern influence. This influence was seen in the dominance of the Brahmin elite, the imposition of Sanskrit and Hindi, and broader attempts to superimpose alien value systems and linguistic codes onto the authentic Dravidian culture – especially the original Tamil cultural heritage (Pillalamarri 2024). These divergent historical trajectories have produced distinct

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[1]   The Tamil language is most widely spoken in the state of Tamil Nadu as well as in Puducherry; the Telugu language is most prevalent in the states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh; Kannada is primarily used in Karnataka, while Malayalam is spoken by the inhabitants of Kerala and Lakshadweep.

political cultures that have become increasingly visible and pronounced in the 21st century.

In parallel with the development of political cultures, different linguistic and ethnic identities have emerged. Hindi gradually became the language of hegemony, while the southern languages – within the broader *Dravida* category – developed as cultural and political alternatives. In this context, language is not merely a means of communication, but the core of political identity. To understand the importance of language in center–periphery relations, one needs only examine the language identity politics proclaimed across India (Đogatović 2025b, 119–133). The dominance of Hindi introduced the term *Hindi belt* into academic discourse, referring to the states where Hindi is dominant – especially as a component of the broader Hindutva political platform. Southern languages have remained deeply rooted in these populations' cultural and political identities. Immediately after gaining independence, there were numerous demands to reorganize federal units along linguistic lines. Particularly significant is the situation in Tamil Nadu, where Tamil identity is strongly tied to the Tamil population in Sri Lanka. Linguistic issues remain an unresolved source of tension and a potential trigger for institutional reconfiguration.

Religious and cultural differences constitute another key layer of this regional divide. Although various powers have historically ruled over the Indian subcontinent, the social role of the dominant religion has remained significant, and Hindutva may continue to be a socially dominant force in the coming decades, regardless of whether the BJP remains in power after the 2029 elections (Đogatović 2025c, 116). What is particularly important in the context of this paper is the fact that religion is an extremely important factor in electoral competition (Mofidi 2014, 20). The dominance of Hinduism, hardline Hindutva, and political nationalism in the North was revitalized with the rise to power of the BJP, now led by the former governor of Gujarat – *Narendra Damodardas Modi*. Three electoral cycles later – two *political nations* are now further apart than ever before. In contrast to the North, permeated by the influence of political Hinduism, the South of India represents a true oasis of secular pluralism. The ideas propagated by Ramasamy – such as rationalism, women's and minority rights, social reform, anti-Semitism, etc. – have been most fully realized in the southern states. In this region, there is a stronger presence of Christians, a deeper secular and liberal tradition, and resistance to the social and political dominance of Hinduism is carried

by social reformist movements with a long tradition. According to one study, 64% of Hindus believe that being Hindu is very important to being truly Indian (Evans and Sahgal 2021, 2). The same study shows that 69% of Hindus in northern and 83% in central India strongly associate Hindu identity with national identity, compared to only 42% of Hindus from the southern parts of India (Evans and Sahgal 2021, 3). Also indicative are the data on the share of Hindus who believe that a Hindu must not eat beef (72%), must believe in God (49%), and must regularly visit temples (48%), while 77% of Muslims believe that a person cannot be considered a Muslim if they eat pork; 60% and 61% of Muslims believe, respectively, that a Muslim must believe in God and regularly attend mosques (Evans and Sahgal 2021, 3).

A significant contribution to understanding contemporary religious stratification in India based on regional belonging is provided through the study of Santhosh Chandrashekar, who points to the significance of the Brahminical conception of India as *Āryāvarta* and the caste structure of Indian society as the logic underpinning the contemporary hegemony of northern India and the provincialization of southern India and lower castes (Chandrashekar 2021, 1). The concept developed from this approach is termed *northernism* (institutionalized domination of the North over the South), and it highlights the popularization of an image of India as synonymous with the Brahminized northern part of the country (Chandrashekar 2021, 1). The *Vindhya Mountain range*, which stretches from Gujarat in the west almost to Varanasi in the east, marks the natural southern border of *Āryāvarta*, beyond which, according to legends and ancient beliefs, the "real Indians" do not live. This range, approximately 1,100 km long, is no longer just a geographical divide (Mukherjee 2024). Thus, in northwestern India and throughout the Indo-Gangetic plain, the "true" Indians live – which, many centuries later, served as the basis for developing the Aryan invasion/domination theory (Chandrashekar 2021, 5). For more on caste stratification and the position of the Dalit caste (formerly *untouchables*, see Đogatović and Krstić 2023, 8–10).

