

# Lok Sabha Elections | Unveiling Disparities Within and Across India's Regions

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May 4, 2024



*(This is a part of a special series disseminating the findings of the Access (In)Equality Index report, produced by researchers at the Centre for New Economics Studies (CNES) at Jindal Global University. Access the report from [here](#).)*

The Lok Sabha 2024 elections have reignited discussions on regional disparity. While some states boast impressive progress, a deeper look reveals a hidden story. Significant pockets of underdevelopment persist even within seemingly well-performing states. This begs a crucial question: How effectively are the governments addressing disparities within their own borders?

A recent study by the Centre for New Economic Studies at O.P Jindal Global University sought to answer this very question. We developed an index to measure inequality across States and Union Territories. The index focuses on access to basic social and economic services and opportunities.

This article is part one of the series which aims to explore the often-overlooked issue of regional disparities within India.

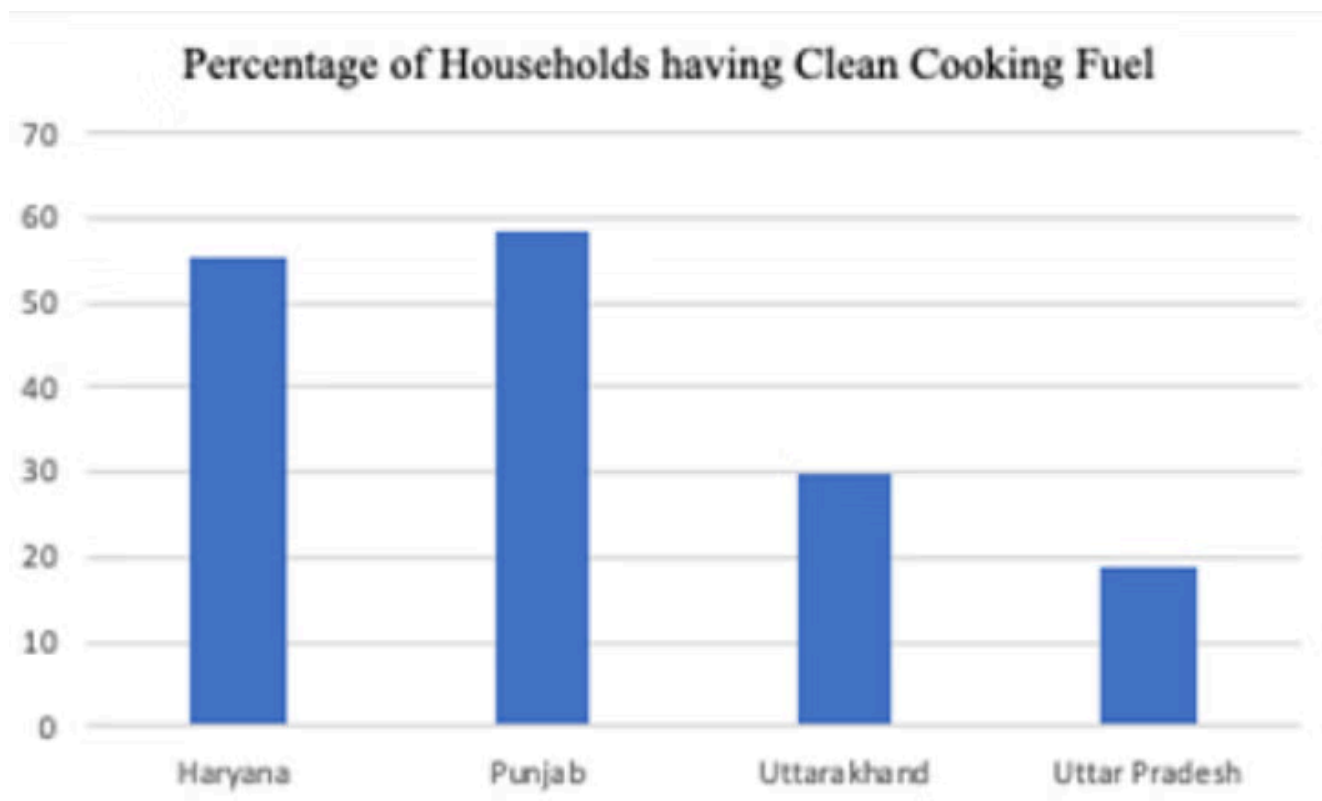
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## Haryana: A State of Contrasts

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The Access Inequality Report 2024 paints a fascinating picture of Haryana. Compared to other northern states, Haryana stands out as an achiever, ranking seventh nationally. This is further bolstered by the performance of Delhi (third) and Chandigarh (second) among union territories.

