

SC Politics in Rajasthan

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I.Introduction

As India prepares for the long-awaited **2027 digital caste census**, announced by Honb. Union Home Minister, it compels us to critically revisit the last comprehensive dataset, the 2011 Census, to understand the lived realities of marginalized communities. In Rajasthan, where Scheduled Castes (SCs) constitute a significant segment of the population, such an exercise is not just statistical but profoundly political. While Rajasthan is often celebrated for its majestic forts, royal heritage, and vibrant culture, its social landscape remains deeply scarred by the entrenched caste system that has historically relegated SCs to the margins. Rooted in a legacy of **Rajput princely rule and dominant landowning castes**, SCs in Rajasthan have long been confined to rigid, hereditary occupations such as agricultural labour, leather work, and sanitation duties, structurally excluded from mainstream socio-economic mobility. Scheduled Castes (SCs) make up approximately **17.8% of Rajasthan's population**, with **12,221,593 individuals** recorded in the **2011 Census**, making it the **sixth-largest SC population among Indian states**, spread across both rural and urban districts¹. The state comprises over **60 SC communities**, including major groups like **Jatav/Chamar, Bairwa/Berwa, Meghwal, Khatik, Balai, and Sansi**, as listed by the Government of Rajasthan². These communities are prominently concentrated in eastern and southern districts, such as **Nagaur, Bhilwara, Karauli, and Tonk**, though urban centres like **Jaipur** also host sizable SC populations³. Despite constitutional safeguards, SCs lag significantly in socio-economic indicators: the overall **literacy rate among SCs stands at 60.4%**, with male literacy at 73.8% and female literacy trailing at 44.6%, compared to the state average of 67.1%, as noted in the NFHS-5 Rajasthan Fact Sheet.⁴ Reflecting their electoral importance, **34 out of 200 Assembly seats and 4 out of 25 Lok Sabha seats are reserved for SCs under the 2008 Delimitation Order**. These structural and demographic realities make SCs a politically influential group, central to the formulation of welfare schemes, the rise of social justice politics, and the recalibration of party strategies in Rajasthan.⁵

II.Historical background

The historical marginalization of Dalits in Rajasthan is deeply rooted in its feudal and caste-based structures. Under the Rajput princely states and jagirdari system, Dalits were confined to roles deemed **“impure”**, agricultural labour, leatherwork, and sanitation and were subjected to systemic exclusion and violence.⁶ Unlike Maharashtra or Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan did not experience strong early anti-caste

¹ [2011 Census](#)

² [Rajasthan.gov](#)

³ [Census India, 2011](#)

⁴ [NFHS 5](#)

⁵ [Census India, 2011](#)

⁶ [The Hindu](#)

reform movements, leaving Dalit communities “**politically dormant and socially vulnerable**” long after independence. A 2006 ethnographic study conducted in Chakwada (Jaipur district) observed that “*many humiliating practices of the past have ceased, but caste discrimination continues in many forms,*” highlighting how deep-seated exclusion endured well into the 21st century .⁷

During **British colonial rule**, the directly administered district of Ajmer-Merwara provided limited educational and employment avenues for Dalits, but the princely states largely resisted social reforms⁸. Agrarian revolts in the early 20th century, such as the Bijolia peasant movement (1897-1941), mobilised rural communities, including disadvantaged castes against exploitative taxation, creating a template for Dalit resistance. Historian Rajendra K. Sharma notes this movement “*laid groundwork for social mobilisation that later influenced Dalit assertion*” in parts of rural Rajasthan.⁹

By the 1940s, the influence of Dr B. R. Ambedkar began to percolate through Rajasthan’s Dalit communities, with activists initiating temple-entry campaigns and demands for access to wells and schools. Scholar Shyamlal contends that “*the emergence of the Ambedkarite movement has been one of the most significant developments in Rajasthan since the 1930s,*”¹⁰ as Dalits adopted constitutional rights, embraced education, and turned to Buddhism for affirmation, even as dominant castes and complacent political parties curtailed their impact.

