

SC Politics in Bihar

Data from the 2023 census in Bihar shows that the **population of Scheduled Castes or Dalits in the state accounts for 19.65 per cent (2.56 crore) of the state's total population.**¹ Given the substantial number of these groups, political parties rely heavily on their support to secure victory in state elections. With the Bihar Legislative Assembly elections upcoming in 2025, many of the deciding factors have to do with the caste politics of the state. The issue of the caste census remains a point of contention between the ruling NDA alliance and the opposition, as well as the budget allocation for the development and upliftment of marginalised backwards communities. To understand the caste politics in Bihar at present, it is necessary to understand the historical relevance of the caste system to the political landscape of Bihar.

Historical Background

The history of the politics of the backward castes in the state is often traced back to the Janeu movement of the 1920s. This movement sought to mobilise the backwards castes and campaign for their upliftment, particularly the Yadavs, who were the most numerous in the state at the time. This was achieved through the acquisition of wealth and land, and the process of “Sanskritization,” that is, by adopting habits and practices of the Brahmins or the upper castes in order to elevate their own position in the caste hierarchy.

Rakesh Ankit in ‘Caste Politics in Bihar: In Historical Continuum’ highlights the domination of “caste orientation” rather than “class orientation” during this period that “fed a clash between the upper elite dominated national freedom movement and the social movement of agricultural communities and backward castes”. This laid the foundation for the differing political interests and socio-economic aspirations between the upper-middle classes and the lower castes.²

The Janeu movement later resulted in the formation of organisations such as the Kisan Sabha, the Yadav Mahasabha, the Momin Conference and the Triveni Sangh. **The Triveni Sangh, which was founded in 1933, is widely considered to be the first effort that was able to consolidate a well-defined and established political outlook for the backward castes** in order to achieve their socio-political interests. It represented one of the earliest initiatives undertaken to form an independent political party for the backward classes and actively acted as opposition to the disinterest and dominance of the Congress and the upper castes. The political representation of the backward castes, scheduled castes and tribes was minimal in the pre-independence era. After independence, their representation increased progressively but the leadership in the Congress failed to and still fails to adequately represent their actual numerical strength.

From the 1930s to 1960s, a combination of various factors - including but not limited to the increasing factionalism within the Congress, and the withdrawal of support of the large population of backward castes in

¹ [Deccan Herald](#)

² [Indian History Collective](#)

Bihar - were responsible for Congress's decline in popularity in the state. The scheduled castes were dissatisfied with the lack of representation in the Congress, particularly in its leadership, which was dominated by upper castes such as the Kayasths, Bhumihars, Brahmin, and Rajputs who constituted over 40% of the party's membership.³

Some crucial reforms that were brought about during this period include the Bihar Land Reforms Act of 1950, which legally abolished the interests of zamindars and tenure-holders and vested these interests in the state. This Act saw some success in altering the existing social hierarchy, producing a "new class of people" from among "occupancy tenants." Some other landmark events in the caste politics of Bihar include the establishment of the Bihar State Backward Classes Federation in 1947, the grant of universal adult suffrage in 1950 and 1952, the formation of the Government of India's Backward Classes Commission in 1953, and the publishing of its report in 1955.

The emergence of the Socialists resulting from a split in the Congress in 1948 was successful in attracting large masses of the middle-class among the backward castes with its ideology focusing on social equality and justice. **Ram Manohar Lohiya was a prominent figure during this era, as well as Karpoori Thakur, who was a Socialist leader from a scheduled caste.** The 1967 elections were held against this background ending Congress' two-decade-long domination in the state with a non-Congress government coming into a power composed of leaders of various political parties. Scheduled caste MPs from the Congress won 23 out of 45 seats. This election season was of great importance for people of scheduled and backwards castes, as it saw leaders of and from these social groups coming into positions of power and playing an active role in decision making.

The Samvid Sarkar (SVD ministry) of Mahamaya Prasad Sinha and Karpoori Thakur came into power in 1967, becoming the first non-Congress government in Bihar. They were succeeded by the government headed by B. P. Mandal in 1968, the first person from the Backward Classes to become Chief Minister. His term was followed by that of B. P. Shastri, who was the first person from the Scheduled Castes to become Chief Minister.