However, a closer look reveals a tale of two Haryanas. On one hand, the state boasts 100 percent coverage under the National Food Security Act and decent clean cooking fuel access (55.3 percent) compared to the states of Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh.

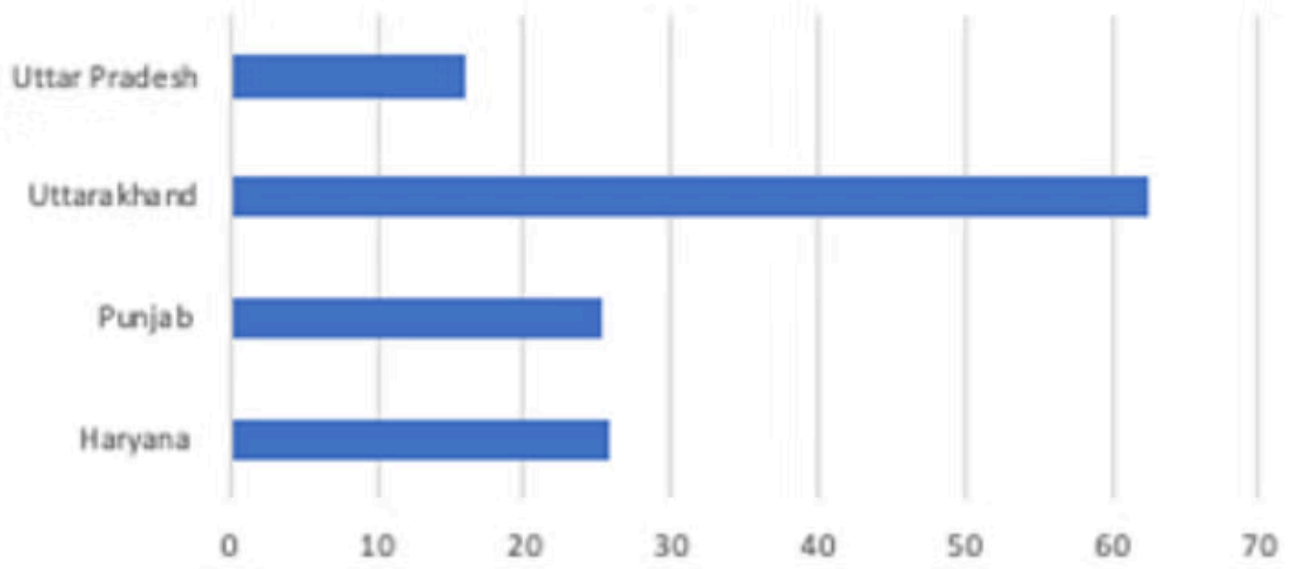


Percentage of households having clean cooking fuel across the states .

(Source: [Access Inequality Report 2024](#))

On the other, Haryana ranks a disappointing 19th, with only 25.7 percent of households having any health insurance or financing scheme coverage. While Uttarakhand outperforms in this category with 62.5 percent of households having one usual person covered by a health insurance or finance scheme.