After **independence** and the adoption of the Constitution, untouchability was abolished and reservations introduced. However, in Rajasthan Dalit leadership initially remained subsumed within **the Indian National Congress**, valued more for representation than for empowerment¹¹. The arrival of **Jagannath Pahadia** as the first Dalit Chief Minister in June 1980 marked a symbolic break, inspired by his earlier remark to Nehru: “*the country is on the right path, but Dalits remain backward and downtrodden.*”¹² Yet his term, lasting just 13 months, was marred by upper-caste resistance, reports from Hindustan Times recount Brahmin legislators refusing to dine with him or using separate utensils due to purity concerns .¹³

The decades of the **1970s and 1980s** witnessed gradual shifts as Dalits began organizing around issues of dignity, land rights, and resistance to caste atrocities. Key symbolic battles, like asserting the right to ride horses in wedding processions or accessing temples became focal points of local political

⁷ [Sage Journals](#)

⁸ [Indian Express](#)

⁹ [RR Journals](#)

¹⁰ [Vedam books](#)

¹¹ [Sage Journals](#)

¹² [National Herald](#)

¹³ [Hindustan Times](#)

struggles¹⁴. These grassroots movements, although decentralized, reflected a growing assertion among Dalit youth and laid the groundwork for future political mobilizations, albeit fragmented along sub-caste lines like **Meghwals, Bairwas, and Regars**. Yet political influence remained limited. Scholar Surinder S. Jodhka notes that SC leaders “*remained dependent on dominant political parties rather than shaping agendas independently.*”¹⁵

By the **1990s and early 2000s**, the rise of parties like **the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)** created new spaces for independent Dalit political expression in Rajasthan, although these successes were intermittent and region-specific. Despite facing challenges from entrenched caste networks and electoral setbacks, the mere presence of an alternative political platform emboldened Dalit communities to contest local elections more vigorously and demand accountability from mainstream parties.¹⁶ The historical trajectory of Dalit politics in Rajasthan, therefore, reflects a slow but persistent journey from marginalization toward political assertion, even as systemic barriers continue to persist.

Legal protections under the **SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989** have not ended caste violence in Rajasthan. The state remains among the top for Dalit atrocities, a UN submission by NCDHR identified Rajasthan as the **second-most affected state**. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, crimes against SCs in the state rose from 5,702 in 2018 to 8,591 in 2019, a 50.7% surge with a 7.3% rise in all-India figures¹⁷. Rajasthan recorded 6,794 such offences out of 45,935 across India in 2019¹⁸. The **conviction rate** remains woefully low, around 32%-39%, compared with 64% for IPC offences nationally. Investigative reports revealed that between 2017-2023, 56,879 atrocity cases were filed in the state, but final reports were submitted in only ~47%, and chargesheets in just ~45%¹⁹. Moreover, RTI records show the SC/ST vigilance committee met only twice in 13 years, undermining legal oversight²⁰. Grassroots **Dalit women activists**, supported by NCDHR²¹ have secured justice in high-profile cases; yet **sub-caste divisions (e.g. Chamars vs. Balmikis) and partisan loyalties** keep SC votes fragmented among Congress, BJP, and BSP, underscoring how structural injustice and political disunity persist despite legal progress.

¹⁴ [IDR Online](#)

¹⁵ [Surinder S Jodhka](#)

¹⁶ [The Hindu](#)

¹⁷ [The Hindu](#)

¹⁸ [Samaj weekly](#)

¹⁹ [News minute](#)

²⁰ [The Quint](#)

²¹ [NCDHR](#)

III. The Bahujan Samajwadi Party

The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), founded by **Kanshi Ram in 1984 and later led by Mayawati**, emerged in Rajasthan during the late 1990s as a vocal advocate for Dalits, OBCs, and Muslims. Grounded in Ambedkarite ideals, it campaigned on political representation, socio-economic justice, and dignity. The party's initial breakthrough came by contesting the **1998 Rajasthan Assembly elections**, consolidating pockets of support in eastern regions such as Bharatpur, Dholpur, Karauli, and Alwar, districts with significant SC populations .²²

Its most striking electoral performance was in the **2008 Assembly elections, winning 6 seats and about 7.6% of the vote share**, marking the BSP as a legitimate third force in the state's politics²³. The party's success prompted the Congress and BJP to pay more attention to Dalit issues. However, this momentum was transient: within months, all six BSP MLAs defected to the Congress, significantly weakening the party's presence, an echo of repeated exits in 2009 and again after the 2018 elections.²⁴

Despite organizational setbacks, the BSP has retained visibility through **issue-based activism**. In July 2023, it led a high-profile protest in Jaipur seeking justice for a **Dalit girl in Todabhim**, demanding fast-track courts, compensation, and government jobs. State president Akash Anand remarked, "*cases of atrocities are surfacing one after another but the government is not bothered at all*," reinforcing the party's role as a persistent voice against caste-based violence .²⁵

The **2023 Assembly elections** further exposed BSP's decline. The BJP clinched 22 of 34 SC-reserved seats, many in erstwhile BSP strongholds, while BSP's vote share plummeted from 7.6% in 2008 to approximately 4 - 5%, reflecting dwindling electoral traction . Political analysts have described the BSP as a "**vote-katwa**" (vote splitter), particularly in multi-cornered contests, where its presence diluted anti-incumbency votes and reshaped electoral outcomes .

