Media, Populism, Nationalism and Federal India

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
	In contemporary times, media serves as a critical intermediary between populist movements, nationalist ideas and the structure of federal governance in India. This paper argues that media comprises traditional print, television and the digital platforms often aligning with populist and nationalist movements. Media creates a perception of 'national unity' and 'consciousness' through the discourse of communication and sentiments of people. It has promoted homogenization of national narratives that created a significant effort on the principles of pluralism and rights of the people. Populism is linked with cultural nationalism as it is fundamental strategy to integrate the identity of people. The populist strategies are followed by dominant politics addressing the interests of majority communities in the country. The notion of nationalism covers the core perspective of symbols of state power such as defense and security. It enables political actors to mobilize support by emphasizing national integrity and security. India's federal structure relies on media that reflects the interests, languages and concerns of its diverse states. The media actively is utilized for shaping Indian nationalism traditionally or digitally. The influence of social media has given a new dimension to the concept of nationalism. The integration of news broadcasting in different states across the country enhances constitutional space for pluralism. Media covers inter-state disputes and demonstrates how national media frames challenges through national

integrity. The rapid dissemination of populist and nationalist movements accelerates political polarization. The requirement of social media platforms consolidates unified, national political narrative. Media has served as a pivotal tool for spreading information at the expense of democratic norms and institutional checks and balances. The necessary conditions for a robust federal democracy depend on populism, accountable government and fundamentally decentralized and plural media landscape. The advocacy to foster decentralized and pluralist media sustains nationalist sentiment, democratic negotiations and institutional reforms essential for federal India.

1.1 Introduction

The link between media, populism, nationalism and federal India represents a critical and complex field of study in contemporary Indian politics. This relationship is essential for understanding the evolving nature of Indian democracy, social cohesion and the balance of power between the central government and the states. Populism is defined a political style or ideology that mediates people against corrupt elite that is articulated in India. Media especially traditional and digital with regards to social media serves as the primary vehicle for the populist discourse allowing leaders to look into traditional filters and communicate directly with the people across. This mediates populism with nationalism to construct a unified 'national' identity at the expense of minority groups or political elites. These dynamics play important role to structure federal India creating pressure on the decentralized political system and varying responses from regional political actors and state-level media. Ensuring timely communication of information and decisions to the citizens, media plays important role in democratic functioning. (National Institute of Mass Communication and Journalism, Ahmedabad , n.d.)

India's federal structure is characterized by a strong center that is challenged by the homogenization and centralizing tendencies that inherent national populism. Populist narratives attempt to have a monolithic national identity which clashes with India's linguistic, cultural and political diversity that threatens the autonomy and pluralism protected by the federal system. A significant portion of the contemporary Indian media at the national level has been critiqued for its role in favoring the populist ruling ideology. It has also contributed to the marginalization or biased representation of regional voices and opposition that undermines function of democracy necessary for federal relations. India's federalism has been

shaped by the interaction between political actor at the Centre and state level and compelled government inhibiting greater challenges. (Ghosh, 2022)

Rise of contemporary right-wing populism and nationalism globally has strategically emphasized the complex impact on India's federal structure. Contextualizing this phenomenon within federal India highlights the inherent tensions between a centralizing national ideology and decentralized federal structure. The centralizing nationalist discourse encounters resistance from regional populism in various states such as West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. These regional movements use media and linguistic identity to counter towards state autonomy. This challenges India's Constitutional checks and balances as the role of media shifts from democratic platform to compete populist agendas impacting country's cooperative federalism.

1.2 Problem Statement

How the contemporary populist-nationalist movement in India critically enabled by a favorable media ecosystem actively undermines the foundational principles of Indian federalism?

1.3 Research Questions

How does the rise of mediated Hindu nationalist populism affect the fragile balance of India's federal structure and what are the implications for democratic pluralism?

How does the dominant populist-nationalist narrative disseminate through traditional and digital media impacts the autonomy and power of state governments in India?

1.4 Hypothesis

The rise of populism and nationalist discourse in mainstream media weakens the power of regional political actors accelerating the erosion of Indian federalism in favor of centralized governance strategy.

