

Regionalism: Notes for UPSC Polity

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

Regionalism is an important topic for the Polity segment of the IAS Exams as it is a major factor affecting the politics of India.

What is the aim of Regionalism?

Regionalism and those that believe in its ideology aim at increasing the political power and influence available to all or some residents of a particular region. Their demands occur in "strong" forms, such as sovereignty, separatism, secession and independence, as well as more moderate campaigns for greater autonomy (such as states' rights, decentralization or devolution). Regionalists favour confederations over unitary nation states with strong central governments. They may, however, embrace alternate forms of federalism.

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 the local populations by improving regional or local economies, in terms of better fiscal responsibility, regional development, allocation of resources, implementation of local policies.

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 may be, whereas "regionalist" parties are a subset of regional parties that specifically campaign for greater autonomy or independence in their region.

Because regional parties – including regionalist parties – often cannot receive enough votes or legislative seats to be politically powerful, they may join political coalitions or seek to be part of a coalition government. Notable examples include the coalition government of 1996 when both mainstream parties such as the Indian National Congress 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 favor. 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. Abolition of regional parties
3. Economic development of backward regions
4. Restructuring the society in a way that it promotes unity
5. Cultural sensitisation