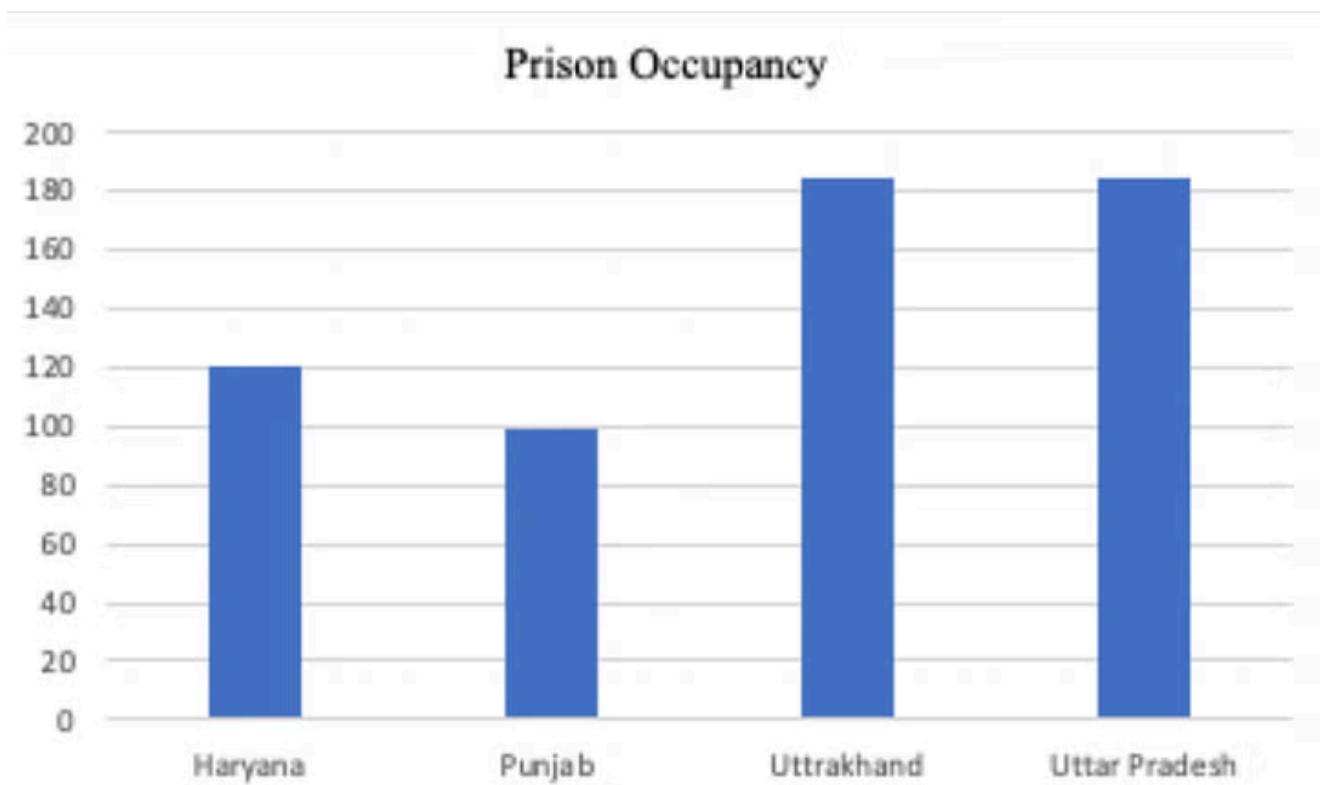
### Percentage of Households with Atleast One Usual Member Covered by Any Health Insurance/Financing Scheme



Percentage of households with at least one usual member covered by any health.

Source: [Access Inequality Report 2024](#))

However, all the states paint a concerning picture in terms of prison occupancy, with most of them being overcrowded. Uttarakhand tops the list at 185 followed by Uttar Pradesh at 184.8 and Haryana at 120.8.



Prison occupancy across states.



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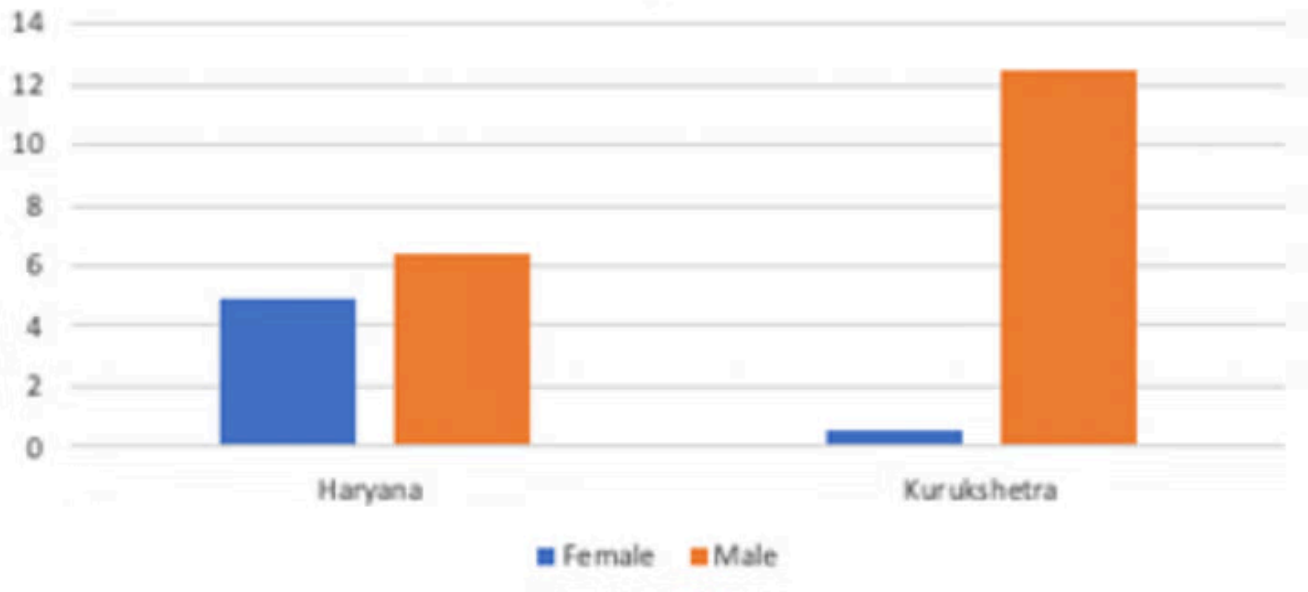
## Kurukshetra: A District in Need