1.5 Thesis statement

This paper argues the rise of media through majoritarian populism and Hindu nationalism in contemporary India challenges the constitutional spirit of federalism by centralizing power, homogenizing diverse identities and marginalizing regional and minority voices through narrative control.

1.6 Methodology

This research emphasizes qualitative research analysis and case study approach. The primary sources are news media reports, speeches, social media. The secondary method is the analysis of data and elaboration strategies.

2.1 Literature Review

Populism emerged during the early ages of emergency period that preserved the democratic structure. The strength of India was Mrs. Indira Gandhi as she led the country into the forefront. Populism in India is a major concern in the political landscape and the leaders are highly reliable upon the support of the public. Populist leaders bring reforms and deliver services to the people to gain support of the masses. This has led to a phenomenon where parties are in power at both the national and subnational levels that contributes to the political environment. Populism focuses on the strategy of dividing right-wing populism that emphasizes nationalism and left-wing populism that emphasizes inequality and injustice. The access to voters across the states is a strategic advantage for the political party such as the Bhartiya Janata Party. The struggle between the positions of the coalitions based political system is a vital factor of political identity in India. (Khalid, 2024)

Nationalism refers to the ethnic and cultural nationalism especially the core ideology of Hindutva. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) formed Hindu nationalism known as Hindutva. It focused on promoting values and culture within Hinduism. The populist ideology focuses on the portrayal of the BJP as the protector of the Hindu culture and values while defending the Hindus from any threat within the nation. Mediated populism has played important role of technology in constructing people and propagating narratives. The Indian media has portrayed Modi's image as divine figure in the Indian politics.

Populism refers to the thin ideology that divides the society into two antagonistic groups such as the 'pure people' and the 'corrupt elite'. For the populist leaders to succeed they establish themselves as the sole authentic voice of the people. The elites exercise disproportionate influence on the socio-political, economic and cultural landscape within the society. The media plays a central role in this landscape. The elite has increasingly become a polarizing figure in the political discourse of the right who constitutes the elite differ across geographies. They represent the constructed process through different contexts. the ancient times signified the right and left oriented parties which deployed anti-elite rhetoric for various political goals. Populist leaders represented the unified will of the people in opposition to the enemy embodied by the liberal system. The politics and processes work behind the people making and the

fashioning of the figure of the elite that is antithetical to the people. The rise of Bharatiya Janata Party conceptualized to hegemonize Hindutva with the recent makeover of the political narrative. The contradiction of the Hindutva ideology using anti-elite rhetoric by some specific elite group is mitigated by the deployment of neo-liberalism adopted to subcontinental specificities that brings in the development. (Roohi, n.d.)

The relationship between the media, authoritarianism and populism is one of the most critical dynamics in contemporary India. The media is the fourth pillar of democracy and a watchdog that ensures transparency in the system. In the hands of populist leaders and under the authoritarianism of leaders, the media is transformed into a tool for perception control, the marginalization of the dissent and the manufacture of popular consent. Understanding this shift requires examining how populism feeds on media spectacle and how authoritarianism dismantles the autonomy of the press. Media and populism undergo rapid changes in which the current forms and institutions organize politics and development. (Monckeberg, n.d.)

3.1 Media landscape in India

The press is a powerful factor in building and developing Indian nationalism and the nationalist movement, social, cultural, political and economic. The national movement on the political side was possible because of the facility of political education and propaganda provided by the press. With the help of press, the Indian nationalist group were able to popularize among the people the ideas of representative government, liberty and democratic institutions. The press is a weapon in the hands of the nationalist groups to popularize among the people their respective political programs, policies and methods of struggle and to form organizations with a broad popular basis. (Desai, 2000) The media becomes a weapon to construct solidarity ties between the progressive forces of different countries. The vital role of social media is an emerging trend in building strong national sentiment and consciousness among the Indian people in the development and consolidation of their growing nationalist movements that forges bonds of fraternity with people and culture across the world.