It is also important to present several claims in support of the economic and demographic differences between the North and South. A deeper analysis reveals developmental asymmetries due to differing social and political cultures, and these are often utilized as political resources since they directly translate into political representation, especially in the case of the disproportionate influence on the number of seats in the lower house. Studies confirm that in the mid-1980s, a

definitive economic divergence between the South and North occurred – that is, it was during this decade that a significant gap in economic performance between the northern and southern federal units was formed (Paul and Sridhar 2015, 117). Southern Indian states have a higher *per capita* income, and their economic growth outpaces that of central and northern federal units (Evans 2021). The five southern states contribute approximately 30% of the federal GDP (Jain 2025). Crucial research in this field has been conducted by Ashish Bos and later by Choithani and Khan. While Bose's study was carried out in the early 21st century, Choithani and Khan highlight the ongoing socio-economic trends in northern and southern India. Taking four federal units from the North (Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan) and four from the South (Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala), Bose identifies trends in the changing population share of these eight federal units relative to India's total population: in 1991 it was 39.6%:23.2%; in 2021 it was 44.6%:19.8% and in 2051 it is projected to be 51.4%:16.5% (Bose 2000, 1698). He also notes changes in the share of these federal units in the number of seats in the Lok Sabha: in 1991 it was 204:129; in 2021 it was 219:119; and in 2051 it will be 229:113 (Bose 2000, 1698). Thus, the *Bharat* region will be able to further capitalize on its demographic advantage in the decades to come. The other side of the coin lies in economic indicators, where Bose points out significant disparities in (1) illiteracy rates (ranging from 28% to 65% in the North vs. 7% to 54% in the South), (2) infant mortality rates (105 to 137 deaths per 1,000 births in the North, vs. 16 to 84 in the South), and (3) female fertility rates (women in northern India give birth to between 3.6 and 4.8 children on average, compared to 2 to 2.85 in the South) (Bose 2000, 1699). Paul and Sridhar, by comparing economic, social, and political indicators and results of southern and northern federal units, also arrived at numerous significant conclusions supporting the thesis of two fundamentally differently oriented and successful regions (Paul and Sridhar 2015, 89–116). Choithani and Khan highlight the increase in internal (labor) migration from North to South Indiaand the unavoidable slowdown in India's population growth and aging (Choithani and Wali Khan 2024, 1–2). Thus, the South exhibits higher GDP growth rates and better health and education indicators (with the contrast between Kerala and Uttar Pradesh being particularly striking), while the North holds a numerical, demographic advantage that secures an increasing number of seats in the lower house. Kerala, for example, is the most

secular federal unit in India: cow slaughter is permitted, beef is served in restaurants, and the BJP had never won a single seat there until the 2024 elections (Anklesaria Aiyar 2020, 11). On the other hand, despite Hindu nationalism, the BJP can be remarkably flexible – in the state of Goa, for instance, the party allowed cow slaughter and beef to be served in restaurants to appeal to Christian voters (Anklesaria Aiyar 2020, 19). Data from the early 2010s shows that foreign direct investment (FDI) in just one southern state – Karnataka – amounted to USD 1.53 billion, which is 2.5 times more than the combined total FDI in four northern states (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh) (Choithani and Wali Khan 2024, 5).

Demographic strength and lower levels of development are increasingly being used as political resources, particularly by the BJP, a phenomenon often referred to as the *demographic dividend*. However, the question of fairness in the federal allocation of resources remains open, especially in light of the vast differences in demography and economic development. This chapter concludes with a striking research finding: a child born in Kerala is more likely to reach the age of five than a child born in the United States, whereas a child born in Uttar Pradesh is less likely to reach the age of five than a child born in Afghanistan (Mukherjee 2024). This quote should serve as a powerful indicator of the depth of India's structural regional inequalities.

POLITICAL SYSTEM, PARTY LANDSCAPE, AND INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRATION

Before the analysis turns to the 2024 general elections, it is necessary to consider two key aspects of Indian politics: (1) the structure of the party system and (2) the mechanisms of institutional integration.

