

THE WORLD'S BIGGEST COUNTRY

INDIA'S DEMOGRAPHIC TRAJECTORY AND IT'S IMPACT ON MUSLIMS, THE PARLIAMENT AND THE LABOUR MARKET

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ABSTRACT

India's dynamic population has undergone significant shifts over the years. Recently, surpassing China's total population presents a unique opportunity for growth and development. While facing the challenges of managing a large population, India also grapples with economic and resource-related complexities. Additionally, there are internal challenges stemming from communal differences among religious communities and representation in governance. These factors necessitate well-informed and effective policymaking.

To ensure the smooth functioning of this vibrant democracy, it is crucial to focus on economic progress and enhancing quality of life. Understanding key concepts like demographic shifts, variations in age groups, uneven population growth, skill disparities, and resource requirements is paramount for a comprehensive approach. This paper explores various facets of India's population dynamics and addresses the hurdles in achieving sustainable growth and effective governance.

Keywords: Indian Population, Migration, Youth, Delimitation, Muslims, Economy

INTRODUCTION

One of the primary requisites for the operation of India is that the economy must be capable of catering to the large population internally and improving production in the international market. To improve and strengthen the economy, an analysis of participants in the workforce must be done. Age structure has economic ramifications as children and the elderly consume more than they produce, while those in prime working ages not only support their consumption but also that of the economically dependent segments of society (*Narayana, 2011*). The age shift can be understood based on the current demographic dividend. Demographic dividend refers to the potential of economic growth resulting from a shift in the population's age structure. This is when the working-age share is greater than the non-working-age share of the population. With an overall decrease in fertility and subsequently fewer births, there are fewer young dependents (*India's Demographic Dividend, 2019*).

There are multiple stages in the demographic dividend. It is possible that an accelerated economy is experienced in both of the beginning phases. The first phase can be identified as a transformation of the nation from rural agrarian to urban industrial, accompanied by declining fertility and mortality rates. This increases the labour force and boosts per capita income since there is rapid industrialisation due to a hike in employment. Then comes the second phase when the low fertility rates catch up, the labour force reduces and eventually negates the first phase. In this phase, the relative working-age population declines, giving rise to the ageing population. This provides yet another avenue to elevate the economy since the lower fertility motivates saving in the prime working years of the economic life cycle to support old-age consumption and retirement security (*Narayana, 2011*). The accumulation of wealth and capital deepening often results from assets invested locally as well as internationally, adding to the country's national income (*Kenton, 2020*).

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), India has a unique opportunity to develop and grow richer before ageing sets in (*Reaping India's demographic dividend, 2022*). The window of opportunity in India has been open since approximately 2005 and it is projected to remain there for five decades, which is longer than any other country in the world. The peak of the first demographic dividend is expected to be in the year 2041, when the working-age population is expected to hit a high of 59% (*Unlocking India's Demographic Potential, 2022*). India, with the biggest population, will have one of the largest workforces globally. The median age, at 28 years, is also a plus point since it is very young compared to the median ages of countries like China and the US, Japan and Western Europe, with median ages of 37, 49 and 45, respectively. It is possible to achieve up to the historical benchmark of 15% of overall economic growth, or even greater if this time frame is utilised efficiently and effectively.

Education, health and governance play a considerable role in reaping the benefits of this transition, as the growth is not automatic or guaranteed. Countries like Japan, Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea have already exemplified how to use this time to maximise profitability, and India can learn from their methods. These broadly include employment, empowerment and education. Southeast Asian countries had adopted family planning, investing in healthcare and child education and increasing participation of women in the workforce to aid them during this stage. Japan, specifically, focussed heavily on expanding health administration, improving the quality of life in rural areas, empowering women and establishing non-profit organisations for health and welfare (*Japan's Demographic Experience, 2016*).

Challenges that arise in India include poor skill training, illiteracy, gender-based disparity, a weak healthcare sector and improper governance. Going forward, the authorities should legislate building human capital and support urbanisation to extract the value of the first dividend. Shifting the focus to the vast Indian subcontinent, many

issues come into the picture, such as migration patterns, disparity in demographic growth, skill gaps, availability of labour and employment opportunities. Each of these should be tackled before deploying development strategies for overall growth. The extensive culture also should be taken into consideration for making policies and changing practices.

Migration has been referred to as “the oldest action against poverty” by economist J.K Galbraith (*Kumar, 2021*). People move from backward, underdeveloped regions to more prosperous regions in search of better livelihood opportunities. This has been confirmed by the Economic Survey of 2016-17, reporting high net emigration from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and high net immigration in Maharashtra, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. However, the largest recipient of migrants was Delhi, accounting for more than half of migration in 2016. Migration can be advantageous as it can fill gaps between demand and supply of labour, enhance quality of life, and refine the skillsets of migrants through exposure and interaction with the outside world. Despite these, there are many challenges migrants face that range from having trouble adapting to cultural and language barriers to facing discrimination and not being accepted by locals (*India’s Internal Migration, 2023*).

Males predominantly migrate for employment and females for marriage. To realise a nation's total economic potential, women must be encouraged to participate in the workforce and given equal access to socio-economic status as men. It is imperative to improve the standard and quality of education in schools and raise awareness about the importance of educating the girl child. The studies should not be limited to theoretical subjects but should include vocational training and work-based training. Work-based training is advisable to lessen and gradually erase skill gaps. It is a form of practical education where the knowledge imparted is in accordance with the requirements of the job market. If the skills offered by those seeking employment do not match the skills required by employers, then time and finances have to be

spent to train them. This results in a lowered rate of return on investment and reduces productivity.

Less employability also stems from the inability of institutions to impart soft skill training, and the gaps that are created can also be attributed to the misaligned aspirations of students. There is an ongoing trend of Indian students opting for foreign universities for higher studies and looking for job opportunities to settle abroad. To retain intellectual power in India, university courses must be refined, and job opportunities must be created. In addition to this, students, as well as workers, should be equipped with the capability to adapt to economic, technological and organisational changes that might occur in the future (Skills shortages and labour migration in the field of information and communication technology in India, Indonesia and Thailand, 2019). Upskilling and reskilling of employees are vital components for companies to invest in, to compete in the rapidly changing marketplace and keep up with the fast-paced technological advancements.

The overall age structure has been understood, but it is necessary to study the disparity in average ages across the states to have a nuanced understanding of the functioning of different systems in various parts of the country. According to the Report of the Technical Group on Population Projections for India, the percentage of Indian population over 60 years has increased from 8.6% in 2011 to 10.1% in 2021 (Viji, 2021). It is projected to increase to 19% by 2050, as per the United Nations Population Division. As per the same report, State-wise data on the elderly population of 21 major states divulge that Kerala has the maximum proportion of elderly people in its population (16.5%), followed by Tamil Nadu (13.6%), Himachal Pradesh (13.1%), Punjab (12.6%) and Andhra Pradesh (12.4%) in 2021. On the contrary, the proportion is the least in the States of Bihar (7.7%), followed by Uttar Pradesh (8.1%) and Assam (8.2%) (Viji, 2021). This imbalance in the aged population across states underlines the need for a differentiated approach to planning for the elderly with location (Singh, 2022).