The influence of public opinion is equally important. Individual media persons and academicians are shown favors and given assignments which are very lucrative when compared to local salaries. The privatization and denationalization of media especially electronic media play vital role. The management of structural adjustment is a discourse that occurs as a result of the adoption of structural adjustment policies and this has to do with the growth of fundamentalism. (Francine R. Frankel, 2000)

India has media landscapes with over 900 TV channels, 550 radio stations and 100 million registered publications. 560 million people use the internet, 400 million are on WhatsApp, 260 million on Facebook, 200 million used Tik Tok earlier. Telegram users are over 30 million and 12 million has Twitter accounts. Media is a multi-layered ecosystem which is defined by dual speed growth where traditional media remains as the relevant digital platform redefining the economics of the industry. The shift in the growth of social media nowadays have democratized content creator which has empowered individuals from rural pockets to become national influences bypassing traditional media gatekeepers. (Menon, n.d.) For a large segment of the population, social media is the usage of internet. The brands have shifted massive portions of their ad spend from television spots.

The industry is witnessing significant consolidation from large-scale mergers creating domestic media capable of competing with global technology. The 'mobile-first' strategy has integrated through live sports, news and entertainment. The rise of Artificial Intelligence personalized content delivery at an unprecedented scale. Despite the growth, media landscape faces challenges. The rapid spread of misinformation and fake news had real-world consequences on public health and social engagement. Social media has empowered marginalized voices and facilitated grassroots activism creating accountability among the government. Media is balanced technological and social platforms with ethical standards of traditional perspective. It is a key driver in positing India as a global leader in innovation and growth. (India's digital advertising surge: Navigating growth in the changing media landscape, 2024-25)

3.2 Centralizing trends and regional resistance through evolution of Indian Federalism

Indian federalism is described as 'quasi-federal' that balances a strong central authority with the linguistic and cultural aspirations of its diverse states. Indian federalism is characterized by 'one-party dominance' asserting federal structure which functioned as unitary system in the post-independence era. This era proved the regional identity was a powerful force to compel the center to reorganize internal boundaries. After emergency, there was a prevalent era of coalitions and the regional parties such as DMK, TMC, and BJD became prominent in ensuring national policy.

There has a shift back toward centralization driven by the single-party majority at the center that visions One Nation, One Tax. The current debate entails India moving toward a Union-state model. Center is strongly necessary for national security and uniform economic growth. In the digital age, social media acts as a double-edged sword allowing center to broadcast a unified national identity empowering regional voice to document and resist every perceived central overreach. The major analyses of Indian federal model and constitutional provisions build dynamic relationship between the center and states

focusing on future trajectories. (Verma, 2025) The future of Indian federalism lies in negotiated federalism where the digital mobilization of regional identities acts as a check against the institutional centralization of power.

3.3 Nationalism from Civic pluralism to cultural majoritarianism

The transition from civic pluralism to cultural majoritarianism represents a fundamental shift in the evolution of India by cultural and religious identity of the majority community. The founders of Inda especially B R Ambedkar and Nehru rejected the European model of the 'Nation-state' and acquired for civic pluralism to achieve unit. Nationalism was defined by the citizenship and the element of civic refers to loyalty towards the Constitution and the democratic institutions of the state. In India, the diversity of the people is to participate in the shared project of development. The vision of unity in diversity is a foundational idea embedding India's Constitution towards the values. (Bag, 2024)

The civic pluralism challenged cultural majoritarianism over the past few years through the ideology of Hindutva. Majoritarianism asserts that the majority community is entitled to a degree of primacy in the state. This shift transforms the nation from a legal entity into a cultural community. The people are defined as a collective group of equal citizens and also a primordial group whose history, symbols and values should dictate the national character. Minorities are expected to assimilate into the majority's cultural mainstream and are labelled as anti-nationals. India is majoritarian state under Narendra Modi with the Bharatiya Janata Party where all are committed to Hindutva ideology or Hindu Nationalism. (Bag, 2024)The approach of civic pluralism has thrived the devolution of power to diverse regions that often favors the principle of 'One Nation, One Election, One Nation, One Tax. In majoritarian system, the will of the people is placed above institutional check. If the majority supports a policy, there is constitutional protection for minorities framed as obstacle to the national interest.

