

A Quantitative Study of Students' Attitudes towards Regionalism in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

Regionalism refers to an individual's loyalty and attachment to a region based on shared language, history, culture and ideologies. It is driven primarily by the identity of individuals and groups. In a multi-national country like India, it has caused both positives and negatives in the past. This study focuses on the college students of Tamil Nadu and understands how they perceive regionalism. The study has adopted a quantitative method to collect data from college students between the ages of 18 and 24 via questionnaires. SPSS V20 software has been used for data analysis. This study aims to understand how much students are aware of regionalism, the most influential factor on students' attitude towards regionalism, whether they perceive regionalism as a positive or a negative factor in our society, and the major impact of regionalism on India's future. Some of the findings of this study are that education is the most influential factor, and regionalism is perceived as having a neutral impact on Indian society.

Keywords: Loyalty, identity, society Tamil Nadu, students, awareness, influential factor, impact.

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Introduction

The phenomenon of regionalism has existed for a long time; it has played a crucial role in the social, economic and political life of the people. Regionalism can be understood at three levels – international, national and sub-national. At the international level, several countries join hands to form an organisation to improve and accelerate the overall development of that particular region. e.g., ASEAN and EU. Regionalism at the national level can be defined as people's liking, loyalty and attachment to a particular region compared to neighbouring areas within a country, which manifests as assertive political and social stances. Sub-regionalism is nothing but regionalism within a particular region. This study is primarily concerned with regionalism at the national level, focusing on the attitudes of college students in Tamil Nadu.

Regionalism is a highly subjective, contentious, controversial and nebulous phenomenon in India. The ambiguity surrounding this concept starts from the term "region", which is loosely defined. Whether this term refers to the physical features, ethnic affinities, or political attributes of the people is highly subjective. But, most commonly in political science, a region refers to a place where people with different backgrounds share a common and collective identity. So, it is a phenomenon driven by the identity of the people.

Regionalism has two connotations – positive and negative. On the positive side, it is associated with people's love and attachment to their culture, language, cuisine, and attire, which helps preserve and enrich them. It is crucial to ensure that various cultures and languages in India are preserved and nourished, irrespective of the number of people attributed to them. As often reiterated, India's strength as a "nation(s)-state" lies in its diversity of culture, language and religion among the people. On the same line, the core of Indian federalism lies in regionalism; India can best be described as a multi-regional federation, and regional identity should be viewed as a holistic representation of the diverse nature of Indian society (Khan, 1992). On the downside, the country's unity is threatened when the same attachment and love for a region starts to overshadow its larger identity, i.e., national identity. Regionalism in India, for decades, has been used by various actors with a negative connotation to further their ends. It has also been a major factor in Indian politics for over seventy years, giving rise to some of the most prominent national and regional parties of the present day.

Background:

Regionalism in India is more pronounced than anywhere else in the world because of the diversity existing across various spectrums of life. Since India's independence, this double-

edged sword has been a tool for the people to take forward their interests and, at times, shaped and threatened the social fabric of this country. The present-day states of Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Tamil Nadu encompassed the erstwhile Madras presidency. Despite being home to a mosaic population, the Madras presidency remained non-bifurcated for several years after independence. The 52-day hunger fast undertaken by Potti Sriramulu demanding a separate state for Telugu-speaking people in the Madras presidency, which eventually led to his death in 1952, is a harbinger for events that followed in the decades. As a result, the state of Andhra Pradesh was established in 1953. The creation of Andhra Pradesh led to further demands from different parts of the country to carve out states on linguistic lines from the existing ones. Fazl Ali Commission, also known as the State Reorganisation Commission, was set up in December 1953 for this purpose and submitted its report in September 1956 (Austin, 1966). The parliament passed the State Reorganisation Act of 1956 to implement the Commission's recommendations, and it gave birth to states like Maharashtra, Gujarat and Punjab. In its report, the Commission categorically rejected the 'one language, one state' theory, but these bifurcations further strengthened the idea of regionalism.