The life expectancy has also increased from 62.6 years in 2000 to 70.15 years in 2020. While declining fertility is desirable to improve health and increase longevity, the economic policies should be designed accordingly to maintain sustainability. Looking at the aged population from an economic dimension, nearly 61.9% of people aged 45-59 years and 35.7% of aged 60 years and above are currently working. They are primarily residing in rural areas and are engaged in agricultural and allied activities. According to the Longitudinal Ageing Study in India of 2017-18, there are 4.4% people aged 45-59 years and 1.5% aged 60 years and above who are seeking jobs (*Nihal, 2022*). This sheds light on the conditions of the elderly who are not being supported by their family or the government. In many cases, they may find themselves compelled to work, even though they often lack the mental and physical capacity to do so. Hence, there is an immediate need to align their needs with the introduction of policies and programmes and provide them with income security.

Some other areas of vulnerability include fewer working-age citizens supporting an increasingly large number of elders, a higher number of women experiencing widowhood, and a worsening health profile (*Bansod, 2011*). Better employment opportunities are required, especially for upcoming generations, since the potential support ratio is decreasing from 8.5 working-age people for every older person in 2001 to about five working-age people in 2026. The parent support ratio is increasing, implying that those reaching the later stages of their working lives will have more aged relatives and parents to support in the future. The parent support ratio in 2001 was about five and is expected to increase to about 14 by 2026, multiplying by almost three-fold. The same income would then be depended upon to support a more significant number of people. This requires improving literacy and providing job opportunities with higher income in multiple fields, especially in southern states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Himachal Pradesh and Punjab in the North.

A significant component for enhancing quality of life requires improvement of healthcare since the elderly experience a greater burden of ailments than other age groups. The growth of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) among the elderly has been substantial in the past few decades. These include cardiovascular diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases, diabetes, and eyesight conditions, all of which are correlated with increasing age and are based on lifestyle (Arunika Agarwal, 2016). Declining mental health, increasing depression, and substance abuse are also highly influential factors that are contributing to poor well-being. Factors like obesity, tobacco use, alcohol consumption, and physical inactivity are fuelling the growing burden of NDCs.

These need to be addressed and given utmost importance to better future living conditions. This growing burden of physical and mental chronic diseases is leading to staggering economic losses. According to the book 'Aging in Asia', the Indian public healthcare system is relatively inefficient, it led to the rise of an unregulated, varied and expensive private sector which provides most healthcare, making a greater indent on poverty and leaving countless citizens vulnerable to catastrophic health expenditures. This demonstrates the need for consolidating the public system to develop prevention measures, early and affordable diagnosis and prompt treatment through setting up more primary healthcare centres in rural areas, investing in medical research and providing schemes for the treatment of people in underprivileged communities. The importance of leading a healthy lifestyle to prevent diseases and disorders must be taught, and awareness must be raised on adopting physical activity and cutting down on tobacco, alcohol and other substances. There is a dire need to promote and support healthy ageing (*Subhojit Dey, 2012*).

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Healthcare should be equally accessible to all sections of society, irrespective of the region, religion and background. This need is warranted, especially where family planning is concerned. In some instances where there is unequal access or shortage of supply, it leads to skewed narratives of a community or religion overpowering others with booming numbers. This is true when the Muslim population growth is considered. As reported by The Wire, it has been repeatedly iterated by Hindutva spokespeople that the Muslims are deliberately growing in population so that they can gain political power and that they are occupying land illegally. This statement is far from the truth, given the fact that the percentage of Muslim couples who wish to access birth control and are unable to do so is the highest out of all religious communities at 11.8% (India's birth control measures resonate among Muslims people, priests play a role, 2023). The younger generation, especially, is more aware of the benefits of having smaller families and focuses on the quality of life rather than boasting with larger families.

Without understanding the truth, surface-level data is being used to disseminate political propaganda by spreading tension with the knowledge of Muslims outnumbering Hindus. The statistics used by

Organiser, a mouthpiece of the political party Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, show that the percentage of Muslims has grown from about 9.8% in 1951 to 14.2% by 2011. The article goes on to mention that zakat is being collected to buy the voice of the media and that the Muslims want large numbers to establish a Caliphate in India and subsequently turn Hindus into second-class citizens (*Choudhury, 2023*). This article shows the extent of ignorance and hatred that exists within some of the Hindus towards the Muslim community. They are trying to spread fear and hostility between the communities, and in 2015, the Lok Sabha member from Uttar Pradesh Sakshi Maharaj also went as far as urging Hindu women to produce “at least four children to protect Hindu religion” (*Aswani, 2023*). It is necessary to correct their views and show them what the reality is to promote goodwill and encourage peaceful coexistence.

While the data is factual, it is crucial to take a closer look to obtain the whole truth. The trend of having smaller Muslim families has become apparent in the last 15 years and it can be attributed to the awareness and efforts by Muslim scholars who taught what the sharia says about birth control. It is accurate to say that Muslims have a higher fertility rate than others, but it is also declining the fastest. The National Family Health Survey shows a fall in the Muslim fertility rate (FR) to 2.4 in 2019-21 from 2.6 in 2015-16 and 3.4 in 2005-06. The plummet is huge, almost halving from 4.4 in 1992-93 (India's birth control measures resonate among Muslim people, priests play a role, 2023). The Muslim population growth dropped by 4.7%, which is far greater than the drop in Hindu population growth, which was by 3.1% (The rate of Muslim population rise fell more than Hindus' in 20 years, 2021).

Another key factor to consider is that fertility does not majorly depend upon religion. While religion does have a negligible effect, the more prominent factors that influence fertility are geographic location and literacy. The regions which have an overall low fertility rate show about the same FR across all religious communities of that place. This means

that the Hindus of a region with an overall high FR will have higher FR than Muslims of a region with an overall low FR. Bihar in the North has the highest Total FR at 3.0, while Southern states like Kerala, Karnataka and Telangana have TFR of 1.7-1.8. It is hence proved that there is no 'Muslim Fertility' or 'Hindu Fertility' as such, as expressed by S.Y Quraishi in his book "The Population Myth".

The disparity aforementioned in the Total Fertility Rates of states of North and South India has other implications when it comes to political power. Delimitation is the method that is used to allot seats in the Lok Sabha based on population. Article 81 of the Indian Constitution requires that each state receive seats in proportion to its population size. Article 82 of the Constitution calls for the reallocation of seats after every population census. Each representative should ideally stand for an equal number of people. There are challenges that arise with overrepresentation in the North and underrepresentation in the South. Unequal representation of states in the Lok Sabha raises the concern of injustice by leaders of Southern states, as northern states whose population growth rates have been higher than theirs would go on to benefit from a delimitation exercise, whereas southern states which have followed the Centre's norms on population control would be penalised (John, 2023). This has been termed as ridiculous and unfair as the states that are reckless are being incentivised.

