
Role of Registered Unrecognised Political Parties in the Bihar Assembly Election- 2025: Caste, Welfare, Migration, SIR and Coalition Politics in a Fragmented Party System

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Abstract:

The 2025 Bihar Assembly election was an important event for India's democracy. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) won the election. But the election was also shaped by many small political parties called Registered Unrecognised Political Parties (RUPPs). These small parties, such as Jan Swaraj, HAM, BMUP, IIP, Jan Adhikar Party, LJP, and AIMIM, did not win many seats, but they still had a big impact. LJP won 19 seats, AIMIM won 5 seats, HAM won 5 seats, and IIP won 1 seat—showing that some RUPPs can achieve electoral success. They split votes, raised issues about caste and welfare, and gave a voice to small communities. This paper studies the role of these small parties in Bihar's 2025 election. It uses Duverger's Law to explain why many parties exist. It also looks at other important factors like caste, migration, a welfare scheme giving ₹10,000 to women, religion, and alliance politics (including fights between RJD and Congress candidates). The paper argues that even though the election system makes it hard for small parties, they are still important for a healthy democracy in India.

Keywords: Bihar Elections 2025, RUPPs, Duverger's Law, Caste Politics, Welfare Politics, Migration, Alliance Politics, Friendly Fights, Religion, SIR.

Introduction:

Bihar is a very important state for understanding Indian democracy. For a long time, politics here has been about caste groups, coalitions (alliances), and many different political parties. The 2025 Bihar Assembly election showed that these things are still very important. But new issues also became important, like welfare schemes to help poor people, problems faced by migrant workers, and the rise of many small political actors.

The NDA won the election clearly. But if we look more closely, we see that the election process was deeply affected by actors outside the main parties. The most important of these are Registered Unrecognised Political Parties (RUPPs). These are small parties that are registered with the Election

Commission but do not have enough support to be recognized as a ‘state party’ or ‘national party’. Examples from the 2025 election include Jan Swaraj (led by Prasant Kishor), HAM (Hindustani Awam Morcha, which broke from the JD(U)), BMUP (Bahujan Mukti Party, focusing on Dalits), IIP (Indian Inclusive Party, a new player in some constituencies), Jan Adhikar Party (advocating for backward castes), LJP (Lok Janshakti Party, which split into factions), and AIMIM (All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen, which focused on Muslim voters). RUPPs are often ignored, but they play a key role. They represent very local issues. They help mobilize (bring together) communities that feel left out. And they can change election results by splitting votes. In a state like Bihar, where society is divided by caste and class, the role of these small parties becomes very important. The 2025 election was shaped by many things: caste groups forming new alliances, big welfare schemes for women, the problems of migrant workers, religious politics, and how different parties formed alliances. In this complex situation, RUPPs were both a cause and a result of political fragmentation (the breaking of votes into many small pieces). This paper will study their role to help us better understand how party competition works in India.

2. Theoretical Framework: Duverger’s Law and Fragmented Pluralism

A political scientist named Maurice Duverger gave a famous theory. His law says that a “first-past-the-post” (FPTP) election system—where the candidate with the most votes wins—usually leads to only two main parties competing (Duverger, 1954). This happens because voters think voting for a small party is a waste, and the system makes it hard for small parties to win seats. However, India, and especially Bihar, shows that this theory does not always work. In a society with many deep social divisions like caste, many parties can survive. Even with the FPTP system, people vote based on their caste identity, which supports many different parties (Chhibber & Kollman, 2004; Yadav, 1999). The presence of RUPPs like HAM (which draws from the Kushwaha caste), LJP (Paswan base), and AIMIM (Muslim base) shows how identity sustains smaller parties. Some RUPPs even manage to win seats, as seen with LJP winning 19 seats, AIMIM winning 5 seats, and HAM winning 5 seats, challenging the mechanical effect of Duverger’s Law. The survival of RUPPs shows what we can call “fragmented pluralism.” This means that while big alliances (like the NDA) may win, many smaller parties exist and affect the results indirectly. They act as “niche” parties, focusing on one specific caste or local issue. They might not win many seats, but they can change vote margins and influence what people talk about.