As this study is focused on regionalism in Tamil Nadu, it is imperative to have a historical background of how Tamil Nadu became a vocal advocate of regionalism and state autonomy. The genesis of modern-day regionalism began with the Dravidian movement, considered one of India's most effective regional movements at one point in time. The movement remained peaceful, using democratic means like public debates and election platforms to support their cause. This movement led to the birth of Dravida Kazhagam (DK), which later became Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). The DMK entered politics with a three-pronged agitation in 1953-54, followed by the anti-Hindi agitation that added to the rising popularity of the DMK in Tamil Nadu. In the 1967 Assembly election, DMK displaced the Indian National Congress (INC) to take over the government for a time in Tamil Nadu's history. Since 1967, the Dravidian parties DMK and AIADMK have been at the helm for over 50 years, carrying the Tamil pride legacy. The political history of Tamil Nadu serves as a guide to understanding what kind of political ideology has been imbibed in the minds of the people.

Nevertheless, the regional politics in Tamil Nadu is a good example of a balance between regionalism and nationalism (The Hindu, July 12, 2016). The growth of technology in the past three decades has made the younger generation in India generally and Tamil Nadu particularly, more aware and informed about various contemporary issues. This study provides an

opportunity to examine the effects and consequences of such exposure among college students in Tamil Nadu towards regionalism.

Hypothesis:

Students do not view regional identity as more important than national identity.

Research Questions:

1. Are the college students in Tamil Nadu aware of regionalism, and how do they define it?
2. What factors have influenced college students' perspectives on regionalism?
3. What role does regionalism play in promoting cultural diversity and economic development of the states in India?
4. How important is regionalism compared to national identity, and how will regionalism shape India's future?

Purpose of the Study:

The three main purposes of this study are to understand the perception of college students in Tamil Nadu towards regionalism and the factors influencing them, and to examine whether students weigh regionalism over national identity.

Research Objectives:

1. To examine the level of awareness and understanding of regionalism among college students.
2. To identify factors responsible for students' perspectives on regionalism.
3. To understand students' perception of regionalism as a positive or a negative force in India.
4. To explore the impact regionalism might have on India's future.

Definitions:

The following terms are defined to avoid any misunderstandings in the subsequent chapters.

1. College Students: Students pursuing bachelors or master's degrees in arts, science, medicine, engineering, law or management studies between 18 and 24.
2. Attitudes: How someone feels and thinks about someone or something, or their behaviour towards them.

3. Regionalism: The strong identification of people with a particular region, often accompanied by demands for political autonomy or the preservation of local culture and language (Dube, 1995).
4. Cultural diversity: The presence of a wide range of cultures within a country involves respecting and nourishing them.
5. Identity: How an individual identifies themselves in a large group.
6. Economic development: Refers to an increase in a State's Gross Domestic Product in a financial year.
7. National identity: A collective sentiment based on shared characteristics such as culture, language, territory, history and often a common political system, which binds people together as members of a nation (Smith, 1991).

The organisation of the study:

This study consists of five sections. Section one introduces the phenomenon of regionalism, its background in India in general and Tamil Nadu in particular, research questions, hypothesis and definitions of terms. Section two presents a literature review that explores the existing literature and research gap. Section three describes the research design, hypothesis, research question and objectives, population and sample, methods used for data collection and data analysis and limitations of the study. Section four presents the study's findings and the hypothesis's testing. Finally, chapter five provides recommendations and a conclusion.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework:

A number of studies are available that examine regional politics, identity and political mobilization pertaining to India. For example, Myron Weiner in his *State Politics in India* compares and analyses political processes in eight states within India and focuses primarily on factionalism and regional dynamics. Rasheeduddin Khan in his *Federal India: A Design for Change* highlights the diversity of India and advocates for a more decentralised and cooperative approach to governance. On the other hand, Pakem B (ed) in his edited volume *Regionalism in India: With Special Reference to North-East India*, explored the conceptual idea of regionalism in India with a special focus on the Northeast. Mouneshwara S went on to explore *The Role of Regional Political Parties in Indian Coalition Politics: A Case Study of Tamil Nadu*, providing a broader view of the role played by regional parties as part of the central coalition government.