The last time delimitation took place was in 1971, and this process has been frozen ever since. This was due to the decisions taken by the subsequent governments of Indira Gandhi in 1976 and Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 2002. The announcement of the state of Emergency in 1976 suspended delimitation until after 2001, and then the Parliament extended this freeze until after 2026, scheduled for 2031. Currently, Lok Sabha has 543 seats, based on five-decade-old data. According to the 2019 research paper 'India's Emerging Crisis of Representation' by policy analysts Milan Vaishnav and Jaimie Hinton, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh alone would gain as many as 21 seats in total, giving the

Northern States a total gain of 32 seats, while Tamil Nadu and Kerala together will lose 16 seats making the total loss of the Southern States 24 seats, if the delimitation is carried out according to the 2031 Census. Despite these challenges, it has now become necessary to carry out the reallocation (*Lahiri, 2022*).

The new allocation could possibly give more power to political parties that have their stronghold in the North, and it might also disrupt the division of reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in each state. The outcome of the exercise will transform the landscape of representation in the Parliament. It is necessary to keep the census data secure since any national political party with access to this information and the ability to influence the delimitation process can change the contours of our electoral constituencies (*Kodali, 2023*). A possible solution to this would be to increase the number of seats in the Lok Sabha which is currently capped at 550. This was also done previously after each census that took place until 1971. The first allotment saw 494 seats in 1952, and then it was increased to 522 in 1963 and then to 543 with provision for seats for Union Territories in 1973. The newly built Parliament building has a seating capacity of 888, which shows some amount of preparation for reallocation after nearly half a century (*John, 2023*).

To conclude, all sections of society must work together in order to achieve a good quality of life for all its citizens and maintain peaceful coexistence. All challenges that are currently being faced can be overcome with proper governance, policymaking and participation of people. India is in a unique position in terms of demography and has a young population. This can be fully taken advantage of to improve its standing in the world. Ageing population in the next 50 years can also be benefitted from, and obstacles like healthcare and lack of economic opportunities must be tackled as early as possible. Finally, the internal issues related to communal tensions and disproportionate representation in the government can be solved by raising awareness,

improving literacy to ensure better family planning, encouraging brotherhood and legislating in an equitable and unbiased manner. India holds great potential, and this potential can be translated in the best possible ways to make it the most dignified and successful democracy.

EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF A GROWING YOUNG POPULATION ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

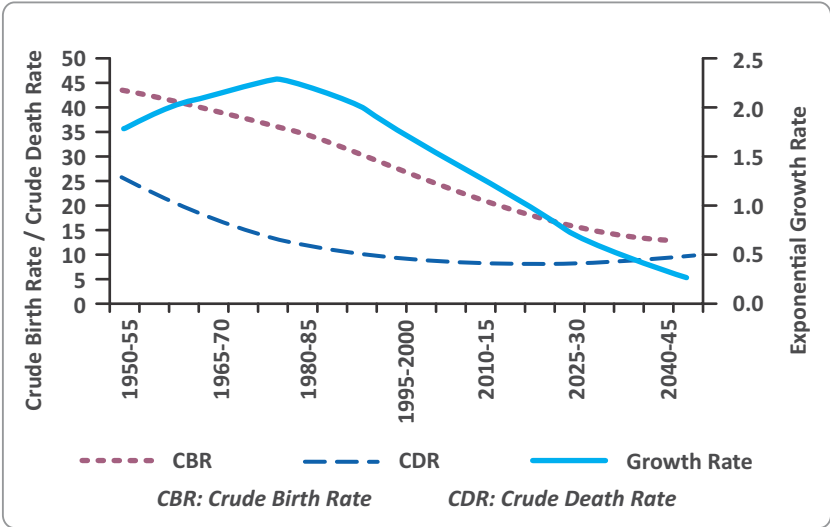
Demographic dividend is defined, by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), as the economic growth potential that can result from a shift in the population's age structure, mainly when the share of the working-age population (15 to 64) is larger than the non-work-age share of the population (14 and younger, and 65 and older).

The concept of demographic dividend is further extended into stages. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), a developing country must undergo a “demographic transition”: this transition shifts a society dominated by agrarian practices with high fertility and mortality rate to an industrialised urban society with low fertility and mortality rates. Within the transition, the first stage involves fertility rates dropping and labour force participation increasing. This promotes investment into economic development and family welfare. In this stage, with all other things being equal, per capita income grows rapidly as well. The IMF states that this first dividend lasts five decades or more. However, the lower fertility rates catch up and lowers the growth rate of the labour force. Along with an ever-ageing population due to advancements in the healthcare system, per capita income grows slowly, and the first dividend turns negative.

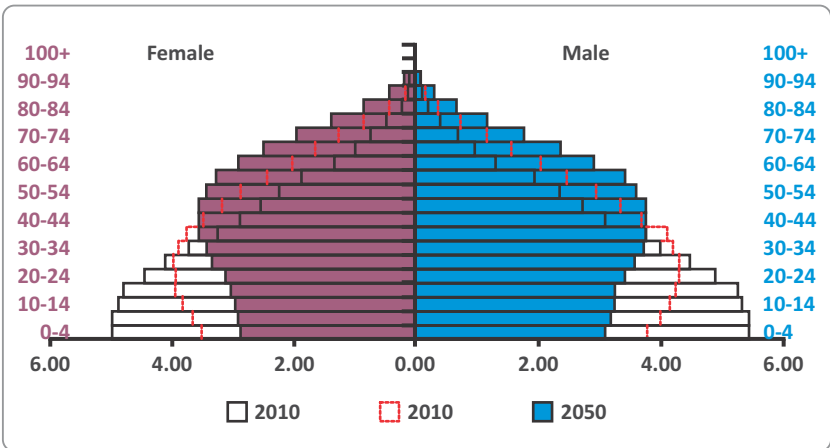
In the coming 30 years, the world's population will grow to almost 9 billion. A majority of this population increase will stem from developing countries according to the United Nations (UN) World Population Prospects. This population surge will also increase the share of 15–64-year-olds: those who belong to the “working age” population.

What about India's demographic dividend? In 2011, Ladusingh and Narayana authored a working paper under the Asian Development Bank titled ‘Demographic Dividends for India: Evidences and

Implications based on National Transfer Accounts'. This paper stated that the population of India will undergo remarkable transitions which will lead to a decline in the share of the Under 14 population and an increase in the Above 65 population, as indicated by the 2050 estimates in the figure below.



Source: Constructed from United Nations World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision (United Nations 2008)



Source: Constructed from United Nations World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision (United Nations 2008)

Another study conducted by the UN found that the window of demographic dividend opportunity in India has been in place since 2005 and will continue till 2055. Evidence of this claim can be found in the population statistics of 2018, where the country's working-age population grew larger than the dependent population. India is lucky to have one of the youngest populations in a world that is ageing. According to the UN World Population Prospects, India's median population age is 28.2 while the country's biggest competitor, China, has a median age of 37.

Rightly exploiting the impact of a growing young population on the demographic dividend can lead to better economic growth, due to an increased labour force, increased fiscal space, and an increase in savings rate. The same has been observed in Japan, which was one of the first economies to experience a demographic dividend. It contributed up to 15% of the overall growth from 1964 to 2004. Another positive change that the demographic dividend brings along is rapid industrialization and urbanisation.

