



# LOOKING AHEAD LOOKING BACK:

The Challenge of Long-Term  
Change in Uttar Pradesh



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### ISAS Special Report

Looking Ahead, Looking Back: The Challenge of Long-Term Change in Uttar Pradesh  
May 2024

Authored by Claudia Chia, Wini Fred Gurung and Gyanesh Kudaisya

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*Printed in Singapore by Oxford Graphic Printers Pte Ltd*

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# **LOOKING AHEAD, LOOKING BACK: THE CHALLENGE OF LONG-TERM CHANGE IN UTTAR PRADESH**

Institute of South Asian Studies

May 2024

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Special Report Issue No. 28





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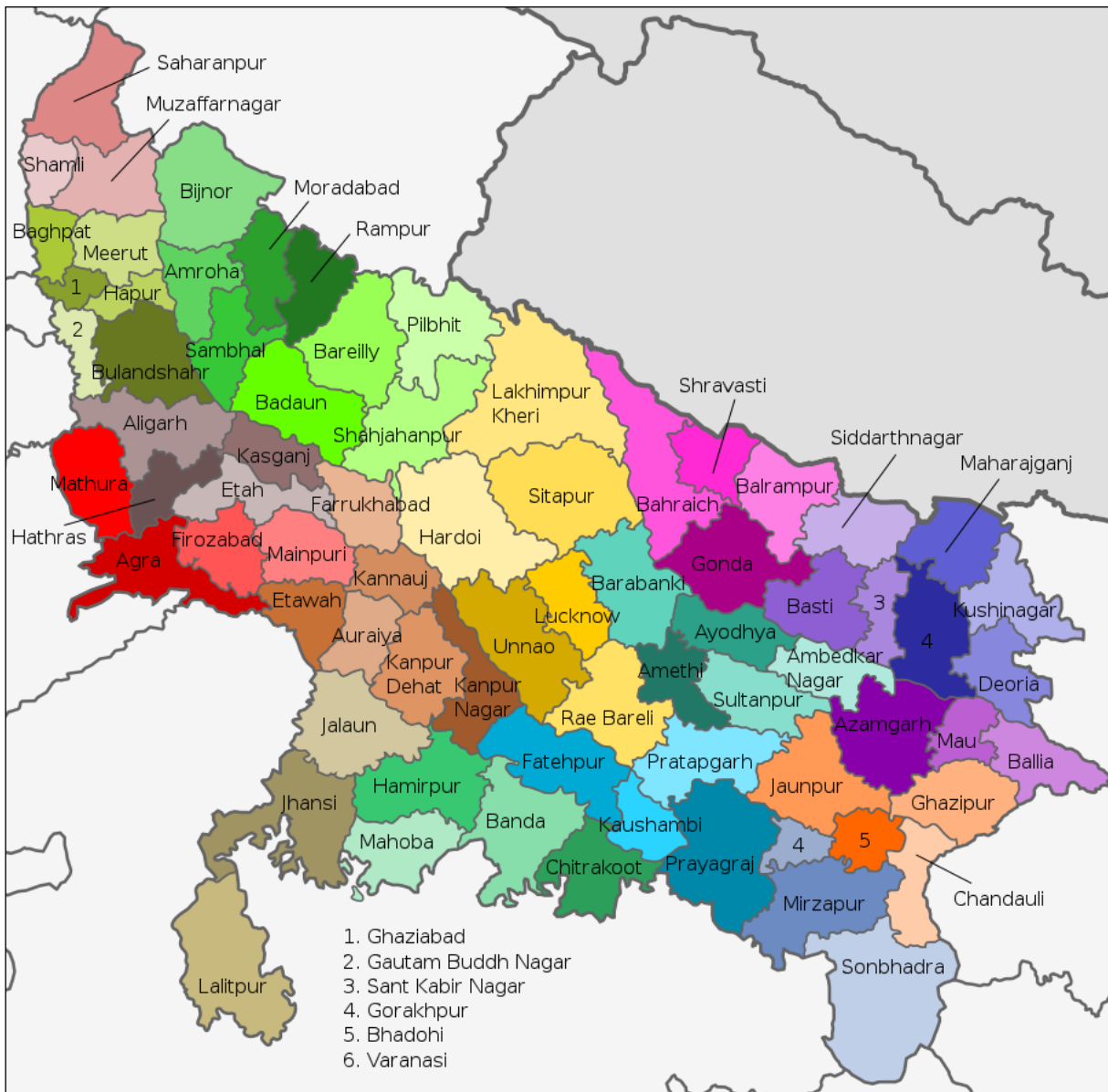
## Executive Summary

*Yet, the political heartland lags behind other Indian states most starkly in key socio-economic and human development indices.*

Uttar Pradesh (UP), India's most populous state, has emerged as a bastion for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), giving the ruling party a massive mandate in successive national and state elections held in 2014, 2017, 2019 and 2022. Yet, the political heartland lags behind other Indian states most starkly in key socio-economic and human development indices.

This Special Report, *Looking Ahead, Looking Back: The Challenge of Long-term Change in Uttar Pradesh*, reflects upon the long-term challenges that confront the state and society in UP. It delineates the key challenges in three broad areas. The first is restoring the confidence of the minorities in their rights as citizens in the principle of the rule of law and in removing perceptions of discrimination in public life. The second is adopting urgent measures to address the cumulative development deficit that UP continues to face for the past several decades by making investments in social infrastructure and prioritising inclusive development. The third is protecting the civil service and the police from political interference and frequent transfers to enhance state capacity for effective governance and service delivery.

## Map of Uttar Pradesh



Source: Wikimedia Commons



## Introduction

*The verdict in March 2022 reaffirmed UP's centrality as a bastion of the ruling BJP while enhancing the political stature of UP's Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.*

As India is undergoing a seven-phase general election to be held between 19 April and 1 June 2024 to elect its Union Government, the heartland state of UP is witnessing an intense and high-pitched campaign. In some ways, the March 2022 elections to the UP legislative assembly prepared the stage for the electoral contest presently underway. The verdict in March 2022 reaffirmed UP's centrality as a bastion of the ruling BJP while enhancing the political stature of UP's Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. The electoral stakes remain high for the BJP in UP as more than one-fifth of the ruling party's Members of Parliament (MPs) in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of the parliament) have been elected from the state in two successive national elections in 2014 and 2019, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi being one of them.<sup>1</sup>

Unsurprisingly, political developments in UP are keenly observed and debated by analysts, policymakers and the public at large. On 18 April 2022, the Institute of South Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore organised a panel discussion on 'Looking Ahead, Looking Back: The Challenge of Long-Term Change in Uttar Pradesh' which brought together a multi-disciplinary panel of experts specialising in UP. The panel consisted of Professor Ajit Kumar Singh, a political scientist; Professor Zoya Hassan; and a historian, Professor William Gould.<sup>2</sup> The presentations of the panellists and the rich discussion

<sup>1</sup> In 2019, out of the BJP's 303 MPs, as many as 64 came from UP, accounting for 22.44 per cent of the ruling party's parliamentary strength. In 2014, the UP contingent in the Lok Sabha for the BJP consisted of 68 MPs, constituting 22.69 per cent of the party's total strength. UP is represented by 80 MPs in the Lok Sabha, accounting for 14.73 per cent of its overall strength of 543 MPs. For details, see <https://www.lokniti.org/lok-sabha-election>.

<sup>2</sup> Dr Ajit Kumar Singh is a former Director of the Giri Institute of Development Studies (an Indian Council of Social Science Research funded institute focused on Uttar Pradesh), Lucknow. He was formerly a faculty member in economics at Lucknow University and Dr Rammanohar Lohia Avadh University, Faizabad, and served on several state and central government committees in the areas of regional economy, economic development and agricultural growth. He has authored a number of books, including *Land Reforms and Rural Development* (Mittal Publications, 2021) and *Agricultural Development and Natural Resource Management* (Mittal Publications, 2021). Professor Zoya Hasan is Professor Emerita at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She is a former member of the National Commission for Minorities, India, from 2006 to 2009, and is the author/editor of 18 books; the recent one being *Ideology and Organization in Indian Politics: Polarisation and the Growing Crisis of the Congress Party* (2009-2019). Professor William Gould is Professor of Indian History at the University of Leeds, United Kingdom. He has published extensively on Uttar Pradesh, authored *Bureaucracy, Community and Influence in India* (Routledge, 2013) and *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); and co-authored *Boundaries of Belonging, Localities, Citizenship and Rights in India and Pakistan*, Cambridge University Press, 2019.

which followed are the core focus of this Special Report, which has been supplemented by further research.