Drawing insights from these studies, this research identifies two theoretical frameworks that guide this work in arriving at its conclusions:

1. Social Identity Theory:

Regionalism as a phenomenon thrives primarily on the psychology of the people. How people identify themselves in a larger group and the means they utilise to promote and preserve their identity feed regionalism. The 'Social Identity Theory' (SIT) was developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1960s and 1970s, and the 'Concept of Reactive Identity Formation' is utilised to provide a theoretical framework for the phenomenon of regionalism in India.

It is a psychological framework that helps to understand how individuals derive a sense of belongingness and identity by being a social group member. It's in the inherent nature of people to categorise themselves into groups to attain various personal and collective objectives. It is evident that when people started living as a society, it led to various developments. Understanding the meaning of our group involves a comparison with other relevant groups of which we are not members (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), thus making comparisons between the in-group and out-group more or less inevitable. As these comparisons intensify over time, it might lead to in-group favouritism and out-group derogation. As a result of this process of identity assertion, a motivational process where groups strive for 'positive group distinctiveness' has ensued, aiming to gain a positive social identity (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). SIT highlights the role of group membership in shaping identity and socio-cultural perceptions and relationships between groups (region).

2. Reactive Identity Formation:

It refers to developing and defining one's identity in response to external factors such as social expectations, cultural norms and oppositional forces (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). As this study is on regionalism in Tamil Nadu, a good example would be to understand how the people of Tamil Nadu assert their identities in terms of language, culture, customs, attire, etc., when threatened by external factors like imposition of a new language, influx of people who have different culture and customs (Dube, 1995). Therefore, the very idea of regionalism stands on the foundation of identity (Smith, 1991). Understanding individual and group identities and external stimuli factors is crucial in a time where regional identities have grown larger, and regionalism has become a feature of the nation(s) state of India (Keating, 1998).

Research Gap:

Despite the existing and growing body of literature on regionalism in India in general and Tamil Nadu in particular, almost all existing literature has focused either on the conceptual framework or region-specific studies. There is a knowledge gap in studying regionalism from the perspective of specific demographic groups like men, women, students or marginalised communities. This study intends to add to the existing literature by focusing on college students in Tamil Nadu.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to understand college students' perceptions of regionalism in Tamil Nadu. It also involved exploring the factors influencing students' views on regionalism, examining the relationship between students' demographic factors and views on regionalism, and exploring how students perceive region, whether as a positive or a negative factor. The questionnaire consists of 17 questions out of which only eight are used for the study due to its direct relevance to research objectives and data quality considerations.

Research Design:

A quantitative method is employed through structured questionnaires to examine students' attitudes towards regionalism in Tamil Nadu.

Variables of the study:

The key variables used in this study are categorised as follows,

Independent Variables: These variables influence college students' attitudes and perceptions towards regionalism. They are,

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Place of Origin
4. Level of Education
5. Field of Study

Dependent Variables: These variables reflect college students' attitudes and perceptions towards regionalism. They are,

1. Perception of Regionalism

2. Attitude towards regionalism's role in cultural diversity, identity, conflict and economy.
3. Opinion on regionalism vs. national identity

Population and Sample:

The data for this study is collected through snowball sampling. Around 365 college students between the ages of 18 and 24 pursuing bachelor's and master's degrees in Tamil Nadu from arts, science, humanities, engineering, medicine, law, and management studies participated in this study. The samples collected from each district varies due to various limitations in this study.

Data Collection:

This study used a self-administered questionnaire to collect data from the targeted group. The questionnaire comprises 17 items, including close-ended, Likert scale-based and descriptive. The questionnaires were circulated online through Google Forms and distributed to students in person, and the same was collected on-site.

Data Analysis:

Data analysis for all research questions and hypotheses was conducted utilising SPSS Version 20 software. The software provided automated analysis of the statistical measures. Research question one will be answered using descriptive statistics involving the calculation of frequency and thematic analysis. Question two will be answered using descriptive statistics involving frequency and cross tabulation of gender and factors influencing students' perspectives on regionalism. Question three will be answered by calculating the frequencies of economic development and cultural diversity. Question four involves chi square testing. Finding frequency and thematic categorisation of participants' views on how regionalism will impact India's future will answer the fifth question.

Limitations:

This study has several limitations, which encourage future research to fill them. They are,

1. Pilot study: This study is a pilot study with selective representation. Analysis and findings are subjective.
2. Self-reported data: Both online questionnaires and filled-out forms on-site might be subject to some error.