The recurring **defections** and centralized party structure underscore the BSP's organizational fragility. In 2008, all six MLAs jumped to the Congress, followed by another wave in 2019, critiqued by journalists as part of a "*homeland of defection politics*" in Rajasthan²⁶. In an effort to revive, state BSP president **Bhagwan Singh Baba** has committed to contesting all 200 Assembly seats, focusing on caste atrocities, unemployment, exam fairness, and hunger, emphasizing grassroots mobilisation .

²² [The Statesman](#)

²³ [Hindustan Times](#)

²⁴ [India Today](#)

²⁵ [Deccan Herald](#)

²⁶ [Hindustan Times](#)

Despite diminished electoral clout, the BSP maintains its significance as a strategic Dalit voice. It continues to vociferously raise issues of caste atrocities, maintain political pressure on both Congress and BJP, and occasionally forge issue-based alliances, such as its **2018 cooperation with RLP**. Still, its resurgence depends on building robust local cadres, preventing defections, and extending alliances beyond identity politics to inclusively address broader concerns like agrarian distress, education, and social justice.

IV. Reservation Policies

The Delimitation of Parliamentary and Assembly Constituencies Order, 2008 reserves **4 of Rajasthan's 25 Lok Sabha seats for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and 25 of 200 state assembly seats**, a reflection of demographic equity and constitutional mandate. Constituencies such as **Ganganagar, Bikaner, Bharatpur, and Karauli - Dholpur** are key SC-reserved regions, and their representation plays a strategic role in electoral calculations. Major parties like the BJP and Congress frequently nominate SC candidates here and concentrate welfare messaging tailored to Dalit communities.

Under the **Rajasthan Reservation Act, 2008**, the state guarantees **16% reservation** in government jobs and educational institutions for SCs, aligned with central norms. This policy is supported by formal listings of 59 qualifying Scheduled Caste communities who are eligible for these benefits. Subsequent data from the Rajasthan Backward Classes Commission in 2024 confirmed that this structure remains unchanged, even with expansions to other categories reinforcing the centrality of SC reservation in both policy and politics ²⁷.

In 2020, the Rajasthan Assembly ratified the **126th Constitutional Amendment** to extend SC/ST reservation in legislatures for 10 more years, ensuring continuity until January 2030²⁸. This political step, endorsed by both Congress and BJP emphasizes the parties' recognition of the electoral importance of Dalit voters. Yet critics in the assembly noted implementation delays and called for better welfare infrastructure beyond legislative presence.

While SC reservation has stood unchanged at **16%**, **Rajasthan's expansion of other quotas** (OBC, MBC, EWS) to nearly **70% in total has diluted** the share of general-category competitive spots and sparked legal scrutiny. Supreme Court rulings like **Indra Sawhney v. Union of India (1992)** cap

²⁷ [Mooknayak](#)

²⁸ [TOI](#)

reservations at 50%, and legal experts warn that Rajasthan's growing quota matrix may jeopardize SC reservation through cascading judicial challenges²⁹.

Grassroots and Dalit-rights groups continue advocating for the effective enforcement of SC reservations, pressing for swift filling of reserved vacancies, transparent audits, and accountability in recruitment processes like the **police constabulary and REET teacher exams**. In 2025, several civil society watchdogs submitted a memorandum to the state government citing chronic underutilization of SC quotas and alleged manipulation in contract-based recruitments. The ongoing debate over reservation in Rajasthan encapsulates a broader political dilemma: how to reconcile affirmative action with constitutional constraints. **Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot** has defended the state's expansive reservation model by asserting, "*The one who deserves their share based on caste strength must receive it.*"³⁰ Conversely, **BJP leaders like Rajendra Rathore** have decried what they term "*quota populism,*" stating that "*reservation without data is political theatre.*"³¹ As Rajasthan inches toward further caste-based demands and electoral realignments, its reservation framework remains both a vital instrument of empowerment and a fraught arena of legal and political contestation.

V.SC Voting Patterns

Scheduled Castes (SCs) form a crucial electoral bloc in Rajasthan, comprising approximately 17.8% of the state's population (Census 2011). The 2008 Delimitation Order designated 34 Legislative Assembly seats and 4 Lok Sabha constituencies, including Ganganagar, Baytoo, Karauli–Dholpur, and Tonk–Sawai Madhopur, as reserved for SC candidates. These constituencies are pivotal electoral battlegrounds where Dalit voter turnout can directly sway outcomes.

