

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2020 · 15 marks

Examine the role of religion in Indian electoral politics in the contemporary times.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 law bars religious appeals (RPA §123(3) + SC 2017) → yet religion stays a strong emotive factor in voting

R2 religion formally out of the ballot → in practice it works as “identity plus,” not alone

Body flow

mobilisation via symbols / sacred sites → **Savarkar's** Hindutva (ethnic-territorial Hindu identity) → BJP's rise since the 1980s tied to Hindu nationalist mobilisation → **Hansen**: set against democratic transformation, not purely religious → **Advani's** “pseudo-secularism” → anti-Congress line → Ram Mandir / CAA / NRC / Babri / “Love Jihad” → vote polarisation + minority consolidation → **Brass**: institutionalised riots prepared & used electorally

Counter-view

religion no longer works alone → **Yadav's** “Identity Plus” → faith combines with governance, employment, development → identity must pair with delivery

Conclusion routes

R1 religion is strong but not sufficient → parties must join identity with governance and delivery

R2 shift from religion-alone to “identity plus” → contemporary parties combine faith with development and security

Indian election law formally keeps religion out of the ballot. Section 123(3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 treats a religious appeal for votes as a corrupt practice.

The Supreme Court's 2017 ruling widened this to bar appeals on religion, caste, creed, community and language. But religion remains a strong emotive factor in voting, combined with welfare, leadership and security.

Its main electoral form is mobilisation through symbols and sacred sites. VD Savarkar's Hindutva gave Hindu identity an ethnic-territorial shape. The BJP's rise since the 1980s is closely tied to Hindu nationalist mobilisation.

Thomas Blom Hansen argues that this rise unfolds against a wider democratic transformation and is not purely religious.

L.K. Advani's attack on "pseudo-secularism" sharpened the anti-Congress line. Ram Mandir, CAA, NRC, the Babri judgement and "Love Jihad" debates convert religious issues into vote polarisation.

Paul R. Brass treats riots as institutionalised and politically managed, prepared and sustained for electoral use.

Yogendra Yadav's "Identity Plus" politics shows how caste & faith combine with governance, employment and development. Parties cannot rely on religion alone; they must join identity with delivery.