3. Limited depth: This study is quantitative and lacks in-depth interviews that offer participants' perspectives.
4. Time constraint: The data collection for this study was completed within 20 days, limiting the sample size.
5. Sampling bias: A non-probability snowball sampling technique limits the study's representativeness.

Results

The three main purposes of this study are to understand the perception of college students in Tamil Nadu towards regionalism and the factors influencing them, and to examine whether students weigh regionalism over national identity. This chapter begins with some basic statistics derived from the questionnaires.

Findings:

The survey involved 365 college students between the ages of 18 and 24 from various fields like arts and science, engineering, medicine, and so on, from across Tamil Nadu, covering all 38 districts. Participants were given the discretion to answer the descriptive type of questions. Out of the 365 participants, about 296 were aware of regionalism. As this study is primarily concerned with how college students perceive regionalism, the data from these 296 participants is used for processing. But, still, the remaining 69 participants who responded as being unaware of a phenomenon called regionalism are crucial to answer one of the research questions.

Research Question 1:

Table 1: Age and Awareness

Age	Participants
18	33
19	33
20	52
21	79
22	53
23	33
24	13
Total	296

Table 2: Perception of Regionalism

Category	Participants
Positive	56
Negative	70
Mixed	30
Total	156

As stated above, 296 (81.09%) out of 365 participants are aware of regionalism, and 69 (18.01%) are unaware of it. In terms of age, participants aged 21 are the most aware. Out of the 296 participants (who are aware of regionalism), 162, 133, and one belong to the female, male, and others category, respectively. Comparing based on level of degree, 169 and 127 are in undergraduate and postgraduate, respectively. To understand how participants have defined regionalism based on their understanding, their views are classified into three categories: positive, negative, and mixed perceptions. Participants defining regionalism as a positive factor, playing a crucial role in the country's overall development and cultural integration, are clustered in the "positive" category. When regionalism is defined as a polarising factor, leading to unequal development and being used by political leaders to meet their ends, these are brought under the "negative" category. The third category is "mixed views", where many participants have taken a middle path by defining regionalism as a double-edged sword, capable of having both positive and negative impacts on the country. Only 156 participants have explicitly described how they define regionalism in their own words.

Research Question 2:

Table 3: Factors Influencing Regionalism

Factors	Frequency
Cultural and Historical Context	42
Education	88
Family Background	65
Media Exposure	32
Personal Experience	28
Social Influence	32
Total	296

Table 4: Influencing Factors and Gender

Factors	Male	Femal e	Others	Total
Cultural and Historical Context	20	22		42
Education	43	45		88
Family Background	38	26	1	65
Media Exposure	17	15		32
Personal Experience	17	11		28
Social Influence	20	12		32
Total	162	133	1	296

From the above table, it is evident that “education” is the most influential factor, followed by family background, cultural and historical context, and so on. “Education” is the most influential factor among both male and female participants.

Research Question 3:

Table 5: Views on Regionalism’s Role in Economic Development

Scale	Frequenc y	Percent
Important	66	24.6
Neutral	82	27.7
Not at All Important	55	18.6
Somewhat Important	45	15.9
Very Important	34	12.4
Total	282	100

Table 6: Views on Regionalism’s Role in Promoting Cultural Diversity

Scale	Frequency	Percent
Agree	112	39.8
Disagree	21	7.4
Neutral	106	35.9

Strongly Agree	32	11.3
Strongly Disagree	9	3.0
Total	280	100

Firstly, on the question of how important regionalism is for a state's economic development, 27.7% of the participants remained “neutral” in their view, followed by 26.4% who viewed it as “important.” Secondly, 39.8% of the participants “agree” that regionalism promotes cultural diversity, and 35.9% remained “neutral.”

Research Question 4:

Table 7: Regional and National Identities

Scale	Frequency
Agree	33
Disagree	92
Neutral	79
Strongly Agree	19
Strongly Disagree	59
Total	282

Table 8: Regionalism in Shaping Identity

Scale	Frequency
Important	63
Neutral	91
Not at All Important	48
Somewhat Important	37
Very Important	43
Total	282

Nearly 31.5% and 20% of the participants “disagree” and “strongly disagree” that regional identity is more important than national identity, respectively; 51.5% fall into this category of

disagreement. While 17.5% perceive regional identity as more important than national identity. And a large chunk of participants, close to 27%, have taken a “neutral” stance.