This idea of cultural majoritarianism represents narrowing of the nationalist imaginary. The civic pluralism sought to unite through inclusion and the management of difference, majoritarianism seeks to unite through homogeneity and the assertion of the dominant identity. This also remains as the central difficulty in the Indian politics determining whether the state remains arbiter of rights or becomes a vehicle for cultural vision.

3.4 Fusion and debate of populism and Hindu nationalism

In contemporary India, the fusion of populism and Hindu nationalism has created an ideological force that has redefined the nation's democratic identity. Populism pits the pure people against the corrupt elite.

Hindu nationalism provides cultural substance defining who the people actually are. This fusion suggests that to be truly of the people is to be the part of the Hindu majority while the elite are characterized as westernized intellectuals. Under the leadership of Shri Narendra Modi, the populist people are not just citizens, they are Punya Bhoomi such as Holy Land inheritors. The idea of right-wing populism equates popular will with the interests of the government. India as a leadership discourse takes roots at the level of popular attitudes. (Ashutosh Varshney, 2021)

Unlike traditional media which operates gatekeeping, social media allows for the direct, unmediated communication characteristic of populist leaders. There is a pervasive reach of social media platforms that have become the primary battlefield for this fusion. It enables the rapid dissemination of cultural pride content. The spread of misinformation is instrumental in creating a shared, digitized reality of millions of voters reinforcing the populist claim that the people are being heard over the media.

The debate surrounding this fusion is polarized. The supporters argue that this blend had democratized Indian politics by giving voice to the authentic India who were marginalized. (Ashutosh Varshney, 2021) Critics argue that the fusion has transformed India from a constitutional democracy into an ethnic democracy. When the people are defined by religion, the democratic rights of Muslims and minorities become conditional. This has led to intense debates over the erosion of institutions where the judiciary, media and election bodies are pressured to align with the populist will rather than the rule of law.

3.5 Federalism as a Check on Populism

Federalism and populism exist in a state of productive rift. Populism seeks to unify the people against a perceived elite while federalism fragments the people into smaller and diverse constituencies. Federalism is a majoritarian project that relies on the claim that a single leader or party represents the will of the people bypassing traditional institutions to speak directly to the masses. It serves as the structural roadblock to the consolidation of power through several mechanisms.

In a unitary state, a populist leader can claim to speak for the entire nation. Federalism makes it difficult because it recognizes that the people of India are many peoples with distinct linguistic, cultural and economic identities. When a national leader homogenizes the national identity, regional federal states act as anchor for localized identities preventing a single populist wave over the country. Federal systems distribute power across different tiers of government. Even if a populist party wins a massive mandate at the center, it faces opposition from the state government controlled by different parties. This cooperative friction ensures that national policies must be negotiated rather than forcing populist leader to

compromise with regional elites. It provides a geographical space for the political opposition to survive. When a populist movement dominates the national media, the states serve as an alternative political ideology. These subnational units can experiment with different policy models that provides a counter-narrative to the national populist rhetoric. (Chatterjee, 2022)

Populists claim a monopoly on representation arguing thar they speak for a homogenous people. In this narrative, the people are not a diverse collection of interests but a single morally superior entity. The elite comprises politicians, judicial figures and the technocrats as they prioritize globalist or institutional interests over the national will. Federalism forces a politics of interest over a politics of passion. By creating multiple web points and competing centers of legitimacy, it ensures that the pure people cannot be easily mobilized into a singular force. It transforms the conflict of people vs. elite into state vs. federalism preserving pluralist democracy.
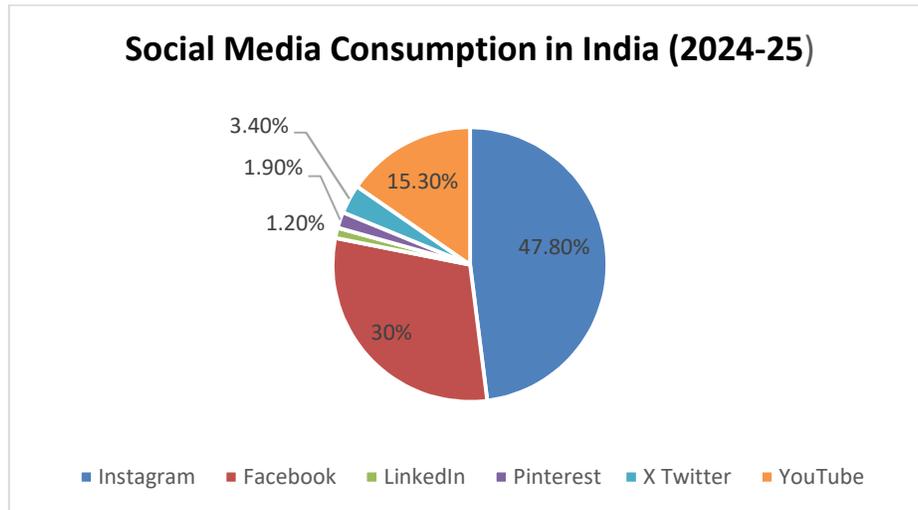
3.6 Media framing of national identity and uniformity