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This disparity becomes even more evident when we zoom in on Kurukshetra, Haryana's ninth most populous district. Despite its vast geographical area, Kurukshetra remains predominantly rural, with 95 percent classified as such. This rural character translates into significant unemployment concerns.

The Human Development Agenda Report for Kurukshetra District reveals a grim reality, the unemployment rate in Kurukshetra is almost 2.5 times higher than the overall rate in Haryana with the unemployment rate for males being nearly double the state average. While women's unemployment is lower than the state average, it's still a pressing issue.

## Unemployment Rate by Gender in Kurukshetra Compared to Haryana

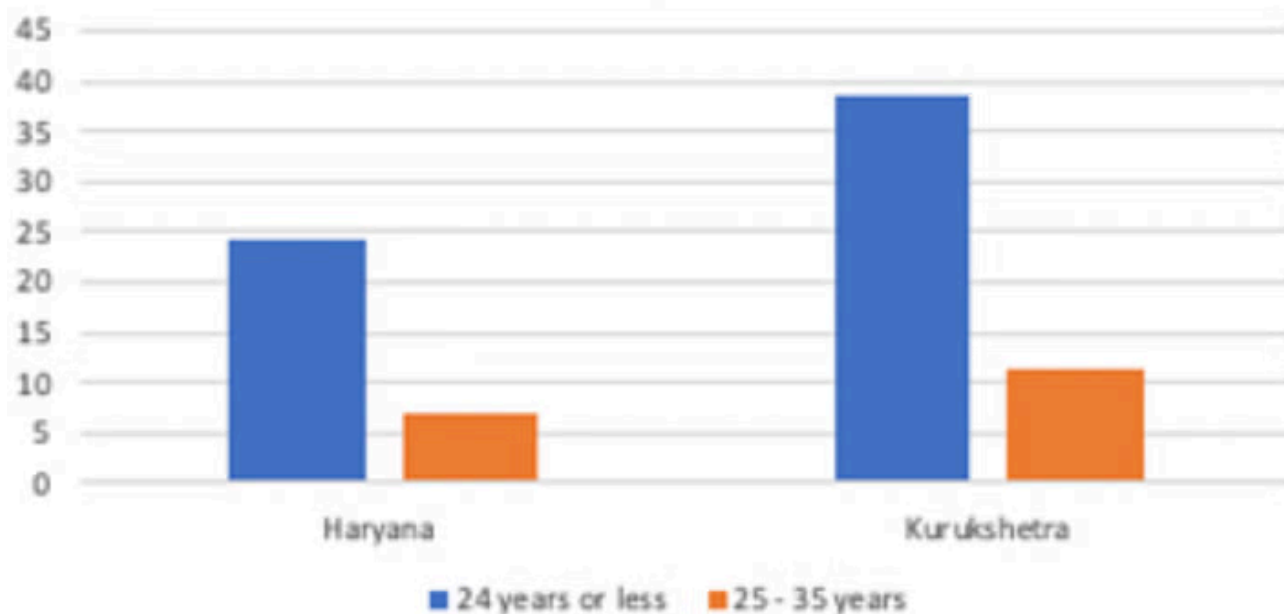


Unemployment rate by gender in Kurukshetra compared to Haryana.