To fully experience and extract the advantages that come with a growing young population, effective policymaking is needed. Policies must promote and establish the improvement of human capital. This will involve providing skill development opportunities, creating job opportunities, improving education infrastructure, and strengthening healthcare infrastructure. To facilitate these changes as well as the migrating rural population, the government must ensure that urbanisation is thoroughly undertaken and successfully implemented.

If policymakers connect the developmental policies with this demographic shift, India is on the right side of a demographic transition that offers a golden chance for its rapid socio-economic development. Policymakers can take advantage of the demographic dividend by studying international strategies from nations like Japan and Korea and devising solutions with the domestic challenges in mind.

POPULATION CHANGES AND LABOR AVAILABILITY, SKILL GAPS, AND MIGRATION PATTERNS

India experienced a population explosion after independence and over more than 70 years India's population has tripled. There has been an increase in the young population of India which increases the country's potential to improve its GDP as the country has an unlimited labour supply. However, at the same time, while there has been exponential population growth, India has not satisfactorily become urbanized. Compared to other countries, India is still primarily rural with only 34% of the population living in urban areas (*World Urbanization Prospects, WUP, 2018*).

India exhibits notable variations in demographic composition and socio-economic transformations across its states and regions, showcasing significant diversity in demographic patterns and socio-economic dynamics (Bhagat & Khesri, 2018). This has resulted in uneven economic growth as certain parts of the country have progressed at a faster pace. These parts offer more opportunities for economic growth compared to the less urbanized areas and it has led to large-scale migration as the less privileged leave their homes to find better opportunities. The Harris-Todaro model of development (1970) suggests migration of labour from rural to urban sectors can achieve growth (*Sanyal & Miaty, 2018*).

According to the 2011 Census, there were 450 million internal migrants in India by the 'place of last residence' metric which is 37.7 per cent of the population. The paper by Rajan et al on the impact of covid on migration estimates that the current migrant population is around 600 million. The paper discusses that while the number seems large, closer analysis reveals that most of the migration is short-distance inter-district migration. Long-distance migrants account for only 12% of the total

which is quite low compared to developing countries like China and Brazil. (Several studies (Davis 1951; Bose 1977; Premi 1990; Zachariah 1964; Srivastava 2011; Bell et al. 2015; Kone et al. 2018) found that the intensity of interstate migration in India was low but pointed out the fact that it is a significant component of labour mobility (Lusome & Bhagat, 2020). The low level of migration can be attributed to tight kinship and caste relationships (*Munshi & Rosenzweig, 2009*). The redistributive effect of migration in India is low by regional and global standards and is the lowest in the Asian region (*Bhagat, 2018*).

There is a causal relationship between migration levels and economic opportunity. Extensive stretches of central, eastern, and northeastern India have experienced significant out-migration trends, characterized by relatively lower levels of urban development. This region of the country encompasses the majority of India's tribal population, which exceeds 100 million individuals. The poorest states in India, i.e., Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have the highest levels of out-migration whereas Maharashtra, Haryana, and Delhi, the capital of India have the highest amount of in-migration from these states. Most of the migrants who go to these states work as unskilled labourers. The study on the destination of out-migration has revealed that it is to Delhi and Punjab from Bihar and to Maharashtra and Delhi from UP. This indicates that most of the developed regions of India are utilizing the labour force of backward areas. The study also found that most of the migrants belonged to backward classes (*Singh et al, 2011*). A case study of Punjab by Kaur et al reveals that most of the migrants do not migrate for the entire year. They migrate to Punjab during the peak agricultural season to seek employment and go back to their places afterwards. Several short-term migrants usually come in the months of April and June and go back to their native places by the end of August. This study also found that most farmers in Punjab preferred to employ migrants who belonged to the general category (*Kaur et al., 2011*). This paradoxical supply and demand of labour can lead to thousands of migrants from lower castes

unemployed and it can lead to perpetuating a cycle of inter-generational poverty. The proportionate amount of the tribal population living in economically poorer areas is also a concern for policymakers.

The gendered narrative of migration is always overlooked. While most male migration motivation classifies employment as reasons for moving, female migration is primarily noted to be because of marriage. The most prominent type of migration in India is also the rural-rural migration mainly due to marriage (*Singh, 2022*). This, however, fails to consider the aftermath of the marriage migration where the woman inevitably gains employment at the new place. In the previous years, there has been a percentage increase in female migration related to business or employment. (*Singh, 2022*) This can be seen because of the improvement in female education.

As mentioned above, most of the migrants belong to backward classes and act as unskilled labourers upon migration. According to the 2011 census, of the labour force between the ages 15-59 which amounted to 431 million, 29% of the labour force was not even literate. An additional 24% had only primary or below primary-level education. 29.6% of the rest had middle or high school education which means that only 12% of the migrant population had higher secondary and higher levels of graduation. This low level of general education corresponds to the continuing high share of those engaged in agriculture and an even higher share of the total population that lives in rural areas (*Mehrotra et al., 2013*). The amount of vocational training that these labourers have undergone also amounted to only 2% and 8% for formal and informal training respectively. With such a high proportion of illiterates in the workforce, it is but natural to expect a very low level of technical education among the workers (*Mehrotra et al., 2013*). Thus, finding a job is easier in the informal sector than in the formal sector (*Sanyal & Maity, 2018*). As the country gears towards urbanisation, it is essential for everyone to have a minimum of a high school diploma to have enough technical knowledge to contribute to the country's progress. Most of the secondary and tertiary sectors prefer skilled labourers over unskilled

labourers which can lead to large levels of unemployment in migrant workers.

Arjan de Haan articulates the social stigmatization and apathy common to migrants in India in his paper and asserts that, unlike China, India has no formal system in place to protect and better migrant interests. Indian migrant workers have to live in less than stellar conditions without a formal contract. They have to work for a smaller salary and have to squat in dangerous places that are breeding grounds for diseases due to a lack of sanitary practices. As children often accompany their parents while migrating, there is a dearth of education amongst the children of labourers.

The Indian government plays a crucial role in addressing population changes and labour dynamics through policy interventions. Initiatives such as the National Population Policy and the National Skill Development Mission highlight the government's commitment to addressing population challenges and skill gaps (*Government of India, 2014*). These policies aim to provide quality education, vocational training, and employment opportunities to ensure the effective utilization of the country's demographic dividend (Planning Commission). Continuous monitoring and evaluation of these initiatives are vital to track their effectiveness and make necessary adjustments.

To bridge skill gaps and promote skill development, comprehensive strategies need to be implemented. This includes aligning educational curricula with industry requirements, enhancing vocational training programs, and promoting apprenticeships. Strengthening public-private partnerships can facilitate the design and delivery of demand-driven skill development programs. Upskilling and reskilling programs should focus on emerging sectors, digital literacy, and advanced technologies to meet the evolving demands of the labour market. Regular skill gap assessments and labour market intelligence systems can inform the development of targeted interventions.