This Special Report is foregrounded upon the central premise that although the Adityanath-led government is now well into its second term in office, it continues to face the unenviable task of dealing with multiple challenges confronting the state and society for several decades. Since the 1980s, UP has seen tremendous political churn. The varied political agendas of the national and regional parties have deeply fragmented the state's politics along the lines of religion, caste and class identities. Although neo-liberal government policies have impacted human development and the well-being of its people, it is well-recognised that UP significantly lags behind other Indian states in most economic and human development indicators, gender empowerment and governance.

*The varied political agendas of the national and regional parties have deeply fragmented the state's politics along the lines of religion, caste and class identities.*

The discussion in this Special Report seeks to reflect upon the long-term challenges in UP by focusing on key problems which so starkly confront the state, namely:

1. identity politics and majoritarianism;
2. economic growth, infrastructure development and employment generation; and
3. governance and functioning of state institutions.

It is around these three key themes that the narrative which follows is organised.

## Identity Politics and Majoritarianism

The UP Legislative Assembly elections of March 2022 were the most significant in recent history, as the BJP and its allies won a two-thirds majority in this crucial state, and marked a further advance in Indian polity's rightward shift which, it embarked upon in 2014. Since then, barring a few setbacks, this trend has not changed. The BJP has consolidated its primacy in most states of India, barring some states like West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, where regional parties hold sway and have kept it at bay.

*Some analysts have attributed the BJP's electoral success to its welfare measures and free rations for the poor during the COVID-19 lockdown.*

The UP elections are of particular significance because the state has consistently given a massive mandate to the BJP in the successive elections of 2014, 2017, 2019 and again in 2022.<sup>3</sup> This momentous outcome has led to considerable debate among political analysts and the public. Before the 2022 elections, there had been the pre-supposition, particularly in UP, that communal polarisation was likely to work for the ruling party and widespread economic discontent could trigger electoral change. However, the discontent over several economic issues did not translate into an electoral verdict against the government. Some analysts have attributed the BJP's electoral success to its welfare measures and free rations for the poor during the COVID-19 lockdown. Here, the debate is between those who stress economic and material factors versus political and cultural factors in influencing the voters' behaviour.

### Hindu Heartland

The state of UP constitutes the heartland of the Hindutva project. It is home to the three holy Hindu sites, which, in many ways, have

<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of the UP state assembly elections of 2017 and 2022, see Rajeev Ranjan Chaturvedi, "The State of Uttar Pradesh: Indian State Elections and Their Implications", ISAS Special Report, No. 46, 13 November 2017, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/media/isas\_papers/ISAS%20Special%20Reports%20No.%2046-%20The%20State%20of%20Uttar%20Pradesh-1.pdf; Ronojoy Sen, "India State Elections 2022: All Eyes on Uttar Pradesh", ISAS Brief No. 907, 17 February 2022, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/ISAS-Briefs-907.pdf; and Ronojoy Sen, "Why the BJP Won Uttar Pradesh", ISAS Brief No. 915, 22 March 2022, https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/ISAS-Brief-915.pdf.

functioned as the ‘nerve centres’ of the BJP’s Hindutva politics. The emblematic significance of Ayodhya, Kashi and Mathura, as symbols of Hindu unity, cannot be underestimated. No other state in the Indian Union has this cultural and political cache, as UP has been critical to the project of advancing the Hindutva agenda in a way that is not the case with other states. It was in UP that the BJP was able to form a government after the Ayodhya movement, and the party experimented, for the first time, with the politics of social engineering. Both these developments have been critical to its success in national politics.

The naming of Adityanath as chief minister of UP in 2017 by the BJP’s central leadership became a defining moment, indicative of the party’s plan to amplify the Hindutva agenda. From his early days in office, Adityanath has used instruments of governance to prioritise Hindutva interests and instituted a governance model that brooks no dissent, disagreement or protest. The BJP’s ‘Gujarat model’ was economic and political, while the UP model is primarily political.<sup>4</sup> Its characteristics have been demonstrated by the regime’s handling of the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act, which provoked widespread protests. The UP government responded with strong measures, including seizing the properties of protestors, a penalty that the Supreme Court later halted.

*The BJP’s ‘Gujarat model’ was economic and political while the UP model is primarily political.*

The BJP’s victory in UP in March 2022 was remarkable, as it was re-elected despite the state government’s inept handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and with not much to show on the economic front in terms of growth and job creation. *Vikas* (development) was a promise but the ruling party delivered its majoritarian vision, showcasing its vigorous implementation of the Hindutva agenda over the last five years. It took pride in the speedy progress of the grand Ram Temple for which the ground-breaking ceremony was performed in August 2020 by Modi, and the inauguration ceremony was carried out with much fanfare on 22 January 2024, well before the national

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<sup>4</sup> On the Gujarat model, see Nikita Sud, “The Actual Gujarat Model: Authoritarianism, Capitalism, Hindu Nationalism and Populism in the Time of Modi”, *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 52, no. 1 (2022): 102-126.

elections in 2024. Under the BJP's watch, lynchings by cow vigilantes were widely reported. The government enacted punitive laws to discourage inter-faith marriages. The Muslim names of prominent cities and towns were replaced with Hindu ones, while school history textbooks have been revised to erase Mughal history.

*Even a cursory examination of the actual conditions on the ground shows limited significant improvement in social and economic conditions, quality of public life, health and education sectors, and employment opportunities.*

Splurging on media advertisements, the chief minister has prominently claimed that UP has jump-started growth and created jobs. Yet, critics point out that, many of these claims do not hold up when fact checked.<sup>5</sup> In recent years, UP recorded one of the lowest growth rates in India. As discussed in the next section, it ranks poorly among Indian states on most human development indicators and continues to be economically backward and socially conservative. Even a cursory examination of the actual conditions on the ground shows limited significant improvement in social and economic conditions, quality of public life, health and education sectors, and employment opportunities.

### **No Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic or the Farmers' Movement**

Inequality in UP remains deep and has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. A slew of issues – primarily economic ones – were at the forefront of popular concerns during the 2022 election campaign, most notably the high levels of joblessness.<sup>6</sup> Although the economic slowdown and unemployment were countrywide, the situation was worse in UP. The severe unemployment crisis was reflected in anecdotal reports from the grassroots in UP. The angry protests by railway job aspirants and the ham-handed response of the UP police in Prayagraj (formerly Allahabad), as reported in the media, were indicative of the high degree of unrest among jobless youth coming as it did after the devastating second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Adityanath faced criticism over his government's

<sup>5</sup> Santosh Mehrotra, "As Uttar Pradesh Heads to Polls, How Does the Yogi Govt's Economic Performance Hold Up?", *The Wire*, 20 December 2021, <https://thewire.in/economy/uttar-pradesh-election-adityanath-economic-performance>.

<sup>6</sup> Subodh Verma, "Double Engine But No Jobs in UP", *News Click*, 23 September 2021, <https://www.newsclick.in/double-engine-but-no-jobs-UP>.

handling of the pandemic, with reports alluding to a large number of unreported or underreported deaths; healthcare workers being unable to function in a seeming collapse of the public health system; and there being acute shortages of oxygen and hospital beds. The bodies of COVID-19 victims, which floated down the Ganges for days, provided a powerful visual motif of the ground realities in some parts of the state.<sup>7</sup> Yet, this disastrous impact was blamed on district-level officials instead of the state or national-level political leadership.

In interviews with journalists, voters complained about joblessness, price-rise and the stray cattle menace. Strong opposition to agricultural reforms favouring big agri-business at the expense of smaller farmers was also a big concern for the farmers, bringing into sharp focus the year-long farmers' movement, culminating in the government being forced to withdraw the three controversial farm laws that had triggered the farmers' agitation. While many of the protests occurred in Punjab, Haryana and Delhi, farmers in the western parts of UP also mobilised against these laws. Modi withdrew these laws in November 2021, a move which helped the BJP regain goodwill among the farmers in UP.<sup>8</sup> This blunted the negative impact of the farmers' movement, except in some pockets of western UP, where electoral support shifted away from the BJP in favour of the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD).<sup>9</sup> Overall, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the farmers' protest showed themselves to be electorally insignificant, if not non-existent. Even though the economic situation was tailor-made for major reversals for the BJP, it romped home with 255 of the 403 seats in the 2022 elections, a margin that exceeded even its expectations.

The BJP's victory in UP, its fourth since 2014, despite a sluggish economy and joblessness has sparked a major debate about the relationship between economic discontent and voter choices. The materialist understanding led many commentators to argue that economic

*Overall, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the farmers' protest showed themselves to be electorally insignificant, if not non-existent.*

<sup>7</sup> Geeta Pandey, "Covid-19: India's holiest river is swollen with bodies", *BBC*, 19 May 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-57154564>.