1. Lok sabha elections

In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the **BJP** clinched all four SC-reserved seats in Rajasthan - Ganganagar, Baytoo, Karauli–Dholpur, and Tonk–Sawai Madhopur, by effectively leveraging welfare schemes such as PM Awas Yojana and Ujjwala, along with targeted outreach through Dalit morchas. However, the Lokniti–CSDS survey exposed significant sub-caste splits: Meghwals and Jatavs predominantly voted BJP, whereas Bairwas and Valmikis leaned heavily toward Congress³². Meanwhile, the BSP fielded candidates in all SC constituencies but garnered less than 1% statewide, highlighting its limited electoral reach³³. Smaller players like

²⁹ [Indian kanoon](#)

³⁰ [IE](#)

³¹ [NDTV rajasthan](#)

³² [The Hindu](#)

³³ [Hindustan Times](#)

the Rashtriya Loktantrik Party (RLP) and Bharat Adivasi Party did make inroads, particularly in tribal-dominant seats, though they fell short in breaking the Congress-BJP duopoly³⁴.

The 2024 Lok Sabha elections ushered in a shift: **BJP's hold on SC seats loosened**, with early trends showing significant **gains by the Congress-led INDIA bloc** in constituencies like Karauli–Dholpur and Bharatpur. Analysts suggest this shift reflects Dalit anxieties over reservation dilution and lingering distrust over caste-based injustices³⁵. The BSP again contested all seats, though once more its vote share remained negligible, enabling Congress and RLP to benefit from the splintered Dalit vote. Independent candidates backed by local Dalit collectives saw modest success, signaling growing grassroots activism in electoral contests.

2. Rajasthan assembly election

In the **2018 Assembly elections**, **Congress** wrested control of Dalit politics, winning 18 of the 34 SC-reserved seats, while the BJP lagged at 12, a reversal driven by anti-incumbency, fallout from the REET recruitment scandal, and strategic BSP vote dilution in eastern districts like Bharatpur and Dholpur³⁶. Sub-caste voting patterns were evident: Jatavs and Bairwas largely supported Congress, guided by historical ties and welfare outreach. Meghwals and Valmikis, who comprise a significant segment of SCs, chose candidates more based on local profile and promises rather than party affiliation. The BSP's presence influenced these dynamics, albeit without winning seats by drawing away critical votes from BJP in SC and OBC-heavy zones.

By the **2023 Assembly polls**, **BJP regained** lost ground, winning 22 of 34 SC seats through a revitalized strategy featuring caste-focused welfare measures and active engagement in Dalit-focused events³⁷. Though turnout among Dalits remained just below state average, it revealed a latent dissatisfaction tied to caste violence and socio-economic neglect. The BSP's on-ground footprint shrank further, catching less than half a million votes statewide, while fringe players like RLP captured key seats by aligning with Dalit and OBC votes, signaling that Dalit strategy in Rajasthan now hinges as much on alliances as on major party narratives.

³⁴ [Vote India](#)

³⁵ [Frontline](#)

³⁶ [IE](#)

³⁷ [Economic Times](#)

3. Trends in SC Voting Patterns

Rajasthan's Dalit electorate is no longer monolithic. **Meghwals and Jatavs**, who account for over half of the SC population, switch loyalties between BJP and Congress depending on government performance, welfare delivery, and caste incidents (notably evident in 2019 vs. 2018/2024 cycles). In contrast, **Bairwa and Valmiki** sub-castes consistently lean Congress, reflecting deeper cultural and electoral affinities³⁸. The BSP once served as a Dalit-interface but has declined, its support partly siphoned off by BJP's caste messaging and Congress's renewed Dalit outreach.

Dalit political engagement in Rajasthan recently moved beyond **identity-based voting to addressing governance issues**. Groups such as the **Rajasthan Dalit Adivasi Forum** and **Ambedkarite youth collectives** have mobilized campaigns in 2023 - 24 demanding the filling of vacant SC-reserved posts in police and REET recruitments, and pressing for swift judicial action in caste atrocity cases. Their activism is reshaping the electoral narrative from symbolic representation to performance and accountability, forcing both BJP and Congress to focus on implementation rather than merely identity-based appeals, reflecting a maturing SC political landscape.

4. Independent candidate

In the 2023 Rajasthan Assembly elections, **Teetar Singh**, a 78-year-old Dalit from the Karanpur constituency, contested as an independent candidate driven by relentless advocacy for land rights and equality. Despite having no resources, just ₹2,500 in cash and no assets, he filed his nomination after standing in more than 30 elections since the 1970s, emphasizing that his fight was "for rights, not popularity"³⁹. While he didn't win, his candidacy highlighted how independent voices from Dalit backgrounds mobilize around tangible grievances like canal land allocation and socio-economic exclusion, signalling a shift from passive voting to active participation in Rajasthan's political narrative.

