

Geopolitical Challenges along India's Continental and Maritime Borders: A Political Geography Perspective

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article History: Received: 24th January 2026 Accepted: 01st February 2026 Published: 05th February 2026 Keywords: <i>Political Geography; Geopolitics; India; Borders; Territoriality; Maritime Security; South Asia</i>	India's geopolitical landscape is shaped by its extensive continental and maritime borders, which constitute critical spaces of territoriality, power, and strategic interaction. Despite India's growing regional and global stature, persistent border disputes, regional rivalries, and maritime security concerns continue to pose significant geopolitical challenges. Existing scholarship largely examines these challenges through strategic or diplomatic lenses, often overlooking their spatial and political-geographical dimensions. This paper adopts a political geography perspective to analyze India's geopolitical challenges along its land and sea borders. Grounded in theories of territoriality, border dynamics, and critical geopolitics, the study employs a qualitative and analytical methodology based on secondary data sources. By integrating continental and maritime borders within a unified framework, the paper highlights how borders function as dynamic geopolitical spaces shaped by historical legacies, regional power struggles, and global strategic shifts. The study contributes to political geography by offering a spatial interpretation of India's border challenges and emphasizing the need for border-sensitive geopolitical strategies.
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1. Review of Literature

The study of geopolitics and political geography has long emphasized the significance of borders as expressions of state power, sovereignty, and territorial control. Classical geopolitical thinkers such as Mackinder, Mahan, and Spykman highlighted the strategic importance of land and sea spaces in shaping global power hierarchies. In the Indian context, early geopolitical analyses focused primarily on India's strategic location in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region.

Scholarly work on India's continental borders has largely concentrated on specific bilateral issues, particularly India-Pakistan and India-China relations. Studies on the Line of Control (LoC) and the Line of Actual Control (LAC) emphasize militarization, conflict management, and diplomatic negotiations. These works provide valuable insights into security dilemmas but often treat borders as static lines rather than dynamic political-geographical spaces. Border regions are frequently discussed in terms of security threats, insurgency, and cross-border tensions, with limited attention to their spatial and socio-political dimensions.

Literature on India's maritime geopolitics has expanded significantly in recent decades, particularly in relation to the Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific. Scholars highlight issues such as sea-lane security, naval modernization, and competition among regional and extra-regional powers. The growing strategic presence of external actors in the Indian Ocean is widely acknowledged as a major challenge for India's maritime security. However, much of this literature remains rooted in strategic studies, with limited engagement with political geography concepts such as maritime territoriality and spatial power.

Critical geopolitics has challenged traditional state-centric approaches by emphasizing discourse, representation, and the social construction of geopolitical spaces. While this perspective has been applied extensively in Western contexts, its application to India's border challenges remains relatively limited. The existing literature thus reveals a clear gap: a comprehensive political-geographical analysis that integrates both continental and maritime borders to understand India's geopolitical challenges in a holistic manner. This study is grounded in political geography and geopolitical theory, drawing upon three interrelated concepts: territoriality, border dynamics, and critical geopolitics.

Territoriality:

Territoriality refers to the strategies employed by states to control space, assert sovereignty, and regulate access to territory. In the Indian context, territoriality is evident in border management practices, military deployment, and infrastructure development along contested frontiers.

Border dynamics:

Border dynamics conceptualize borders as socially and politically constructed spaces rather than fixed lines. Borders function as zones of interaction, conflict, and negotiation, shaped by historical legacies and contemporary power relations.

Critical geopolitics:

Critical geopolitics emphasizes the role of narratives, representations, and discourse in shaping geopolitical realities. This perspective allows for an examination of how India's borders are framed within national security discourses and regional geopolitical imaginaries. Together, these theoretical approaches enable a nuanced understanding of India's geopolitical challenges as spatially embedded and politically constructed phenomena.

3. Methodology

The study adopts a **qualitative and analytical research methodology**, appropriate for political geography and geopolitical analysis.

a. Data Sources

1. Scholarly Articles and Books from Web of Science and Scopus-Indexed Journals

Peer-reviewed journal articles and academic books indexed in Web of Science and Scopus constituted the core scholarly foundation of this study. These sources were used to review existing debates on political geography, geopolitics, border theory, and maritime security. Key themes such as territoriality, border dynamics, continental and maritime geopolitics, and critical geopolitics were examined through established and contemporary academic literature to ensure theoretical rigor and analytical depth.