<sup>8</sup> Debasish Roy Chowdhary, "India's Farmers Have Forced Modi To Retreat But He Will Be Back, With More Religious Polarization", *Time*, 2 November 2021, <https://time.com/6123001/modi-farmers-protests-farm-laws/>.

<sup>9</sup> This shift led to the increase in the RLD's assembly seats in the UP Assembly which increased from one in 2017 to nine in 2022 in western UP.



discontent would trigger a price rise change in UP. However, this did not happen. In the past, price rise and adverse material conditions had impacted the voters' choices. However, this was clearly not the case in the March 2022 verdict. Economic concerns, including the lack of job opportunities, did weigh on the voter's mind. Yet, they did not translate into an electoral verdict against the government.

## Politics of Polarisation

The key to the BJP's electoral success is based on its two long-term projects: the first is cultural, and the second is political.

*The political leadership in UP succeeded in making Hindi the overriding language in the public domain.*

The origins of the cultural project can be traced to Hindi politics, which played a key role in producing a 'Hindi-Hindu' socio-cultural construct in the politics of North India and the cultural development of the UP society in particular. It was germane to the emergence of the Hindu Right in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> The political leadership in UP succeeded in making Hindi the overriding language in the public domain.<sup>11</sup> By the 1970s, most universities in UP had been 'vernacularised', creating a space for Hindi as the language of communication and culture.

Hindi expansion helped to construct the idea of majoritarianism and helped invigorate Hindu nationalism. From the mid-1980s, these processes moved from popular discourse to the centre of political deliberations. The project of Hindi promotion, Alok Rai argues in *Hindi Nationalism*, had been undertaken by Hindi propagandists with a clear political agenda tied to "...a culturally exclusive, socially divisive, and ultimately upper caste and anti-democratic politics which had produced it".<sup>12</sup> This facilitated Hindi's transformation from the common man's vernacular to a Sanskritic Hindi, delinked from the masses. Rai notes this to be an important tactic in the formation of UP's regional elite and the consolidation of their position.

<sup>10</sup> On these issues, see Alok Rai, *Hindi Nationalism* (Tracks for the Times), Orient Blackswan, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of the push to Hindi after Independence by UP politicians, see Gyanesh Kudaisya, *Region, Nation, "Heartland": Uttar Pradesh in India's Body-politic*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006, Chapter 6.

<sup>12</sup> Alok Rai, *Hindi Nationalism*, op. cit.

Hindi expansionism also contributed to the forming of a revivalist strand in the political arena, which ultimately sparked off right-wing resurgence. This process was further facilitated by the deliberate neglect of Urdu in UP, as the state's vernacular elite was deeply hostile to Urdu. It cannot be a coincidence that the state's neglect of Urdu coincided with the emergence of a 'Hindi-Hindu' identity and marginalisation of the rich and composite cultural traditions of the Indo-Gangetic belt. Further, the expansion of Hindi media since the days of the Ayodhya movement reinforced this cultural politics. Unsurprisingly, Hindi media has played an active role in the dissemination of Hindu nationalism.

On the other hand, the political project manifested itself in the Ram Temple campaign, which kick-started the rise of Hindutva and had its greatest impact in UP. Hindu nationalists worked assiduously to consolidate the majority community in UP, which prepared the ground for the rise to power of the BJP. Politically, it opened the prospect of changing both the ideological discourse and institutional politics in favour of a majoritarian idea of India as a 'Hindu nation', in contradistinction to the pluralist, non-parochial idea of India. Importantly, it prepared the groundwork for majoritarian consolidation in the Hindi heartland, which, given its overwhelming size, helped the Hindu Right to establish a strong base to offset its weakness in other states, especially in the South.<sup>13</sup>

*Hindu nationalists worked assiduously to consolidate the majority community in UP, which prepared the ground for the rise to power of the BJP.*

It may be noted that the inauguration of the Ram Temple on 22 January 2024, as a prelude to the national elections in April 2024, is significant as it was undeniably the Ayodhya movement, which had provided momentum to UP politics in the decades since the late 1980s. The BJP's victory in recent elections needs to be seen in the light of these long-term efforts.

Communal politics was put at the forefront by Adityanath's statement early in the election campaign that UP was faced with an '80-20

<sup>13</sup> On these issues, see James Chiriyankandath, "Yes, but not in the South": The BJP, Congress, and regional parties in South India", in Mujibur Rehman, ed. *Rise of Saffron Power*, Routledge India, 2018, pp. 44-61.

election', in a clear reference to the state's 40 million Muslims, who comprise roughly 20 per cent of the population. This framed the metanarrative of the BJP's campaign, which aimed at appealing to the 80 per cent Hindus while relegating the 20 per cent Muslims to the margins. Further, using bulldozers to demolish some properties of key opponents and prominently displaying bulldozers at election rallies conveyed the same message unabashedly. The BJP's 'law and order' rhetoric aimed to divide voter citizens into two camps: those who are lawful by nature and those who are inherently lawless. This theme created a rhetoric for reverse polarisation, which worked for the ruling party, particularly in constituencies where Muslims constitute 40 per cent or above of the demography, as the majority rallied behind the BJP.

## Welfarism

*Tangible benefits make it easier to mobilise support and affirm loyalty to the party leadership.*

The BJP's success has put the spotlight on the centrality of welfare schemes in the party's electoral strategy. Welfare schemes were clearly an important and visible part of the campaign, so much so that the term *labharthi* (The BJP's term for beneficiaries) has entered the Indian political lexicon. Polling data shows that welfare schemes were actively used by the ruling party to gain legitimacy and support from the beneficiaries. In the BJP's discourse, welfare is not the state's duty but rather an act of benevolence linked to political returns.<sup>14</sup> Modi's repeated references to free rations during his campaign speeches did not go unnoticed, with his photograph printed on ration bags, coupled with the party's efforts at identifying the beneficiaries, which helped amplify the electoral message. Tangible benefits make it easier to mobilise support and affirm loyalty to the party leadership.

Welfare schemes influenced voter choices because the most important aspect of these schemes was their emphasis on direct benefits such as cash transfers and providing toilets, housing and

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<sup>14</sup> For an analysis of these issues, see Yamini Aiyar, "Citizen vs labharthi? Interrogating the welfare state", Centre for Policy Research, 2 January 2023, <https://cprindia.org/journalarticles/citizen-vs-labharthi-interrogating-the-welfare-state/>.

free rations since the pandemic. Arvind Subramaniam points out that this was “subsidised public provisioning of private goods”, a “new welfarism” where public goods such as health and basic education are not given the same priority as the targetted distribution of private goods.<sup>15</sup> Most importantly, these economic benefits were not provided as a matter of right to decent living but as largesse from the state. In contrast, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee (MNREGA) scheme was instituted as an economic right which has been whittled down, while the one-time provision of private goods was given top priority. In the new dispensation, the citizen is obligated to the state for these benefits and cannot actively claim them as rights. Public policy analyst Yamini Aiyar has observed that this is a “remarkably neoliberal take on welfare” which tends to view any welfare provisioning as Left wing. She further argues that welfarism, stripped of the language of rights, has created a new language of political mobilisation for the ruling party.<sup>16</sup>

*Most importantly, these economic benefits were not provided as a matter of right to decent living but as largesse from the state.*

Nonetheless, one cannot disregard the significance of the economic relief provided to the people through these schemes. Even though welfare schemes were important, they were not enough to offset economic distress, unprecedented job losses and rampant unemployment. In retrospect, people voted for a combination of welfare and the overall political agenda of the BJP. The construction of the Hindu vote also trumped the caste-based politics of the two regional parties – the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) – through mobilisation of the upper caste and non-dominant backward and lower caste communities.

## Dynamics of Caste Outreach

Along with economic discontent and joblessness, this election poses a bigger question mark on *Mandal* or Other Backward Classes (OBC) politics, or at least the kind practised in the past by the SP and the

<sup>15</sup> Arvind Subramaniam and Josh Felman, “India’s Welfare Balm”, Project Syndicate, 28 April 2023, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/welfare-policy-explains-why-india-prime-minister-modi-still-popular-by-arvind-subramanian-and-josh-felman-2023-04>.

<sup>16</sup> Yamini Aiyar, “Citizen vs labharthi? Interrogating the welfare state”, op. cit.