To promote inclusive growth and reduce regional disparities, targeted policies are required. Investments in infrastructure development, particularly in rural areas, can attract investments, create employment opportunities, and reduce migration pressures. Special economic zones and industrial clusters can be established in lagging regions to stimulate economic growth and create a balanced distribution of industries. Additionally, promoting entrepreneurship, micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and rural livelihood programs can empower local communities and promote sustainable development.

This study has explored the effects of population changes on labour availability, skill gaps, and migration patterns in India. Key findings indicate that India's demographic shifts, including population growth, ageing, and internal and international migration, have significant implications for the labour dynamics in the country. The analysis revealed regional variations in population dynamics, with implications for labour availability across different regions. Skill gaps were identified as a crucial challenge, impacting productivity, competitiveness, and employment opportunities. Migration patterns were found to influence labour availability and skill mobility.

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES OF AN AGEING POPULATION

The number of elderly adults is significantly rising, which represents a considerable change in the global population. This demographic change, also known as the "ageing population," presents several difficulties for governments and society everywhere. Examining how various nations are handling the requirements of older individuals, ensuring their well-being and involvement within society, is critical as the aged population continues to increase. This article aims to explore the pressing issue of ageing populations and shed light on the strategies employed by states and communities to provide adequate support and care for the elderly.

Understanding the Challenges

The problems brought on by an ageing population are numerous and varied. The growing pressure on healthcare systems is one of the main issues. More specialised services, long-term care, and medical attention are frequently needed by older persons. Innovative strategies are required to guarantee high-quality care without compromising the entire healthcare system due to the burden on healthcare resources.

Taking care of older individuals' social and emotional well-being is a substantial additional task. Numerous elderly people struggle with loneliness, social isolation, and mental health problems. A reduction in their general quality of life may be brought on by a lack of social connection, restricted mobility, and fewer possibilities for meaningful participation. Therefore, it is essential to create programmes and policies that encourage social interaction, support mental health, and mitigate the harmful effects of isolation.

Moreover, financial security is a significant concern for older adults. Many seniors face economic hardships due to inadequate retirement savings, limited pension benefits, and rising healthcare costs. Ensuring

financial stability for the elderly requires a comprehensive approach that includes accessible and affordable healthcare, pension reforms, and social safety nets.

Strategies Employed by Governments and Societies

Governments and societies worldwide have recognized the importance of addressing the challenges posed by an ageing population. They are implementing various strategies to support the well-being and inclusion of older adults.

Healthcare Reforms

Governments are focusing on strengthening healthcare systems by increasing funding for geriatric care, promoting preventive healthcare measures, and integrating primary and specialized healthcare services. They are also exploring innovative technologies to provide remote healthcare services, monitor chronic conditions, and improve accessibility for older adults.

Social Initiatives

Communities are developing social initiatives to combat loneliness and social isolation among the elderly. These initiatives include community centers, senior activity programs, intergenerational projects, and volunteer networks that promote social interaction, emotional support, and opportunities for older adults to contribute to society.

Age-Friendly Infrastructure

Governments are investing in age-friendly infrastructure, including accessible public transportation, senior-friendly housing, and community spaces designed to meet the needs of older adults. These efforts aim to enhance mobility, safety, and independence for the elderly population.

Employment and Retirement Policies

Governments are reviewing employment and retirement policies to encourage older adults to remain in the workforce if they desire and to

support a smooth transition into retirement. Flexible work arrangements, skills training programs, and age discrimination legislation are some of the measures being implemented to ensure the economic well-being of older workers.

Caregiver Support

Recognizing the importance of informal caregivers, governments are implementing support systems to assist family members or friends who provide care to older adults. These systems may include respite care services, caregiver training programs, and financial assistance to alleviate the burden on caregivers.

The challenges posed by an ageing population are complex, requiring comprehensive strategies and collaborative efforts from governments, communities, and individuals. By examining policies, social initiatives, and societal attitudes towards older adults, it becomes evident that various measures are being implemented to address the needs of the elderly population. Healthcare reforms, social initiatives, age-friendly infrastructure, employment policies, and caregiver support are among the strategies employed to ensure the well-being and inclusion of older adults.

As societies continue to grapple with the challenges of an ageing population, it is crucial to remain proactive in developing innovative solutions. By prioritizing the needs of older adults, promoting intergenerational understanding, and fostering a culture of respect and inclusion, we can build a society that values and supports individuals across all stages of life.

THE MYTH OF THE MUSLIM POPULATION BOOM

While at first glance, statistics and numerical figures are considered to be objective, unbiased measures of truth, it remains possible to warp narratives based on data to suit one's interests. The increasing politicisation of data is especially apparent when it comes to the study of populations and demographics in the context of religious communities. A discourse that has gripped India over the past few decades has been the idea that the Muslim community in the nation has caused a population boom. Using surface-level data and statistics, these allegations have been used to instigate anxieties surrounding an eventual skew, with Muslims supposedly outnumbering Hindus in the country.

Most recently, Organiser, a mouthpiece of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), published an opinion piece on why the "growing population of Muslims in India should be a matter of concern". The rhetoric weaponised in the article uses two surface-level statistics to prove the alleged Muslim boom: the fact that Muslims have higher birth rates than other religious communities in India and that the percentage of Muslims in India has risen from 9.8% in 1951 to 14.2% in 2011.2 Although these figures are not incorrect, a more nuanced analysis is required to better understand the larger picture.

As per the results of the fifth edition of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data conducted in 2019-21, Muslims do have the highest Total Fertility Rate (TFR) at 2.4. Meanwhile, Hindus and Christians have a TFR of around 1.9, and Sikhs of 1.6.3 However, the decline in TFR is also the fastest for Muslims, marking a decrease of nearly 47% since NFHS-1 (1992-93) compared to 41% for Hindus. Considering the higher rate of decline in TFR for Muslims, the gap in the total fertility rate between Hindus and Muslims has been decreasing over the decades and is likely to converge soon.

The NFHS study also reveals that variations in fertility rates are also caused by region and geographical location. Those regions with high fertility on average were characterised by higher rates across all groups, irrespective of religious affiliation, and the same holds for low fertility regions. In 'The Population Myth', former Chief Election Commissioner S.Y. Quraishi discusses the inter-state differences in fertility.

Using NFHS-4 (2015-16) data, it is seen that Kerala has the lowest and Bihar has the highest TFR in the nation. The fertility rate for Muslims in Kerala (1.86) is far below that of Hindus in Bihar (3.29), implying that religion is not the most powerful driver of fertility. Instead, it can be inferred that if populations of some religions are concentrated in a high-fertility state, they are likely to have high fertility on account of the region, as opposed to the religion. Quraishi concludes by suggesting that "there is no 'Hindu fertility', 'Muslim fertility', or 'Christian fertility' as such."

Blindly using data in a vacuum without the context of the socio-economic landscape of the nation allows for the manipulation of statistics. The Hindu nationalist arguments surrounding Muslim fertility are often falsely based on the idea that correlation implies causation: since it is Muslims that have the highest fertility rate, it is assumed that fertility is higher by virtue of being Muslim. However, religion is only one of the pieces of the complicated picture that makes up demography and fertility studies.