This phenomenon represents a significant shift in India' political communication. It frames uniformity as the primary vehicle for efficiency, unity and progress and overlooks a foundational principle of 'Unity in Diversity'. In the contemporary times, media has framed national interest in the context of slogans such as 'One Language, One Tax, One Nation that represents a structural reality of Federal India. By framing uniformity as the ultimate national interest, any dissent from state is framed as 'anti-national' in India. The shift in media narrative has profound implications for how federalism is governed. If the state government disagrees with the Centre, the media outlets frame the disagreement as blocking the national interest. Media also serves as a vehicle for digital nationalism. The social media and news channels amplify the principle of 'One Nation' making the defense of regional diversity parochial. Populist frame the national benefits from 'One Tax, One Grain, One Card that is credited to the central leadership while implementation failures are framed as the fault of incompetent state administrations. (Gautum, 2025)

Constitutional federalism allows for diverse expressions through Unity in Diversity. Media identifies certain regional languages, cultural differences and linguistic identities to national unity. The media also identifies and preserves regional languages by providing a platform for people. Regional news channels, literature and cinema ensures that local dialect do not fade away under the pressure of a dominant national or western language. The broadcasting of news in mother tongue, the media reaches rural and marginalized people ensuring thar the information is reaching through national dialogue. When a regional language is featured, it articulates identity of the speakers preventing the linguistic marginalization leading to social friction. Media also showcases traditions, festivals and histories of regions of federal

India. It uses certain collective stances transcending shared culture. Traditional and digital media allow for a national conversation where people from different linguistic backgrounds fostering a sense of shared destiny.

4.1 Role of social media in authoritarianism and populism

Social Media Consumption in India (2024-25)

Instagram 47.80% | Facebook 30% | YouTube 15.30% | X Twitter 3.40% | Pinterest 1.90% | LinkedIn 1.20%

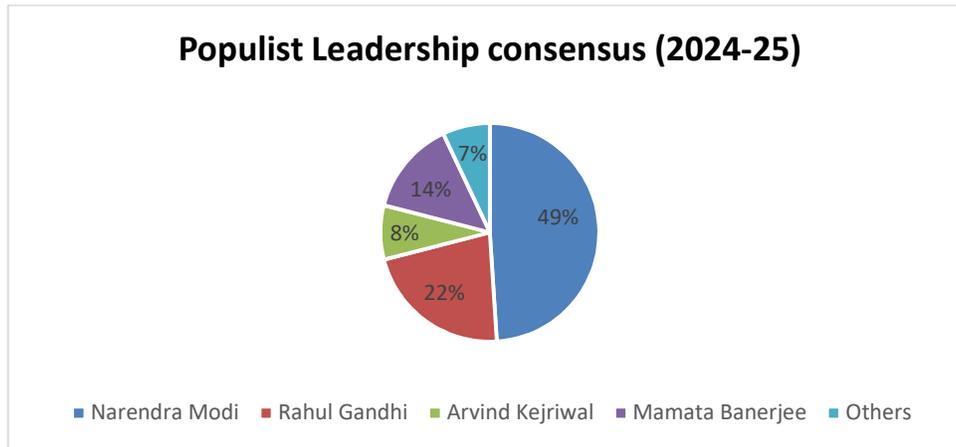- ■ Instagram ■ Facebook ■ LinkedIn ■ Pinterest ■ X Twitter ■ YouTube

The distribution of social media usage in India reveals a dynamic landscape where community-based platforms are dominant. Based on the market share data from 2024-25 here is the breakdown.

