

Role of Caste In Political Representation

An Analysis on representation from 1952 to 2024 in Telugu States

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Abstract—The Caste has remained the most influential feature of socio-political institutions in India. It is considered influential in determining electoral strategies, leadership, distribution of resources and power. The influence has been overwhelming in spite of constitutional provisions been in place. This paper studies about entrenched caste hierarchies in the state of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. This caste dynamics in Telugu states have been dictatorial during election outcomes and allocation of state resources. It studies into proponents of caste census that needs to be made alongside offering an exposure on caste discrimination hidden under aggregated data. It looks into how caste dynamics have shaped political power structure from 1952-2024 in Telugu states and factors that helped them maintain the dominance in politics and governance. To understand the political, social, economic arguments for and against conducting a caste census for these states.

Index Terms— socio-economic survey, caste census, caste and politics, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh.

I. INTRODUCTION

Rajni Kothari in his famous work *Caste in Indian Politics*, gives an analysis on relationship between caste and democratic processes in post independence India. Caste has found its way into mainstream with a modern, reoriented version of itself as an instrument of political mobilization, coalition building and electoral bargains [1]. In *Political Power Structure* Prof. G Ram Reddy examines relationship between caste hierarchies and political recruitment in Telugu States. The dominant agrarian castes like Reddys, Kammas have extended their socio-economic domination into political representation. In the Telugu states, caste dynamics have historically dictated electoral outcomes, the composition of party leadership, and the allocation of state resources. Andhra Pradesh, since its formation in 1956, witnessed the dominance Reddys and Kammas[2]. The Reddys, largely associated with the Congress party, built political influence through landownership, control over rural patronage networks, and their representation in state and central politics [3]. The Kammas, rose to prominence particularly after the emergence of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in 1982, under the charismatic leadership of Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao (NTR), leveraging their agrarian wealth and business networks, especially in the coastal districts. In Telangana region within united Andhra Pradesh, Velamas occupying a position of influence alongside Reddys.

II. EVOLUTION OF CASTE SYSTEM IN INDIA

In India, caste system is one of the complex for of social stratification. It can be traced back to vedic age where society is divided into varna system of four categories such as Brahmins (priests and teachers), Kshatriyas (warriors and rulers), Vaishyas (merchants and farmers), and Shudras (laborers and service providers). Beyond these four varnas existed the Dalits, or "untouchables," who were considered outside the traditional hierarchy. But the colonial periods caused a significant evolution of caste system. In 1871 British reinforced caste identities and separate electorates were introduced. The Government of India Act 1935 introduced concept of scheduled caste and scheduled tribes in India. In the post independent India this tradition has continued further. The caste census data is not available properly in the state. As Deshpande (2011) says absence of such data benefits the dominant caste and deepen social divisions which in turn encourage identity based politics. The last comprehensive caste census was conducted in 1931 [4]. In Telangana, socio-economic, educational, employment, political and caste survey (SEEEPC) aim is to collect data on socio economic indicators alongside caste data. But it has faced a criticism on the methodology, sample data used.

Role of Caste in Political Politics

Political parties have evolved around the notion of caste, identity, economic interests, social factors. In the post-Independence era party formation was accommodated by Congress party and its ability to incorporate leaders from various backgrounds. It is elite based party where people saw it as a symbolic representation [5]. The formation of regional party in 1982 by NTR, Telugu Desam Party was formed on the notion of Telugu identity. But there are still caste undertones to the formation of TDP as a Kamma party as NTR background and the party's subsequent leadership patterns reflected certain caste preferences. By 1990, with rise of backward class consciousness led to formation of caste based constituencies. The Bahujan Samaj Party's limited success in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, despite its significant impact in other states, highlighted the complex nature of Dalit politics in these regions. The presence of multiple Scheduled Caste communities with different historical experiences and contemporary interests made unified Dalit mobilization challenging. Regional parties like the TRS in Telangana combined regional identity with implicit caste appeals and party's mobilization is based on regional identity and caste arithmetic [6].