In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, constituencies such as Barmer and Bikaner witnessed independent candidates like **Ravindra Singh Bhati and Gopi Chand Meghwal** enter the electoral fray. Bhati, a 26-year-old denied a BJP ticket, garnered over 4 lakh votes in Barmer, disrupting the BJP-Congress binary and finishing second⁴⁰. Meanwhile, Meghwal, a Dalit

³⁸ [The Print](#)

³⁹ [Live Mint](#)

⁴⁰ [Economic Times](#)

candidate contesting from the SC-reserved Bikaner seat, secured under 1% of the vote⁴¹. Despite such efforts, **no single independent Dalit candidate won** in either the Assembly or Lok Sabha polls, largely due to lack of organizational support, financial constraints, and the deeply entrenched dominance of national parties.

VI. Performance of SC political parties

1. **Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP):** The BSP, under the leadership of Mayawati, has historically positioned itself as the voice of Dalits across India, but in Rajasthan, its political impact has remained limited. While the party fielded candidates in all 25 Lok Sabha seats in 2019 and 2024, its vote share in Rajasthan has hovered below 4%, and it failed to win any parliamentary seat⁴². In the 2018 Assembly elections, the BSP won six seats, primarily in eastern Rajasthan districts like Bharatpur, Dholpur, and Tonk, where Jatav and Bairwa sub-castes have a sizable presence. However, in 2023, it lost all six of those seats, reducing its legislative presence to zero, as voters gravitated toward either BJP or Congress⁴³. Analysts attribute this downfall to the lack of a charismatic state leadership, limited cadre presence, and failure to expand appeal beyond core Jatav voters⁴⁴.
2. **Ambedkarite Groups and Minor Parties:** Rajasthan has also witnessed a rise in Ambedkarite identity-based parties and Dalit-centric collectives, though none have secured legislative wins⁴⁵. Notable among these are Ambedkar Jan Morcha, Azad Samaj Party (ASP) founded by Chandrashekhar Azad Ravan, and smaller outfits like Bharatiya Dalit Panthers and Bharat Adivasi Party (BAP). In 2023, ASP supported a few independent candidates in Dalit-dominated areas like Tonk-Sawai Madhopur and Dausa, though they failed to gain traction. These parties serve more as symbolic mobilizers and watchdogs on Dalit issues, highlighting unfilled reservations, caste violence, and police inaction, than as actual vote-winners. Their inability to forge meaningful alliances or build grassroots networks has so far limited their success, despite growing activism.
3. **Bharat Adivasi Party (BAP):** Though primarily focused on tribal issues, the Bharat Adivasi Party, formed in 2023, has adopted an inclusive rhetoric of Bahujan politics, which includes Dalits and OBCs. In its debut Assembly elections, it won 3 seats, including in Dungarpur and Banswara, and gained visibility by forming coalitions with Dalit activists and students'

⁴¹ [TOI](#)

⁴² [Live Hindustan, 2024](#)

⁴³ [Economic Times](#)

⁴⁴ [IE](#)

⁴⁵ [The Hindu](#)

unions⁴⁶. Although it doesn't represent SC interests alone, its intersectional focus on tribal-Dalit alliances offers an emerging model of grassroots coalition politics that could shape future electoral dynamics, especially in southern Rajasthan.

4. **Rashtriya Loktantrik Party (RLP):** Though not a Dalit-specific party, Hanuman Beniwal's RLP has carved a space among non-dominant caste groups, including marginalized SC sub-castes like Bairwa and Valmiki, particularly in rural western Rajasthan. In the 2018 Assembly polls, RLP won 3 seats, and though it contested independently in 2023, it remained relevant through alliance-building and vocal opposition to both BJP and Congress on reservation and caste issues⁴⁷. However, its ideological ambiguity, often allying with BJP, limits its acceptance as a reliable SC voice.
5. **Azad Samaj Party (ASP):** Inspired by Bhim Army's activism in Uttar Pradesh, Chandrashekhar Azad Ravan's ASP has sought to enter Rajasthan's political landscape. In 2023, the ASP fielded candidates in Dalit-majority districts like Tonk and Dausa, but failed to cross even 1% vote share. However, ASP's grassroots campaigns against caste-based violence, especially after incidents in Baran and Jalore, has increased its visibility, if not yet its votes⁴⁸.

