

# Ideological Imprints

Deciphering People's  
Take on Redistribution



## Introduction

In July 2020, a petition was filed in the Supreme Court challenging the inclusion of the terms “socialist” and “secular” in the preamble of the Constitution of India via the 42nd Constitution Amendment of 1976.<sup>1</sup> The Constitution, a historic document adopted on November 26, 1949, is a testament to the principles and values that guided the Indian freedom struggle. Its preamble reflects the aspirations of a nation striving for democracy and egalitarianism. However, the petitioners claimed that in a democracy, “citizens cannot be bound to accept a particular ideology, and the application of the ideology depends on the will of the people as reflected through votes from time to time.”

The preamble is considered the “spirit and backbone” of the Constitution of India (Lahoti 2004). Across the globe, there is a growing trend of basing constitutional interpretation on the preamble, and India is no exception (Orgad 2010). In the subsequent section, we elaborate on the significance of the preamble as understood by the judiciary. While the petition, led by Subramanian Swamy, is still pending before the Supreme Court, it raises some pertinent questions. What is the spirit of the Constitution, and to what extent is it aligned with the will of the people?

Examining all the core tenets of the preamble is a substantial task, but our paper makes a modest attempt to delve deep into one that defines its socialist character. In a pivotal moment in 1976, the Constitution was amended to explicitly designate India as a “socialist” republic. This change was enacted through the 42nd Amendment during the emergency under the leadership of Indira Gandhi. The committee, led by Swaran Singh, formed to propose Amendments to the Constitution, reported that the Amendment aimed at making the “Directive Principles more comprehensive and giving them precedence over those Fundamental Rights that have been used to obstruct socio-economic reforms aimed at implementing the directive principles”.<sup>2</sup>

It appears that the Amendment aimed to reinforce the underpinnings of socialism that had always been present in the Constitution. The Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs), though non-justiciable, are intended to underlie the State’s obligations to its citizens and guide lawmaking. They encapsulate the principles of socialism under Articles 38, 39, 41, and 46.<sup>3</sup> These directives advocate for a society where wealth is not concentrated in the hands of a few, thereby harming the common good. They also underscore the importance of addressing economic and social inequalities and hierarchies by safeguarding the interests of the weaker sections of society. Even before the preamble was amended, the socialist spirit was intricately woven into these DPSPs at the time of adopting the Constitution. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar aptly observed that the DPSPs provide a “socialistic pattern of society.”

Why is this constitutional socialism of significance? The Constitution plays a pivotal role in delineating the boundaries of State power and establishing limits to State authority, a concept termed as constitutionalism. The DPSPs and the preamble outline the spirit with which the State must perform its functions—i.e., in the best interests its citizens, especially, the vulnerable sections of society. When enacting welfare legislation, the executive and legislature draw strength from these socialist tenets embedded in the Constitution. In the past, the judiciary, too, has invoked India’s socialist character to scrutinise the validity of executive and legislative actions.<sup>4</sup>

Belov et al. (2021), in their comparative analysis of socialist and non-socialist countries’ Constitutions, argue that it is essential to explore “the socialist legacy” of a country not only by examining the Constitutions’ literal text but also by assessing the norms the State embodies and their practical implementation. In India, the State has made significant efforts to breathe life into the DPSPs, which represent socialism “in writing,” through a range of welfare policies since gaining independence, thus embodying socialism “in action.”

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1. Note that the original preamble, adopted by the Constituent Assembly in November 1949, did not include these two terms.

2. The Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976.

3. Article 38 directs the State to strive “to minimize income inequalities and endeavor to eliminate status inequalities” and promote the welfare of the people. Article 39 encourages the State to, among other things, ensure “that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are distributed in a manner best serving the common good.” According to Article 41, the State, based on its economic capacity, should “make effective provisions to secure the right to work, education, and public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness, and disablement. . . .” Finally, Article 46 urges the State to promote the “educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people,” especially those belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

4. *Randhir Singh v Union of India, 1982*; *Excel Wear v. Union of India, 1978*; *BALCO Employees Union v. Union of India, 2002*.