The caste-based political mobilization in Telugu regions was also influenced by economic changes and social politization. The economic success through education, politics and business began to assert political influence. This led to more complex political equations where traditional hierarchies were challenged by new forms of social and economic capital. Parties balanced caste appeals with elements such as s exclusive caste-based appeals often proved electorally limiting. But it was successful in some political parties which combined caste mobilization with government based promises during elections. his ongoing negotiation

between traditional social structures and modern democratic politics continues to shape the political landscape in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh [7].

III. ROLE OF BAHUJANS (BC, SC, ST) IN TELUGU STATES

The Caste is bedrock of socio-political life in India, and its role in shaping the political landscape of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana is persistent. In Telugu speaking states caste plays a crucial role in electoral discrimination and political frameworks. It influences political power, leadership, policy influence. In the early years of Andhra Pradesh, caste emerged not only as a social marker but as a political instrument. The Congress Party, which was dominant in first three decades, is represented by Reddys which was over represented in the legislative assemblies. After 1980, politicization of Khammas. Through TDP, media ownership, business capital created a strong presence. Political parties created welfare schemes, reservation policies for these communities but never really shared political power. Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) like Yadavs, Gouds, and Kapus started to emerge as vote banks. For instance, the representation of these communities in the influential portfolios is very rare. After bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh in 2014, the caste dynamics have changed in politics. Telangana witnessed the rise of Velma caste. These are traditionally land owning group who built a cadre based party. In Andhra Pradesh, Reddys remained politically active reclaiming the prominence under Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy.

This shift highlighted how caste-based leadership continued to evolve alongside ensuring that caste remained a crucial determinant in Telugu states. Despite the appearance of modernity and economic development, caste continues to play an embedded role in party politics. Political party favored the candidates from dominant castes, even when those constituencies have a majority population from backward or marginalized communities. The caste based communities have become as lobby groups in shifting their political demands. The Kapu community, for instance, has periodically demanded inclusion in the OBC category. In 2016 Kapu Reservation Agitation, demonstrate how caste identities continue to influence not just electoral behavior but policy-making and governance priorities. The caste plays a decisive role in grassroots politics. Panchayati Raj institutions, municipal bodies, and cooperative societies these caste hierarchies are challenged. The reservation of seats for women and backward communities in local bodies has created opportunities, but real power often remains with male leaders from dominant caste groups. The role of caste in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana politics is neither incidental nor diminishing. It is foundational, multifaceted, and deeply interwoven into the democratic fabric of these states.

IV. ROLE OF DOMINANT CASTES (REDDY, KAMMA, KAPU, VELAMA)

The political trajectory of Telugu states has been largely shaped by four dominant castes Reddys, Kammas, Kapus, and Velamas. Reddy caste has long been traditionally a dominant land-owning community concentrated in the Rayalaseema and parts of the Telangana regions. They had access to education, government jobs, leadership roles under British administration. Since first general elections in 1952, 52 out of 16, 1972 with 103 seats and again in 2004 with 106 seats have been won by them in Andhra Pradesh legislative assembly. This included leaders who held chief minister post like Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy, Kasu Brahmananda Reddy, and Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy. After bifurcation Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy party won 53 seats in 2019 and 48 in 2024.

Kammas are another dominant caste primarily located in the coastal Andhra region, especially in the Krishna, Guntur, and Prakasam districts. Unlike Reddys, who dominated the Congress structure, Kammas made their political breakthrough in the 1980s through the Telugu Desam Party (TDP). In the 1978 elections won 44, 1983 won 43, 1985 won 42 and 1994 won 52 out of 294 seats. Their influence extended beyond politics into media ownership (e.g., Eenadu newspaper, ETV network), enabling them to shape public narratives and consolidate support. In the 2024 elections, Kammas held 31 seats in Andhra Pradesh.

