

Impediments to development

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There is a range of factors that impact on India's capacity to enhance the human wellbeing of its citizens. These include the country's colonial legacy, population growth, cultural barriers, India's political culture, climate-related natural hazards, terrorism, corruption and communal unrest.

India's colonial legacy

The British ruled the Indian subcontinent from 1858 to 1947. The area over which control was exercised extended over much of present-day India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The British monarch bore the title of Empress or Emperor of India. British control of India had both positive and negative long-term consequences.

Britain's interest in India can be traced to the activities of the East India Company during the first half of the 18th Century. Initially, the company established a trading presence along the subcontinent's coast. This presence would, however, expand in the latter half of the century when the British waged a war on land in eastern and southeastern India, the outcome of which was its ability to exercise political control over the rich province of Bengal.

By the end of the century British rule had been consolidated and extended up the Ganges valley to Delhi and over most of the peninsula of southern India. The British had by then established a military superiority that would enable them to extend control all the remaining Indian states, either by conquering them or forcing their rulers to become accommodating allies.

During the period of British control, India was made up of two types of territory: British India and the native Princely States. The control of the latter was exercised

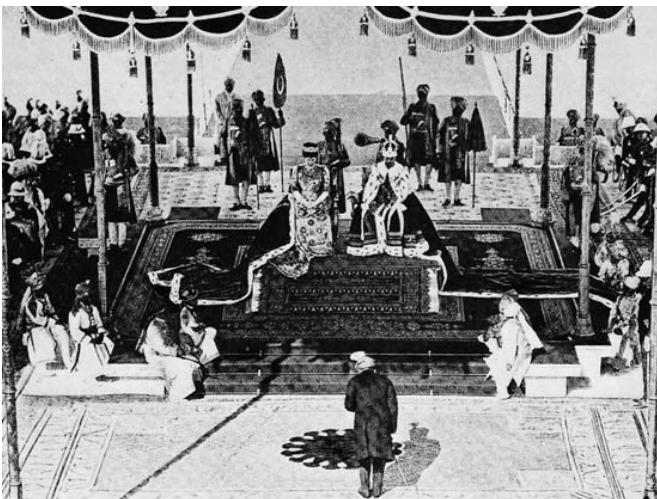


Going to the reception on the Maharajah's of Kashmir's Elephant. William Henry Jackson's 1895 Tour of India. Source: <http://www.harappa.com/magic/index.html>

through indigenous Indian rulers by the central government led by a Viceroy – the official appointed to administer India in the name of the British monarch. British India consisted of provinces administered by British appointed Governors, Lieutenant Governors or Chief Commissioners.

British rule had a number of enduring benefits. These include:

- The unification of more than 550 of princely states into a single political entity which would ultimately form the foundation of an independent India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.
- The establishment of parliamentary democracy built on the principals of one-person, one-vote; the rule of law; and an independent judiciary.
- A system of public administration. The 1,000-strong Indian Civil Service provided the foundations of strong, efficient government post independence.
- The establishment of universities and stock exchanges.
- Education for both males and females.



King George V and Queen Mary, crowned Emperor and Empress of India during a visit to India in 1911. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delhi_Durbar

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- The building of transport infrastructure, especially ports, dams, irrigation canals, roads, telephone and telegraph, and railways* brought unity to connected regions which would later help India modernise.
- The English language which provided a source of unity for the subcontinent.
- Banned the caste system and attempted to abolish a range of cultural practices including suttee (the custom of widow burning) and infanticide (the intentional killing of infants).

* India has one of the world's largest railway networks comprising 115,000 km of track and 7,500 stations. In 2012, it transported over 25 million passengers daily (over 9 billion on an annual basis). The network employs 1.4 million people.

The costs of British rule included economic exploitation. Before the British occupied India the country was one of the richest countries in the world. When the British left in 1947, India was poor and industrially backward. The British had restricted the development of any industry that would compete with those back in England. India's role was to supply the raw materials needed by Britain's factories (for example cotton) and a market for its manufactured products (cloth). In other words Britain extracted large trade surpluses from India, and forced it to export commodities and become a dumping ground for British manufactured goods.