While scholars have meticulously documented the evolution of the State's ideology and leaders' understanding of socialism in India since independence, limited attention has been given to how individuals perceive the socialist underpinnings of welfare and wealth redistribution (Qurban 2023; Mulford 2020; Mohan 1975; More 1984; Gould 2002).

A Constitution defines and shapes the relationship between the State and its people, and an account of constitutional ideology that focuses solely on the State perspective is incomplete. The State's perception of its relationship with citizens and the formulation of laws aimed at welfare or redistribution impact the populace, whether as beneficiaries, taxpayers, or both. Do the recipients of welfare schemes genuinely benefit from them, or would they prefer to see State support in another form? Do taxpayers, who may not be beneficiaries, believe it is the best use of their money? Answers to these questions would offer insights into how people perceive the welfare State and its fundamental role in society.

This paper aims to understand how individuals from various professional and socio-economic backgrounds perceive and interpret the socialist principles within the Constitution of India. Given the ambiguity and contestation surrounding the term "socialist" on the one hand, and the consensus that DPSP reflect India's socialist ideals on the other, we analyse people's perceptions of welfare, focusing on wealth redistribution, poverty alleviation, and the reduction of income inequalities.<sup>5</sup>

We employ a qualitative research approach and interview diverse participants to achieve this. Although we work with a small sample, due to resource and time constraints, we hope that our qualitative insights will provide a glimpse of the evolving public perception of wealth redistribution and State welfare. This qualitative study serves as a precursor and guidepost for broader research aimed at comprehensively capturing public ideology.

As we reveal, there is a misalignment in how the State operationalises welfare and what people find desirable. When unpacking this question, the aim is not to aggregate preferences and suggest that the will of the majority should be upheld. We acknowledge that the Constitution acts as a guardian of individual rights and protects the interests of the minority against majority rule.

Our study aims solely to highlight how the State's welfare actions are perceived by those who are beneficiaries and those who incur the costs of such actions. Such an analysis must encourage a healthy scepticism of the ideal of redistribution.

The next section of the paper provides historical context on socialism in India, its uniqueness, and the scholarly critique surrounding its inclusion in the Constitution. The third section elaborates on the methods we adopted for gauging people's perceptions and the limitations of our approach. Finally, the fourth section analyses the insights we obtained from our interviews.

## India's Socialism—A Unique Ideological Blend

While the term "socialist" found its place in our Constitution's preamble only in 1976, the roots of socialist ideology had already taken hold, subtly but surely, during the Constitution's adoption. The question arises: why did India, upon gaining independence, embrace socialism as its governing philosophy? The answer lies in a complex web of historical factors deeply rooted in India's struggle for freedom and the pursuit of social justice.

The emphasis on social justice was one of the key inspirations for adopting socialism in post-independence India. India's struggle for independence was born out of the desire to challenge the exploitative nature of British colonial rule, which exacerbated social inequities. The oppressive colonial regime and caste-based discrimination worsened the socioeconomic disparities. Independent India aimed to eliminate socioeconomic inequalities and advance the cause of the poor (Habib 2016).

However, what distinguishes Indian socialism from its global counterparts is the specific historical context in which it emerged. During independence, India grappled with profound poverty and glaring socioeconomic inequities. In this context, most leaders felt deep sympathy for the ideals of a welfare

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5. As encoded in Articles 38, 39, 41, and 46 of the Constitution of India. Note that this study is not concerned with gauging how well people understand "socialism" as a concept or with reconciling competing points of view on socialism. Throughout the paper, socialist ideals refer to the four aspects defined here.

State that worked for the poor and supported causes like wealth redistribution. At the same time, the mixed-economy model was aimed at encouraging industrial growth and productive capital. Such an approach, it was thought, would help economically uplift the masses. Finally, given that India was recovering from violent upheavals of partition and the freedom movement, Indian leaders wanted to avoid that violent communist revolutions suffered by countries like Russia and China.

Consequently, India chose a middle path with the State closely guiding the economy to ensure that the poor benefit, but also steered clear of radical redistribution. This was a compromise for both the radical socialists and those who wanted the State to play a limited role—a compromise that both sides were willing to make (Frankel 2005).