BSP. Caste has been the central axis around which the SP and BSP politics have been organised. Their caste-oriented social justice plank was superseded by the BJP, which co-opted non-dominant backward castes by giving greater representation to these groups under the capacious Hindutva umbrella. In retrospect, voters were willing to overlook the economic failures of the government. This was further affirmed by a post-poll survey conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi, as per which, 54 per cent of Hindus voted for the BJP from 47 per cent in 2017.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, only 26 per cent of Hindus participating in the survey voted for the SP. Data from the survey showed that the BJP garnered votes from the upper castes, non-dominant OBCs and a section of the Dalits.

*The BJP's dominance is based on a Hindu coalition, whereas the Congress coalition comprises upper castes, Dalits and Muslims.*

This formidable coalition in the Hindi heartland, UP in particular, has established a new dominant party system – the 'BJP system', akin to the 'Congress system' of the 1950s and 1960s. However, there is a fundamental difference in the nature of the two systems. The BJP's dominance is based on a Hindu coalition, whereas the Congress coalition comprises upper castes, Dalits and Muslims. The social core of the BJP is bound by 'Hindutva', whereas the core of the Congress system has been defined by social and political pluralism. This marks a major shift in Indian politics, not just in terms of one-party dominance, but also in the nature of dominance itself, which seeks to alter the very basis of politics by reflecting a social identity defined in ethnic and religious terms rather than in terms of everyday material issues that affect people.

Can UP's turn to the Right be reversed? Undoubtedly, the Hindu Right is at present well entrenched. However, in the shifting sands of UP politics, which has witnessed momentous changes in the past, this too can gradually change. It may be worth emphasising that close to 60 per cent of people in UP did not vote for the BJP in 2022. The wider issues thrown up in the election – the 'bulldozer' approach to handling dissent, communal polarisation, economic inequality,

<sup>17</sup> The UP Post Poll Survey Report by Lokniti, CSDS, <https://www.lokniti.org/state-election-studies>.

agrarian distress, joblessness and public health – shall not go away and shall continue to influence public discourse and determine voter behaviour in the long run.



## Economic Development, Infrastructure and Employment Generation

With a population of almost 20 crores (200 million) in 2011, now nearly 24 crores (240 million),<sup>18</sup> UP is the sixth-largest political unit in terms of population in the world. The state is endowed with good natural and human resources in terms of fertile land tracts, plenty of water and large livestock resources, besides the availability of skilled and educated manpower.

**Table 1: Population Growth in UP: 1951 to 2011**

Year	Population in lakh	Decadal Increase	Urban Population (Per cent)	Density of Population (Per Sq Km)	Sex Ratio
1951	632.2	11.8	13.6	215	910
1961	737.4	16.7	12.9	251	909
1971	883.4	19.8	14.0	300	879
1981	1,108.6	25.5	18.0	377	885
1991	1,391.1	25.5	19.8	473	879
2001	1,662.0	25.9	20.8	690	898
2011	1,998.0	20.2	22.4	829	908

Source: Census Reports; AS Singh, UP@75

*The literacy rates of the state have also been very low, especially among women.*

The state has great economic potential, but it has largely remained unexploited. On consideration of UP's developmental trajectory over the last 50 years, certain basic features stand out. Its per capita income has remained low, poverty levels have been high, growth has been sluggish and the rate of population growth has been high. Only in recent years has the population growth rate seen a declining trend, as can be seen in Table 1. The literacy rates of the state have also been very low, especially among women. Health indicators have also been disappointing and, in some indices worse compared to countries in

<sup>18</sup> The decennial census of India due in 2021 did not take place because of the COVID-19 pandemic and no plans have been laid out for it yet. However, the data from the Unique Identification Authority of India, which is responsible for Aadhar enrolment, indicates an eligible population figure of 23.32 crores (233.2 million) for UP.

sub-Saharan Africa. Among the states of the Indian Union, UP finds its place in the bottom tier in terms of economic and social indicators.<sup>19</sup>

**Table 2: Average Annual Growth Rate of Total and Per Capita Income in UP and India, 1951-2021**

Period	Total Income (₹)		Per Capita Income (₹)	
	India	UP	India	UP
	NNP	NSDP	NNP	NSDP
1951-56	3.6	2.0	1.7	0.5
1956-61	4.0	1.9	1.9	0.3
1961-66	2.2	1.6	0.0	-0.2
1966-69	4.0	0.3	1.8	-1.5
1969-74	3.3	2.3	1.1	0.4
1974-79	5.3	5.7	2.9	3.3
1981-85	5.3	8.7	3.1	6.3
1985-90	5.8	5.7	3.6	3.3
1990-92	2.5	3.1	0.4	1.1
1992-97	6.8	3.2	4.9	1.4
1997-02	5.6	2.0	3.6	-0.4
2002-07	7.8	5.2	6.1	3.2
2007-12	7.7	6.8	6.3	4.9
2012-17	6.7	6.5	5.5	5.0
2017-20	5.5	4.6	4.4	3.0

Note: NPP stands for net national product while NSDP refers to net state domestic product.

Source: Division of Economics and Statistics, State Planning Institute, UP; AK Singh UP@75

There are certain distinct features of the UP economy which stand out. To begin with, there are vast regional, inter-regional and intra-regional differences. Western UP is relatively developed compared to the sub-regions of Bundelkhand and Eastern UP, with Central UP situated in between. Urbanisation in the state is only around 22 per cent, and there exist sharp rural-urban disparities (Table 1). Women's agency is rather weak in a society with patriarchal social norms. Civil society organisations remain weak and are less active than in other states.

*Urbanisation in the state is only around 22 per cent, and there exist sharp rural-urban disparities.*

<sup>19</sup> For an incisive early analysis of UP's dismal record, see Dreze Jean and Gazdar H, "Uttar Pradesh: The Burden of Inertia", in Dreze, Jean and Amartya Sen (eds.), *Indian Development: Selected Regional Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997.

There exist sharp social and economic disparities among different social and religious groups, particularly the Muslim, Scheduled Caste and Dalit communities that remain disadvantaged.

**Table 3: Multidimensional Poverty Index, UP and India, 2006 and 2016**

Index	UP		INDIA	
	2006	2016	2006	2016
Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPIT)	0.360	0.180	0.279	0.121
Multidimensional Headcount ratio (HT) in per cent	69.0	40.4	54.7	27.5
Number of Poor (millions)	133.20	82.89	635.20	364.22
Intensity of Poverty (AT) in per cent	52.2	44.7	51.1	43.9

Note: The multidimensional headcount ratio is not comparable with the poverty ratio as estimated by the Planning Commission as it takes into account the different types of deprivation in addition to income deprivation.

Source: UNDP MPI Report 2018

## Phases of Growth

*From mid-1975 to 1990, its growth rate accelerated to around five per cent and stood close to the national average.*

When one considers UP's growth experience, one can discern four to five distinct phases. In the first phase from 1951 to 1975, growth was relatively stagnant, with a growth rate of hardly around 2.5 per cent, with the population growing almost at the same rate. However, from the early 1970s, UP emerged as one of the primary beneficiaries of the Green Revolution. From mid-1975 to 1990, its growth rate accelerated to around five per cent and stood close to the national average. However, the decade of the 1990s was crisis-ridden largely because of the fiscal crisis, which worsened in UP, and its growth rate came down from five per cent to around three per cent. Nevertheless, after 2002, there was some acceleration for almost 15 years till 2017, with an annual growth rate averaging six per cent to seven per cent.<sup>20</sup>

However, in the last four or five years, growth rates declined again, partly because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Between 2017 and 2021, the growth rate was less than five per cent, making it the lowest in the

<sup>20</sup> Ajit Kumar Singh, "The Economy of Uttar Pradesh Since the 1990s: Economic Stagnation and Fiscal Crisis", in Sudha Pai (ed.), *Political Process in Uttar Pradesh: Identity, Economic Reforms and Governance*, Pearson Longman, New Delhi, 2007.

last two decades.<sup>21</sup> Thus, one can see from the tables in the preceding pages that over the decades, UP's growth rate has been below India's gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate, except for a brief interlude in the 1980s when UP registered robust growth.

With regard to per capita income, it is striking that in the years 1950-1951, UP's per capita income stood very close to the national average. However, except for a brief spell in the 1980s, it has largely underperformed, and this trend has been accentuated. In the last three decades, UP's per capita income has been only half of the national average and the gap has been increasing over time. It is noteworthy that the fluctuations in the growth rate are closely related to the plan investment, which was very low in the first 40 years of planned growth after 1950-51. Thereafter, it rose to around seven per cent or more, accounting for the high growth which UP registered between 1975 to 1990. Then, again due to the fiscal crisis of the 1990s, the plan investment declined and consequently growth rates were impacted and saw a steep decline.