In this context, a deep partisan polarization between the country's North and South is immediately apparent. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), led by Prime Minister Modi, dominates the northern and central parts of the country, drawing on Hindutva, Hinduis, and the Hindi language. Its campaign often emphasizes centralization and the idea of national unity under a single political banner. In contrast, the southern federal units display a fragmented, pluralistic support for regional and opposition parties that, at the core of their political agendas, nonetheless share numerous common values. Among the most successful southern regional parties are the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), Anna

Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS), Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP), Telugu Desam Party (TDP), the Communist Party of India (Marxist), and many others. Though ideologically diverse, these parties share a set of values: a commitment to secularism, anti-caste politics, protection of regional identity, and resistance to centralization. DMK, for instance, is often considered the paradigm of southern politics, promoting the values of Dravidian heritage and linguistic autonomy. These shared values form the core of the previously mentioned common ground among many political actors and electoral participants from the southern federal units.

Despite these deep divisions, India still functions as a coherent federation, owing to strong institutional integration mechanisms. Five main factors sustain this cohesion: (1) economic dependence on the central government, particularly through tax policy and budgetary regulations; (2) shared institutions such as Parliament, the Election Commission, the judiciary, the military, and public administration; (3) pan-Indian issues such as relations with China and Pakistan, counterterrorism, and internal security; (4) crisis management – from the COVID-19 pandemic to economic and environmental disasters – which often fosters solidarity and coordination between the center and the federal units; and (5) the threat of force from the center – especially in cases of the development of intra-state armed and/or secessionist tendencies. These processes represent a complex dynamic in which deep political polarization unfolds within a formally unified institutional framework. That very framework will be examined in the next chapter, through an analysis of the 2024 election results and how they have reinforced regional differences.

POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE DIVIDE: THE 2024 GENERAL ELECTIONS

The 2024 general elections marked a turning point in India's contemporary political history – not because of the results themselves, but because of how voting patterns reaffirmed and even deepened the country's regional, cultural, and ideological divisions. While the northern and central states largely remained aligned with the Hindu-nationalist narrative and supported the ruling BJP-led coalition, the South demonstrated strong resistance to this model, backing regional parties and the opposition INDIA alliance (*Hindi-speaking heartland*) (Selvaraj 2024). This divide is not merely partisan – it reflects deeply

rooted differences in political culture, historical experience, and visions for India's future.

This chapter analyzes how the *Bharat*:*Dravida* dichotomy became politically tangible through the election results. The focus is on the spatial distribution of votes and seats, comparisons with previous electoral cycles, and the ideological and programmatic differences between the main actors. The goal is to demonstrate that the 2024 general elections were not merely a power struggle, but an institutional mirror of the cultural and political fragmentation that increasingly shapes Indian society and democracy.

The elections were held in seven phases from April 19th to June 1st, with 543 members of the lower house of Parliament elected by direct vote. This time, Narendra Modi secured his third consecutive term with support from the *Telugu Desam Party* (Andhra Pradesh) and the *Janata Dal* (Bihar). Over 968 million citizens were eligible to vote, and approximately 642 million exercised that right. The BJP contested as part of the existing NDA coalition, while the INC led the opposing INDIA alliance. The BJP won 240 seats, or 36.56% of the vote (about 236 million votes), while the entire NDA coalition secured 42.5% of the vote and 293 seats. On the other hand, the INDIA alliance garnered 40.6% of the vote and 234 seats, with the INC alone winning 99 seats and approximately 137 million votes (21.19%) (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2024, cited in: Đogatović 2025c, 111).

The elections were held amid deep political and social polarization, and unlike the previous two electoral cycles, in which the INC suffered heavy defeats, 2024 was marked by the presentation of a clearly binary framework: NDA versus the INDIA alliance. Ideologically, there was an intensification of Hindutva rhetoric, promotion of the Hindi language's national significance, and the concept of a unified nation, while the opposition emphasized federalism, social justice, and secularism. In this sense, the elections resembled a referendum on the future model of the Indian state more than a conventional party and coalition contest.