This consensus also reflected the ideology that appealed to key Indian leaders and the masses at the time (Adhia 2013). Profit-making was often viewed with scepticism, and businessmen and industrialists were met with suspicion. The collective desire was to build a society where wealth was not concentrated in a select few's hands but distributed for the common good.

## **Indian socialism— A unique flavour**

While socialism is typically thought of as entailing the collective ownership and control of the means and modes of production, Indian socialism is characterised by a multi-faceted approach that encompasses elements of social justice, economic redistribution, welfarism and, in the early years of independence, nationalisation of industries (Kent-Carrasco 2017).

India's unique socialism is illuminated by comparing its experiences with those of other socialist countries. There is a consensus among scholars that Indian leaders sought to develop their distinct brand of socialism and make an effort to distinguish themselves from the Soviet model, particularly the violence of Stalinism (Hilger 2021; Sherman 2018). For instance, while socialist leaders in India advocated for State monopoly over industry and trade, they also aimed to avoid coercing individuals and achieve socialist goals through peaceful means.

Sherman (2018) argues that socialists in India initiated a new type of revolution that envisioned a more equal society and spiritual fulfillment as their ultimate goal, while retaining the centrality of the individual, private property, and purposeful work.

## **Dissonance between constitutionalism and socialism**

Belov et al. (2021) define the core principles that undergird socialist societies (prioritising social responsibility and collective interests) and non-socialist societies (valuing individual liberty and separation of powers). They argue that while some of these principles are incompatible, others may be combined—a process they term “transformative” or “new constitutionalism.” They cite India, Colombia, and South Africa as examples of this approach. The Constitution of India enshrines non-socialist principles such as the separation of powers and prescribes socialist development goals, such as overcoming economic poverty, in the directive principles. Another contradictory facet that Belov et al. (2021) overlook is the insertion of private property as a Fundamental Right in the Constitution of India (later relegated from this position).

While Belov et al. (2021) do not necessarily view the blending of these principles as contradictory, some scholars do. Rajagopalan (2015) posits that constitutionalism and socialism are incompatible and that this tussle existed even before the 1991 liberalisation reforms were introduced. Independent India's birth was marked by this inconsistency of being a constitutional and socialist country, and leaders like Nehru attempted to reconcile the two. On the one hand, Nehru created a Constitution that would protect the rights of individuals, especially those they were unable to exercise under colonial rule. On the other hand, he relied on central planning through institutions like the Planning Commission to overcome social and economic inequalities that plagued India. According to Rajgoapalan (2015), meeting the latter's ends would require compromising individual rights.

As noted by Tripurdaman Singh (2020), starting from the First Amendment, the government has, over time, diluted Fundamental Rights and allowed them to be trumped by State policy under DPSPs. Palkhivala (1974) and Singh (2020) also document the erosion of constitutional values over the

years. Rajagopalan (2015) argues that the key reason for this decline is that socialist institutions are “incompatible with the Constitution,”—as evidenced by the tussles between the judiciary and the executive.

However, Chakrabarty (2008) and other scholars argue that India has retained its socialist character over the years. They point out that the government’s reliance on “State-guided routes to liberalisation” rather than “market fundamentalism” in implementing the 1991 liberalisation reforms proves this socialist orientation. Dhavan (1992) and Austin (1999) assert that socialism and constitutionalism are not only in harmony but also “interdependent” and “almost synonymous.”

## What do people think?

As is evident from the analysis above, scholars have delved into the evolution of various strands of Indian socialism and their compatibility with other ideals of the Constitution. However, there has been limited focus on the evolution of public ideology.

Scholars in other countries (Europe and the United States) have endeavored to capture people’s perceptions of equality, wealth redistribution, and the welfare State (Calzada and Del Pino 2008; Jacoby 2008). Such studies in the Indian context are sparse. Aiyar (2016) and Klasen (2011) have also examined the impact of socialist policies in nations like India, China, and South Korea, with a focus on infant mortality and malnutrition. However, these studies do not comment on people’s perceptions and their ideologies.