Poverty and education are some major determinants of fertility rates, both of which differ between Hindus and Muslims and could account for the differences in TFR across the communities. Other factors like access to healthcare, age of the population, and historic and cultural norms impact fertility, which cannot be accurately captured in a political dialogue surrounding the population.

Reuters attempted a qualitative study of the response to family planning measures by the Muslim community in India, in 2021. Organiser and other proponents of the Muslim boom rhetoric have often blamed the

supposed refusal of birth control and other initiatives by Muslims for their higher fertility rate. The report finds that priorities in Muslim families have begun shifting towards ensuring better education and quality of life for their children, as opposed to having larger families. Since smaller families can ensure education for all children, there has been a growing trend of having fewer children, especially among the younger generations in the community. In a conversation with Reuters, a Muslim priest, or imam, addresses the misconception that Islam does not support birth control measures: "The Shariat (Islamic law) talks of family planning. It is our responsibility to clear these misconceptions. We have conducted awareness programmes, made appeals and speeches about what Shariat has said about such issues."

Disproportionate fertility rates can also be the consequence of the inability of public health care services to keep up with the demand for birth control and other family planning measures. Based on NFHS-4 data, 12.9% of all couples aged 15-49 years have an unmet need for contraception. This statistic is highest amongst Muslims, where 16.4% of couples are unable to gain access to modern methods of birth control despite desiring them. Meanwhile, only 12.4% of Hindu couples have an unmet need for the same, pointing to unequal access to healthcare and contraceptive services.

A nuanced, holistic analysis of the data reveals that while Muslims may have the highest fertility rate in the nation, this is fast declining. Further, the reasons for high fertility are often a result of socio-economic factors that indicate the skewed living experiences of Muslims as compared to Hindus and other religious affiliations. Generalising superficial statistics to feed political rhetoric sets a dangerous precedent for how data and figures are consumed by the layperson, and how they can be twisted to fit into any particular narrative. With a lowering fertility rate and increased receptiveness to family planning, Muslims are unlikely to "overtake" the Hindu population at any point, and the myth of the Muslim population boom remains just that: a myth.

THE CONCERNS OVER LOK SABHA REAPPORTIONMENT IN INDIA

Over the past few decades, there has been an increasing gap in the population growth rate of the states in Northern and Southern India. This disparity has raised questions of overrepresentation and underrepresentation of states in the Lok Sabha. This article attempts to understand how the increasing population in a few states influences the allocation of seats in representative bodies and the challenges raised by its implications for seat redistribution.

Article 81 of the Indian Constitution defines the composition of the Lok Sabha; the Lok Sabha should have a maximum of 550 elected members, with a provision for up to 20 representatives from Union Territories. It further specifies that the allocation of Lok Sabha seats to each state should be determined in a manner that aims to maintain a consistent ratio between the number of seats and the population of the state to the greatest extent possible. Similarly, the US Constitution follows a congressional reapportionment every decade. The population totals used for this process include the resident population of each state and account for the number of US government military and civilian employees stationed overseas, along with their dependents. The allocation of seats to each state in the United States is determined based on its proportionate share of the total population among all 50 states. This means that each state receives the number of seats in the House of Representatives, reflecting its relative population size. Additionally, every state is constitutionally entitled to at least one seat in the House and two seats in the Senate, regardless of population size.

However, in India, this process has been frozen since 1976. During the Emergency, the 42nd Constitutional amendment, also called 'Indira's Constitution' or 'mini-Constitution', introduced a provision to Article 81(3). This provision stated that the values of the 1971 census shall stay

valid until the next census taken after 2000. A similar provision was also added to Article 82, which halted the readjustment process until 2000. In 2001, the 84th Constitutional Amendment extended these deadlines from 2000 to 2026. This extension was justified based on the National Population Policy and the progress of family planning programs across the country. A delimitation exercise did occur subsequently, starting in July 2002 and concluding in May 2008, based on the 2001 census. It involved readjusting all parliamentary and assembly constituencies in the country. However, due to the freeze imposed in 2001, the total number of seats in the Lok Sabha could not be increased.

Alistair McMillan, a political scientist, previously documented significant discrepancies in over- and underrepresentation in India's Lok Sabha. His calculations based on the 2001 Census revealed that Tamil Nadu should have had seven fewer seats, while Uttar Pradesh should have gained seven more seats than allocated.

To further highlight the disparities, Milan Vaishnav and Jamie Hinton updated McMillan's calculations using the 2011 Census figures. Using the Webster method, a reliable formula for unbiased seat allocation, the study projected state population figures up to 2026 based on data from both the 2001 and 2011 Censuses. The analysis illustrated even more severe malapportionment issues that could persist beyond the reapportionment freeze. The revised seat counts for each state are shown in the Table below, with the analysis consolidating the data for Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, which were bifurcated in 2014.

Malapportionment in the Lok Sabha, 2011 (Actual) and 2026 (Projected)

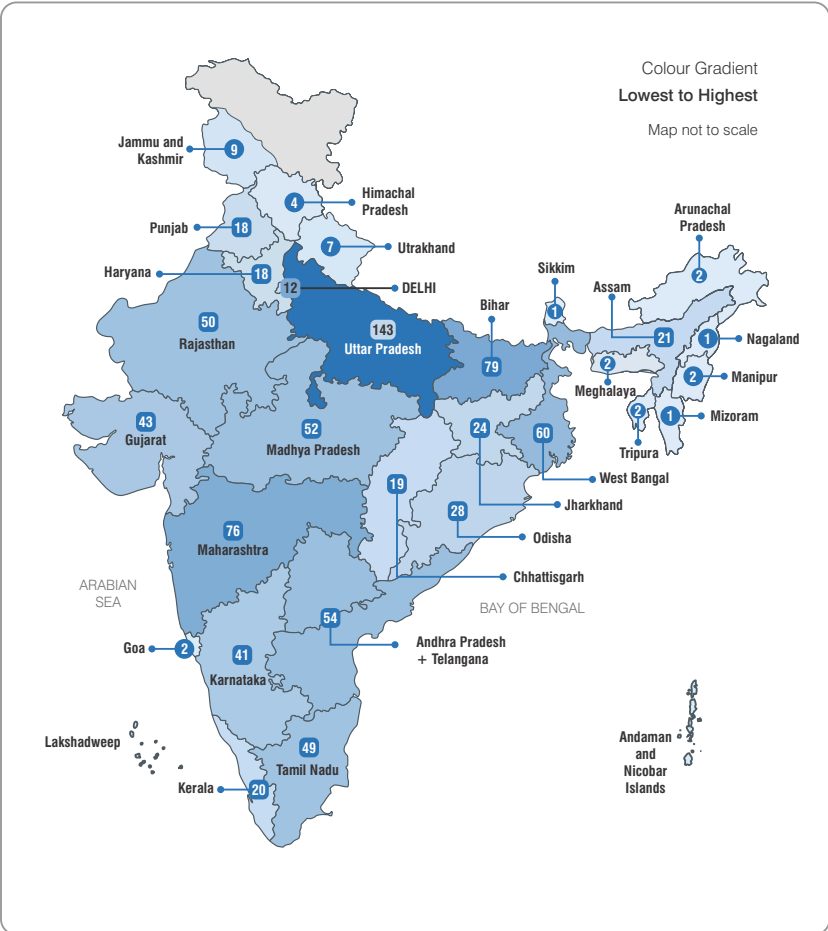
| State | Current Seats | Proportional Seats (2011) | Over-and Under-representation (2011) | Proportional Seats (2026) | Over-and Under-representation (2026) |
|-------------------------------|---------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Tamil Nadu | 39 | 32 | +7 | 31 | +8 |
| Andhra Pradesh + Telangana | 42 | 37 | +5 | 34 | +8 |
| Kerala | 20 | 15 | +5 | 12 | +8 |
| Odisha | 21 | 18 | +3 | 18 | +3 |
| West Bengal | 42 | 40 | +2 | 38 | +4 |
| Karnataka | 28 | 27 | +1 | 26 | +2 |
| Himachal Pradesh | 4 | 3 | +1 | 3 | +1 |
| Punjab | 13 | 12 | +1 | 12 | +1 |
| Uttrakhand | 5 | 4 | +1 | 4 | +1 |
| Assam | 14 | 14 | 0 | 14 | 0 |
| Jammu and Kashmir | 6 | 6 | 0 | 6 | 0 |
| Chattisgarh | 11 | 11 | 0 | 12 | -1 |
| Delhi | 7 | 7 | 0 | 8 | -1 |
| Maharashtra | 48 | 49 | -1 | 48 | 0 |
| Gujarat | 26 | 27 | -1 | 27 | -1 |
| Haryana | 10 | 11 | -1 | 11 | -1 |
| Jharkhand | 14 | 15 | -1 | 15 | -1 |
| Madhya Pradesh | 29 | 32 | -3 | 33 | -4 |
| Rajasthan | 25 | 30 | -5 | 31 | -6 |
| Bihar | 40 | 46 | -6 | 50 | -10 |
| Uttar Pradesh | 80 | 88 | -8 | 91 | -11 |

