



Hyperpoliticisation of Indian Higher Education

For Prelims: [Indian Higher Education](#), [Vice-Chancellor](#), [University Grants Commission \(UGC\)](#), [National Education Policy \(NEP\) 2020](#), [All India Council for Technical Education](#)

For Mains: Political Interference in Indian Higher Education, Academic freedom and autonomy

Source: TH

Why in News?

[Indian higher education](#) has a **long history of intertwining with political agendas**. This trend has only intensified in recent years, impacting various aspects of academic life and institutional integrity.

How have Politics Shaped Indian Higher Education?

- **Political Foundations:** Indian higher education institutions have long been influenced by political agendas, with **politicians founding colleges** to bolster their careers.
- **Electorate Demands:** Many institutions were created to meet the **socio-cultural demands of the electorate**, reflecting the diverse and complex nature of Indian society.
 - Governments have placed **educational institutions in politically advantageous locations**, often catering to socio-cultural demands.
- **Naming and Renaming:** The naming and renaming of universities, particularly by state governments, are frequently driven by political motives.
 - Example: The Uttar Pradesh Technical University (UPTU), Lucknow was renamed several times.
- **Appointments and Promotions:** Academic appointments and promotions have sometimes been **influenced by political considerations rather than the qualifications and merits of candidates**.
 - Several Indian states are showing dissent over appointment of state **governors as chancellors** for state universities.
- **Academic Freedom:** While norms of academic freedom have not always been strictly followed, especially in undergraduate colleges, universities have generally adhered to international norms, allowing professors to teach, research, and publish freely.
 - **Self-censorship is becoming prevalent**, especially in the social sciences and humanities. Prominent academics have faced repercussions for publishing controversial material.

Higher Education in India

- Higher education in India refers to **tertiary level education** provided after 12 years of schooling.
- India has the **world's second largest higher education system** with over 58,000 higher education institutions.
- There are now 43.3 million students enrolled for higher education. Nearly **79% of students are enrolled in undergraduate courses with 12% at the postgraduate** (master's degree) level.

Only 0.5% were studying for a PhD, with most of the rest studying for sub-degree diploma programmes.

- The most popular undergraduate subject area is Arts (34%), followed by Science (15%), Commerce (13%), and Engineering & Technology (12%).
- At the postgraduate level, the top subject area is Social Science (21%), followed by Science (15%) and Management (14%). For PhD level, the largest number of students are enrolled in Engineering & Technology (25%), followed by Science (21%).
- The **higher education participation rate (GER) has risen to 28.4%**, a 1.1% increase from 2020-21.
 - The top States/Union Territories with highest GER are Chandigarh, Puducherry, Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Kerala, and Telangana.
- The total number of foreign students in Indian institutions was around 46,000 in 2021-22.

What are the Consequences of Hyperpoliticisation of Education?

- **Reduced Academic Freedom:** There's a growing concern that political influence could **undermine academic freedom**, with faculty and students potentially facing pressure to align with the political ideology.
 - **Liz Magill, president of the University of Pennsylvania**, testified before a U.S. Congressional committee on the issue of antisemitism on college campuses. Under pressure from wealthy donors and alumni, she resigned.
- **Global Reputation:** A politicised academic environment may **deter talented students and faculty** from enrolling or working in Indian institutions. This could hinder India's efforts to become a global leader in higher education.
- **Reduced Diversity of Thought:** When political agendas dominate academic discourse, it can lead to a **stifling of open debate and a reluctance to explore alternative viewpoints**.
- **Potential for Student Activism:** Increased politicisation can lead to **student activism** aligned with or against the political party. While **student activism can be positive**, it can also disrupt academic life if it becomes overly politicised.
- **Erosion of Public Trust in Academia:** When universities are seen as pawns in political games, public trust in the value and objectivity of academic research can erode. This weakens the legitimacy of academic expertise in shaping public policy.
- **Reduced Research Funding:** Politicians with short-term agendas may be less likely to **invest in long-term research projects** with uncertain commercial applications.
 - This can stifle innovation and India's ability to compete in the global knowledge economy.
- **Reduced Employability:** Employers increasingly value **skills like critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability**. A hyper-politicised education that prioritises ideology over these skills can leave graduates less prepared for the workforce.

What can be done to Mitigate Political Interference?