3. Literature Review: Many scholars have studied India’s party system. While Duverger’s (1954) theory is a starting point, others have shown its limits. Scholar Yogesh Yadav (1999) said India is in a “third electoral system” where one-party rule is gone and multi-party competition is the new normal,

driven by social movements. Kanchan Chandra (2004) studied why ethnic parties succeed. Her work helps us understand how caste-based RUPPs in Bihar get support. For instance, HAM and LJP rely on specific caste bases (Kushwaha and Paswan, respectively), while AIMIM appeals to Muslim voters and BMUP tries to unite minorities including Dalits. They appeal to people's shared identity. Christophe Jaffrelot (2003) wrote about the "silent revolution" in India, where lower castes gained political power, creating space for new parties like Jan Adhikar Party. Other scholars like Zoya Hasan (2002) have written about the rise of coalitions and party fragmentation. Research on welfare politics shows how schemes like giving money to poor women are becoming very important for winning votes (Drèze & Sen, 2013; Khemani, 2015). Studies on migration highlight the economic problems that shape political debate in Bihar (Rodgers & Rodgers, 2011).

All this research tells us that while election rules matter, social divisions and political strategies are just as important. The persistence of RUPPs is a clear example of this complex interaction.

4. Electoral Context of the 2025 Bihar Assembly Elections

The 2025 Bihar election was a tough fight between two main alliances. The NDA, led by the BJP and JD(U), won a clear victory. They managed their coalition well and mobilized voters effectively. The opposition alliance, Mahagathbandhan, was led by the RJD and included the Congress and left parties. They struggled to stay united and consolidate votes. Alongside these big alliances, hundreds of RUPPs also contested the election (Election Commission of India, 2024). Among them, LJP (Lok Janshakti Party) emerged as the most successful RUPP, winning 19 seats by consolidating the Paswan vote in several districts. AIMIM (All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen) won 5 seats by focusing on Muslim-dominated constituencies, particularly in Seemanchal. HAM (Hindustani Awam Morcha) won 5 seats, primarily in the Kushwaha-dominated areas of central Bihar. IIP (Indian Inclusive Party) managed to win 1 seat, showing that even very small parties can secure a victory in specific constituencies. Jan Swaraj fielded candidates in over 40 seats, mainly in the Kosi and Seemanchal regions, but did not win any seat. BMUP concentrated on constituencies with high Dalit populations, though it did not win any seat. Jan Adhikar Party targeted pockets of backward classes and Dalits, also without winning. While most RUPPs did not win seats, their vote share in many constituencies was high enough to decide who won or lost. The election campaign focused on issues like unemployment, the problems of migrant workers, welfare programs, and the quality of governance.

5. Caste Politics and RUPPs

Caste is still the biggest factor in Bihar's elections. Big parties try to create alliances of different castes to win votes. But this approach often leaves some small sub-castes feeling ignored. This creates an opportunity for RUPPs (Brass, 1991; Jaffrelot, 2003). HAM emerged as a key player

among the Kushwaha (Koeri) caste, a group that fell under-represented in the JD(U). Its victory in 5 seats demonstrated the electoral strength of a focused caste-based appeal. LJP continued to mobilize the Paswan community; despite internal splits, it won 19 seats, showing that a strong caste base can translate into seats even for a party that is not part of the ruling alliance. Jan Adhikar Party focused on extremely backward classes (EBCs) who often fall between the cracks of larger caste coalitions, though it did not win any seat. BMUP tried to build a coalition of Dalits, arguing that both groups face discrimination and need a separate political platform. While BMUP did not win seats, it cut into the Dalit vote share that traditionally went to the RJD or LJP in some constituencies, thereby affecting the margins. Jan Swaraj, led by Prasant Kishor, built a following among a mix of Yadavs, Muslims, and other groups in eastern Bihar. AIMIM, on the other hand, directly appealed to Muslim voters, positioning itself as a dedicated representative of the community. These RUPPs gave a political voice to communities that felt left out of the big caste alliances. Their electoral victories—especially those of LJP, AIMIM, and HAM—proved that RUPPs can sometimes overcome the structural disadvantages of the FPTP system.

6. Migration and Economic Distress

Bihar has a big problem with migration. Many people leave the state to find work elsewhere because there are not enough jobs at home. In the 2025 election, migration became a big political issue, especially after the difficulties faced by migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic (Rodgers & Rodgers, 2011). RUPPs like Jan Swaraj and Jan Adhikar Party played a role by talking about the problems of migrant workers and demanding local employment guarantees. They organized public meetings in migrant-heavy districts like Madhubani, Sitamarhi, and Gopalganj. However, their impact was limited because the elections were still dominated by caste-based voting and welfare promises. Even the successful RUPPs—LJP, AIMIM, and HAM—did not make migration a central issue in their campaigns.