Many believe India's bureaucracy – a legacy of British colonialism – has held back the Indian economy for more than four decades by curtailing the entrepreneurial spirit of many Indians through their insistence on time consuming bureaucratic processes ('red-tape'). They are equally good at discouraging foreign investment from coming into the country.

The manner in which the British withdrew from India created political instability and initiated an arms race in the region. This instability detracts from efforts to enhance human wellbeing.



Refreshment stall in station - Madras Railway William Henry Jackson's 1895 Tour of India. Source: <http://www.harappa.com/magic/index.html>

Partition of British India

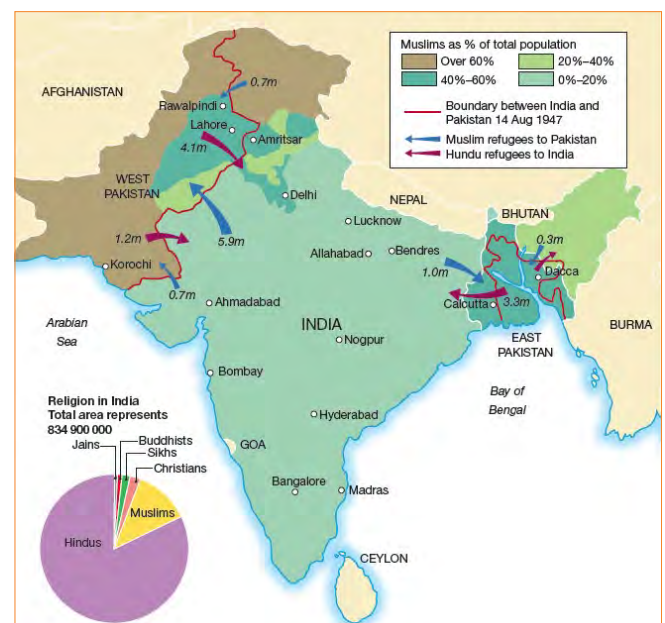
In 1947, the British Indian Empire was partitioned (or divided) into two sovereign states – India and Pakistan (which later split into the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the People's Republic of Bangladesh). This partition involved more than just the division of territory. It involved the division of the Empire's assets including the British Indian Army, the Indian Civil Service and other administrative services, the railways and treasury. The haste in which the partition of India occurred resulted in the mass displacement of people and outbreaks of religious-based violence. As many as one million people died.

Once the new borders were established, about 14.5 million people crossed into what they hoped were the relative safety of a religious majority – Islam dominated Pakistan or Hindu dominated India.

The Partition of the British Indian Empire was a highly controversial arrangement, and remains a cause of much tension on the Indian subcontinent. It has certainly hindered efforts to enhance the human wellbeing of people within the region.



Crowded Indian train during the partition of India.



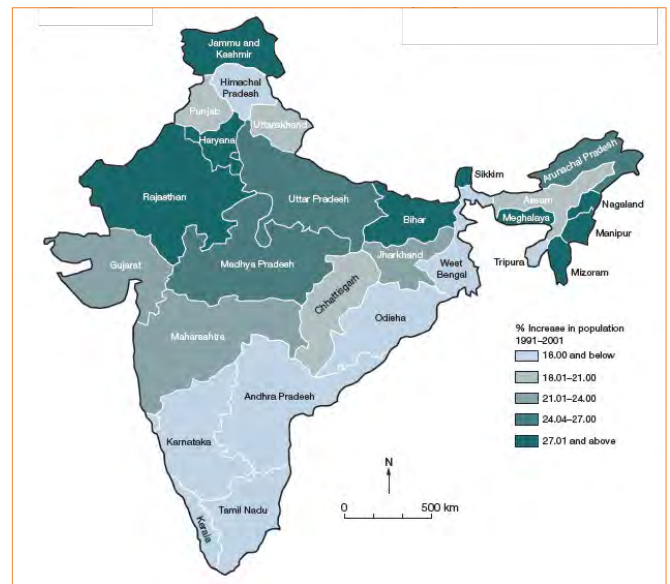
The partition of India led to one of the greatest mass movements of people in history.