JP Movement and the Present Era

A turning point in the history of Bihar's political landscape came in 1974 with the **JP movement, which was an anti-corruption political movement against the Congress government under Indira Gandhi started by student fronts of Jan Sangh and Samyukta Socialist Party.** This movement was crucial in turning the loyalty of the scheduled castes completely against Congress. The movement also produced most of the political leaders of the 1990s. The early 1970s also saw the growth of Naxalite Movement, particularly in the regions of Bhojpur, Patna, Gaya and Aurangabad, with its presence continuing well into the 1980s. These districts have been denoted as backward districts, indicating that recruitment to Naxal movements targeted backward and scheduled castes, such as the Yadavs and Kurmis, who were prone to facing oppression and exploitation. The three dominant Naxalist factions in Bihar were the CPI(ML) Liberation, CPI(ML) Party Unity, and the Maoist

³[Indian History Collective](#)

Communist Centre (MCC) which is an extreme left party. The CPI(ML)Party Unity and the MCC are banned and operate underground.

In 1977, the Janata Party came to power and under Chief Minister Karpoori Thakur, introduced significant reforms for the benefit of the backward castes. **This government implemented 25% reservation for Other Backward Classes** in government services and also took the decision of holding elections for the village level Panchayats. These reforms were instrumental in dismantling the dominance of upper-castes in positions of authority. The backward castes formed nearly 60%⁴ of the state's population but prior to 1977 had not been given any real opportunity for political participation. However, the Janata period also saw its fair share of violence and disruptions, most of which was directly caused by the reservation policy. The dominance of the upper caste groups in the social hegemony and in offices of political power was almost erased and replaced by a dominance of the backward castes.

This ministry was eventually dismissed by Indira Gandhi and the Congress government which returned to power in 1980. This victory was possible due to the division between the non-Congress forces in the state, and an increase in the number of MLAs from the scheduled castes. The 1980s reign of the Congress was characterised by political disarray, violence, and abuses of power, which all contributed to the Congress's downfall in the state and gave way to anti-Congress parties to come into power.

During the elections of 1990 and 1995, many MLAs from Bihar belonging to backward castes were elected into power. **A key figure in the political history of Bihar for the Scheduled Castes was Lalu Prasad Yadav belonging to the Yadav OBC.** He was a key leader in the RJD who came to power in 1990 and ruled for 15 years until 2005. He pursued populist policies and his decisions such as the arrest of the Hindu nationalist L.K. Advani and the stopping of his Rath Yatra and his strong opposition to the upper caste made him popular among the lower-caste Hindus and the Muslims. However, during this time, among the caste groups within the backward class, **the economically rich and politically influential Yadavs were the recipients of most of the benefits during his tenure, while the larger mass of the backward caste remained poor.**

The subsequent decline of his popularity contributed to the formation of the **Samata Party in 1994 by the engineer and Kurmi leader, Nitish Kumar.** The policies implemented under Nitish Kumar's government are considered to have performed better, especially on matters such as reservation of seats for EBCs and women as well as 15-point package for minorities, which have appealed to Muslim communities as well. However, there persists some hesitation owing to their alliance with the BJP. The NDA alliance, (comprising mainly of the JDU and LJP) was successful in winning majority seats in the 2010 Bihar Legislative Assembly elections, primarily owing to the strong support of the backwards caste community.