Researchers in India have largely concentrated on the public perception of specific welfare policies instead of documenting views on the principles underlying welfare. Some scholars, such as Adhia (2013), have attempted to capture the evolving public ideology, such as sympathy for capitalism, by analysing news media, State awards, and Bollywood movies. However, this research primarily focused on the shifts that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s leading up to the 1991 reforms. Furthermore, in analyses like these, it is challenging to determine whether news media and movies reflect public perception or shape it. It is likely that media and public narratives influence each other.

To address these gaps, we conducted a qualitative study that explores how individuals from diverse professional and socio-economic backgrounds perceive redistribution and State welfare.

## Understanding People’s Views on Redistribution and Welfare

Prominent scholars such as Adam Smith, J.S. Mill, John Maynard Keynes, Deirdre McCloskey, and others have emphasised that public ideology plays a pivotal role in shaping the economic outcomes of societies. They argue that people’s principles and perceptions are at least as important as economic incentives (Adhia 2013). A change in principles and perceptions can significantly impact the economic policies that individuals endorse. Our findings demonstrate that these perceptions are, in turn, guided by the incentives created by the policies and actions of the State.

Given this, exploring how people perceive the State’s role, especially concerning equality and the promotion of economic and social well-being, becomes critical. Our interviews aimed to delve into citizens’ perceptions, aspirations, and apprehensions regarding the State’s role in providing welfare and redistributing resources.

### The growing recognition of a culture of dependence

We observed that most individuals held strong opinions about the government’s free distribution of goods and services. Most respondents argued that such support is often unhelpful and, in principle, undesirable. This sentiment was shared across income brackets, except by daily wage labourers, who had the lowest income in our sample.

Respondents provided a combination of the following four reasons for upholding this viewpoint. Firstly, they saw free goods and services as triggering a negative feedback loop where people are

not encouraged to work and become more reliant on the government for all their needs. In other words, respondents recognised the culture of dependence created by schemes offering free goods and services. They argued that it makes people lazy and less likely to take long-term care of themselves. Respondents believed that individuals could meet their needs without such assistance.

Secondly, respondents argued that they prefer dignity and opportunity over free handouts. Such respondents considered free goods and services to be humiliating and degrading.<sup>6</sup> Hobbs et. al. (1993) examined the increase in charity prompted by poor government policies in Canada. They documented similar beliefs among the recipients.<sup>7</sup>

Third, some negative perceptions of free goods and services were driven by people’s awareness of leakages, bureaucratic hurdles, and implementation failures in existing schemes. While discussing the Public Distribution System (PDS), one respondent mentioned that the food provided at ration shops is “inedible; even dogs won’t eat it” (Roosma, Oorschot, and Gelissen 2014).

Research suggests that people’s attitudes toward the welfare State and its functions are influenced by their actual experiences with State performance (Roosma, Oorschot, and Gelissen 2014). People are more likely to support publicly sponsored welfare policies when they believe that interactions with the State are efficient, fair, and reliable. This stands in stark contrast to circumstances when beliefs about inefficiency, corruption, injustice, and arbitrary decision-making are fostered through experiences (Jaeger 2009). Our interviews corroborate this phenomenon, with respondents citing the corruption and inefficiencies of State actors when justifying their lack of support for some schemes.

Finally, respondents argued that the promise of free goods and services often aligns with political incentives and is primarily a tool for the incumbent party to attract votes and stay in power. Some stated how free money is a “burden on all of us”, except the real beneficiaries—government officials. One respondent mentioned, “Freebies are a way for funds to go unaccounted for”.

This phenomenon has been theorised by scholars like Desai (1975) and Jaffrelot (2006) in different contexts. According to Desai (1975), India’s political culture has rendered the label “socialist” useful in winning elections. Similarly, Jaffrelot (2006), based on a historical analysis, finds that at the root of affirmative policies like reservations are political considerations.

In fact, some respondents pointed to a sharper insight and a deeper problem—once initiated, ending the culture of freebies becomes challenging as all subsequent political parties become tied to the promise. Who wants to be the party that ends welfare? Verma et al. (2022) also demonstrate how free handouts alter political incentives.

As we reveal in the following section, this is not to suggest that respondents do not see any need for government assistance or welfare. Most respondents considered the elimination of poverty as a worthy goal but were opposed to some of the means adopted by the government.