Source: Election Commission of India, Office of the Registrar General, 2006 and Calculations by Authors from Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

By 2031, when the next decennial census will take place, the data used for Lok Sabha seat distribution will have been six decades old. Thus, if the delimitation exercise takes place, it will cause a considerable shift in the number of seats allocated to each state, with southern states losing seats to the northern states having larger populations. States in the South could lose as many as 24 seats, while those in the North may gain more than 32 seats. Moreover, this exercise could also potentially strengthen parties with strongholds in the northern regions. States like Kerala and Tamil Nadu in the south, which have experienced slower population growth, contend that they should not be penalised for effectively managing and curbing population growth compared to states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in the North, which have seen a significant population increase. Some even argue that it is highly absurd and unjust that states that effectively implemented family planning measures are penalised while those with a careless approach are incentivised. On the other hand, the northern states argue that they have been unfairly treated since the principle of "one person, one vote" is a fundamental aspect of democratic representation.

The delimitation exercise will also impact the allocation of seats designated for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST) in each state. Adjusting both figures to align with the 2011 Census data would not significantly alter the total number of reserved seats: there would be a slight increase of 1 seat reserved for ST and 2 seats reserved for SC. However, beneath this minor adjustment lies a noticeable regional shift: states in the southern region, with slower population growth, would experience a reduction in reserved seats, while states in the northern region, with faster population growth, would witness an increase. Overall, the reservation status of 18 seats would change. Based on calculations conducted by authors from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the following figure presents 2026 projections on potential changes in the composition of seats in the Lok Sabha.

Expanding the Lok Sabha using 2026 Population Projections



Source: Office of the Registrar General, 2006 and Calculations by authors from Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Despite all these challenges, Vaishnav and Hinton argue that the reapportionment exercise must not be delayed any further, and doing so would be akin to kicking the can down the road. They propose two solutions to the drastic shift that will occur during the reapportionment. Their first strategy, which aligns with Alistair McMillan's hypothesis, suggests increasing the number of seats in the Lok Sabha. They argue

that this approach offers two benefits. Firstly, it would result in MPs representing smaller constituencies, facilitating more efficient governance by alleviating the strain on understaffed administrative bodies caused by the significant population pressures. Additionally, the two explained that this strategy appears to be more politically viable, as politicians are more likely to agree to an increase in the number of seats in specific areas or states rather than relinquishing seats in regions where they hold significant influence. For this to occur without any of the states losing representatives, the maximum Lok Sabha strength must be increased to 848. The other solution by Vaishnav and Hintson involves reforming the composition of the Rajya Sabha. Although the purpose of the Upper House is constitutionally intended to be a platform for states to advocate for their interests, it has become customary for non-residents of a specific state to hold Rajya Sabha seats representing that state.

No matter the route taken, it is imperative for the delimitation exercise not to be delayed after 2026 to tackle the problem of malapportionment in Lok Sabha. The crux of the problem deals with representation, especially the widening rift between North and South. This dialogue must be a part of the larger conversation about India's democratic federalism; the centre and the states must take this opportunity to discuss other issues that address interstate inequality. Missing this opportunity would pose the risk of causing additional harm to India's federal structure, which is a crucial, albeit imperfect, component of India's democratic system.

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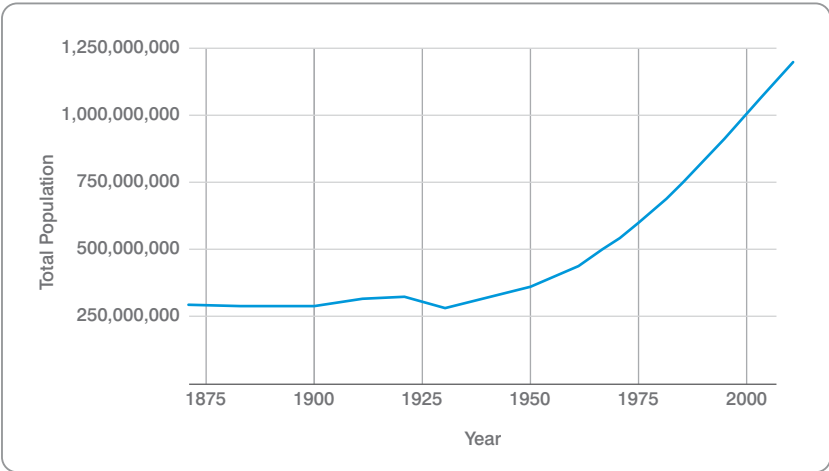
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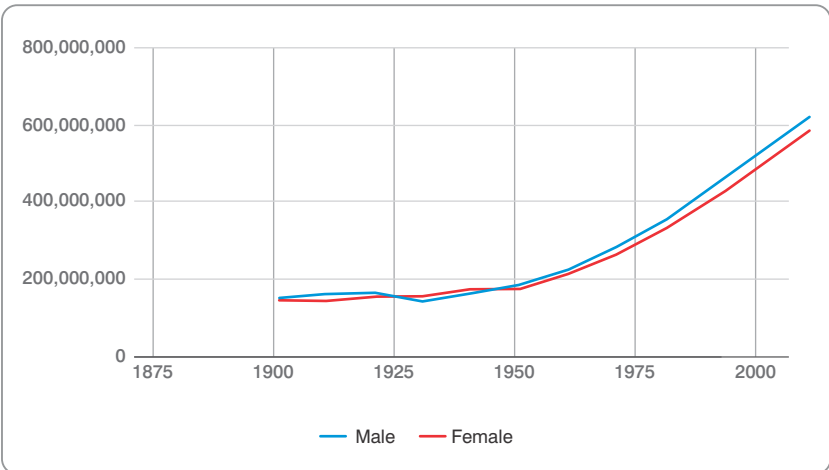
APPENDIX