⁴[Indian History Collective](#)

Reservation Policies

The Delimitation of Parliamentary and Assembly Constituencies Order, 2008, provides for the reservation of seats in the Lok Sabha for members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled tribes. Of the total composition of the Lok Sabha, 412 seats are general, 84 seats are reserved for Scheduled Castes and 47 seats for the Scheduled Tribes. In the state-wise distribution, **40 out of 243 seats are reserved for members of SC/ST from Bihar.**

In the post-Independence era, Bihar, B.P. Mandal of the dominant Yadav caste and Karpoori Thakur representing the weaker barber castes dominated the political space. Karpoori Thakur was in support of implementing 26% reservation for OBCs, but this was reduced to 20% after making additional provisions for the reservation of women and economically backward sections. During Karpoori Thakur's regime, **The Mungeri Lal Commission in 1977 suggested the sub-classification of backward castes into extremely backward classes and backward classes.** Following this reclassification, **20% reservation was given to backward castes, 12% to EBCs, and 8% to OBCs.** This resulted in tensions with not only the upper castes, but also with the dominant OBCs of Yadavs.

Lalu Prasad Yadav's tenure from 1990 was characterised by the Yadavs and dominant OBCs enjoying a large share of the benefits from reservation and welfare schemes, often appropriating the reservation quota despite being the more socially, educationally and economically uplifted class. **Benefits of reservation did not percolate equally to the most backward classes such as the EBCs and OBCs**, who were often sidelined. It was against such a backdrop that Nitish Kumar was then able to successfully cement the support of these backward sections, with the EBCs showing continued support for his party, the Janata Dal (United) (JD(U)).

During Nitish Kumar's regime which began in 2005, he has expressed strong support for the OBC reservation, advocating for the removal of the 50% cap on reservations, accepting the 10% EWS reservation in 2019 and pushing for a caste census in Bihar. **In 2007, he introduced the 'Mahadalit' Schemes targeting the upliftment of the poorest, most disadvantaged Dalits at the lowest rung of the caste hierarchy, comprising 22 of Bihar's Scheduled Castes.** He initiated a state-wide caste census in 2023 in order to obtain updated data of the population of the SC, OBC and EBCs. The socio economic and caste census conducted by the UPA Government had not publicly disclosed the findings and data. In 2018 and 2019, the Bihar Legislative Assembly voted unanimously in favour of a caste census, and in **June 2022, an all-party meeting headed by Nitish Kumar gave unanimous assent to conducting a caste census.**

On 9 November 2023, the Bihar Legislative Assembly passed the Bihar (In admission in Educational Institutions) Reservation (Amendment) Act, 2023 and the Bihar Reservation Of Vacancies In Posts And Services (For Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes And Other Backward Classes) (Amendment) Act, 2023. The Amendments **increased reservations for EBC, OBC, SC, and ST communities from 50 to 65%** in educational institutions and government jobs. The Act was passed unanimously in the Bihar Legislative Assembly following the publishing of the report of the caste survey conducted in the state. **The Act aims to**

add an additional 10% reservation for economically weaker sections, making the total quota for reservation 75%.⁵

On 20 June 2024, the Patna High Court declared both Amendments as unconstitutional. According to the High Court, the data from the census report suggests that SC and ST communities occupy a total of 68.52% jobs within the government sector, indicating that they have adequate representation and opportunities, and that provisions should be made for the upliftment of more marginalised and vulnerable groups. The High Court also stated that the data from the report does not present any reason for the reservation ceiling to exceed the 50% limit as prescribed in *Indra Sawhney v. Union of India*, and by extension, was a violation of the basic structure of the Constitution.

SC Voting Patterns

The population of SC in Bihar is significant, comprising about 19% of the state's population. The SC is sub categorised further into various sub castes with differing socio-economic and political profiles. Given their population, their voting behaviour is a crucial determinant of electoral outcomes.

Lok Sabha Elections

2019: In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the NDA Alliance led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Janata Dal (United) (JD (U)) secured 39 seats (35.4% of the total vote share) in Bihar. The influence of Ram Vilas Paswan, the leader of the Lok Jan Shakti Party (LJP) played a significant role in gaining the support of the Scheduled Castes, particularly the Dusadh sub-caste, in favour of the alliance. Some sub-castes such as the Musahar and Pasi preferred the UPA Alliance led by the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD).