*With regard to per capita income, it is striking that in the years 1950-1951, UP's per capita income stood very close to the national average.*

The sectoral growth rate for UP presents an interesting picture. If considering the period from 2017 to 2021, one finds that only the agricultural sector has done well, registering a three per cent rate of growth, increasing from 2.7 per cent in the 2012-17 period. However, the manufacturing sector registered a negative growth at 0.2 per cent over the 2017-2022 period, notwithstanding the Adityanath government's claims about promoting the state's industrial development. The growth rates for the services sector over the corresponding years declined from 6.2 per cent to 5.1 per cent.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> During the 1990s, the growth rate at the national level improved significantly following the economic reforms. However, the growth rate of the UP economy declined in that decade, coming down to 3.2 per cent during 1992-97 to two per cent during 1997-2002. In this phase, UP faced a severe fiscal crisis leading to a decline in public investment (Singh 2007, 2012). As the fiscal situation improved in the first decade of the present century, the growth rate of the UP economy too picked up, registering a growth rate of 5.2 per cent during 2002-07 and further to 6.8 per cent during 2007-12 and 6.5 per cent during 2012-17. However, there has been a sharp deceleration in economic growth after 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Data drawn from Ajit Kumar Singh, Uttar Pradesh Economy@75, mimeo, p. 6.

## Constraints on Development

*Notwithstanding the recent growth of infrastructure in the state, UP continues to lag behind most states in terms of the overall infrastructure development index.*

What are some of the constraints on development? A major constraint has been the poor investment climate. Not only were public sector investments low, but private investments were also minimal with outside investors yet to be forthcoming in coming to UP. Even if they were willing to come, they were to face certain constraints. Infrastructural constraints have played a major role, particularly power shortage, which has been a critical bottleneck.<sup>23</sup> As far as roads are concerned, low rural connectivity remains a significant drawback.<sup>24</sup> Further, poor maintenance of the canal network and deficient urban infrastructure in most cities and towns have restricted UP's capacity to attract investment from outside. Notwithstanding the recent growth of infrastructure in the state, UP continues to lag behind most states in terms of the overall infrastructure development index.

Further, political instability and frequent regime changes, particularly between 1989 and 2007, served to impede UP's economic progress. Although from 2007 onwards, all elected governments have completed their terms in office, political parties, faced with electoral competition and instability, continue to be motivated by the expediency of staying in power rather than focusing on the state's long-term development. As a result, local-level state institutions remain weak. There is also an absence of a regional entrepreneurial class, as is seen in the case of Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. UP's woes are further compounded by deep-seated governance issues and limited state capacity, keeping in view its over-sized geography and demography. The state has a history of policing and law and order problems, not to mention bureaucratic corruption and rent-seeking.

<sup>23</sup> The installed capacity of power generation has also sharply jumped from 200 MW in 1950 to almost 6,000 MW in 2020. However, much of the increase took place before 1990-91, with limited expansion thereafter. Yet, power generation has fallen short of the growth in demand and UP is currently importing nearly 70 per cent of its power requirement from outside.

<sup>24</sup> The length of roads maintained by the state's Public Works Department has increased from 71,773 kilometres in 1990-91 to 25,4970 kilometres in 2019-20.

## Accelerating the Pace of Growth

Looking ahead, how can UP move towards faster rates of growth? To begin with, the strengthening of social infrastructure is urgently needed. Although UP has extensive educational infrastructure,<sup>25</sup> the quality of instruction remains poor, especially at the primary and secondary school levels where teaching standards remain rudimentary, teachers are in short supply and drop-out rates are high, particularly for girls.<sup>26</sup>

Further, looking ahead, another area of concern remains the health and well-being of the population. Although UP has seen an expansion of healthcare infrastructure, it remains inadequate considering the size of its population. In 1961, government hospitals and dispensaries numbered only 693. While these expanded to 4,385 in 1991, their numbers have since remained static at 4,512 in 2020. Private hospitals were only 29 in 1961 and registered multifold growth, peaking at 19,414 in 2012. However, they have since shrunk to 15,632 in 2020.<sup>27</sup> Statistics for doctors, para-medical staff and hospital beds show UP to be at the lower end of the health index.<sup>28</sup>

*Although UP has seen an expansion of healthcare infrastructure, it remains inadequate considering the size of its population.*

Considering the precarious education and health scenario which exists in UP, it remains intriguing that the budget priorities of the

<sup>25</sup> UP's educational infrastructure has expanded rapidly since its first five-year plan, from six universities in 1951 to 45 in 2019-20 and the number of degree colleges rising from 40 to 7,391 over the corresponding period. In 1950-51, there were 987 higher secondary schools, 2,854 upper primary schools and 31,979 primary schools; the corresponding number of these institutions in 2019-20 was 27,959, 83,859 and 138,185 respectively. [SA of UP, cited by AKS@UP at 75]

<sup>26</sup> For a compelling analysis of these issues, see Jean Dreze and Haris Gazdar H (1977), "Uttar Pradesh: The Burden of Inertia", in Dreze, Jean and Amartya Sen (eds.), *Indian Development: Selected Regional Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi. The strong dropout and attrition rates are evident from the NSS that data of 2019-2020. It shows only 15.38 per cent persons above the age of 15 years have studied up to Middle School and only 16.99 per cent finished High School, while only 8.3 per cent of the population have an undergraduate or above degree. Moreover, the educational profile of the rural population lags significantly compared to the urban population. However, a remarkable aspect is the expansion in the enrolment of girls at all levels, overtaking that of boys. In 1980-81, girl students comprised hardly one-fifth of the total students at different levels. However, by 2019-20, nearly half of the students at the school level were girls and their number exceeded that of boys at the degree level.

<sup>27</sup> Data drawn from Statistical Abstract for UP, cited by Ajit Kumar Singh in 'Uttar Pradesh Economy @75', mimeograph.

<sup>28</sup> Shruti Rajagopalan, and Abishek Choutagunta, 'Assessing Healthcare Capacity in India', (April 2020). *Mercatus Working Paper*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3570651>.



*Public sector enterprises will need to be adequately managed, rent-seeking must continue to be curbed and service delivery should see significant improvements.*

state government have tended to neglect the social sector.<sup>29</sup> There remains the imperative to increase public expenditure outlays, attract private investments for which procedures will need to be improved and regulatory mechanisms relaxed, and policy reforms in land, labour and markets initiated. Public sector enterprises will need to be adequately managed, rent-seeking must continue to be curbed and service delivery should see significant improvements. Finally, decentralisation and *Panchayati Raj* Institutions at the grassroots level need strengthening because the real power is yet to be given to them, despite the provisions of the 73 Constitutional Amendment of 1993.<sup>30</sup>

Undeniably, there has been noteworthy improvement in some of these trends in the last five years, particularly in the law-and-order situation, which has been a special focus of Adityanath. Although the overall situation has improved, critics point out that often draconian measures are used by the police to instill fear among the mafia and criminals.

There remains the need to undertake proactive measures to invite capital. Under the Adityanath regime, regulatory mechanisms have been made easier, and UP's ranking in the 'Ease of Doing Business Index', which used to be around 12<sup>th</sup> position, jumped to second position. This is indicative of the elimination of rent-seeking, especially at the ministerial level. However, sufficient resource investment is yet to flow in. Often Industrial Entrepreneur Memorandums are promised, but in practice, only about one-third are delivered. Nonetheless, the

<sup>29</sup> Despite the poor status of social indicators in UP, successive state governments have tended to neglect the social sector and this is reflected in the budgetary allocation to the sector. The share of the social sector remained at around 33 per cent of the total expenditure between 2000-01 and 2006-07. The share improved to around 38 per cent after that, but throughout this period, the share of social sector expenditure in UP was several percentage points below the average share in all states (Singh 2018). Per capita expenditure on social services is also much lower in UP as compared to other states except Bihar. In 2015-16, per capita social sector expenditure in UP was only ₹6,163, (about \$5114) about 30 per cent lower than the all state's average expenditure of ₹8,693 (about \$5161) [Singh 2018]. States like Chhattisgarh and Telangana spent more than double the amount on the social sector as compared to UP (Source: Singh 2018).

<sup>30</sup> The amendment provided constitutional status to *Panchayati Raj* institutions, devolving powers and responsibilities to the village bodies, enabling a framework for their funding and providing reservations to women and Scheduled Castes and Tribes. For details, see Subrata K. Mitra, 'Making Local Government Work: Local Elites, Panchayati Raj and governance in India, in Atul Kohli, edited, *The Success of India's Democracy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001.

outlook for future growth is much better due to certain steps taken by the present regime.