The Kapu community presents a paradox in Andhra-Telangana politics. In 1955, they secured only 14 seats, and even in 2024, their count was 18 out of 175 seats. The Kapu community's demand for OBC status and greater representation reached a peak in the 2010s, particularly through movements like the 2016 Kapu Garjana in Tuni. These mobilizations have highlighted the community's political frustration and desire for inclusion. The rise of Jana Sena and its alliance with the TDP in 2024 may signal a new chapter for Kapu politics, but whether this translates into structural change remains to be seen.

The Velama caste, a relatively smaller community compared to Reddys and Kammas, emerged as a dominant political force in Telangana after the bifurcation. KCR's rise to power restructured the caste calculus in Telangana. Velamas maintained a visible yet controlled share of power 10 seats in 2014 and 8 in 2023.

Looking at the caste-wise electoral representation data from Andhra Pradesh (1955-2024) and Telangana (2014-2023), the caste-wise representation data in Andhra Pradesh (AP) legislative elections from 1955 to 2024 reveals significant trends in political dominance and social representation. Among the dominant castes, the Reddy community has consistently held a major share of seats, peaking in 1972 with 103 out of 287 seats (36%) and again in 2004 with 106 seats out of 294. Although their representation has slightly declined in recent years, with 48 out of 175 seats in 2024, they continue to wield significant influence. The Kamma caste shows fluctuating patterns relatively low in early years (2 seats in 1957) but surging in 1994 (52 seats), reflecting shifting political alliances, especially with the rise of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), traditionally supported by Kammas.

Table 1: Caste - wise representation in the elections of Telangana.

Year elections	Total no. seats	Reddy	Kamma	Kapu	Rao (velama)	SC	ST
2014	119	40	4	9	10	19	12
2018	119	40	9	5	10	19	12
2023	119	45	5	6	8	19	12

Year of elections	Total no. of seats	Reddy	Kamma	Kapu	Rao (velama)	SC	ST
1952	167	52	26	14	12	0	0
1957	85	30	2	1	30	18	4
1962	300	92	14	11	33	43	11
1967	287	85	12	10	29	39	9
1972	287	103	12	8	16	40	11
1978	294	84	44	22	20	39	15
1983	294	86	43	21	18	39	15
1985	294	85	42	20	19	39	15
1989	294	113	14	9	18	39	15
1994	294	90	52	21	24	39	15
1999	294	88	46	21	18	39	15
2004	294	106	13	7	19	39	15
2009	294	87	45	23	17	45	18
2014	175	60	10	12	8	29	7
2019	175	53	11	17	8	29	7
2024	175	48	31	18	11	29	7

Table 2: Caste - wise representation in the elections of Andhra Pradesh
*Above data is sourced from Election Commission of India

The Kapu caste, despite its large population, has historically been underrepresented compared to Reddys and Kammas, although it has gradually gained ground, securing 18 seats in 2024. Velama representation remained modest and stable across the decades, with a slight uptick in 2024, possibly reflecting the growing political influence of Telangana based leadership. The representation of Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) has been more consistent due to reservation policies, with SC maintaining around 39 to 45 seats in AP since the 1980s and ST consistently holding 15 to 18 seats. The formation of Telangana as a separate state in 2014 led to a reset in representation.

In Telangana first three elections (2014, 2018, and 2023), Reddys remained dominant (around 40–45 seats), while SC and ST were steadily represented (19 and 12 seats, respectively), indicating continuity in affirmative action. The data underscores the enduring dominance of forward castes like Reddys and Kammas in the Telugu states while also reflecting gradual but limited inroads by historically marginalized communities, pointing to a complex interplay of caste, regional politics, and electoral strategies over time. These patterns of caste wise representation highlight not just electoral outcomes but deeper structural dynamics within Andhra Pradesh and Telangana's political culture. The consistent over representation of certain dominant castes especially the Reddys and Kammas points to entrenched networks of political patronage, socio economic capital, and access to power that have historically excluded backward castes and marginalized communities from leadership roles. Even when leaders from non dominant castes rise to prominence, such as Kapus or Velamas, their ascension often hinges on exceptional political circumstances or individual charisma rather than a broader systemic shift in representation. While reservations for SC and ST have guaranteed a baseline of inclusion, these provisions have not fully translated into greater political agency or proportional influence within party structures or governance outcomes. the data from 2024 presents a mixed picture. While there is marginal improvement in the representation of Kapus and Velamas, dominant groups continue to control a significant portion of legislative seats. This raises critical questions about the effectiveness of democratic institutions in reflecting social diversity and fostering inclusive governance