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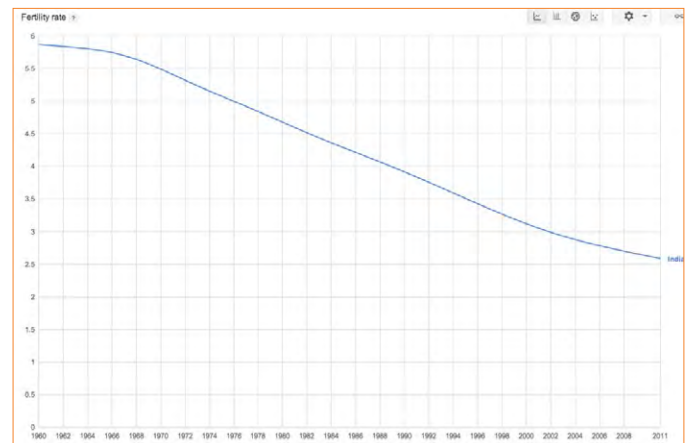
Population growth

Enhancing the material wellbeing of a people is difficult when the population is growing rapidly. Unless the rate of economic growth exceeds the rate of population increase, GNI per capita will decline. In other words, while the 'economic pie' is getting bigger each person get a smaller slice because it is shared between more people. The key to tackling rapid population growth is to tackle the causes of poverty. As people's standard of living improves, fertility rates decline.

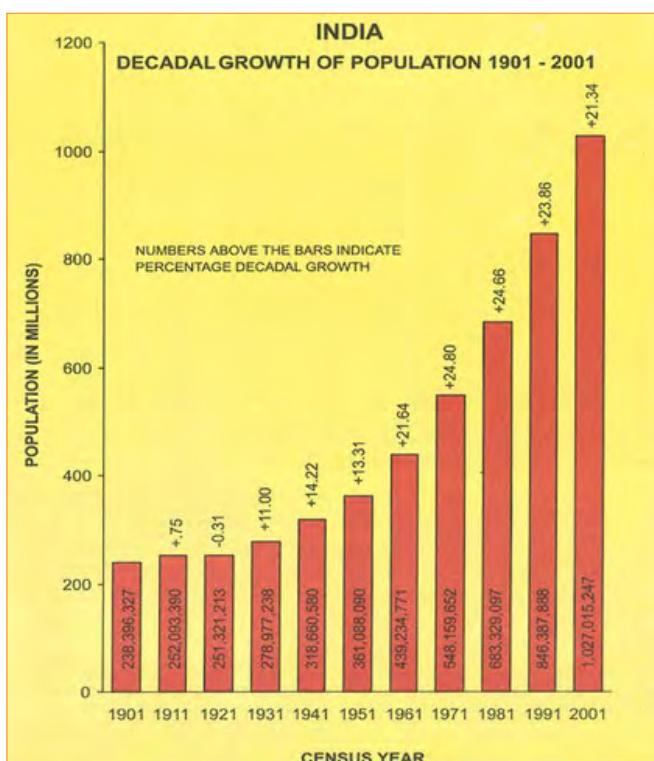
In 2013, India's population reached a massive 1.28 billion people. This makes the country the second most populous on earth. Only China, with 1.36 billion, has more people. By 2050 India's population is projected to overtake that of China. Graphs below shows the decade-by-decade increase in India's population. The decadal growth rate peaked at 24.80 per cent in 1970s and has since declined to 21.34 per cent. The next two graphs show the spatial variation in population growth in the decade 2001–2011 and the decline in fertility rates since 1960 when the average women gave birth six children. The birth rate is now 2.6. The final graph shows that the rate of decrease in fertility is far from uniform. Rates are still relatively high in India's Hindi-speaking heartland but below replacement level in the south. The decline in fertility has been attributed to increased female education participation rates, urbanisation, and rising standards of living more generally.