## **No welfare or a different form of welfare?**

It is pertinent to note that interviewees often distinguished between services such as free water, electricity, bus tickets, and cash transfers on the one hand, and free education and healthcare on the other. While some were critical of the latter, most viewed government expenditures on education and healthcare as more productive and less wasteful.

Furthermore, instead of providing support in the form of free goods and services, respondents believed that the State should focus on creating opportunities from which people can benefit. We observed that this view was most strongly held by entrepreneurs across income brackets. For instance, some street vendors whom we interviewed mentioned that, rather than charity, they would prefer the freedom to operate their businesses without government intervention. Others referred to opportunities in terms of providing robust infrastructure and enacting laws conducive to business growth.

Similarly, middle- and high-income entrepreneurs believed that immediately after independence, there was a need for an extensive State welfare system. However, in recent decades, markets and private enterprises have been able to meet most individuals’ needs. In such circumstances, the State

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6. These categories of respondents included three distinct groups.

7. Note, however, that this differs from the response to government welfare programs.

should concentrate solely on creating the “rules of the game” and supporting those struggling for basic subsistence. In particular, the State should promote competition, encourage innovation, and create an environment conducive to business prosperity. Thriving businesses will offer opportunities for everyone, regardless of their wealth or income.

Entrepreneurs expressed the strongest support for the need to get the government “out of the way”. This sentiment is likely rooted in the frustration of navigating a complex web of regulations to operate their businesses.

Interestingly, one respondent who strongly advocated similar views was a former public sector employee from the Electricity Board of Kerala.

The respondent mentioned “wherever the government steps foot, it would bring corruption. As citizens, we should make sure we force the State to have as little role as possible”.

## **Trust in the institution of the State and skepticism towards its functionaries**

The old paradigm of *mai-baap sarkar* still reigns supreme in the minds of several respondents. This tendency to view the State as the “parent and provider” is particularly strong among low-income groups (also noted by Roy (2004)). Individuals feel that the State can and will offer remedies for all economic and social problems.

During the interviews, we observed that individuals held starkly distinct views on the State as an institution and the State in practice, i.e., the workings of State functionaries.

When considering the State as an institution, people held the paternalistic view that the State knows what is best for its citizens and will enact beneficial programs for them. Throughout the course of the interview, on several occasions, interviewees mentioned how “whatever the government does is for the good of the people”, “people always complain, no matter what the government does”, “people do not realize that the government knows what is best. Sometimes, the grand plans of the State only become clear in the long term”, and finally, “the State is doing what it can, and people do not deserve more than this”.

This tendency to praise the abstract institution of the State is juxtaposed with the complaints that the respondents shared about their everyday interactions with functionaries of the State. These interactions were marred by bureaucratic red tape, corruption, mistreatment, and discrimination. Across interviewees, those who extolled the virtues of the State later also recalled instances of abuse of power or a lack of dignified treatment on the part of public officials.

This contradiction is best reconciled in the vast literature on Public Choice, highlighting our failure to view the State as composed of self-interested actors who are not necessarily guided by higher virtues or welfare interests (McLean 1987; Rowley, Schneider, and Mueller 2008; Niskanen 1998). Public choice theory applies insights from economics to political science and shows how State functionaries also aim to further their self-interest in performing their role. Failure to acknowledge this often results in people viewing the State as benevolent and always well-intentioned.

It is pertinent to note that, in some instances, appreciation for the State was also rooted in fear. We could discern from the respondents’ body language that they were reluctant to share any critical perspective on questions such as, “what are some of the challenges you see in the way the State delivers welfare?” Some of these cues included repeatedly looking at the recorder while answering such questions or, after expressing a concern, adding that “mostly, everything is fine”. Especially hesitant respondents re-confirmed whether they were being recorded.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, in some instances, respondents could not critically evaluate the State’s role due to their tendency to adhere to the status quo. We faced this challenge, especially in the “what if” questions that required hypothetical reasoning. Respondents tended to rely on “what is” rather than “what should be” when answering these questions. For instance, in questions like whether the respondents think a certain welfare scheme merits an increase in taxes, some argued that increases in taxes are inevitable regardless of the schemes.