2024: The 2024 Lok Sabha election showed a shift in SC voting patterns across states. In Bihar, Dalit voters ensured victory for the NDA but by a smaller margin than in 2019, with the BJP and JD(U) led alliance winning 30 seats (46.3% of the vote share). LJP's Ram Vilas Paswan's successor, Chirag Paswan was able to retain the support of the Dusadh voters. In Bihar, the NDA's performance in SC-reserved seats (Gopalganj, Sasaram, Hajipur, Samastipur, Jamui, and Gaya) remained robust but showed a reduced margin of victory in some constituencies, showing the diversified preferences of SC voters. Among the sub-castes under the Dalits, Ravidasi and Musahar voters showed increased support for the INDIA bloc (Congress and RJD).

Bihar Assembly Elections

2015: The Mahagathbandhan (RJD, JD(U), Congress), with significant SC support, won 178 of 243 seats (42.9% vote share), with Lokniti-CSDS data indicating that SC voters, particularly Ravidasi and Musahar sub-castes, leaned heavily towards the RJD due to its historical association with backward caste mobilization.⁶ There was a split among Dusadh voters, with some showing preference for the NDA (BJP-LJP) alliance.⁷ However, promised initiatives of the Mahagathbandhan like Nitish Kumar's "Mahadalit" welfare

⁵ [Supreme Court Observer](#)

⁶ [Frontline](#)

⁷ [Frontline](#)

schemes were able to capture a significant number of SC voters. **The NDA was only able to secure 58 seats (34.9% of the vote share)**

2020: **NDA wins 125 seats (37.9% of votes), narrowly defeating the Mahagathbandhan, which had secured 110 seats.** Lokniti-CSDS post-poll surveys show that SC voters' loyalty returned to the NDA, owing to the alliance between BJP, JD(U) and LJP, as well as Nitish Kumar's governance record.⁸ Issues like unemployment and the response to COVID-19 were instrumental in swaying certain sub-castes such as voters of Ravidasi and Musahar to support the RJD-led Mahagathbandhan. Axis My India exit polls predicted a close contest, **with the NDA securing around 38-42% of SC votes compared to the Mahagathbandhan's 35-40%**, suggesting a fragmented SC vote bank influenced by local factors and candidate appeal.

Trends in SC Voting Patterns

Analysis of the voting patterns of both Lok Sabha and elections reveals that **there is a divergence in the political preferences of sub-castes.** The voting behaviour of the Dalits is not uniform due to variances in voting patterns among its different subcastes. **The LJP led formerly by Ram Vilas Paswan and presently Chirag Paswan of the Dusadh sub-caste has enjoyed support of their community.** Hence, this sub-caste tends to prefer the NDA. The voting pattern of other sub-castes such as the **Ravidasi and Musahar voters, displays greater volatility, shifting between the NDA and INDIA/Mahagathbandhan** based on their approach to tackling economic and social justice issues. The NDA saw a period of dominance, having secured a strong support over SC voters in 2019, but failed to have a firm grasp, especially among non-Dusadh SCs. By 2024, the INDIA bloc had capitalized on issues such as constitutional protection and socio-economic welfare.

Differences in voting behaviour can also be attributed to the urban-rural divide of voters. **Data from Lokniti-CSDS shows that rural areas are dominated by Musahar and Pasi subcastes, who tend to lean towards the RJD and its populist appeal.**⁹ Urban areas, where Dusadh predominates, show voting patterns more in favour of the NDA and its emphasis on development.

The NDA's focus on welfare and introduction of welfare schemes such as PM Awas Yojana have gathered and enjoyed sustained SC support, but **SC sub-castes that are more economically marginalised are more receptive to the RJD and Congress, who focus on identity-based mobilisation.**

Independent Candidates

Due to the dominance of political parties and alliances in the state, independents often receive only limited support and success during elections.

2019 Lok Sabha Elections: No prominent IND Dalit candidates won, with most SC-reserved seats going to candidates from the NDA or UPA. A lack of organisational support is seen with IND Dalits receiving only about 1-5% of vote shares, mainly from Ravidasi or Musahar backgrounds.