2. Government Reports and Policy Documents

Official reports and policy documents published by the Government of India and relevant ministries were used to understand state perspectives on border management and maritime security. These included documents related to national security, defence strategy, maritime policy, and regional cooperation. Such sources provided authoritative insights into India's strategic priorities, institutional frameworks, and policy responses to geopolitical challenges.

3. International Strategic Assessments

Strategic assessments and reports produced by international organizations, research institutes, and strategic think tanks were consulted to capture regional and global perspectives on geopolitical developments. These assessments offered comparative insights into power dynamics, regional rivalries, and maritime competition in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region, enabling the study to situate India's border challenges within a broader geopolitical context.

4. Maps and Secondary Spatial Data

Cartographic materials and secondary spatial data were used to analyze the geographical configuration of India's continental and maritime borders. Maps illustrating territorial boundaries, maritime zones, strategic locations, and regional connectivity were employed to support spatial interpretation. These sources facilitated a political-geographical understanding of border regions as dynamic spaces shaped by strategic, historical, and spatial factors.

b. Method of Analysis

- Thematic analysis of geopolitical challenges
- Spatial interpretation of continental and maritime borders
- Political-geographical synthesis linking theory and empirical realities

This approach allows for an in-depth examination of borders as dynamic geopolitical spaces rather than merely strategic or military frontiers.

4. Geopolitical Challenges along India's Continental Borders

India's continental borders extend across politically diverse and historically complex regions. The legacy of colonial boundary-making and post-independence territorial disputes has produced enduring geopolitical challenges. The India-Pakistan border remains one of the most militarized in the world. The Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir represents contested territoriality, where sovereignty is asserted through military presence and geopolitical narratives. Persistent tensions, ceasefire violations, and cross-border security concerns have transformed the border into a zone of prolonged instability. Along the northern frontier, the India-China border presents a distinct geopolitical challenge. The undefined nature of the Line of Actual Control has resulted in periodic standoffs and heightened militarization. Infrastructure development and strategic positioning along this border reflect competing territorial claims and broader regional power rivalries.

India's eastern borders with Nepal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar illustrate different geopolitical dynamics. While some borders are relatively stable, issues such as migration, border management, and internal security continue to shape geopolitical relations. These borderlands function as transitional spaces where internal and external geopolitics intersect.

5. Geopolitical Challenges along India's Maritime Borders

India's maritime location situates it at the heart of the Indian Ocean, an area that has gained considerable strategic importance in recent years. The significance of maritime boundaries has increased in the context of globalization, energy dependence, and intensifying geopolitical rivalry. While India's Exclusive Economic Zone and island possessions expand its strategic influence, they also expose the country to new security challenges. The growing involvement of extra-regional actors in the Indian Ocean has heightened competition over critical sea routes and maritime dominance. Additionally, threats such as piracy, maritime terrorism, and the protection of marine resources add further complexity to India's maritime geopolitical setting. Viewed through the lens of political geography, maritime borders represent active arenas of strategic engagement rather than simple legal lines. These maritime challenges mirror wider transformations in global geopolitics and highlight the necessity of adopting spatially grounded approaches to maritime strategy.

6. Discussion: A Political Geography Interpretation

When examined from a political geography perspective, India's geopolitical challenges across its land and maritime frontiers display shared structural characteristics. Borders function as evolving geopolitical spaces, continually shaped by processes of territorial control, strategic influence, and dominant geopolitical discourses. Considering continental and maritime borders together underscores the integrated nature of India's geopolitical landscape. Pressures arising along land borders inform maritime strategic planning, while changes in the maritime domain increasingly affect continental security dynamics. In this context, political geography offers a comprehensive analytical approach for interpreting India's geopolitical position that extends beyond traditional strategic or security-based explanations.

7. Conclusion

India's geopolitical challenges along its continental and maritime borders are deeply rooted in spatial, historical, and political processes. By adopting a political geography perspective, this study demonstrates that borders are not passive lines but active geopolitical spaces where power, sovereignty, and strategy intersect. The study contributes to political geography by offering an integrated analysis of India's land and sea borders and emphasizing the importance of spatial thinking in geopolitical studies.

Future research may build upon this framework by incorporating empirical field studies and comparative analyses to further enrich the political-geographical understanding of India's border challenges.

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