## Vision of UP as a Trillion Dollar Economy

Finally, one may consider the dream of Adityanath to make UP a US\$1 trillion (S\$1.3 trillion) economy, aligned with Modi's vision of making India into a US\$5 trillion economy (S\$6.7 trillion) by 2025. Following the footsteps of his leader, Adityanath has promised to transform UP into a US\$1 trillion (S\$1.3 trillion) economy by 2027. The state's budget for 2023-2024, with an outlay of ₹6.90 lakh crore (S\$125.1 billion), the biggest in UP's history, was announced in February 2023. In presenting it, Finance Minister Suresh Khanna set an investment target of ₹10 lakh crore (S\$180 billion) and the creation of 20,000 jobs over five years under the new UP Tourism Policy 2022.<sup>31</sup>

*Following the footsteps of his leader, Adityanath has promised to transform UP into a US\$1 trillion (S\$1.3 trillion) economy by 2027.*

However, economists have pointed out that Adityanath's US\$1 trillion (S\$1.3 trillion) target for the UP economy may be unrealistic. Ajit Kumar Singh goes to the extent of describing it as a 'pipe dream'.<sup>32</sup> He points out that in 2021, UP's GDP stood at ₹17 lakh crores, which is US\$0.3 trillion (S\$0.405 trillion). In his estimation, if UP aims to have a US\$1 trillion (S\$1.3 trillion) economy in the next five years, this must go up to ₹75 lakh crores (S\$1.35 trillion), registering an increase of 4.4 times in five years. For this to happen, UP must have an annual rate of GDP growth of 35 per cent per year, an almost impossible target to achieve, keeping in view the historical trends of UP's GDP growth.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Saksham Tandon, "Uttar Pradesh Budget 2023-24: Roadmap to a Trillion Dollar Economy", *Investindia.gov.in*, 6 March 2023, <https://www.investindia.gov.in/team-india-blogs/uttar-pradesh-budget-2023-24-roadmap-trillion-dollar-economy>. The government also allocated an additional ₹7,248 crore (S\$1.34 billion) for farmers and the old age pension scheme, and ₹1,120 crore (S\$207 million) for Divyang Pension Yojana. It also made a provision of ₹12,631 crore (S\$2.3 billion) for various programmes under the National Rural Health Mission.

<sup>32</sup> A K Singh, 'Uttar Pradesh@75 (miniograph)', op. cit.

<sup>33</sup> Ajit Kumar Singh, "Economic Growth in Uttar Pradesh in Recent Years: Rhetoric and Reality", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 11 December 2021. Singh questions the Yogi government's exaggerated claims about the improved state of the UP economy. Despite the hype about investments in the manufacturing sector and the 'Ease of Doing Business' index, he draws attention to the negative growth of 3.34 per cent in manufacturing during the present regime, as compared to a high growth of 14.64 per cent in the previous regime.

Finally, if UP has to address its long-term challenges, the state's leadership will have to place development at the centre of the political agenda. Regrettably, political parties have shown the propensity to come to power through electoral appeals to caste, community and locality, not so much for developing the state. Although the elected BJP talks of *Sab ka Saath, Sab ka Vikas* or inclusive development for all, the concept remains unclear of what constitutes the development of the people. Consensus has to be built and strengthened among the state's political and bureaucratic elites about the state's developmental priorities.

## Governance and State Capacity

Governance and state capacity, which are wide-ranging nature, encompass issues such as bureaucratic reforms, policing, petty corruption, rent-seeking and governance. There are two key issues – the first relates to the question of temporality and challenges us to examine the relationship between the colonial and the post-colonial while the second relates to the spatial characteristics and scale of UP.

In elaborating on the first issue of temporality, which essentially is about looking at continuities before and after independence in the context of the state, one could reference the work of David Potter on bureaucratic culture.<sup>34</sup> It highlights continuities in administrative structures, exemplified by the Indian Civil Service (ICS), the ‘steel frame’ of the British Raj, which largely remained intact, except for a change in nomenclature. Thus, at the highest levels of the state, the top civil service, consisting of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and the Indian Police Service (IPS), saw institutional continuity. If one looks at the careers of the first post-independence generation of UP government officers, a sense of patriarchy, a strict adherence to hierarchy, the continuing resilience of *esprit de corps*, a cultivated stance of maintaining a certain distance from local society and dependence on certain political intermediaries were features of this institutional continuity. These continuities are important in understanding the nature of state power in the context of present-day UP.

*These continuities are important in understanding the nature of state power in the context of present-day UP.*

At the same time, there were two fundamental changes after 1947 in UP’s state structure: firstly, the massive expansion in the size of the administration, and secondly, its centralisation in the secretariat in the capital, Lucknow. At the time of independence, UP had a lean structure at the apex level in terms of the ICS (subsequently the IAS) and the IPS. By the 2000s, this had proliferated considerably, propped

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<sup>34</sup> David C. Potter, *India’s Political Administrators: From ICS to IAS*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996 (2<sup>nd</sup> edn).

*Further, the government's energies were increasingly consumed in dealing with transfers, public grievances, petitions and memorandums that ideally should have been dealt with at local levels.*

up by thousands of support staff, security personnel and subordinate employees. In William Gould's view, "The state's development was mortgaged to the enhancement of the wage bill".<sup>35</sup> Further, the government's energies were increasingly consumed in dealing with transfers, public grievances, petitions and memorandums that ideally should have been dealt with at local levels. Gould reckons that by 2000, over 40 per cent of IAS offices in UP were posted in the state secretariat in Lucknow, making the entire structure top-heavy, with a proliferation of departments.

The functions of administration underwent a fundamental transformation after independence, specifically in the new role of the state as an agency to foster planned development.<sup>36</sup> This had two significant long-term consequences: firstly, a massive increase in the size of the administration, as noted above, and secondly, a changing relationship between bureaucrats and public goods.

## Challenges Facing the Bureaucracy

In their study of the IAS, Milan Vaishnav and Saksham Khosla observe:

"While small, India's elite civil service cadre, the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), occupies the nerve centre of the Indian state. Unfortunately, the IAS is hamstrung by political interference, outdated personnel procedures, and a mixed record on policy implementation, and it is in need of urgent reform."<sup>37</sup>

While not specific to UP, their analysis, based on extensive use of 'big data', is revealing in many aspects of governance. They note that the quality of "individual bureaucrats can have strong, direct,

<sup>35</sup> William Gould, *Bureaucracy, Community and Influence in India: Society and the State, 1930s-1960s*, Routledge, 2010.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Vaishnav and Tandon observe, "The IAS of today is hampered by several concomitant issues: a decline in the quality of recruits, political interference, perverse incentives for career advancement, a lack of specialized expertise and a perception of widespread corruption. These infirmities have compromised the ability of the IAS to fulfil its mandate." See Milan Vaishnav and Saksham Khosla, "The Indian Administrative Service Meets Big Data", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1 September 2016, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/09/01/indian-administrative-service-meets-big-data-pub-64457>.

and measurable impacts on tangible health, education and poverty outcomes. Further, they point out that ‘officers with strong local ties – thought to be vulnerable to corruption—are often linked to improved public service delivery’. They highlight that “political interference generates substantial inefficiency: the best officers do not always occupy important positions, while political loyalty offers bureaucrats an alternative path to career success.”<sup>38</sup>

It is well recognised that the IAS has carried out a broad portfolio of responsibilities such as maintaining law and order, overseeing revenue collection, managing pandemics and natural disasters, conducting free and fair elections, and, not the least, rolling out a plethora of developmental schemes. However, there is a growing view among policymakers that the IAS is faced with serious institutional decline.<sup>39</sup> Political analyst, Pratap Bhanu Mehta, noted that “the bureaucracy confuses ends with means, rules with outcomes, control with efficiency”.<sup>40</sup> “The overwhelming perception”, according to one commentator, is “that corrupt bureaucrats are despised but thrive; the honest are respected but do not rise; and idealists end up in the boondocks”.<sup>41</sup> To add to their woes, misgivings are frequently expressed about whether the IAS, as a generalist service, can continue to deliver in a complex governance context where domain knowledge and specialisation are increasingly valued. While it is acknowledged that frequent transfers of officers lead to their constantly learning new skills, critics point out that they rarely stay long enough in one field or sector to make an impact.

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In the context of governance in UP, the role of the bureaucracy has invited sharp critical scrutiny, including from members of the IAS themselves. The memoirs of T S R Subramanian and N C Saxena, two distinguished officers who spent much of their career in UP, are

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Pratap Bhanu Mehta, ‘Our Bureaucracy, Our Selves’, *Indian Express*, 5 June 2009.