The following data reflects the share of social media traffic and engagement across different platforms in India.

- Instagram (47.80%): currently the market leader in terms of engagement and growth is driven by reels and influencer culture among Gen Z.

- Facebook (30%): despite the rise of newer platforms, facebook maintains a massive user base in various territories.

- YouTube (15.30%): while its market share is 15.3%, its reach is the highest in India with over 462 million active users who use it for long form of video, education and entertainment.

- X Twitter(3.40%): remains the primary hub for real-time news, political discourse and official communications.

- Pinterest (1.90%) and LinkedIn (1.20%): these platforms serve specific purposes such as the creative inspiration and LinkedIn is used for professional networking and Busines-2-Business marketing.

4.2 Populist leadership consensus (2022-25)

Populist Leadership consensus (2024-25)

Legend: ■ Narendra Modi ■ Rahul Gandhi ■ Arvind Kejriwal ■ Mamata Banerjee ■ Others

- The following chart represents the preference share for 'Choice for Prime Minister' serving as the necessary proxy for the populist reach and national appeal of the leaders for 2024-25.

- The most populist figure Shri Narendra Modi (49%) seen strongest from 2024-25, as the period of 2019-22 transitioned into a more contested dominance. His high rating is sustained by the network of beneficiaries who receive direct government support.

- The second populist figure is Mr. Rahul Gandhi (22%) who jumped significantly in 2024. This reflects a successful counter-populist narrative shifting from democratic ideals to issues of unemployment and inflation.

- Mrs. Mamata Banerjee (14%) and Arvind Kejriwal (8%) command significant pocket of influence strategy. Their share indicates a large portion of Indian electorate who prioritized linguistic and cultural identities over centralized national narrative.

- The 'Others'(7%) category represents leaders such as Akhilesh Yadav and Yogi Aditynath.

- The overall data centers around 'Modi-centric' government moving towards to a more multi-populist environment where diverse regional voices are essential for national governance.

4.3 Perspectives on Nationalism in Federal India

- In the contemporary landscape from 2023-25, nationalism has evolved between narratives and regional identities. Based on the data analysis, there is prevalent nationalistic discourse.

- Pluralist nationalism has polarized significant majority (79 %) of Indian believing that India belongs to all religions equally. This perspective emphasizes constitutional values and a multi-cultural national identity.

Perspectives on Nationalism in India

- Pluralist Perspective ■ Majoritarian Perspective ■ Regional Perspective ■
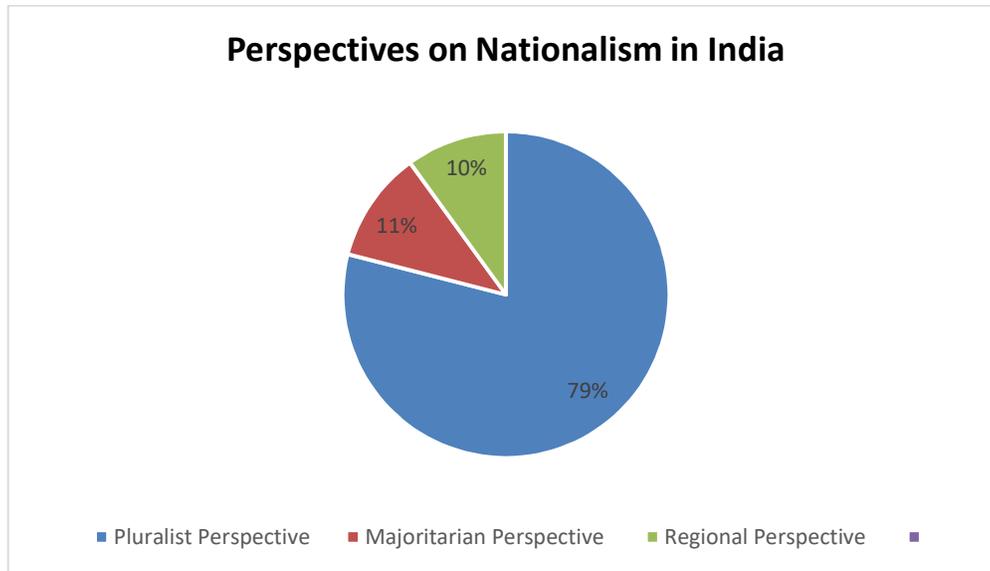
- (11%) of Hindus believe that Hindus are religious nationalists by seeking national identity in Hindu heritage and cultural milestones such as the Ram Mandir.
- Regional perspective (10%) prioritizes state's linguistic and cultural identities. It opposes to the principle of 'One Nation, One Election.'