⁸ [Frontline](#)

⁹ [The Hindu](#)

2024 Lok Sabha Elections: The rise of Chandrashekhar Azad's Azad Samaj Party (ASP) in Uttar Pradesh inspired some IND Dalit candidacies in Bihar, but none secured victories. In Karakat, Pawan Singh (a Rajput, not SC) contested as an independent, impacting NDA votes but not representing Dalit interests directly.

Performance of SC Political Parties

BSP: The Bahujan Samaj Party, which holds predominance in Uttar Pradesh, has a relatively minimal sphere of influence in Bihar, with its presence limited to the districts bordering Uttar Pradesh such as Gopalganj and Sasaram. **In 2019, it garnered 19% of SC votes** (per Lokniti-CSDS) but won no seats. **In 2024, its vote share declined further (estimated 5-10%),** with no wins, as SC voters preferred NDA or INDIA candidates. In assembly polls (2015: 2 seats; 2020: 1 seat), its performance remained marginal, lacking a strong local leadership.

LJP: LJP has always historically been aligned with the NDA. Its former leader Ram Vilas Paswan was a crucial leader from the Dusadh subcaste of the Dalits. Under his leadership, **the party was able to win 6 seats in 2019.** Post-2020, the party split into LJP (Ram Vilas) under Chirag Paswan and Rashtriya Lok Janshakti Party (RLJP) under Pashupati Paras, significantly weakening its impact. **In 2024, LJP (Ram Vilas) won 5 seats within the NDA, successfully leveraging the support of Dusadh votes,** while RLJP's influence declined.

HAM (Secular): Jitan Ram Manjhi's Hindustani Awam Morcha (Secular) is largely supported by the Musahar subcaste (5% of SCs). **It won 1 seat in 2020 (NDA ally) and 1 in 2024 (NDA).** Individually its electoral impact is small, and it is dependent on alliances.

Sub-Caste Dynamics

According to the Bihar caste survey of 2023, the population of SCs is around 19% of the total population of Bihar. The Scheduled Castes are further categorised into sub-castes, with the most prominent ones in Bihar being Dusadh, Chamar, Musahar, and Pasi. Major Dalit sub-castes and their political alignments are as follows:

1. **Dusadh (Paswan) form about 5.3% of the total population of the Scheduled Castes,** making them the most populous SC. They are strong supporters of the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) and its factions, led by the Paswan family (formerly Ram Vilas Paswan, now Chirag Paswan). The Dusadh identity is politically assertive, **often aligning with the NDA due to LJP's consistent partnership with the BJP.** The Dusadhs are relatively in a better economic position among other SCs, having made some progress through government jobs and political representation.
2. **Ravidasi are about 5.2% of the total SC population.** They face significant discrimination but have a growing educated middle class. Historically their political alignment has been mixed, **leaning towards the RJD and Congress, with some sections supporting the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP),** although its impact is limited as compared to Uttar Pradesh.

3. **Musahar constitute about 3% of the total SC population in Bihar.** They are among the most marginalised, landless labourers among the Scheduled Castes. Despite Nitish Kumar's Mahadalit initiatives, illiteracy and high levels of poverty are widespread. **They have historically supported the RJD due to its focus on the poor, but welfare schemes such as Nitish's Kumar's Mahadalit schemes have made them supporters of the JD(U)-NDA alliance.** Jitan Ram Manjhi's HAM (Secular) also has had some influence in the Musahar subcaste, but with limited success.
4. **Pasi, having population strength of 0.9% among the SC,** are concentrated mainly in eastern Bihar. They are less politically mobilised and organised than Dusadh or Ravidasi. **They tend to align with dominant regional parties (RJD or JD(U))** based on local candidates rather than a cohesive sub-caste agenda.

Others (Dhobi, Dom, etc.) also follow a similar pattern, lacking any significant political organisation, tending to vote in line with broader SC trends, lacking independent sub-caste mobilization.