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8. The authors made sure to respect the decision of the respondents to either not record the interview or to stop the recording when they felt uncomfortable.

## “Rich” and “poor” view each other with mutual respect

Research in other countries has highlighted how welfare recipients are often seen as incompetent (Schofield, Suomi, and Butterworth 2022). Our interviews revealed a different story. Instead of viewing the low-income population as parasitic or lazy, most high-income respondents mentioned that welfare recipients are capable and competent. These respondents argued that they only need the right opportunities to improve their condition.

Similarly, far from being antagonistic or sharing mutual antipathy, a common sentiment among the low-income respondents was that the rich became rich due to their hard work. This contrasts with the disdain that most people shared for the wealthy (particularly businessmen) pre-1980s (Adhia 2013).<sup>9</sup> Our interviews hint at a transformation in mindset, wherein the rich do not necessarily create an image of deprivation for the economically weaker sections of the population and instead serve as an inspiration to work hard and toil.

Some low-income groups expressed contempt for other individuals in their income band. These respondents argued that a lack of ambition and motivation keeps some people poor. The most common example cited was that of daily wagers who make enough for that night’s alcohol and then stop working. Limited faith in people’s desire to be productive also led most respondents to argue against cash transfers. Respondents argued that recipients of free money will likely use it for unproductive and harmful activities like drinking.

## High reliance on non-State welfare and safety nets

Literature that focuses on the need and indispensability of State-provided welfare overlooks the non-State welfare provided by individuals and civil society (Khera 2020). Our interviews also aimed to gain insights into people’s perceptions of non-State assistance. The results highlight the crucial role of civil society in providing for those in need.

Respondents across income brackets, but particularly among low-income groups, argued that assistance from friends, relatives, employers, and, in some cases, even private moneylenders is more beneficial than State assistance during emergencies. They contend that such assistance is timely, reliable, and more accessible in times of distress. Law and order were the only areas where some respondents had faith in the State’s role during an emergency.

According to the respondents, although assistance from friends, family, and employers was not always unconditional—often requiring repayment once they were out of trouble—State-provided assistance was far from cost-effective. Even services offered by the government for free, such as healthcare, were plagued by red tape and numerous bureaucratic hurdles.

Interestingly, some respondents, such as street vendors, argue that emergency-like situations in their profession are caused by State actors (police officials) who abuse their authority. By virtue of operating in public spaces, vendors frequently encounter State functionaries. The harassment of vendors in the form of undue evictions, arbitrary penalties, and seizure of goods is well-documented. In such cases, they often rely on Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and support from civil society to reclaim their rights.

Some researchers argue that such non-State welfare arises when the State fails to provide for its people (Hobbs et al. 1993). In such cases, there is an increase in charitable institutions. Hobbs et al. (1993), who conducted their study in Canada, view this development as evidence of the State’s failure and find that beneficiaries of charities consider donations to be humiliating. In the Indian context too, scholars regard welfare as a duty of the State, and as a corollary, the right of an individual (Khera 2020).

Such analyses suffer from two issues. First, they pay little attention to the resource and capacity constraints of the State. Second, they undermine the bureaucratic hurdles, delays, and poor-quality that most State-sponsored welfare programs suffer from. Our findings hint at the useful role that non-State welfare plays in providing a safety net and reliable assistance for those in need. Often, these non-

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9. Our study only has limited comparability with Adhia’s work due to the varied methodological approaches. While we rely on semi-structured interviews with respondents, Adhia analyses public perception through secondary sources such as movies and news media.



State providers are either personally related to the beneficiaries or operate locally. Local context and knowledge allow the providers to better understand and respond to challenges.

## Limited support for redistribution

The final part of our questionnaire focused on eliciting people's perception of taxing the wealthy to provide for low-income populations. Except three, all respondents argued against adopting such an approach. Some stated that, as a matter of principle, taking from one and giving to another is undesirable. Here, Rajagopalan's (2015) contention on socialism and constitutionalism being incompatible reflected in our interviews most clearly.