5.1 Populism's Challenge to Federalism

Through the consensus data of 2023-2025, the major intersection of populism and federalism can be prominent creating a dynamic counterbalance. Populism is used by national and state leaders in India. The Union government utilizes schemes such as PM-Kisan, Ayushman Bharat to build a direct relationship with voters bypassing state-level mediation. The regional parties specifically rely on state specific welfare schemes such as Griha Laxmi and Ladli Behna.

The period of 2023-25, there have been certain challenges to the federal idea of special protection for specific state to protect diversity. The Supreme Court verdict in 2023, upheld the abrogation of Article 370, a major victory for 'One Nation, One Constitution' populism as a challenge to federal India. The populist narratives favored national identity triggering defensive sub-nationalism in Southern and Eastern States in India. National populism relied on authority of single leadership that undermined the traditional federal structure where regional leaders act as the primary stakeholders in national policy. (Thomas, 2023) The prominent principle of 'One Nation, One Election' argued populist push of efficiency. The recent trend in 2024 data shows that nationalism remains high, trusts in state government for local service delivery through central government.

5.2 Media, Populists Narrative and policy implementation

The Citizenship Amendment Act and National Register of Citizens provide data highlights how nationalism redefines the legal boundaries of citizenship based on religious identity. The CAA features the non-Muslim refugees who entered India by 31st December 2014. This challenged the Constitutional provision through the concept of secularism and created a federalism as state governments passed a resolution refusing to implement it. The populist rhetoric distinguished between sharanarthi and ghuspethiya. The major protests of Shaheen Bagh were framed by sections of the media as democratic exercises and as conspiracies funded by external enemies. Media narratives portrayed state governments resisting the CAA as 'anti-constitutional' and acting against the national interest putting the Union's power in direct ideological conflict with State rights.

The union government passed three laws intended to liberalize the agricultural sector by allowing farmers to sell produce outside the state regulated markets called as mandis and encourage contract farming. The media coverage of the protest of farm law polarized a clash between state-aligned narratives and counter narratives. These protests gained larger support of farmers from sections of Punjab and Haryana through the mainstream of Godi Media. (Monckeberg, n.d.) Populist rhetoric portrayed the farmers as innocent but misled by opposition parties implying that they were unaware what was good for them. The protests created a populist paradox where the government represented the people against the elites. The farmers claimed the title of true people. Through this instance, the utilization of social media run by protesters provided on grounds facts to counter anti-national identity.

Media at times targets the opponents from ideological debates to highly localized and administrative arena. State level media focuses on the administrative record of the opponent. If the opponent is in power then the media gets influenced by the rival parties which specifically fails in local infrastructure and developments. Content in Hindi, Tamil, Bengali and Marathi is growing faster than the English content. This has empowered the rural and the semi-urban population to participate in the conversation prioritizing effectiveness in communication. From the last 2024 and in the recent times, state level political cells use platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram to circulate localized memes. (India's digital advertising surge: Navigating growth in the changing media landscape, 2024-25) Many regional news channels are directly owned by political families leading to the blackout periods where an opponent's passive news is ignored while their mistakes are broadcast on loop. Media often provide favorable coverage to the opposition that faces sudden withdrawal of government tenders or advertisements by taking away their money.

