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Regionalism - An Overview

According to standard definition "Regionalism is a political ideology that focuses on the interests of a particular region, group of regions or other subnational entity." The region as a social system is the relation between different groups of people.

What is Regionalism

Regionalism can be explained as an 'insider-outsider' thought process where the loyalties are tied to the region of origin. Movements which are regional in nature are a type of 'identity movements' where the demands include special privileges or self-rule. Prolonged deprivation or neglect (real or perceived) unites people into asserting in a pronounced way for their regional identity viewing that as the solution for the state's unfavourable policies towards them.

Regionalism depends on the social setup, geography among other factors. At times, Regionalism can promote healthy competition and be a precursor to nationalism. However, it can also lead to bitterness and petty politics such as the case of numerous river water disputes in India.

Regionalism is an important topic for the Polity or GS 1 segment of the IAS Exam (<https://byjus.com/ias-exam/>) as it is a major factor affecting the politics of India.

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What is the aim of Regionalism?

Regionalism and those that believe in its ideology are concerned with increasing the political power and influence of the residents of a particular region. Their demands include but are not limited to sovereignty, separatism, secession and independence. Regionalists tend to favour a confederation of loss states instead of a unitary nation-state with a strong central government. At the time they do tend to accept alternate forms of federalism (<https://byjus.com/free-ias-prep/federalism/>).

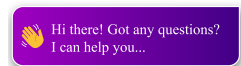
Those who believe in regionalism claim that strengthening governing bodies and political powers within a region will be of benefit to the local population as it will improve the regional economy through better allocation of resources, regional development, and better implementation of local policies. This, of course, comes at the cost of weakening the central government or limiting their role when it comes to governance.

Regionalism in India

While there is an innate sense of a pan-Indian identity, various foreign sociologists/scholars have noted the fixation on caste, tribe, language and community. Counter points include that regionalism has given rise to multi-party politics in India, deepening federalism. Regionalism is not necessarily 'anti-nation' or even 'anti-people' but there are both functional and dysfunctional aspects to consider.

We can trace back to the divide and rule colonial policies which sowed the seed in India. In the last 100 years, there have been many regional movements in India with demands following into the following broad categories:

- Secessionist Demands – Extreme form – Militant/Fundamentalist Groups – a new country separate from India
- Separatist Demands – A new state to be formed which can better serve the linguistic/ethnic minorities in the region.
- Full Statehood – Over the years, several Indian Union Territories got full statehood.
- Autonomy – demand for more power versus political interference from the central government.



Difference between Regionalism and Regional Political Parties

Political parties that are regional are not necessarily regionalist parties. Or in simpler terms do not believe in the ideology. A "regional party" is any political party with its base in a single region, whatever its objectives and platform maybe, whereas "regionalist" parties are a subset of regional parties that specifically campaign for greater autonomy or independence in their region.

Since regional parties, as is often the case, cannot receive enough votes or legislative seats to be politically powerful, they may join political coalitions or seek to be a part of the coalition government. Notable examples include the coalition government of 1996 when both mainstream parties such as the Indian National Congress (formed on December 28 (<https://byjus.com/free-ias-prep/this-day-in-history-dec28/>), 1885) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) joined hands with each other and other political parties, including regionalist ones to form the government.

Relevant Questions regarding Regionalism in India

What are the main causes of regionalism in India?

- Language.
- Religion.
- Regional Culture.
- Economic Backwardness.
- Rise of Political Parties with a regionalist agenda

What are the effects of regionalism in India?

Regionalism often promotes Vote- Bank politics, thereby national integration and unity as a whole. Regionalism can weaken the time tested fabric of 'Unity in Diversity', if not promoted in a positive manner. For the most part, it is in a negative manner as certain political parties promote regionalism in a bid to stay in power and consolidate it by swaying the voters in their favour. At the very least it turns the people belonging to the same country against each other.

How can regionalism in India be mitigated?

It is hard to curb regionalism in a nation as vast and diverse as India. But the following steps can be taken to mitigate some of its worst effects.

1. Doing away with regional imbalance
2. The economic development of backward regions
3. Restructuring society in a way that it promotes unity
4. Cultural sensitisation

Frequently asked Questions about Regionalism

What is the idea behind Regionalism?

Proponents of regionalism usually claim that strengthening the governing bodies and political powers within a region, at the expense of a central government, will benefit local populations by improving regional or local economies, in terms of better fiscal responsibility, regional development, allocation of resources, implementation of local policies and plans, competitiveness among regions and ultimately the whole country.

What is the difference between Regional Parties and Political Parties?

Political parties that are regional are not necessarily regionalist parties. A "regional party" is any political party with its base in a single region, whatever its objectives and platform may be, whereas "regionalist" parties are a subset of regional parties that specifically campaign for greater autonomy or independence in their region.

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