(Source: human development agenda report for Kurukshetra district)

Young people, especially those under 24, face the brunt of this problem. With a staggering unemployment rate of 39 percent compared to the state average of 24 percent. This lack of opportunity often forces them to seek work abroad, sometimes even resorting to illegal means.

## Youth Unemployment in Kurukshetra Compared to Haryana



Youth unemployment in Kurukshetra compared to Haryana

(Source: human development agenda report for Kurukshetra district)

Adding to these woes, the healthcare infrastructure in Kurukshetra lags behind. Between 2016 and 2019, the district saw a meagre addition of only 15 hospital beds. This is significantly lower than the state's overall growth in healthcare facilities. Additionally, between 2015-16 and 2019-21, although there is some reduction in the proportion of underweight children in both Haryana and Kurukshetra, the improvement is less significant for Kurukshetra when compared to Haryana, Kurukshetra continues to have more than one-fifth of its children under five years who are underweight.

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## A Wider Lens: Regional Disparity Within States

Kurukshetra's case exemplifies a critical point that is often missed in discussions of regional disparity. Even within states boasting impressive overall rankings, significant internal divides can persist.

This is evident in several districts of Haryana beyond Kurukshetra. Jind, for instance, grapples with a similarly concerning youth unemployment rate in rural areas, reaching a staggering 52,089.

This worrying trend extends to Kaithal (47,593), Hisar (46,453), Karnal (42,446), Rohtak (39,786), and Yamunanagar (34,642), highlighting the urgent need for targeted interventions within Haryana itself.

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## Contrasting Performance Within the Region

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Furthermore, comparing Haryana's ranking (7th) with its neighbour, Uttar Pradesh (ranked 18th), underscores the importance of looking beyond state-level averages. While Haryana boasts an impressive overall ranking, a closer look reveals internal disparities. On the other hand, Uttar Pradesh, with a lower ranking, presents a mixed picture with pockets of progress amidst broader challenges.

For instance, Uttar Pradesh ranks 25th in terms of access to health with 42.4 percent of mothers having received at least 4 antenatal care visits.

However, in its capital city, Lucknow, the performance on the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) paints a multifaceted picture. Here 53.1 percent of mothers have received at least four antenatal care visits, significantly exceeding the state average.

Additionally, institutional births have also seen a noteworthy increase, rising from 1752 in NFHS-4 to 3489 in NFHS-5, suggesting progress in access to quality healthcare facilities for childbirth. In essence, Lucknow's performance on various indicators surpasses the state average for Uttar Pradesh. This exemplifies the potential for improvement within the state through targeted interventions and resource allocation strategies.

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## A Call for Action

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The stories of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh illustrate a crucial point: significant internal disparities can exist even within states with seemingly impressive overall rankings. While some districts flourish, others face significant challenges. Moving forward, a multifaceted approach is essential for ensuring inclusive and sustainable growth across states.

This requires targeted interventions that address the specific needs of struggling districts. For instance, in Kurukshetra, expanding food processing industries can leverage local agriculture, creating jobs and thereby a demand for skilled labour in processing and logistics.

However, a skilled workforce is crucial. Investing in secondary and higher secondary education ensures that the youth is equipped with the necessary qualifications, while skill-based training programs bridge the gap between theory and practical work requirements. Furthermore, specialised ITIs can equip women with industry-ready skills, empowering them economically and allowing them to participate in these new opportunities. Finally, bolstering healthcare infrastructure with new hospitals, beds, and medical professionals improves access to quality care for all residents.

This interconnected approach forms the cornerstone of revitalising districts like Kurukshetra. Through the action of creating jobs that leverage local resources, fostering skill development to equip the workforce for those jobs, and investing in education and healthcare to build a healthy and qualified population - a self-sustaining ecosystem is created. This allows struggling districts to thrive and contribute to the overall economic growth of the state.

The next part of this series will delve deeper into regional disparities across other states in India, exploring how these disparities play out and the unique challenges and opportunities each region presents.

*(The authors would like to also thank the fellow contributors on the AEI report: Dr Siddhartha Bhaskar, Aryan Govindakrishnan, Jheel Doshi for making this study possible.)*

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