5.3 Impact of Nationalism and Decentralization on Indian Federalism

The mere intersection of media, populism and nationalism has reshaped the Indian federalism. The idea of cooperative federalism and social shifts pushes the system towards a more centralized and unitarian model. The nationalism in India shifted from a civic identity towards a majoritarian one that prioritizes national uniformity over regional diversity. The central government is essential for national security and global strategy. Center assumes powers traditionally held by states in areas of education and internal security. This centralized vision views regionalism as the backbone of federalism and as a threat to national integrity rather than a legitimate expression of diversity.

Decentralization of diversity vs. Centralization of power refers to the core aspect of political goal and economic view. Decentralization of diversity refers to the principle that governs country's social, linguistic and cultural heterogeneity through the federal side of the Indian Constitution. The mere accommodation of identities recognizes that a resident of Tamil Nadu has different cultural and linguistic needs than a resident of Punjab. By empowering state governments, the system allows for regional languages, local festivals and educational strata. It identifies a principle of subsidiarity through which the decisions should be made at the local level. For instance, the importance of 73rd and 74th Amendments necessitates Panchayats and Municipalities respectively aiming to decentralize power so that the local communities could manage their own resources. By allowing regional groups to have 'self-rule' within their own states, India prevents these groups from feeling marginalized by a distant central authority which reduces secessionist tendencies. Centralization of power is the concentration of decision-making, financial control and legislative authority in the Union government. Through the fiscal control such as GST council and the use of tax, financial power has moved upward. The use of Governor's office or central investigative agencies to influence state politics is a tool of centralization bypassing the mandate of regional voters. (Forum IAS , 2025)

In India, there is a relationship between centralization and state autonomy that defines the quasi-federal system. Centralization provides the power of center to override powers through the government's role and provisions. State autonomy refers to the capacity of states to govern independently within their constitutional jurisdiction. The one-size-fits all approach provides policies in health and education and development in regional needs. The use of central agencies and the politicization of administrative overreach debates about cooperative federalism. (PolSci.Institute, 2025)

The regional pluralism refers to the idea that different states and ethnic groups should have the autonomy to maintain their unique languages, laws and cultures. But due to the recent developments and hindrances

it is been replaced by monolithic national identity. Pluralism in India is built on the recognition with civilizational traits. The importance of Uniform Civil Code erased the regional legal and political variations especially tribal customs in Northeast conflict with national inheritance laws. (Tejaswini, 2025) The promotion of Hindi as the national language sparks resistance in Southeast states such as Tamil Nadu and Karnataka as it is perceived a strong threat to regional languages.

The political and electoral implications is defined by the tension between centralized autonomy and regional pluralism. The electoral politics are tied to the fiscal federalism. Centralization through the Goods and Services Tax and the expansion of Centrally Sponsored Schemes has made states more reliant on central funds. This allowed the national ruling party to claim credit for welfare delivery bypassing state-level leadership and weakening the electoral leveraging of regional requirements. The delimitation and representation pose a massive electoral risk. Southern states have implemented population control, prevalence of fear of seats in Parliament relative to Northern States creating North-South divide leading to significant regional alienation and shifting the balance of power in Lok Sabha elections. (R, 2024)

Conclusion

In conclusion, the intersection of media, populism and nationalism has reshaped the democratic landscape of federal India. This research demonstrated India's federal structure to balance regional aspirations with national integrity, importance of media and the rise of populism. Populist rhetoric expanded national identity that is in tension with country's pluralism. The role of media transitioned from a facilitator of democratic debate shifted to profound implications for Indian federalism. The will of people is formed through singular idea; there are regional concerns and state level autonomy with obstacles to national progress hindering unity of India. The centralization of political narrative homogenizes pressure on federal units eroding constitutional spirit of cooperative federalism. The future of India's federal democracy depends on the ability of media to understand its role as independent arbiter and the state's capacity to protect regional diversity. To preserve the 'Union of States' is imperative to foster a media ecosystem that values local nuances such as national unity. India's Constitutional framework presents transformative challenges. Protecting India's regional diversity from pressures of centralized populism is mandatory. Asserting that cooperative federalism ensuring that populist mandates allow states to maintain constitutional autonomy in governance. Regulating how information is spread and promotes digital literacy is necessary. Hence, harmonizing national unity with regional aspirations protects legal and cultural rights.

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