<sup>41</sup> Uttar Sengupta, ‘Shaking Up the Frame’, *Outlook*, 16 June 2014, cited in Vaishnav and Tandon, op. cit.



*Their memoirs provide a compelling narrative on the decline in norms of governance in UP.*

instructive.<sup>42</sup> Subramanian served from the 1960s to the 1990s in UP and the Government of India, holding several important positions, including those of Chief Secretary of UP and Cabinet Secretary to the Government of India.<sup>43</sup> Saxena too served in the state and the centre from the 1960s onwards, retiring from the IAS in 2002.<sup>44</sup> Their memoirs provide a compelling narrative on the decline in norms of governance in UP. Two aspects stand out from their memoirs. The first relates to a continuity in the critical role played by the district officer and the second relates to the high expansion of the politician-bureaucrat interface. Let's briefly consider each of these.

In their early years, both Subramanian and Saxena served as district officers. While Subramanian was posted in the Ghazipur district, Saxena served in Aligarh and Agra districts. Both testify that the district officer remains the pivot of the 'system', a continuing feature of governance that has remained unchanged from colonial times. This observation is corroborated by the study by Vaishnav and Tandon, who note:

"Typically, district officers oversee revenue collection, law enforcement and crisis administration, making them among the most powerful bureaucrats in the country. They also are responsible for supervising all infrastructure development projects and working with district-level agencies to implement centrally sponsored schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, an all-India rural roads program, or the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, a federal workfare

<sup>42</sup> T S R Subramanian, *Journeys Through Babudom and Netaaland: Governance in India*, New Delhi, Rupa, 2004; and Naresh Chandra Saxena, *What Ails the IAS and Why It Fails to Deliver, An Insider's View*, New Delhi, Sage Select, 2019. Also see Naresh Chandra Saxena, "Has the IAS failed the nation? An insider's view", *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 2018, 53, 14-17.

<sup>43</sup> T S R. Subramanian (1938-2018) joined the IAS in 1961 and served in UP in different capacities in the districts and the State Secretariat and was appointed Chief Secretary in the aftermath of the demolition of the Babri Mosque in December 1992. He later served in the Centre as Secretary in the Ministry of Textiles and thereafter as Cabinet Secretary during 1996-98.

<sup>44</sup> N C Saxena (b. 1942) joined the IAS in 1964 and served for 15 years in different capacities at UP, including as Secretary in the Land Reforms Department (1980). He later served in the Government of India in the Ministries of Environment and Rural Development and as Secretary of the Planning Commission. Between 1993 and 1996, he was Director, National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie, the academy for training IAS officers. Subsequent to his retirement in 2002, Saxena also served as a Member of the National Advisory Council and as Consultant with UNICEF, UNDP.

program and the largest social-sector scheme in the world. On account of their wide-ranging powers, district magistrates can be described as the ‘king-pin’ in a district’s affairs...”<sup>45</sup>

In recent decades, the functions of the District Magistrate have grown in importance as the nodal office for the implementation of projects that use constituency development funds allocated to the MPs and Members of the State Legislature. Elected representatives constantly interact with district authorities and often exert pressure to use the earmarked funds to enhance their political reputations and leverage their electoral support. Politicians are only acutely aware that the success of development projects in their constituency affects their ability to get re-elected and impacts their political careers directly. As the execution of such projects is the responsibility of the district authorities, they can expedite or slow down the pace. This dynamic inevitably shapes the civil servant-politician relationship.

*Politicians are only acutely aware that the success of development projects in their constituency affects their ability to get re-elected and impacts their political careers directly.*

Further, a well-recognised feature of politics has been the growing interface between citizen and local bureaucracy, which stems from the ever-growing portfolio of social welfare and social security schemes which are run concurrently by both the central and state governments.<sup>46</sup> Such schemes involve the disbursement of funds to a large number of beneficiaries or *labharthis*. Perhaps the most well-known of such schemes has been the MNREGA – a sense of the scheme’s scale may be gauged by the sheer number of beneficiaries, which, at present, are reckoned to be 14,764,589 in 75 districts across UP. At a local level, such numbers could be electorally significant. For example, some of the larger districts, such as Azamgarh in eastern UP, have 348,350 beneficiaries while Hardoi in central UP has 328,585 beneficiaries.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Vaishnav and Tandon, op cit.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Vikram K Chand (ed.), *Reinventing Public Service Delivery in India: Selected Case Studies*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006, 404 pp.

<sup>47</sup> Number of MGNREGA Beneficiary Registration Status who joined PM-SYM (As reported by the States/UTs through NREGASoft), Govt. of India, Ministry of Rural Development, [https://mnregaweb4.nic.in/netnrega/PM\\_SYM/PM\\_SYM.aspx?page=S&short\\_name=UP&state\\_name=UTTAR%20PRADESH&state\\_code=31&fin\\_year=2023-2024&source=national&Digest=98Dzm/o1he5PW1Ki0/jOxw](https://mnregaweb4.nic.in/netnrega/PM_SYM/PM_SYM.aspx?page=S&short_name=UP&state_name=UTTAR%20PRADESH&state_code=31&fin_year=2023-2024&source=national&Digest=98Dzm/o1he5PW1Ki0/jOxw).

The sheer complexity and range of welfare schemes are added to this geographical scale. The Indian government's schemes are of two types: 'central sector schemes', which are fully funded from central funds, and 'centrally sponsored schemes', mainly funded by the centre and implemented by the states.<sup>48</sup> In addition, the UP government has 43 schemes listed on its official website, ranging from pensions and support for the girl child's education and marriage to insurance for crop failure, digging of tube wells and urban housing.<sup>49</sup>

### Political Interference and 'Punitive Transfers'

*To effectively administer these schemes, bureaucracies at the state secretariat, district, sub-division, block and village levels need leadership, technology, personnel, skills and processes that can prevent 'leakages' and corruption.*

A key question is how to effectively administer an ever-growing number of such schemes that have become politically significant in local politics. This inevitably raises the critical question of state capacity. To effectively administer these schemes, bureaucracies at the state secretariat, district, sub-division, block and village levels need leadership, technology, personnel, skills and processes that can prevent 'leakages' and corruption. However, when one considers the state of the bureaucracy in UP, a rather dismal picture emerges, characterised by rampant political interference in everyday governance and frequent punitive transfers of officials.<sup>50</sup> "The most visible and lamentable aspect of political interference in the civil service has been the phenomenon of punitive transfers", observe Vaishnav and Tandon. In UP, the practice of frequent and "punitive postings" has been resorted to by successive chief ministers, irrespective of their ideological and party affiliation.

Here are some examples of chief ministers who have shaped UP's politics. Mulayam Singh Yadav of the SP, during his first term as chief minister between December 1989 and June 1991, transferred 419 IAS officers and 228 IPS officers. In his second stint as chief minister between December 1993 and June 1995, he shifted as many as 323

<sup>48</sup> According to figures provided in the Union Budget of 2022 the Government of India had 740 'central sector schemes' fully funded from central funds and 65 'centrally sponsored schemes' mainly funded by the centre and implemented by the states.

<sup>49</sup> "Scheme List for Uttar Pradesh", <https://govtschemes.in/allschemes/Uttar%20Pradesh#gsc.tab=0>.

<sup>50</sup> Virendra Nath Bhatt, "A Hellhole for Civil Servants", *Tehelka*, 23 Sept 2013.

IAS officers and 493 IPS officers. His successor, Kalyan Singh of the BJP, transferred 485 IAS officers and 665 IPS officers between September 1997 and November 1997. Mayawati of the BSP, the state's first Dalit chief minister, in her first two terms that barely lasted four months and six months respectively (June-October 1995 and March-September 1997), broke all records by transferring 568 IAS officers and 787 IPS officers.<sup>51</sup> Such transfers seem to have become a feature of governance in UP. In May 2002, on taking office for her third stint as chief minister, Mayawati transferred over 200 IAS officers and IPS officers in her first week, affecting nearly one-fourth of the IAS/IPS cadre in UP.<sup>52</sup> In May 2007, she took oath for her fourth term as chief minister and, within six months, she transferred over 1,000 officers. Her successor, Akhilesh Yadav of the SP went even further when, within one month of taking power in March 2012, he transferred 1,000 officers of the IAS and IPS.<sup>53</sup>

*Tabadala Udyog* (Transfer Industry) is the phrase used by the media to describe this rampant phenomenon. Its deleterious consequences can be gauged by the fact that in 2023, the cadre strength of the IAS in UP was only 561 officers, while IPS officers numbered only 456 in 2022, many of whom have had to face the brunt of these frequent and punitive transfers.<sup>54</sup> Undoubtedly, the morale and professional circumstances in which the IAS and IPS officers find themselves in UP seem to be greatly compromised. Instructive in this context was a writ petition filed in 2011 under the Public Interest Litigation before the Supreme Court by T S R Subramanian, together with 83 senior retired IAS officers and IPS officers, who sought mandatory court injunctions to protect the independence of the civil service from political interference. The petition requested the Apex Court to direct the central and state governments to ensure that senior civil service

*Undoubtedly, the morale and professional circumstances in which the IAS and IPS officers find themselves in UP seem to be greatly compromised.*

<sup>51</sup> For details of frequent bureaucratic transfers, see Ajoy Bose, *Behenji: A political biography of Mayawati*, New Delhi, Penguin, 2007.