VII. Sub caste dynamics

1. **Meghwals** form over 50% of Rajasthan's SC population, especially in southern districts like Jalore and Pali. Historically linked to devotional movements and leatherwork, they've shown strong Ambedkarite inclination. According to The Caravan, "Meghwal community is vocal in its resentment towards the BJP, and will most likely vote for the Congress"⁴⁹. However, BJP's 2023 Dalit outreach, like deploying Arjun Ram Meghwal to prominent roles, has won over a section of urban, educated Meghwals. Still, pervasive caste violence documented in the killing of nine-year-old Inder Kumar Meghwal in 2022, reinforces Marginalization and sustains their collective consciousness⁵⁰.
2. **Jatavs** are the second-largest SC subcaste, historically aligned with the BSP in Rajasthan's border regions with UP. Lokniti surveys and The Print note their current split loyalty, some gravitate to Congress due to its caste census and welfare promises, while others revert to BJP during pro-Dalit outreach waves⁵¹. The Jatav community is also becoming vocally

⁴⁶ [Hindustan Times](#)

⁴⁷ [The Wire](#)

⁴⁸ [The Hindu](#)

⁴⁹ [Caravan Magazine](#)

⁵⁰ [Forward Press](#)

⁵¹ [The Print](#)

Ambedkarite, with rising youth activism emphasizing performance politics over identity labels.

3. **Valmikis**, considered among the most socio-economically disadvantaged SCs in Rajasthan, are primarily sanitation workers in urban and rural settings. Studies show they traditionally support Congress due to its promises of job regularisation via exhaustion of safai karamchari quotas⁵². The BJP's inclusive messaging in 2019 yielded minor shifts among urban Valmikis, but their turnout and support remain tightly correlated with policy implementation in sanitation services.
4. **Bairwas** are politically active, especially in eastern Rajasthan (Tonk, Sawai Madhopur). Former Deputy CM Prem Chand Bairwa, a prominent Bairwa leader represents BJP and anchors their caste outreach. A Times of India profile traces his lineage to Deputy CM Banwarilal Bairwa, a Congress stalwart, indicating Bairwas' persistent political influence⁵³. They tend toward Congress when BJP neglects caste grievances but swing when local or state-level Bairwa leaders align with BJP.
5. **Smaller SC sub-castes**, including Dhobis, Doms, and Regars, comprise under 10% of the SC population. These groups lack distinct political identity and typically vote along larger SC narratives. A Newslandry profile of a Marghali (Meghwal) village underscores systemic exclusions faced by these sub-castes⁵⁴. BSP's state-level void has partially opened space for localized candidates, but absent substantial organisational backing, their collective influence remains minimal.
6. **Inter-sub-caste tensions and alliances** shape Dalit politics in Rajasthan. Swarajya notes the state's Ambedkarite efforts often falter due to 'non-uniform' caste relations. For instance, Meghwals align with Rajput interests in southern Rajasthan, showcasing the complexity of Dalit solidarity⁵⁵. This leads to uneven alliances, not simply a Dalit-vs-Savarna dichotomy.
7. **Emerging sub-caste mobilisation** is visible among youth-based Ambedkarite groups within Meghwal and Jatav communities. These collectives are actively advocating for caste atrocity redress, caste-based job vacancies, and political visibility beyond reserved seats. According to The Hindu, their activism is increasingly steering party manifests and selecting candidates, a sign that Rajasthan's SC politics is maturing beyond passive vote-bank alignment⁵⁶.

⁵² [The Print](#)

⁵³ [TOI](#)

⁵⁴ [Newslandry](#)

⁵⁵ [Swarajya](#)

⁵⁶ [The Hindu](#)