Figure 1: Year-wise Indian Population from 1871 to 2011



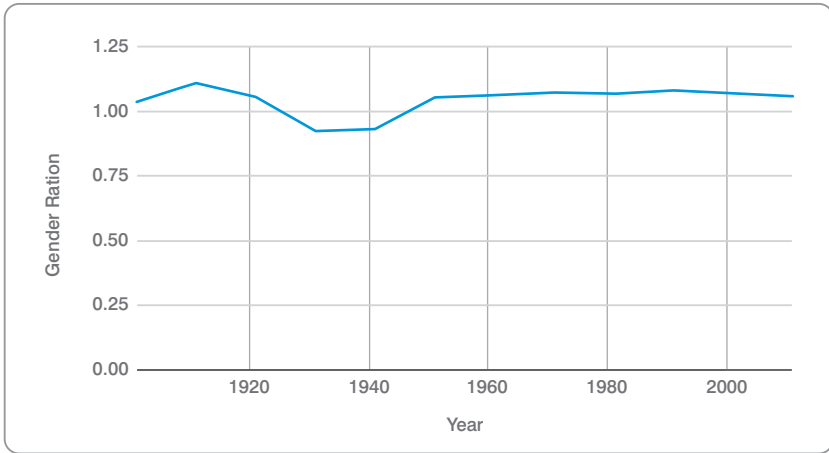
Source: Census of India from 1871 to 2011

Figure 2: Gender-wise Population of India



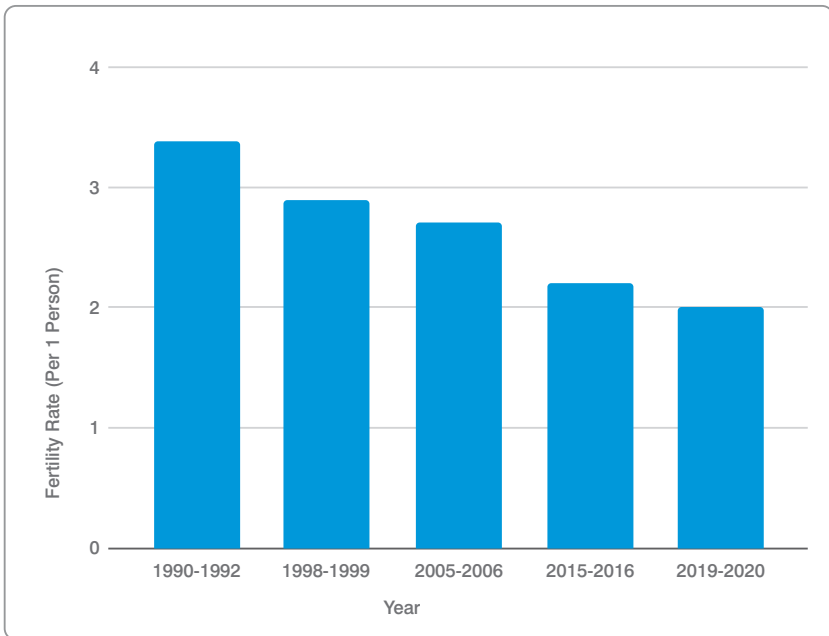
Source: Census of India from 1901 to 2011

Figure 3: Change in Gender-ratio from 1991-2011



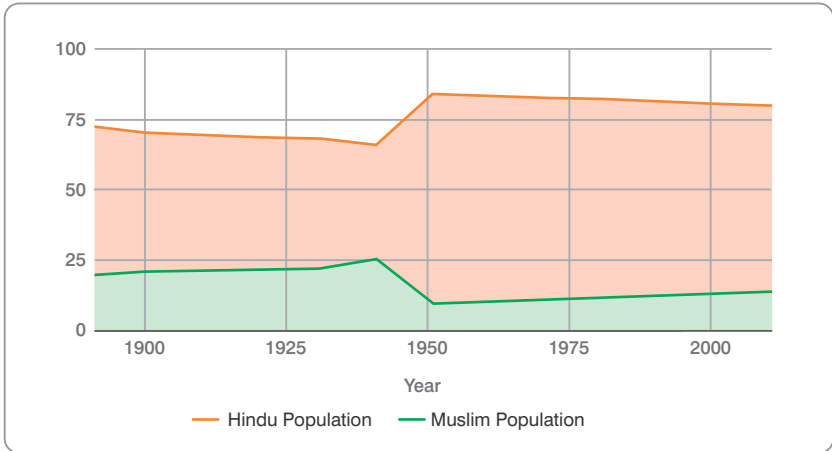
Source: Census of India from 1901 to 2011

Figure 4: Fertility rate of India



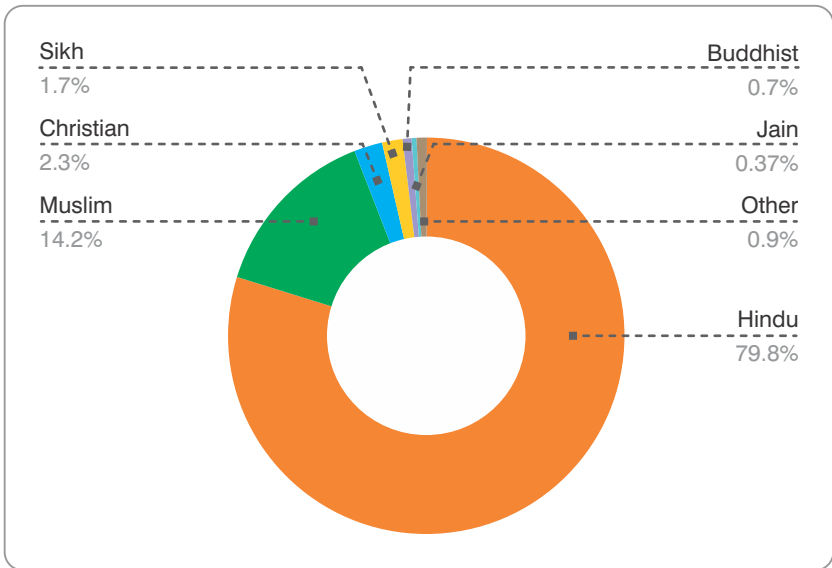
Source: National Family Health Survey 1-5

Figure 5: Variations in Hindu population and Muslim population from 1891-2011 (in percentage)



Source: Census of India from 1891 to 2011

Figure 6: Division of Population based on Religion as per the census of 2011



Source: Census of India, 2011

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