The geographic and ideological voting map reveals a tripartite division of political space: (1) the *Hindi-Hindu-Hindutva belt* – dominated by the BJP, especially in Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, and Odisha, marked by media polarization, strong politico-religious mobilization, and economic underdevelopment; (2) the *anti-Hindutva belt* – with strong support for the INDIA alliance and regional secular parties such as *Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam* (Tamil

Nadu), *Samajwadi Party* (Uttar Pradesh), *Shiv Sena* (Maharashtra), among others, characterized by higher levels of general education, less susceptibility to manipulation, and greater resistance to BJP rhetoric; (3) the *transitional belt* – states such as Haryana, Punjab, and Rajasthan, where the most intense contest between national and regional actors unfolded. Andhra Pradesh also stands as a strong example of a *swing state*, reflecting the process of *Hindutvaization* of politics, as the shift from the *YSRCP & TDP* (22 + 3 seats) coalition to the *NDA & YSRCP* (21 + 4 seats) bloc illustrates (Naveen 2024).

In support of the theses of this study and from an electoral-analytical perspective, this section of the chapter presents the eight most important individual election results:

1. At the national level, the NDA dropped from 348 seats (2019) to 293 seats (2024), a decline of 10.12% of the total number of parliamentary seats;
2. In the North, the NDA dropped from 195/229 (2019) to 140/229 (2024) seats, a 10.12% decline, while in the South it rose from 31/129 (2019) to 49/129 (2024), an increase of 3.31%;
3. Compared to the 2019 elections, the NDA "won over" Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, and Telangana (+37 seats);
4. At the national level, INDIA rose from 53 seats (2019) to 186 seats (2024), an increase of 24.48% of the total number of parliamentary seats;
5. INDIA rose both in the North from 14/229 (2019) to 84/229 (2024) seats, a growth of 12.89%, and in the South from 28/129 (2019) to 56/129 (2024) seats, representing a growth of 5.15%;
6. Compared to the 2019 elections, INDIA succeeded in "winning" Bihar, Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh (+137 seats);
7. Other parties, running independently, declined from 142 independent seats (2019) to 64 independent seats (2024), a drop of 14.36%;
8. Power shifted in two federal units in the North (Haryana and Uttar Pradesh) and four federal units in the South (Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana).

Some patterns that emerge include the following: (1) BJP, or rather the NDA coalition, paradoxically and despite regrouping in many federal units, may in fact be the biggest loser of the election; (2) there is a significant difference in support for the NDA in northern India (61.13% of seats) and southern India (37.98% of seats); (3) the

inclusion of numerous "third parties" into the NDA/INDIA coalitions further intensified political polarization (a two-coalition model); (4) in 6 out of 14 federal units in the North and South, there was a complete change of power; (5) the South has not entirely rejected the NDA (only seven seats fewer than the INDIA coalition), nor has the North completely rejected INDIA (70 seats more than five years ago). However, at the national level, despite certain aberrations (e.g., NDA victories in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, INDIA in Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, and divided seats in Goa), the South remains a bastion of anti-NDA sentiment, while the North continues to reinforce the character of the Hindi-Hindu-Hindutva belt. One indicator of polarization is the strong allegiance to the NDA in the western part of the country (Gujarat and Rajasthan) and to the INDIA coalition and third parties in the eastern part (West Bengal, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, and Nagaland). Additionally, the NDA was nearly equally successful in both small (up to 10 seats) and large (10 or more seats) federal units – winning over 50% of seats in 10 out of 18 large and 8 out of 18 small units. On the other hand, anti-NDA parties also "won" half of these units – 8 out of 18 large and 10 out of 18 small. This further confirms the polarization indicator.

Cultural, economic, and educational factors have strongly influenced the formation of these political/electoral patterns. While identity politics and religious symbolism (Ayodhya, cow protection, attacks on Muslims, etc.) dominated in the North, values of civic resistance, inclusion, and secularism contributed to resistance against centralization in the South. On the other hand, one of the decisive reasons for the BJP losing its absolute majority of seats in Parliament is a certain manipulation of the interests and fears of the lower castes (especially Dalits). On the other hand, the votes of Muslim voters consolidated around the coalition between the INC and the Samajwadi Party, which this time ran in alliance (Sen and Khattri 2024). Differences in education levels, patriarchal structures, poverty, and the caste system have further deepened this regional divide. Research has shown that Muslims and Christians predominantly supported the INC and its allies, especially in the South and the far East of the country (Bhattacharya 2024). In Kerala, 18% of the population is Christian and 26% Muslim, and the INC managed to win 18 out of 20 seats, which is mainly attributed to minority community support (Bhattacharya 2024).