Political behaviour of Sub Castes

- 1. Internal Hierarchy within SCs :** Rajasthan's SCs are internally stratified. The Meghwals and Jatavs are the largest and most politically assertive groups, often dominating Dalit discourse. Conversely, smaller groups, Valmikis, Bairwas, and others, remain on the periphery due to economic marginalization and weaker leadership. Conflicts arise when dominant groups monopolize party tickets or claim greater welfare benefits. For instance, some Meghwal leaders have publicly criticized BJP's outreach as "dividing" the Dalit vote, reflecting underlying tensions over resource distribution .⁵⁷
- 2. Electoral Loyalties & Shifts:** Meghwals, who comprise roughly half of SC voters, historically backed Congress due to its welfare agenda. A 2018 The Print analysis described them as "vocal in resentment towards BJP," yet some shifted in 2023 after the party elevated Dalit leaders like Arjun Ram Meghwal . Jatavs, traditionally BSP supporters in border districts, have transitioned toward Congress, reacting to BSP's decline and Congress's push for a caste census. Meanwhile, Valmikis and Bairwas, typically aligned with Congress, gave conditional support based on promises like sanitation job regularization .⁵⁸
- 3. Impact of Caste Atrocities and Welfare Promises;** High-profile caste atrocities, such as the 2015 Dangawas massacre, have significantly influenced SC behavior. The Caravan reported Meghwals vowing not to vote BJP, saying "we will vote Congress"⁵⁹. The BJP responded with symbolic gestures like appointing Arjun Ram Meghwal as Law Minister, an explicit outreach to Dalits⁶⁰. Congress countered with legislation like the 2022 SC/ST Development Fund, yet Dalit voters remain sensitive to both symbolic representation and tangible justice.⁶¹
- 4. Sub-Caste Divisions & Intra-Dalit Politics:** The SC community isn't a cohesive monolith. Meghwals and Jatavs often cooperate politically, attracting overtures from both BJP and Congress. According to The Sunday Guardian, this "Jat-Dalit combo" helped Congress limit BJP in 2023⁶² . Valmikis and Bairwas choose pragmatically, supporting whichever party addresses their local grievances, such as job quotas or atrocity redressal. Meanwhile, smaller sub-castes, Doms, Dhobis, Regars mirror broader SC trends but lack distinct political leverage.

⁵⁷ [Money control](#)

⁵⁸ [Sunday Guardian](#)

⁵⁹ [Caravan Magazine](#)

⁶⁰ [The Print](#)

⁶¹ [IE](#)

⁶² [Sunday Guardian](#)

5. **Youth Activism & Performance Politics:** Dalit youth, particularly among Jatavs and Meghwals, are increasingly demanding accountability and justice. Student fronts and groups like the Ambedkarite Students' Forum push political parties to act on caste atrocities and reservation implementation, steering politics toward performance rather than identity alone. The Hindu noted how this emerging cohort is influencing candidate selection and electoral promises .
6. **Emerging Electoral Patterns:** The 2023 Assembly elections underscored these shifts: BJP won 22 of 34 SC seats, largely due to combined appeal across sub-castes and welfare delivery, while Congress retained strongholds among Valmiki and Bairwa voters⁶³. The Jat–Dalit alliance, particularly in Shekhawati, helped stem BJP's momentum in key regions. But rising Dalit activism means future electoral behavior will depend more on justice, representation, and administrative effectiveness than mere identity loyalty.

VIII. Major Political leader of SC Community

1. **Arjun Ram Meghwal (Meghwal sub-caste):** A former IAS officer turned four-time Lok Sabha MP from Bikaner (2009–present), Meghwal has risen to become the Union Minister of Law & Justice, and MoS for Parliamentary Affairs, Culture, Heavy Industries, Finance & Corporate Affairs . Known for cycling to Parliament and wearing traditional turbans, he is regarded as BJP's primary Dalit face in Rajasthan⁶⁴ . His elevation is widely viewed as part of BJP's strategy for Dalit outreach ahead of elections.⁶⁵
2. **Prem Chand Bairwa (Bairwa sub-caste) :** A seasoned BJP leader, Bairwa represents the Dudu Assembly constituency and was appointed Deputy Chief Minister in December 2023, becoming the first Dalit to hold that role in Rajasthan . Praised as emblematic of BJP's "social engineering," he holds portfolios in higher education, transportation, and AYUSH.⁶⁶
3. **Khiladi Lal Bairwa (Bairwa sub-caste) :** A former BJP MP from Karauli–Dholpur (2009–2014), he served as chairman of the Rajasthan SC Commission from 2022–2023 . Having switched from Congress to BJP, he remains a prominent SC Bairwa political figure, representing Dalit interests within the party structure.⁶⁷

⁶³ [IE](#)

⁶⁴ [Times now Hindi](#)

⁶⁵ [The Print](#)

⁶⁶ [New Indian Express](#)

⁶⁷ [Sansad](#)

4. **Chunnilal Premi Bairwa (Bairwa)** : A veteran Congress leader, Premi Bairwa was elected MLA from Keshoraipatan constituency in 2008–2013 and again in 2023. He also leads the Congress' Bundi district unit, marking his deep grassroots influence .⁶⁸
5. **Nauroti Devi (Meghwal)** : A former stone-cutter who became Sarpanch of Harmada village (Ajmer) in 2010, she is a notable Dalit grassroots activist. Her transformation, from laborer to elected leader via NGO-supported legal activism, makes her a symbol of Dalit women's empowerment .⁶⁹