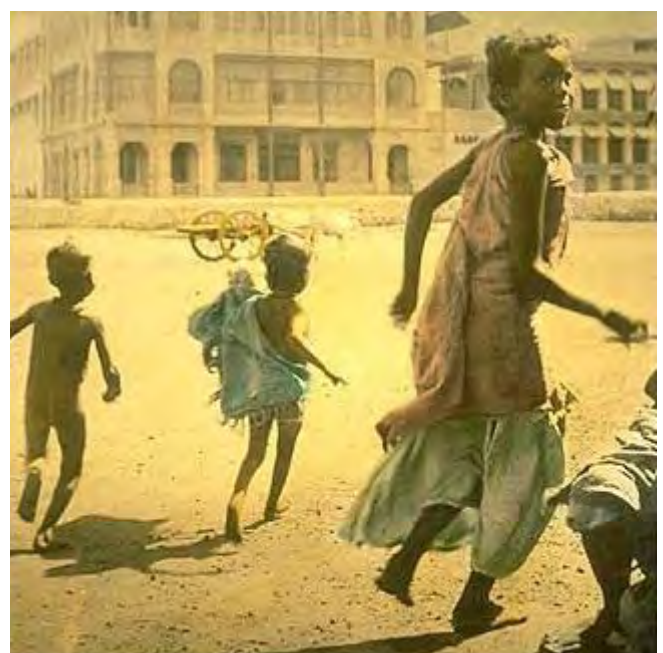
Spatial variations in population growth, 2001–2011 (Source: India Census 2011)



India's fertility rate 1960–2011

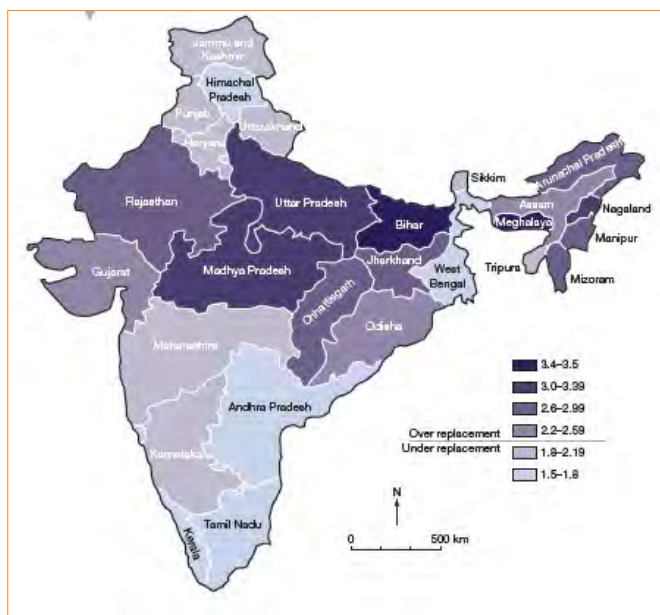


Decadal growth in India's population, 1901–2001



Woman and children fleeing camera, Bombay. William Henry Jackson's 1895 Tour of India. Source: <http://www.harappa.com/magic/index.html>

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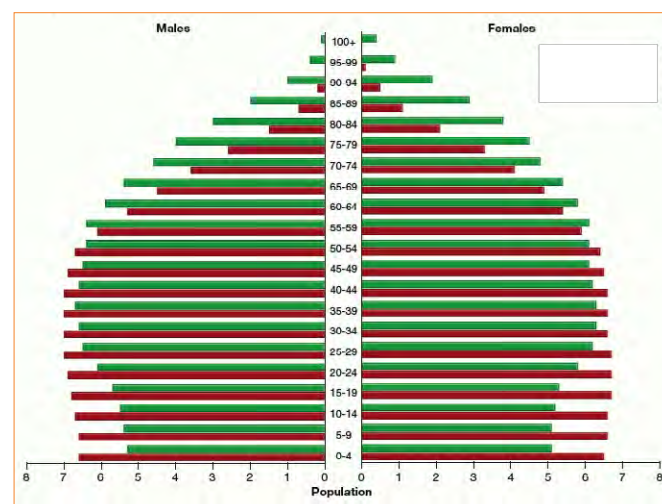