7. Welfare Politics and the ₹10,000 Scheme

One of the biggest features of the 2025 election was welfare politics. The government started a scheme giving ₹10,000 to women. This became a central issue in the election campaign, showing how direct cash handouts are becoming a key way to win votes (Drèze & Sen, 2013; Khemani, 2015). RUPPs found it very hard to compete with the big parties on welfare issues. Big parties had the money and resources to promise and deliver such schemes. RUPPs like IIP and BMUP could only criticize the politics of these schemes but could not promise anything similar themselves. Some, like HAM, tried to argue that they would implement better welfare measures, but their lack of resources limited their credibility. The electoral success of IIP (winning 1 seat) came not from welfare promises but from a hyper-local caste-based appeal.

8. Religion and Identity Politics

Religion played an important role in the 2025 election, especially in constituencies with large Muslim populations. AIMIM focused exclusively on Muslim voters, projecting itself as the party that would protect minority rights. It won 5 seats in Muslim-dominated areas, proving that a party with a clear religious identity can succeed in Bihar's fragmented political landscape. BMUP also tried to mobilize minority communities, including Muslims and Dalits, but its message was less focused, and it failed to win any seat. However, this election also showed that the fate of RUPPs is deeply intertwined with the behavior of larger alliances. The internal fragmentation of the Mahagathbandhan—manifested in RJD-Congress friendly fights, the Congress's disjointed campaign, and the failure to address the SIR controversy effectively—created the political space for RUPPs to grow. In a fragmented party system, the weaknesses of the big coalitions become the lifeline for the small parties. These small parties are a key part of India's democratic pluralism, even though they struggle with many structural disadvantages. The presence of multiple Muslim-focused RUPPs—such as AIMIM, BMUP, and several smaller ones—split the minority vote. This fragmentation often benefited the NDA or the RJD, depending on the constituency. AIMIM's success in winning 5 seats showed that a well-organized religious appeal could consolidate enough votes to win, but it also highlighted how such parties could reduce the overall electoral strength of the Muslim community by dividing its votes across different parties.

9. The SIR Controversy, the Congress, Rahul Gandhi, and Mahagathbandhan Fragmentation

The 2025 election was not only shaped by the presence of RUPPs but also by the internal dynamics of the opposition Mahagathbandhan (Grand Alliance). This section analyzes three interlinked factors: the controversy over voter list revision (SIR), the role of the Congress and Rahul Gandhi, and the internal coalition failures that fragmented the anti-NDA vote.

9.1 The SIR Controversy and Electoral Legitimacy

A process called Special Intensive Revision (SIR), where the voter list is updated, became a controversial issue in the run-up to the election. There were widespread allegations, particularly from opposition parties and civil society groups, that the process was being used to systematically remove the names of voters from marginalized communities, including Dalits, Muslims, and poor migrants (Election Commission of India, 2025). RUPPs, particularly BMUP and Jan Adhikar Party, played a crucial role as the first responders to this issue. Lacking the resources of larger parties, they used grassroots networks to identify voters whose names had been removed. They organized protests outside district collectorates, filed complaints with the Election Commission, and used social media to create public awareness. AIMIM also joined the protests in minority-dominated areas of

Seemanchal, framing the issue as an attack on Muslim political rights. This positioned these RUPPs as defenders of democratic rights, enhancing their credibility among communities that felt targeted by the state machinery.

9.2 The Role of the Congress and Rahul Gandhi

The Indian National Congress, as a key constituent of the Mahagathbandhan, attempted to position itself as the principal challenger to the NDA. Rahul Gandhi, as the party's leading campaigner, held several rallies across Bihar. His campaign focused on two main themes: first, attacking the BJP over issues of unemployment and the alleged manipulation of electoral processes (including the SIR controversy); and second, promoting a message of social justice and caste census, which he framed as a continuation of the Congress's historical commitment to marginalized groups. However, the Congress's role was marked by a fundamental contradiction. While Rahul Gandhi spoke of alliance unity, the party's state unit engaged in aggressive seat-sharing negotiations that alienated its senior partner, the RJD. This friction was most visible in the "friendly fights" (see section 10). The Congress's inability to accept a subordinate role in Bihar, despite its weaker organizational presence compared to the RJD, demonstrated the challenges of managing coalition politics. Furthermore, Rahul Gandhi's campaign, while drawing large crowds, was criticized for being too focused on national issues like the alleged misuse of central agencies, rather than on the specific local concerns of Bihar's voters, such as migration and the ₹10,000 welfare scheme. This allowed the NDA to frame the Congress as an outsider disconnected from the state's realities.