Indicators also point to the escalation of political regionalization and the erosion of national unity. Southern states increasingly demand economic and political autonomy, while BJP representatives from the North insist on a new federalism through a centralized model. Slogans such as "one nation, one language, one religion" increasingly clash with alternative visions emphasizing "one federation, many peoples, many languages". Although the BJP has retained key positions in Aryavarta, its presence in states such as Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, and eastern regions indicates a broader ambition for control. Nevertheless, the growth of regional parties and the strengthening of the INDIA coalition have led to a decline in national political homogeneity.

The election results have shifted the balance between the two main political actors. Future analyses will almost certainly move toward the thesis that the political system is transitioning from a dominant-party model to a two-party or two-coalition arrangement. In the coming years, it will become clearer whether this new model will lead to (de)stabilization of social relations, and whether India will continue its path toward greater centralization or evolve into a true federation. The idea of a consociational democracy and even confederalism is not beyond the realm of possibility.

The implications of these elections on the state of secularism, the rise of identity politics, and the development of political polarization have been discussed elsewhere (see Đogatović 2025a; Đogatović 2025c). The growing influence of religious values in state policy and the shrinking space for opposition call into question the theoretical model of twin toleration and highlights the risk of a merger between religious and democratic institutions. Opposition forces in the South increasingly position themselves as defenders of Nehruvian and Gandhian legacies. Political tactics – such as weakening institutions, exploiting security narratives, and marginalizing the opposition – have contributed to the erosion of this democratic principle.

Several key questions arise – is regional polarization permanent or temporary? Will India move toward deeper federalization, or continue the process of centralization? To what extent have political divisions become institutionalized? These are just some of the open questions, with potential answers ranging from maintaining the current status quo to ideas of confederalization, federal reforms, political instability, and decentralized pluralism.

There are four key conclusions of this chapter: (1) The 2024 elections represent the culmination of India's geographic-political division; (2) Support for the BJP and regional parties reflects a segment of profound socio-cultural and economic differences; (3) The regionalization of politics raises questions about the sustainability of the current federal system; (4) The process of divergence between two political visions of India – Bharat and Dravida – is in full swing.

CONCLUSION:
REGIONALIZATION, SEPARATION, OR...?

The results of the 2024 general elections, as well as the broader socio-political patterns that accompanied them, raise fundamental questions about the direction in which the Indian federation is headed – whether we will witness an ever-tightening regionalization of politics, almost at the verge of institutional and substantive polarization – or whether this is merely a transient stage of a dynamic democratic system in which resistance to centralization and homogenization appears as corrections rather than threats. There is also the question of whether Indian federalism, in its current form, can absorb the growing regional tensions or whether deeper reform is necessary – perhaps even toward asymmetric federalism or a confederal structure. Finally, the question arises whether India is undergoing a process of quiet separation or is searching for a new formula of national unity – one that better fits its complex, plural, and increasingly polarized reality.

The hypothetical framework of this work has been confirmed repeatedly. The first hypothesis, about the increasingly pronounced political and cultural dichotomy between the northern and southern parts of India, has been fully confirmed. The other two hypotheses – about the ideal-typical polarization and the dominance of NDA/BJP in the north and regional parties in the south – have shown partial validity, considering the existence of exceptions, such as the intra-southern rivalry between Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, but the tendencies remain more than clear (Naveen 2024). The 2024 elections have solidified the political map division of India: the north has firmly aligned with the Hindu-nationalist discourse, while the south remains marked as a space of pluralism, secularism, and regional autonomy.

Since the mid-1980s, the dominant political discourse has increasingly aligned with a cultural reservoir marked by confessional

and caste divisions, thus encouraging a type of politics that motivates voters to vote based on narrow, communal identifications – often against their own rational judgment (the so-called vote bank) – where the INC tried to mobilize minority votes, especially Muslim and other marginalized groups, while the BJP systematically built its own voter base among the Hindu majority population (Mofidi 2014, 21). On the other hand, the greatest barrier to the complete Hinduisation of India is about 200 million Muslims (15% of the population). However, despite fears of demographic rise – it is estimated that by 2050 India will have 1.3 billion Hindus and 300 million Muslims (Khan and Lutful 2021, 6). Nevertheless, this does not prevent the Sangh Parivar and its militant wing, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, from constantly manipulating data about the degree of illegal Muslim migration from Bangladesh and Pakistan and the potential demographic rise that would threaten the existence of the Hindu Rashtra (Deshmukh 2021, 6).