The electoral politics and voter behavior in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are deeply structured around caste identities, alliances, and community specific appeals. While welfare politics, development promises, and leader charisma all play important roles, they are usually filtered through the lens of caste. Despite gradual shifts in urban voter behavior and emerging caste-neutral youth perspectives, the overall electoral culture remains firmly anchored in caste-based strategies. Unless structural reforms, greater representation for marginalized groups, and awareness based political education gain traction, caste will continue to shape not just how people vote but why they vote.

V. ANALYSIS OF THE POLITICAL REPRESENTATION FROM 1952 TO 2024

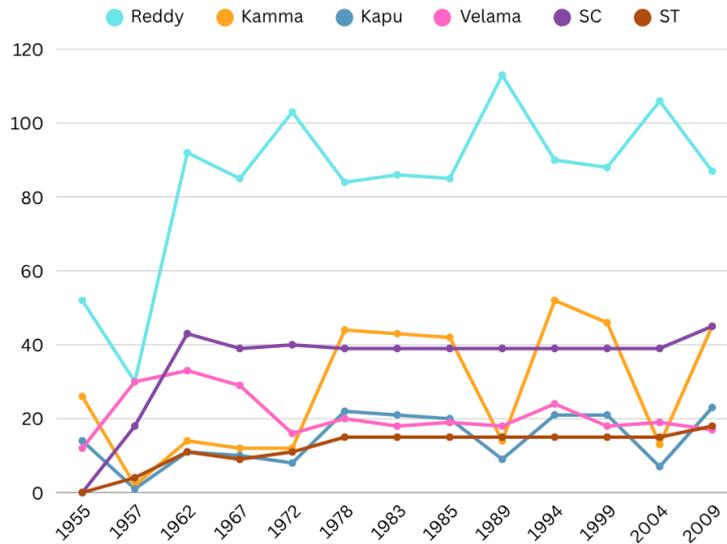


Figure 3 -Graph showing caste wise political representation from 1952 to 2009

This presents a longitudinal overview of the representation of six major caste groups Reddy, Kamma, Kapu, Velama, Scheduled Castes (SC), and Scheduled Tribes (ST) in the legislative and political landscape of the Telugu-speaking regions spanning from the early 1960s to the early 2020s. The x-axis represents years, beginning from 1962 up to 2020, while the y-axis captures the relative numerical strength or dominance (likely in percentage or number of elected representatives) of these caste groups over time. A prominent pattern that emerges from this graph is the consistent over representation of the Reddy and Kamma castes, traditionally dominant land-owning communities in the Andhra and Telangana regions. From 1962 to the late 1980s, the Reddy community maintained a marked dominance, often exceeding or nearing the 100-mark, implying either their parliamentary dominance or leadership presence. The Kamma community follows closely, particularly rising in influence post-1983, which correlates with the rise of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), founded by N.T.Rama Rao, a Kamma leader. Interestingly, while the Reddy and Kamma groups show consistent political power, the Kapu community’s representation appears sporadic and more subdued, despite being a numerically significant backward caste group. This aligns with the broader narrative of Kapu political underrepresentation and their long-standing demand for reservations and greater political inclusion. Velamas, a relatively smaller community but politically influential especially in the Telangana region—witnessed a surge in prominence post-2000, particularly aligning with the rise of the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) and its leadership under K. Chandrashekar Rao, a Velama himself. This ascent marks a notable shift in caste-based political dominance in Telangana. In stark contrast, the SC and ST communities, though significant in demographic terms, remain consistently underrepresented across the decades. Their representation shows minimal fluctuation and rarely crosses the 20-mark, highlighting persistent structural exclusions and marginalization despite constitutional safeguards and political reservations. Even as democratic politics in the Telugu states matured, the entrenched dominance of upper and intermediate castes continues to limit the upward mobility of historically oppressed groups.