The importance of regionalism in shaping participants’ identity reveals a critical story. Here, 35.8% of the participants consider regionalism to be either “important” or “very important” in shaping their identity. Nearly 31% have taken a “neutral” stance.

To understand how participants have perceived regionalism will impact India’s future, their views are broadly categorised into four themes: political ideology and power dynamics, regional versus national identity, focus on national interests, and cultural loyalty and belonging. Among these, more than 40% of the participants have expressed their view that regionalism will impact India’s future by creating friction between regional and national identity.

The results of this study indicate that a slim majority of the students (51.5%) disagree that regionalism is more important than national identity. Additionally, when asked about the importance of regionalism in shaping their identity, 35.8% of participants considered it important or very important. These findings indicate that a majority of students do not prioritize regional identity over national identity. Therefore, the data supports the hypothesis. Hence, it is proved.

Conclusion

The study’s results are mixed, not inclined towards one particular idea or theme. It has helped to understand regionalism from college students’ perspectives. A total of 365 participants has taken part in this study, of whom 295 were identified to be aware of regionalism, and they form the core study group. Nearly 70 participants defined regionalism in a negative connotation, based on the view that it directly affects national unity and leads to polarisation. Education is found to be the most influential factor among college students on regionalism; the same factor was dominant among both male and female participants. Almost 28% and 27% of the core study group remained “neutral” and viewed regionalism as an “important” factor, respectively, for the economic development of a state. 40% of the participants considered regionalism as an “important” factor in promoting cultural diversity, while 36% remained “neutral” on the same question. Identity is one of the important factors driving regionalism; on the same line, 35.8% view regionalism as an “important” factor in shaping their identity, and 31% remained neutral. 51.4% view regionalism neither as a positive nor as a negative factor in our society. One of the most important questions this study intends to answer is whether students view regional identity as more important than national identity. For this question, 52.5% of the participants “disagree”

that regional identity is more important than national identity, and 27.5% have remained neutral. Contestation between national and regional identities is the most predominant way, according to the participants, by which regionalism will impact India's future.

The following conclusions can be drawn from this study,

1. Regionalism has been mainly defined in "negative" terms.
2. "Education" is the most influential factor.
3. A significant proportion of the participants perceive regionalism as having a "neutral" impact on society.
4. Contestation between regional and national identities will be the major impact of regionalism on India's future.

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Appendix: Survey Questionnaire

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender? *Male *Female *Others
3. Which district are you from?
4. What degree level are you currently pursuing?
*Undergraduate *Postgraduate
5. What is your field of study?
*Arts and Science *Engineering *Medicine *Law *Management Studies
*Humanities *Others
6. Have you heard about regionalism? (If 'no', not required to answer other questions)
7. How would you define regionalism in your own words? (in a sentence or two).
8. Are there any factors that have influenced your views on regionalism?
*Family Background *Education *Personal Experience *Media Exposure
*Social Influence *Cultural and Historical Context
9. Have you ever been exposed to different regional perspectives or opinions?
*Yes *No *Somewhat
10. How do you view regionalism?
*Political Phenomenon *Social Phenomenon *Economic Phenomenon
11. Do you think regionalism promotes cultural diversity?
*Agree *Strongly Agree *Neutral *Disagree *Strongly Disagree
12. How important do you think regionalism is in shaping your identity?
*Important *Very Important *Neutral *Somewhat Important *Not at All Important
13. Do you think regionalism will lead to conflict between regions?
*Agree *Strongly Agree *Neutral *Disagree *Strongly Disagree
14. Do you think regionalism is important for the economic development of a state?
*Important *Very Important *Neutral *Somewhat Important *Not at All Important
15. Is regionalism a positive or a negative factor in our society?
*Positive *Very Positive *Neutral *Negative *Very Negative
16. Do you think regionalism is more important than national identity?
*Agree *Strongly Agree *Neutral *Disagree *Strongly Disagree
17. How do you think regionalism will impact India's future (in a few sentences).