Thus, it is not only a matter of geographical division, but also of cultural and economic differences that have permanently marked the relations between the north and the south. However, in terms of politics, this divide is no longer as pronounced as it was in the first decades after independence. While party lines were once clearer – with the Congress dominating both the north and the south, and the BJP having no influence in the southern states – contemporary political dynamics show greater intermingling. In the meantime, the BJP has gained power in Karnataka and is gradually expanding its influence in other parts of the south, while the INC faces a decline in support at the national level. At the same time, regional parties are gaining strength in the north by mobilizing the Dalit electorate, with major parties such as the BJP and INC increasingly seeking to incorporate intra-Dalit divisions into their strategies. In other words, the north-south cultural-geographical framework remains important, but the political landscape today is significantly more fluid and subject to new forms of coalitions and realignments. Federal cohesion is increasingly questioned – not necessarily in terms of formal secession, but as a crisis of national consensus. The key question becomes – can one party, such as the BJP, legitimately govern India if it systematically loses support in a large part of the south, or is a paradigm already forming in which regional parties, such as *Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam* or *All India Trinamool Congress*, take on the role of balancers and bearers of a new political pluralism? This dynamic opens space for the potential thesis of *de*

facto confederalism. India functions as a network of sub-nations, with an increasingly loose institutional reliance on the center.

Already at the beginning of the previous post-election period, India became more centralized and less liberal – the second Modi government managed to shift India from a de facto Hindu-majority state to a de jure Hindu-majority state through the adoption of controversial policies and laws such as the revocation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, introduction of the National Register of Citizens, and amendments to the citizenship law (Jaffrelot and Verniers 2020, 1–3).

The idea of one India with multiple political cultures is becoming more present, and the Hindi-dominant model is less viable by peaceful means. BJP's centralizing impulses not only deepen regional tensions but also stimulate demands for deeper institutional reform – in the direction of asymmetric federalism.

At this point, several guidelines are proposed: first, a clearer division of competencies between levels of government is needed, especially in the areas of finance and cultural policy; second, overcoming Hindi normativity and recognizing multiple cultural models of Indian identity is essential; and third, institutions must become spaces of inclusivity, not assimilation. Such an approach has a strong chance of preserving the pluralistic character of India and mitigating the centripetal and centrifugal pressures that divide it.

The question remains open – whether India is on the path to transforming into a Bharat-for-all model or whether the southern states, led by the idea of Dravida Nadu, will gradually distance themselves from a unitary national vision. Instead of answers, a call for re-examination remains. The future of India does not lie in homogeneity but in embracing complexity – not in cornering a single principle of nationhood, but in building dynamic pluralism as the foundation of new national cohesion. If the southern population gains the impression of political marginalization, louder demands for constitutional restructuring could arise, leading to deeper decentralization of power and broader authority for individual states, and if these demands are ignored, there is a risk that some more radical voices in the south may openly advocate the idea of political separation (Tharoor 2025). *Hic iacet lepus*.

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ДВЕ ИНДИЈЕ: ФЕДЕРАЛИЗАМ, РЕГИОНАЛИЗАЦИЈА И ИЗБОРИ 2024. ГОДИНЕ

Резиме

Овај рад истражује дубоке друштвене, културне и политичке поделе између северне и јужне Индије, са посебним освртом на њихов утицај на резултате парламентарних избора 2024. године. Полазећи од хипотезе да се подела Индије на север и југ – заснована на језичким, религијским, економским и културним разликама – директно одражава на политичку динамику, у раду се анализира како су се те разлике институционализовале кроз партијски систем и регионално политичко организовање. Север, у којем доминира хинду-националистичка Баратија цаната партија, супротстављена је југу, широм кога јачају регионалне странке и либералнији политички дискурс, што доприноси дубљем развоју двопартијског односно двокоалиционог система и продубљивању политичке поларизације. У раду се такође разматра и историјски контекст односно утицај колонијализма, религијских и културних идентитета, као и економске диспропорције која подупире регионалне тензије. Истраживање показује да се федерални оквир Индије суочава са изазовима који потичу из растуће политичке и културно-идентитетске поларизације, што у коначном оставља далекосежне последице по стабилност и интеграцију државе.

Кључне речи: Индија, политичка поларизација, регионализам, федерализам, Баратија цаната партија, парламентарни избори