Political Behavior of Sub-Castes

1. **Hierarchy Within SCs:** Despite being categorized as SCs, an internal hierarchy exists. **Dusadh and Ravidasi, being larger and more assertive, often dominate political narratives, while Musahar and Pasi remain at the margins due to extreme poverty and lack of leadership.** Tensions exist, particularly between Dusadh and Ravidasi, fueled by competition for political representation and resources. For instance, the LJP's Dusadh-centric agenda has alienated Ravidasi voters, who see it as neglecting broader SC interests. Similarly, Musahar's resentment toward "upper" SCs like Dusadh stems from perceived exclusion from welfare benefits.
2. **Electoral Dynamics:** The Dusadh sub-caste's loyalty to the NDA, especially via LJP, is a standout trend. **A substantial majority of Dusadh voters backed the NDA in Lok Sabha polls in 2024 despite the LJP split.** Chirag Paswan's appeal as a young Dusadh leader sustains this, though his faction's focus limits outreach to other SCs. **Ravidasi voters have oscillated between NDA and Mahagathbandhan/INDIA.** In 2015, they heavily supported the RJD-led coalition (over 60% per CSDS), but by 2020, NDA gained ground (around 40%) due to JD(U)'s governance appeal. In 2024, the INDIA bloc regained traction (50-55%) among Ravidasi voters. **Musahar votes have been split, with RJD retaining a base (40-50% in 2015 and 2020)** due to its appeal to economically weaker classes, while **Nitish Kumar's Mahadalit schemes pulled 30-40% toward JD(U)-NDA.** In 2024, the INDIA bloc's focus on constitutional safeguards saw a slight Musahar shift (45% estimated by Axis My India). Smaller groups like the Pasis lack sub-caste-specific mobilization, often following broader SC trends or local candidate appeal. Their support is typically split between NDA and RJD coalitions.
3. **Key Influencing Factors:** **Dusadh alignment with LJP reflects strong sub-caste leadership, while Ravidasi and Musahar lack comparable figures in Bihar (unlike UP's Mayawati or Azad).** Jitan Ram Manjhi (Musahar) and BSP's marginal presence have been unable to fill this gap. **Nitish Kumar's**

Mahadalit Mission targets poorer SCs (Musahar, Pasi) and offers housing, education, and jobs. It has played a key role in drawing some SC votes toward JD(U). Conversely, the BJP's national schemes, such as the PM-KISAN scheme, resonate with Dusadh's aspirational class. Musahar and Pasi, being landless and poorer, respond to immediate relief promises, like RJD's job pledges, while Dusadh and Ravidasi, with some economic stability, prioritize development and identity.

Major Political Leaders of SC Community in Bihar

Chirag Paswan of Lok Janshakti Party (Ram-Vilas) (LJP (RV)) is a prominent leader from Bihar belonging to the Dusadh subcaste. As part of the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA), he currently holds the office of the Minister of Food Processing Industries.

Prominent leaders from the **Janata Dal (United) (JDU)**, which is also part of the NDA Alliance, include **Chief Minister Nitish Kumar**. Ram Nath Thakur leads and represents the JDU in the Rajya Sabha, and Lalan Singh, the Minister of Panchayati Raj, Minister of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying since is the representative of JDU in the Lok Sabha. Umesh Kushwaha is the Bihar state President of JDU

Key leaders from the **Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) include Lalu Prasad Yadav**, former chief minister and current President of the RJD, and his son Tejashwi Yadav, who is the party Chairman. The leader of the Lok Sabha from the RJD is Abhay Kushwaha, and the leader of the Rajya Sabha is Prem Chand Gupta.

Jitan Ram Manjhi of Hindustani Awam Morcha (Secular) is also a leader belonging to the SC community in the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

Major Issues and Demands of SCs in Bihar

Caste divisions are deeply rooted in the political as well as the socio-economic spheres in Bihar. As a result, the **Scheduled Castes are subject to various forms of caste-based discrimination and violence**. The practice of untouchability, which is now a criminal offense, still dictates the professions and livelihoods of many people belonging to SC communities. Scheduled Castes are often segregated spatially and denied access to public places and civic services such as temples, schools, and hospitals. The formation of caste-militias has led to massacres of the Scheduled Castes. Honour killings, murder, and lynching are brutal acts of violence committed against people of the Scheduled Caste.