Others rooted their opposition in more practical considerations—per them, redistribution is not feasible or achievable. Such respondents argued that it is unlikely that the benefits of redistribution will reach the intended beneficiaries owing to leakages. Yet others, argued that while the government should work on uplifting the poor, it can raise money for this in ways other than taxing the rich. For instance, one respondent suggested that the government should increase the tax on alcohol and cigarette consumption. This, they argue, is also likely to reduce the consumption of such goods.<sup>10</sup> Others, including a former government employee, argued that the State has enough resources that, if used effectively, can advance the welfare of the poor without needing to increase taxes on the rich.

Interestingly, several respondents from low-income groups voiced their opinions against taxing the rich and giving it to the poor, arguing that it is “hard-earned” money. Instead of redistribution, the government should empower the poor to climb the social ladder. However, their responses on how such empowerment can be realised remained ambiguous.

On the contrary, several respondents were in favor of and wanted to see greater voluntary assistance from those who were better off. It is worth noting that the authors did not inquire about voluntary assistance, and most respondents themselves raised this as an alternative to coerced redistribution.

Finally, we observed that middle-class salaried respondents considered themselves to be the worst victims of taxation policies. A corporate employee stated, “Businesses get tax write-offs, welfare schemes are available for the poor, but the middle class suffers.”

To contextualise our findings on redistribution and how people perceive the role of State welfare, we also gathered people's views on the State's finances. While most respondents were aware that the government's resources, often referred to as “public” money, are raised through taxation across different income brackets, some were not. Those in the latter category tended to perceive the State's resources as abundant and nearly unlimited. This perception is also reflected in their desire for increased State involvement in areas such as education, healthcare, employment, and religious activities.

We observed that awareness of the source of the Government's resources is not limited to individuals with higher levels of education or greater economic means. A few respondents from lower-income groups also demonstrated a relatively strong understanding of how welfare schemes are financed.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, two respondents who were very vocal about greater transparency in public spending belonged to low-income groups. For instance, one taxi driver mentioned, “If you increase the taxes for free education, and I contribute even 2 rupees towards it, I would want to know where my money is going and that my money is going in it.” They mentioned that the Government should conduct public consultations on how to spend its surplus and ensure people's buy-in for their plans. These respondents also believed that money is best spent locally by people who understand their conditions and circumstances.

## Conclusion

In July 2020, a petition raised questions about the Constitution of India, the values encoded in the Preamble, and whether it aligns with the nation's ethos. In responding to this question, most scholars

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10. Note that the evidence on the price elasticity of goods like alcohol and cigarettes is mixed.

11. However, respondents who were unaware of the source of the State's resources belonged to low-income groups.

tend to rely on other constitutional values, the laws enacted by the Government, and other historical developments. Another crucial element to complete this puzzle is understanding the public perspective. Our paper encourages the development of this scholarly inquiry and serves as a starting point for it.

We initiated our exploration by delving into India's distinct brand of socialism and examining some of the well-documented historical and cultural influences that have shaped it. Indian socialism is not your typical form of State control; it encompasses aspects of social justice, economic sharing, and welfarism. The Preamble and the DPSPs are considered to embody the core principles of Indian socialism. We relied on these principles to understand the goals of a socialist State.

Our qualitative interviews revealed a growing sentiment against the culture of dependence created by the free distribution of goods and services, regardless of income level. Many people believe in the dignity of self-sufficiency and view Government handouts skeptically, driven by concerns about inefficiency, corruption, and political motivations. Nevertheless, amidst these reservations, the State's role in providing free education and healthcare is acknowledged.

The paradox of trust in the institution of the State versus skepticism towards its functionaries underscores a fundamental misunderstanding—a failure to recognise the State as composed of self-interested actors. The paternalistic view of the State as benevolent often clashes with personal experiences of bureaucracy, corruption, and discrimination.

Furthermore, our research illuminates the significant role of non-State welfare in India, often surpassing the State in terms of timeliness, reliability, and accessibility during emergencies. This underscores the importance of civil society and individual assistance in the Indian context.

Perhaps the most striking revelation is the limited support for redistribution. The majority of respondents, regardless of income, resist the idea of taxing the wealthy to support the poor. Some view this as undesirable on principle, while others question the feasibility and efficacy of such measures. Instead, there is a prevailing belief that the State should empower the less fortunate.