Fertility rates by state and territory, 2012

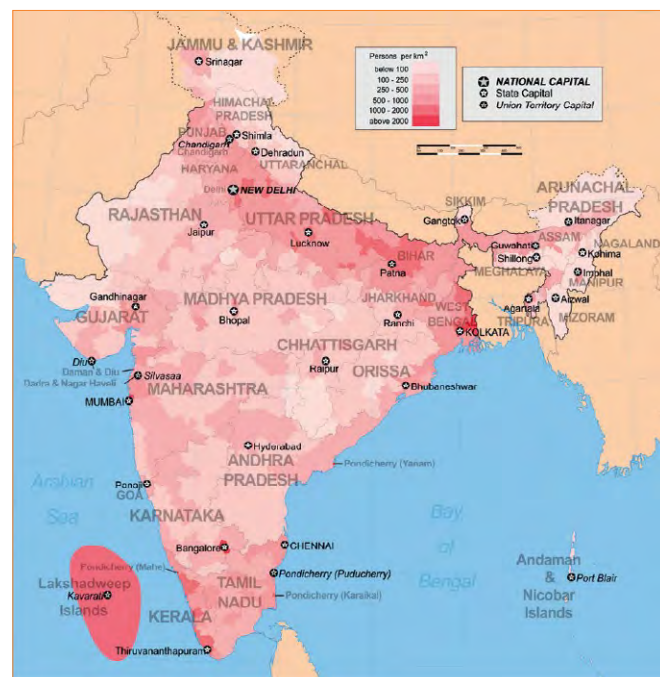
Population structure

Thirty-one per cent of India's population is under the age of 15 years of age and more than 50 per cent is below 25. More than 65 per cent are below the age of 35. This means that India has a relatively young population (median age 26.7 years compared, for example, Australia's median age of 39.9). This is important because future population growth is unavoidable, as this group will shortly enter the childrearing age group.

The figure below features two population pyramids – one showing India's age and sex structure in 2012; the other the projected structure in 2050. The narrowing of the base of the pyramid reflects the declines in fertility over the last two decades.



Green (2012) and Red (2050)
India's population structure, 2012 and 2050 (projected)



Population density



Indian workers building railway. William Henry Jackson's 1895 Tour of India.
Source: <http://www.harappa.com/magic/index.html>

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*A British Colonial residence. William Henry Jackson's 1895 Tour of India.
Source: <http://www.harappa.com/magic/index.html>*

Cultural barriers

India is a culturally diverse nation. It is also an emerging economic powerhouse. Sadly, however, India still struggles to address the great disparities in human wellbeing found within the country. As in all societies, cultural factors can either enhance or obstruct efforts to improve people's quality of life.

India's diverse culture

India is a place where several cultures interact. The most significant of these are the Aryan, in the north, and the Dravidian people in the south. Add to this India's religious diversity. The country is the birthplace of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Today, Hinduism and Buddhism are the world's third and fourth-largest religions respectively, with over 2 billion followers and possibly as many as 2.5 or 2.6 billion followers. From time-to-time, ethnic or communal violence ignites, complicating efforts to promote a more socially just society.

India's caste system

The caste system is a form of social stratification and control. Traditionally, it divided Indian communities into thousands of hereditary groups called Jāti. Each Jāti was identified with a traditional job function or tribe. The Jati featured four broad caste groupings with hundred of sub-castes. The principal groups were the Brahmin (priests, scholars and teachers), Kshatriyas (warriors, administrators and law enforcers), Vaishyas (farmers, cattle raisers and traders) and Shudras (service providers and servants). A fifth group, the Panchama, are the outcasts or untouchables (Dalits).

The caste system was a form of social control. The untouchables, for example, if they aspired to improve their situation in life, were penalized by again being born an untouchable in the next life. While now illegal elements of this social practice, and the discrimination that goes with it, still holds sway in some parts of India.

India's untouchables

The Dalits (or untouchables) are the lowest social status group in the Hindu caste system. In fact, the Dalits are actually born below the caste system.

The untouchables were assigned, by birth, to spiritually contaminating work that nobody else wanted to do. They lived on the fringes of Indian society and were historically associated with occupations regarded as ritually impure, such as leather tanning, butchering, or removal of rubbish, animal carcasses and waste. Dalits worked as manual labourers cleaning streets, latrines, and sewers. According to Hindu beliefs, such jobs corrupted the workers' souls, making them unfit to mingle with other kinds of people.