A significant reason for their backwardness is linked to their economic oppression. **Scheduled Castes are deprived of access to economic resources and means of production**. Many of them, particularly the Musahar and Pasi subcastes, are landless dependents, and hence are prone to fall victim to bonded labour, unpaid work, and exploitation at the hands of upper-castes and moneylenders. **Widespread illiteracy and resultant unemployment** a major issues faced by the Scheduled Castes, which the policy of reservation has failed to address sufficiently. Despite the implementation of economic upliftment schemes such as the PM Awas Yojana, access to benefits, particularly in rural constituencies like Gaya and Sasaram, remains a major hurdle.

Nitish Kumar's Mahadalit schemes were also implemented unevenly, to the detriment of Musahar and Pasi communities, who reported problems with the delivery of benefits in housing, education, and employment as opposed to the better-organised Dusadh sub-caste, which was able to access benefits more consistently. SC-reserved constituencies such as Jamui and Samastipur also fall behind in development and infrastructure.

Scheduled Castes were not given any political representation or opportunity for participation in the political process prior to Indian Independence. Through the Freedom Struggle, there emerged organizations and bodies that campaigned for the rights of these Castes, however, to this day, they are yet to become a decisive force. **The lack of prominent SC leadership in mainstream parties**, except for figures like Chirag Paswan (Dusadh), highlights feelings of political marginalization among other sub-castes. **Disparity in the conditions of caste subdivisions indicates the absence of a generic, unifying political sentiment among the larger community of Scheduled Castes.** Dusadh voters align with the LJP which is part of the NDA, whereas Ravidasi and Musahar leaned toward the INDIA bloc or the BSP. This fragmentation weakens their collective electoral influence.

Specifically concerning the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, a major issue concerning the Scheduled Castes was the discussion surrounding **constitutional amendments that would potentially reduce or completely discard reservation quotas for SCs** in education, jobs, and political representation. The opposition INDIA bloc pursued the narrative of claiming that the BJP would amend reservation quotas for SCs to their detriment, promising greater reservation for SCs under a Congress-RJD regime.

Due to the extent of the reservation policy implemented in Bihar, some communities within the larger SC community have received significant benefits while others are left behind. **Therefore, a major demand of the Scheduled Castes is not only for the caste census to be conducted, but also for further sub-categorisation under the SC and ST communities.**

Conclusion

From a historical perspective, scheduled and backward castes were excluded from political participation due to deep rooted caste divisions which permeated the socio-political and economic fabric of Bihar. The upper-castes were dominant in government despite their population being numerically weaker, and the majority population of the backward castes were deprived of political representation and denied political opportunities. The dominance of Congress saw a decline in the state due to internal divisions which gave way to the advent of independent organisations and leaders belonging to scheduled and backward castes to actively participate in government for the first time. Due to mismanagement and inadequate responses to crises and emergencies in the next decade, populist movements led by JP Narayan and following governments with leaders from the Scheduled Caste communities made significant progress for their interests, but also resulted in widespread dissatisfaction and agitation among the upper-castes.

This is not to say that the problems of the Scheduled Castes have been addressed. To this day, the SC community in Bihar still face abject poverty, landlessness, illiteracy, and are often subjected to bonded labour

and atrocities of caste based violence. Often these issues are politicised and used as nothing more than talking points during election seasons. Not merely reservation but the active role of government is needed for the upliftment of the marginalized sections.

Initiatives such as Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram and PM Adarsh Gram Yojana endeavour to promote development of infrastructure in areas dominated by minorities, and SC/ST communities. The Mukhyamantri SC/ST Udyami Yojana and Bihar Udyami Yojana provide interest free loans and direct cash benefit transfers to encourage self employment among SC/ST youth. SC/ST Atrocity Prevention Scheme provides financial and legal aid to victims of caste based violence. Such schemes as well as their effective implementation could go a long way in achieving social, political and economic equality and justice. Conducting a thorough caste census as well as a skill census would allow the accurate determination of those groups which are actually in need of government assistance.