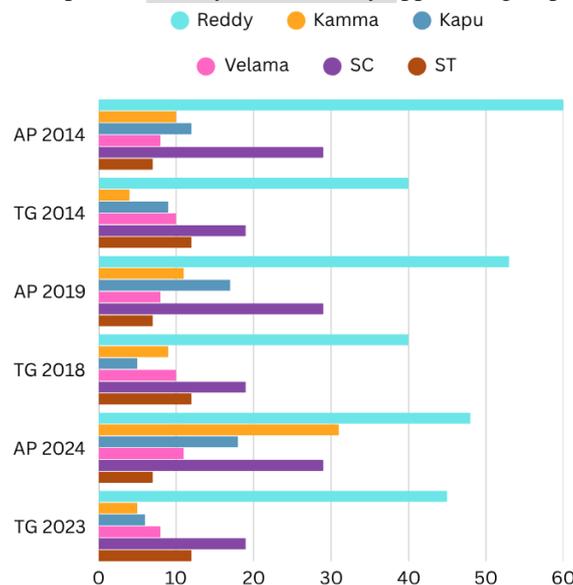


Figure 4- Political representation from 2014 to 2024 in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana

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domain, where dominance remains circumscribed within a few caste clusters, despite changing electoral landscapes and regional bifurcation. In Telangana, however, the Velama community shows a sharp and distinct spike in representation from 2014 to 2023, reflecting the hegemony of the TRS (now BRS), under Velama leadership. This signifies a remarkable transformation in caste politics, where a numerically smaller community has exercised disproportionate political clout through strategic party dominance and institutional control.

In contrast, the Kamma community, once a dominant force through the TDP, shows a marked decline in both states particularly in Telangana highlighting their waning influence after the political marginalization of TDP in the region. This downward trajectory reflects both the party's electoral defeat and the inability of the Kamma elite to reconfigure their political base post-bifurcation. The Kapu community, despite its numerical strength, continues to reflect limited representation in both states. This underrepresentation, persistent across all three election cycles, signals either a lack of cohesive political mobilization or the failure of Kapu-centric political movements to translate demographic strength into electoral success. Meanwhile, the SC and ST groups remain on the lower end of the spectrum, reiterating patterns observed in the first graph. Their marginal political presence points to the ongoing challenges of substantive inclusion, even in a supposedly democratized political framework. Furthermore, their stagnant position across all electoral cycles indicates that mere electoral participation has not translated into proportional power-sharing or policy influence.

Overall, the second graph powerfully illustrates how caste continues to mediate access to political power in AP and TG. The dominance of certain castes, particularly Reddy and Velama, in respective states, showcases how caste capital when aligned with party leadership and electoral machinery can secure sustained political influence. At the same time, the exclusion of lower castes and the decline of formerly dominant groups like Kammias presents a dynamic but uneven evolution of caste politics. The visualization serves as compelling evidence that regional bifurcation did not disrupt entrenched hierarchies but merely restructured them along new territorial lines, offering fresh avenues for caste-based consolidation rather than transformation.

VI. ANALYSIS

The absence of a comprehensive caste census since 1931 is a major factor contributing to this policy inefficacy. While SCs and STs are counted in each decennial census, the lack of detailed, updated data on OBCs and other caste groups leaves policymakers without a clear picture of current social realities. As a result, welfare schemes and reservation policies are often based on outdated assumptions, risking both the under-allocation of resources to communities in need and the over-extension of benefits to groups that may no longer require the same level of support. Governments should commit to publishing periodic reports on how caste census data is being used and what measurable impacts it has had on reducing inequalities. This transparency will allow groups to monitor progress and hold policymakers accountable. The experience of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana demonstrates both the urgency of such an initiative and the risks of proceeding without it. The challenge now is to ensure that enumeration becomes a catalyst for change, rather than a mirror reflecting inequalities we choose not to address.

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