IX. Major Issues and demands of SCs in Rajasthan

Despite constitutional safeguards, **manual scavenging** remains a stark reality in Rajasthan. Between March and June 2025 alone, 11 sanitation workers died while cleaning septic tanks without protective gear, prompting the Rajasthan High Court to demand an official response and monitoring mechanism from the state government. The court directed that a high-level committee be formed to prevent such deaths and ensure the enforcement of safety norms under the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013. The deaths, concentrated in districts like Bikaner and Alwar, underline the systemic negligence in occupational safety for Dalit workers, especially Valmikis, who form the majority in sanitation jobs.⁷⁰

The **demand for a state-specific caste census** has gained traction among Dalit organizations such as the Bhim Army and local Ambedkarite forums. In their 12-point charter submitted in early 2024, activists demanded a comprehensive enumeration of SC sub-castes, citing inequity in resource distribution. They also called for the setting up of special courts under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, mandatory fast-tracking of atrocity cases, and disciplinary action against police officials who unjustly close complaints. These demands stem from a perceived institutional apathy and persistent under-reporting of caste crimes.⁷¹

Another pressing issue is the **low conviction rate in caste-based crimes**. As per a recent RTI-based analysis published in Newslaundry, over 56,000 caste atrocities were registered in Rajasthan from 2017 to 2023, but the conviction rate hovers around 22%. Activists are demanding that atrocity-prone areas be officially notified and equipped with dedicated Dalit protection officers, legal aid centres, and

⁶⁸ [PRS](#)

⁶⁹ [The Hindu](#)

⁷⁰ [TOI](#)

⁷¹ [TOI](#)

improved witness protection measures. They argue that without such systemic backing, the SC/ST Act remains symbolic rather than transformative.⁷²

Discrimination in sanitation job hierarchies has also emerged as a recurring grievance. While municipal records show SC quotas being met, many upper-caste contractors reportedly hire general category persons as official workers, but subcontract the hazardous cleaning tasks to Dalits off-record, depriving them of formal salaries, health insurance, or pensions. Valmiki community leaders have demanded biometric attendance systems, direct wage disbursement, and priority in safety equipment allocation. This reflects the demand not just for jobs, but dignity of labour and equal status in employment.⁷³

The issue of **land insecurity** is another cornerstone of SC mobilization. Dalits, especially in rural Rajasthan, often occupy land informally without titles, making them vulnerable to eviction. The Swamitva Yojana, though promising, has faced sluggish implementation. In SC-dominant villages of Dausa, Karauli, and Barmer, surveys remain incomplete, and land disputes are yet to be resolved, affecting eligibility for government schemes like PMAY. SC activists are now demanding universal digital land records, boundary dispute resolution cells, and time-bound regularisation of long-held lands.⁷⁴

Finally, unfilled **SC-reserved vacancies** in sectors such as police, REET, and state services have become a flashpoint. Despite thousands of sanctioned posts, there is a backlog of over 17,000 unfilled SC vacancies across departments. Protests erupted in Jaipur and Sikar in late 2024, where Dalit student groups demanded an independent audit of recruitment and criminal investigation into exam paper leaks under the RPSC. They also called for a constitutional body at the state level to monitor Dalit welfare scheme implementation and reserved category job appointments.

X. Conclusion

Despite formal constitutional safeguards, Scheduled Castes in Rajasthan continue to grapple with entrenched caste discrimination, underrepresentation, and fragmented political agency. **Traditional parties like the Congress and BJP have often absorbed Dalit leaders without structurally addressing SC concerns, while the Bahujan Samaj Party's decline has left a vacuum in focused Dalit representation.** However, a silent transformation is underway, driven by emerging **Dalit youth and women**. From Ambedkarite student unions challenging discriminatory practices on campuses to

⁷² [Newslandry](#)

⁷³ [The Print](#)

⁷⁴ [The Hindu](#)

women sarpanches implementing grassroots reforms, this new leadership is asserting both dignity and delivery. Their demands are no longer confined to symbolic inclusion but extend to structural rights, land titles, timely job quotas, caste atrocity redressal, and quality education.

The announcement of a **digital caste census in 2027** by Hon. Union Home Minister, offers a potential inflection point. If conducted transparently, it could provide the data needed to inform sub-caste specific reservations, equitable distribution of welfare, and evidence-based policymaking. Yet, it also raises pressing questions: **Will the census become a tool for genuine inclusion or electoral arithmetic? Will it reinforce caste hierarchies or dismantle them?** As Dalit politics in Rajasthan moves beyond passive allegiance to issue-based mobilization, particularly among women and youth, the future hinges not just on how the state responds, but on how assertively SC communities organize, represent, and reclaim their democratic space.