- **Institutional Autonomy:** Strengthening institutional autonomy is key to resisting undue influence. Encourage **universities to diversify funding sources** to reduce dependence on government funds.
 - Uphold academic freedom as a non-negotiable principle, ensuring free discourse and research.
 - Establish **autonomous university** boards that lead to higher research quality, particularly in disciplines susceptible to political influence.
 - In line with **India's push for world-class universities**, institutions should strive for **autonomous status**.
 - This empowers them to design innovative curriculums, seek diverse funding sources, and compete for recognition as **Institutions of Eminence under the UGC Act 2017**, ultimately fostering a more dynamic and competitive higher education landscape in India.
 - Implement the recommendations of the **National Knowledge Commission (NKC), 2005** and **Yash Pal Committee (2009)** to grant **greater autonomy to higher education**

- **institutions** in academic, administrative, and financial matters.
- NKC recommends **reforming existing universities**: update curricula every three years, use internal assessments, adopt a course credit system, and attract talented faculty.
 - Establish Central and State Boards of Undergraduate Education for curricula and examinations.
 - Create an **Independent Regulatory Authority for Higher Education (IRAHE)** independent of stakeholders, established by an Act of Parliament.
- **Depoliticise Governing Bodies**: An independent selection process for selecting **vice-chancellors** and other key positions, based on academic merit and experience, can reduce political influence.
 - **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** makes recommendations for **motivating, energising, and building the capacity of faculty** through clearly defined, independent, transparent recruitment, freedom to design curricula/pedagogy, incentivising excellence, and movement into institutional leadership. Faculty not delivering on basic norms will be held accountable.
 - This can help ensure that decisions are made in the best interests of the institution and its students, rather than for political gain.
- **Protect Dissent and Critical Inquiry**: Uphold the **right of faculty to engage** in research and express views without fear of retaliation or censorship is crucial for maintaining the integrity of higher education.
 - Clear policies and safeguards should be in place to protect academic freedom.
- **Student Union Independence**: Ensure university student unions remain autonomous bodies elected by students, without interference from political parties or authorities in their elections or functioning.
- **Empowered Ombudsman**: Establish an **independent ombudsman mechanism to investigate and address complaints** of political interference, academic freedom violations or politically motivated harassment from any stakeholders.

Regulatory Framework for Higher Education in India

- India's higher education system is overseen by various statutory bodies under the purview of the **Ministry of Education** at the Central and State levels, which are responsible for maintaining the quality and standards of higher education.
- **Main Regulatory Bodies**:
 - **University Grants Commission (UGC)**: A statutory body established in 1956, apex body responsible for coordinating and maintaining standards and release of grants in university education.
 - The Commission **advises the Central and State Governments on measures for Higher Education development**.
 - It operates from New Delhi and has six Regional offices in Bangalore, Bhopal, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Pune.
 - **All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)**: Established in 1945 as an advisory body and later given statutory status in 1987.
 - It approves new technical institutions, courses, and intake capacity, and delegates some powers to state governments for diploma-level institutions.
 - It sets norms and standards, accredited institutions, and promotes technical education through various schemes.
 - The **AICTE is headquartered in New Delhi** with regional offices in Kolkata, Chennai, Kanpur, Mumbai, Chandigarh, Bhopal, Bangalore, and Hyderabad.
 - **Council of Architecture (COA)**: Established by the Government of India under the **Architects Act, 1972**. It is responsible for **registering architects and ensuring the maintenance of standards for recognized qualifications**.
 - Governs the standards of architectural education and practice in India.
- **Recent Developments in the Regulatory Framework**:
 - **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**: Proposes the establishment of the **Higher Education Commission of India (HECI)** as a single overarching body for all higher education, excluding medical and legal education. HECI will consist of four independent verticals:
 - **National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC) for regulation.**

- **General Education Council (GEC) for standard setting.**
- **Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC) for funding.**
- **National Accreditation Council (NAC) for accreditation.**
- HECI will operate through technology-based intervention and will have the **authority to penalise higher education institutions that do not comply with norms and standards.**
 - Both public and private higher education institutions of national importance will be subject to the same regulations, accreditation, and academic standards.

Drishti Mains Question:

Q. Discuss what you mean by politicisation of higher education. Analyse its consequences and suggest measures to preserve academic integrity and freedom.

Read more: [Revamping India's Higher Education System](#)

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Which of the following provisions of the Constitution does India have a bearing on Education? (2012)

1. Directive Principles of State Policy
2. Rural and Urban Local Bodies
3. Fifth Schedule
4. Sixth Schedule
5. Seventh Schedule

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 3, 4 and 5 only
- (c) 1, 2 and 5 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Ans- (d)

Mains

Q1. How have digital initiatives in India contributed to the functioning of the education system in the country? Elaborate on your answer. **(2020)**

Q2. Discuss the main objectives of Population Education and point out the measures to achieve them in India in detail. **(2021)**