<sup>52</sup> Sharat Pradhan, 'Mayawati transfers over 200 officers in seven days', *rediff.com*, 11 May 2002, <https://m.rediff.com/news/2002/may/11up.htm>.

<sup>53</sup> Citing a 2012 study by Lakshmi Iyer and Anandi Mani, Vaishnav and Tandon note that "the probability that an IAS officer would be transferred in a given year was 53 per cent, and this is increased by 10 per cent when a state elects a new chief minister".

<sup>54</sup> *Civil List of the Indian Administrative Service, Uttar Pradesh, 2023* and *Civil List of the Indian Police Service for Uttar Pradesh, 2022* [available online on the UP Government portal].

appointments are made for a fixed term based on advice from the Civil Services Boards. They further prayed that oral instructions given by the politicians to the civil servants must be recorded in writing. In a landmark judgement on 31 October 2013, the Supreme Court pronounced that the “...fixed tenure of bureaucrats will promote professionalism, efficiency and good governance”. The Bench further observed, “Much of the deterioration in the functioning of bureaucracy is due to political interference”.<sup>55</sup>

*The calls for reforms from within the civil service seem to be growing.*

The calls for reforms from within the civil service seem to be growing. For example, Arvind Mayaram, a former Finance Secretary to the Indian government, with a distinguished career in the IAS, makes the case that there is a need to “right-size the Indian Administrative Service” and “declutter the top”. He notes, ‘The political executive must recognise the seriousness of the problems in the civil services and objectively undertake a paradigm shift in administrative reforms.’<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Arvind Mayaram, “Reforming the Indian Administrative Service”, ISAS Working Paper 365, Institute of South Asian Studies, 7 May 2023, <https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/papers/reforming-the-indian-administrative-service/>.

## Looking Ahead

As political parties face the national elections from 19 April to 1 June 2024, the pulse of political activity in the heartland state has quickened. Will Modi's recent inauguration of Ram Temple further boost the electoral prospects of the BJP? Will the BJP be able to leverage the Modi-Adityanath *double engine ki sarkar* (two-engine government) working in tandem to retain UP as its electoral bastion? Will UP still act as a bulwark for the BJP in a nationwide contest, which sees the major opposition parties coming together in an alliance to oust Modi? Will the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), an opposition front comprising 28 parties led by the Congress, be able to effectively come together to put up candidates for a direct one-to-one fight against the BJP? Political analysts may disagree on the answers to these questions. Yet, they would undeniably concede that the electoral verdict in UP will once again shape the political future of the Hindutva project, which has now become deeply entangled with the future of Indian democracy itself. In doing so, the verdict from UP will 'make or break' the electoral resolve of the BJP for a consecutive third term in office for Modi.

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Meanwhile, intense political activity is underway in the state to stitch together electoral alliances. There are strong indications that working under the banner of the INDIA alliance, the SP, led by Akhilesh, will work with the Congress to challenge the BJP in UP. It remains to be seen if seat-sharing arrangements among the different parties will work out amicably or not. Analysts see this as a very considerable challenge, with undercurrents of tensions manifesting. The possibility of a straight two-way contest between the BJP and the opposition has already received a setback, with Mayawati announcing that the BSP will not join any alliance or bloc and will contest alone, a move that will inevitably divide the non-Hindutva votes. Nonetheless, the INDIA leadership seems confident in crafting its appeal, particularly to farmers, OBC communities and Muslim voters, all of which add up to a significant total.

*These efforts are part of its larger strategy of Hindutva outreach and expansion of influence among UP's diverse and multitudinous Dalit communities.*

On its part, the BJP has taken steps to reinvigorate its alliances with smaller parties that are influential in particular areas of UP – the Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party, Apna Dal (Sonelal) and the Nishad Party, all of which have historically helped in maximising the electoral dividend for the National Democratic Alliance in the 2014 and 2019 elections. These efforts are part of its larger strategy of Hindutva outreach and expansion of influence among UP's diverse and multitudinous Dalit communities. By reaching out to the subaltern Hindu castes, the BJP wishes to strengthen its case that the party encompasses all Indians while rejecting caste hierarchy.

However, there is intense competition for the allegiance of the Dalit communities in UP. A recent study argues that the Dalit movement which was institutionalised after 1989 in UP by Kanshi Ram and Mayawati through the BSP is “unravelling” and the BSP is faced with an “existential crisis”.<sup>57</sup> It draws attention to the fragmentation of UP's Dalit politics, with newer formations such as the Bhim Army, led by Chandrasekhar Azad, which is trying to mobilise the younger generation of Dalits back to the radical ideological foundations of the Dalit movement laid by B R Ambedkar and Kanshi Ram.

In parallel, the BJP has intensified its outreach to the backward caste – the Pasmada Muslim communities which have a substantial presence in the state. The party has tried to work with the All India Pasmada Muslim Mahaz by taking up issues of hierarchy and discrimination that have long existed in the Muslim society. The party has also criticised the elite Ashraf leadership, which it blames for promoting ‘separateness’ and ‘pseudo-secularism’ that has kept the Muslim masses backwards.<sup>58</sup> To what extent these efforts will succeed remains to be seen.

<sup>57</sup> Sudha Pai and Sajjan Kumar, *Maya, Modi, Azad, Dalit Politics in the Time of Hindutva*, Gurugram, Harper Collins, 2023. For the origins and development of the Dalit movement in UP, also see Sudha Pai, *Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Democratic Revolution: The Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2002.

<sup>58</sup> A measure of the scale of the BJP's outreach to Pasmada Muslims is provided by the fact that the party fielded a record 391 Muslim candidates in the UP municipal elections held in May 2023, out of whom 61 candidates won. See Mayank Kumar, “BJP candidate list for U.P. civic polls shows outreach to Pasmada Muslims”, *The Hindu*, 1 May 2023, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/bjp-candidate-list-for-up-civic-polls-shows-outreach-to-pasmada-muslims/article66801133.ece>.

While the electoral behaviour of voters in UP in the 2024 national elections cannot be predicted, analysts will agree that it will have a 'make or break effect' on the fortunes of whichever political party or electoral alliance comes to power. Further, the new dispensation will have to come to terms with the key challenges which UP is faced with, notably:

1. Restoring the confidence of the minorities in their rights as citizens and in removing the perception of discrimination in public life.
2. Taking cognisance of the cumulative development deficit which UP has faced for many decades, making investments in social infrastructure and giving priority to inclusive development.
3. Protecting the civil service and police from political interference and frequent transfers and enhancing state capacity for service delivery.



## Appendix 1: About the Authors

**Ms Claudia Chia** is an independent researcher. Formerly, she was a Research Analyst at the Institute of South Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore (NUS). She earned her Master of Arts (by Research) in South Asian Studies from NUS. Her dissertation on the United Nations' mediation efforts on Kashmir received the Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry's prize for the best thesis on South Asian Studies.

Ms Chia worked as a graduate teaching assistant under the Graduate Teaching Fellowship at NUS. During her two years of teaching, she was a two-time recipient of the Graduate Students' Teaching Award. She has also worked as a research assistant and provided research support and analysis on India-ASEAN relations, India-Singapore bilateral relations, diplomatic history in South Asia and entrepreneurship education in India.

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Ms Gurung graduated with a Master's degree in International Relations from the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India. She holds a Bachelor's degree (with Honours) in Political Science from Jesus and Mary College, University of Delhi.

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Associate Professor Kudaisya received his MA and MPhil degrees from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi, and a PhD from the University of Cambridge, United Kingdom. He has held a post-doctoral fellowship at the Centre for Contemporary Studies of the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, New Delhi. Prior to joining NUS, he was an Assistant Professor at the School of Arts in Nanyang Technological University. He has held visiting research appointments at the Asia Research Institute, NUS, and the Research School of Pacific & Asian Studies of the Australian National University, Canberra, as well as at the Institute of Advanced Studies, JNU, and the National Institute of Ethnology in Osaka.





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