Humans were born an untouchable as a form of punishment for their conduct in a former life. If a person was born in to the (Dalit) untouchable caste, she or he could not ascend to a higher caste within that lifetime; untouchables had to marry fellow untouchables, and could not eat in the same room or drink from the same well as a caste member.

In the Hindu religion (with its belief in reincarnation) untouchables who followed the restrictions outlined above were rewarded with a promotion to a caste in their next life.



Woman carrying large sheets of corrugated roofing iron. William Henry Jackson's 1895 Tour of India. Source: <http://www.harappa.com/magic/index.html>

Role and status of women

While Indian women have held high office including that of President and Prime Minister, women continue to face atrocities such as rape, acid throwing, dowry killings and forced prostitution.

While traditions such as sati (where a widow is burned alive on her husband's funeral pyre) are now illegal some instances of the practice are still found in remote parts of the country. Purdah (the practice of concealing the body from the eyes of males) is still applied by Indian women in some communities and child marriage remains prevalent despite it being illegal under Indian law.

Women are less likely to participate in education and in most Indian families women do not hold any property in their own names, and do not get a share of any inheritance. Due to weak law enforcement, women continue to have little access to land and property. In fact, some of the laws continue to discriminate against women, when it comes to land and property rights.

Activists in India argue that the manner in which women are treated won't improve unless the way boys are brought up changes. It is said that young men grow up as 'little princes'. They often allowed to misbehave with impunity, told that everything they do is wonderful, and taught that women exist only to serve and to gratify them. Such attitude cannot help but promote a distorted view of women and their role in society.

India's political culture

Like Australia, India is a federation of states with a parliamentary system of government based on the Westminster system of inherited from the British. It is also the world's largest democracy. The notion of 'majority rule' is only tempered by the legally prescribed protections enjoyed by minority groups.

For most of the time since independence, India's government has been led the Indian National Congress (INC), the party of Mahatma Gandhi. In the pre-independence era, the party was at the forefront of the struggle for independence. Today, the party is considered to be on the centre-left of Indian politics (a position similar to the ALP in the Australian political context). India's other major political party is the right-wing Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Initially, the economic policy of the INC was centred on the promotion of public sector enterprises. In recent times, however, they have embraced more economic liberal policies that recognise the importance of free markets (just as the ALP has). They have favoured

economic liberalism while claiming to care for the wellbeing of those in the weaker sectors of the economy. The BJP on the other hand promote the privatisation of infrastructure and services and the roll-back of labour and environmental protections. The party also favours Indian heritage and culture over all things Western.

The culture of corruption is widespread and extends from the bottom to the top of Indian society. It is said that government ministers to cream off tens of millions of dollars and claim to be affronted when their corrupt activities are exposed. Elsewhere a bribe of 100 rupees will allow you to escape a traffic fine, and the poor must pay *baksheesh* (a gratuity, tip, or bribe) in order to be issued a ration card by an official.



Four turbaned natives pushing Pangborn in hand-car in Bolan Pass [Baluchistan]. William Henry Jackson's 1895 Tour of India. Source: <http://www.harappa.com/magic/index.html>

Climate-related natural hazards

Natural disasters in India, many of them climate related, hamper efforts to combat poverty and enhance human wellbeing. Drought, flash flooding, cyclones and landslides brought on by torrential rains pose the greatest threat.

Flooding is the most common natural disaster in India. The heavy southwest monsoonal rains (July to September) cause the Brahmaputra and other rivers to overflow their banks, flooding surrounding areas. The floods can kill thousands and displace millions. The monsoon rains, especially when excessive or early, may ruin crops. Almost all of India is flood-prone, and flash floods and torrential rains, have become increasingly common in central India in recent decades, coinciding with the rising temperatures linked to global warming.

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India's geographical position also means that it is affected by tropical cyclones. These disrupt the lives of millions of Indians living in coastal areas. Tropical cyclones are particularly common in the northern reaches of the Indian Ocean in and around the Bay of Bengal. Cyclones bring heavy rains, storm surges, and winds which often isolate affected areas. In the North Indian Ocean Basin, the cyclone season runs from April to December, with peak activity between May and November.