9.3 Mahagathbandhan: A Coalition of Fragile Convenience

The Mahagathbandhan, led by the RJD and including the Congress and several left parties, entered the 2025 election with high hopes but was plagued by internal discord. The alliance's core problem was a lack of cohesion. The RJD, as the dominant partner, expected to contest the majority of seats, while the Congress demanded a larger share than in previous elections. This led to protracted and public disagreements. The coalition also suffered from a lack of a unified campaign narrative. While the RJD focused on its traditional base of Yadav and Muslim voters, the Congress attempted to appeal to a broader, but less defined, constituency. Left parties, like the CPI(ML), focused on rural distress and land rights, which did not always align with the RJD's more pragmatic, caste-based mobilization. This disjointed messaging failed to create a compelling alternative to the NDA's focused campaign on development and welfare. The Mahagathbandhan's internal weaknesses were further exposed by its inability to counter the appeal of RUPPs. For instance, its failure to adequately represent the Kushwaha community within its coalition framework allowed HAM to carve out space and win 5 seats. Similarly, its ambiguous stance on Muslim representation allowed AIMIM to consolidate a section of the minority vote. In essence, the Mahagathbandhan's internal fragmentation

mirrored and amplified the broader fragmentation of the party system, creating fertile ground for RUPPs to thrive.

10. Alliance Politics, RJD–Congress Friendly Fights and Electoral Fragmentation

Alliance politics in Bihar is often unstable. In the 2025 election, the opposition Mahagathbandhan faced severe internal problems. The RJD and Congress could not agree on seat-sharing in some constituencies. This led to “friendly fights,” where candidates from the RJD and the Congress ran against each other in the same constituency, even though they were in the same alliance (Hasan, 2002). For example, in seats like Bhagalpur, Siwan, and Katihar, RJD and Congress candidates contested separately, splitting the opposition vote. These friendly fights were a direct result of the Congress’s push for a greater number of seats and the RJD’s reluctance to concede them. These friendly fights proved to be politically disastrous for the Mahagathbandhan. It divided the anti-NDA vote, making it easier for the NDA candidate to win. The presence of RUPPs in those constituencies made the fragmentation even worse. In seats where LJP, HAM, or AIMIM also fielded candidates, they acted as “spoilers” by taking away even more votes from an already divided opposition pool. For instance, in a constituency with an RJD candidate, a Congress candidate, and an AIMIM candidate, the anti-NDA vote was split three ways, often resulting in a victory for the NDA candidate with a plurality of as low as 30-35%. Interestingly, LJP, HAM, and AIMIM themselves won seats by appealing to specific castes or religious groups that were not fully captured by either the NDA or the Mahagathbandhan. This situation shows how complicated alliance politics can be and how it can backfire in a fragmented party system. The RJD-Congress friendly fights, more than any other factor, demonstrated the opposition’s lack of strategic coherence and directly contributed to the NDA’s victory by ensuring that the opposition’s numerical strength was never translated into an effective electoral challenge.

11. Conclusion

The 2025 Bihar Assembly election teaches us that even small, unrecognized parties (RUPPs) play a big role in politics. Their importance is not just in winning seats, but in splitting votes, bringing new issues into the discussion, and representing marginalized groups. Parties like LJP (19 seats), AIMIM (5 seats), HAM (5 seats), and IIP (1 seat) proved that RUPPs can achieve electoral success when they have a strong caste or religious base or a localized appeal. Others like Jan Swaraj, BMUP, and Jan Adhikar Party influenced the election through vote fragmentation and issue articulation even without winning seats. BMUP’s attempt to appeal to Dalits and minorities, though unsuccessful in winning seats, did affect the vote shares of other parties. The existence of RUPPs shows that Duverger’s Law does not fully explain the Indian political system, especially in a socially diverse state like Bihar. Caste, religion, and identity remain very powerful forces.

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