This study provides insights into the complexities of socialism and welfare in India. It challenges preconceived notions and underlines the importance of citizens' perspectives in debates surrounding the Constitution of India. The misalignment between State policies and public perception must urge us to reconsider the ideal of redistribution and encourage a deeper reflection on the role of the welfare State in society.

## Methodology

### The approach

Given the limited scholarly attention our area of study has received, we conducted qualitative interviews employing a semi-structured questionnaire. This approach allows us to gain a comprehensive overview of people's perceptions of redistribution and welfare, as well as the factors that influence these perceptions. Qualitative research facilitates the capture of nuances, emotions, and the depth of individual experiences. Additionally, this qualitative method enables us to establish better rapport with respondents, a crucial aspect in ensuring their comfort and obtaining insights into their ideologies and beliefs.

### Research objective

Our objective was to examine how people perceive the welfare State and wealth redistribution. Some of the themes covered in our questionnaire include:

1. Identifying the need for State intervention: where do people identify the necessity for State intervention? How do they perceive its scope and priorities?
2. Challenges in the current welfare delivery system: do they encounter any challenges in the current mode of welfare delivery, and do they envision an alternative?
3. Understanding of State resources: how do people perceive the source and limitations of the State's resources?
4. Dependency on non-State assistance: to what extent do individuals rely on welfare from non-State actors, such as individuals and NGOs?

### Pilot study

To test our questionnaire, we conducted a pilot study in July with four participants. These pilot interviews were carried out in Grade G and Grade F colonies in North and West Delhi, as well as in Ballabhgarh, Haryana. The pilot study enabled us to identify questions that were either vague or ambiguous or prone to misunderstanding. We also realised that some questions had overlaps. Based on this feedback, we reworked the questions.

### Sampling method

Since we were dealing with a limited sample set, we relied on purposive sampling to better address our research questions. We selected respondents from a range of income levels and professions. This allowed us to gain insights from those who avail themselves of State welfare services (such as free rations, subsidised housing, employment guarantee schemes, etc.) and those who either do not use these services or are less likely to depend on them. Additionally, we chose respondents from various income levels to ensure that the perspectives of those with a relatively high tax burden were also represented in the study. Finally, we included a variety of professions to capture the voices of salaried individuals (both in the private and public sectors) and entrepreneurs.

### Research location and setting

In Delhi, we covered the following areas: Hauz Khas, Lajpat Nagar, Pushp Bhawan, and Madanpur Khadar. These locations were selected for logistical convenience and the socio-economic diversity of our respondent pool. For instance, Madanpur Khadar houses several low-income residents of Delhi, many of whom rely on ration shops and other government assistance. In Hauz Khas, we interacted with middle- and low-income entrepreneurs. Finally, areas like Pushp Bhawan provided us access to low-income migrant construction workers. Some of our respondents were located in other parts of the

country, such as Hyderabad and Bangalore. We conducted interviews for data collection in July and August 2023.

## **Data collection**

We employed a combination of offline and online interviews using a semi-structured questionnaire. Each interview lasted between 20 minutes and an hour. We informed all participants about the study's purpose and obtained their consent to conduct and record the interviews while ensuring anonymity. Participants were also free to withdraw their responses at any point. We did not select any respondents to whom the researchers were personally or financially related.

## **Sample characteristics**

A total of 28 respondents were interviewed, with approximately 50% falling within the low-income bracket, while the remainder consisted of a mix of middle and high-income respondents. Furthermore, we ensured a balanced representation of individuals with varying degrees of dependence on State welfare.

## **Data analysis**

After parsing and reviewing the interview transcripts, we coded the data. Based on this coding, we identified common patterns and themes to distil key insights. We also captured those responses that were markedly different from others.

## **Limitations**

It is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of our research. The small sample size and non-random selection of participants necessitate caution when generalising findings. While our study offers valuable insights, its outcomes should be interpreted within the context of these constraints.

Establishing rapport with respondents while interviewing them online proved slightly more challenging than in-person interviews. This may have affected the quality of responses in online interviews. Finally, given the sensitive nature of our discussion, some respondents may have been subject to social desirability bias.