Terrorism

Development is hindered in places affected by internal and external social and political instability. India is surrounded by hostile countries. From time-to-time, tensions arise with both China and Pakistan. Additionally, India is facing a growing number of homegrown threats, which are a potentially more serious area of concern than across border disputes.

Terrorism in India can be categorised as being either external or internal. External terrorism emerges from neighbouring countries and internal terrorism emulates from religious or communal violence and the Naxalite-Maoist insurgency. The latter is an ongoing conflict between Maoist groups, known as Naxalites or Naxals, and the Indian government. The Naxalites control territory throughout Bihar, Jharkhand and Andhra Pradesh states and are supported by many of the rural poor.

It is often said that much of the terrorism in India is sponsored by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) organisation. Extremist groups, especially the separatist forces operating from bases in Pakistan, have often targeted Mumbai. The 2008 Mumbai attacks, for example, which killed 164 people over a period of four days and twelve locations, including the historic Taj Mahal Palace Hotel, was conducted with the support of Pakistan's ISI.

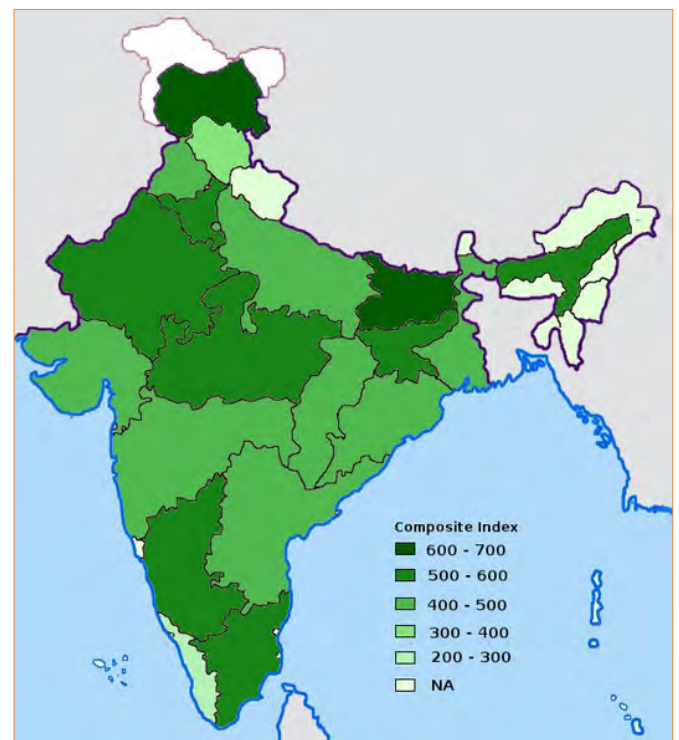


Taj Mahal Palace Hotel. Source: Wikimedia Commons

The cost of maintaining the security forced need to safeguard against such attacks is a major drain on Indian finances and diverts resources from development-based initiatives.

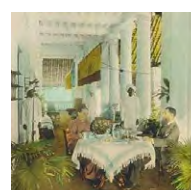
Corruption

Corruption involves a lack of integrity or honesty and usually takes the form of bribery. Corruption, like terrorism, eats away the country from the inside. Corruption has been deeply entrenched in India's bureaucratic and political system for decades. Politicians and bureaucrats have amassed a great deal of private wealth, much of which is 'black money' — deposited, untaxed, in overseas accounts. This form of corruption results in a significant loss of revenue. Estimates put the loss of taxable income at \$420 billion over the past decade.



India: Spatial pattern of corruption

Given India's cultural and ethnic diversity it is perhaps not surprising that tensions between groups arise from time-to-time. Hundreds are killed each year in religious-based violence between Muslims and Hindus. The worst affected states include Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, and Bihar, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal.



The 1895 Tour of India was a magic lantern slide tour of India created by the American photographer William Henry Jackson. In India, he made a series of hand-colored lantern slides which he later took on a lecture tour of the USA.