

ISSN:2583-004X
E-ISSN:2582-7154

INDIAN STUDIES REVIEW

(A UGC-Care Listed and Peer-Reviewed Journal)
Vol. 5, No. 2 (July–December 2024)



**A JOURNAL OF CENTRE FOR STUDY OF
POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE, DELHI**

RNI Reg. No: DELENG/2020/79638

ISSN: 2583-004X

E-ISSN: 2582-7154

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INDIAN STUDIES REVIEW

Journal of Centre for Study of Politics and Governance

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Indian Studies Review is a Multidisciplinary, UGC-Care listed, Peer-reviewed, academic journal published twice a year (January and July) both online and in print from Delhi. It welcomes original research articles from authors doing research in social sciences and its sub-disciplines. The objective of the journal is to provide platform to the researchers, academicians, policy makers and policy practitioners to engage with issues of contemporary relevance in polity, economy or society and initiate a scholarly intellectual debate through their research monographs. Articles must have a theoretical structure and methodological insight employed in the critical and objective enquiry. Review articles and book reviews are also welcome.

2024 Lok Sabha Election Verdict

Prof Sanjay Kumar¹

ABSTRACT

The paper analyses trend and patterns of the verdict of 2024 Lok Sabha election, which in many ways surprised analyst, political commentator and to some extent even the political stakeholders. The BJP led National Democratic Alliance performed worse than what was widely expected and Congress lead INDIA alliance performed much better compared to what some analysts may have believed, especially the Congress which fell just 1 short of the 100 mark. The Congress trailed behind the BJP which won 240 seats by a long margin but after the verdict somehow the narrative was such as if Congress has defeated the BJP. A careful analysis of state wise verdict suggests; the 2024 verdict was hardly a national verdict as parties performed very differently in state which may be similar. The BJP performed so well in Bihar but not in UP, it won all the seats in MP, but lost in Rajasthan, managed to rest power from Biju Janata Dal in Odisha but could not pose any challenge to the TMC in West Bengal. Using data from the Election commission of India and from the post poll survey conducted by the Lokniti research team of Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), this paper tried to analyse the factors which resulted in such a fractured verdict at the state level, resulting in BJP losing 63 Lok Sabha seats compared to 2019 election and Congress tally reaching a reasonable number. Using primary data collected through the survey conducted by Lokniti-CSDS (National Election Study 2024) this paper analyses the voting patterns, issues which were important for voter's in these elections, role of leadership and similar such issues in these elections.

Keywords: Lok Sabha Election, Verdict, NDA, INDIA, Voting Pattern

THE VERDICT

The 2024 Lok Sabha elections marked a significant shift in India's political landscape, returning the country to the era of coalition politics. The BJP emerged as the single largest party winning 240 seats with 36.6% vote share, but it failed to secure a clear majority on its own. Compared to its 2019 performance, the BJP lost 63 seats, and its vote share also declined by about one percent (**Table 1**). This dip in vote share indicates a weakening hold of the BJP in key states, like Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Haryana. However,

1. Sanjay Kumar, Professor and Former Director of Centre for the Study of Developing Societies.

the BJP allies managed to win 52 seats with 6.9% vote share, ensuring the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) retained power at the Centre.

On the other hand, the Congress witnessed a revival, improving its seat tally to 99 with 21.2% vote share. In comparison to the 2019 verdict, Congress secured a swing of almost two percent in its favour. Although this gain was insufficient to position the party as a dominant national player, its allies added considerable strength, winning 98 seats with 12.6% vote share. In fact, Congress allies emerged stronger than the BJP allies. This robust performance by the Congress-led INDIA alliance highlights a shift in the electorate's preference toward regional representation and coalition strategies, signalling the growing decentralization of India's political power.

Table 1: Final tally – Return to the coalition era

BJP	Change over from 2019	BJP allies	INC	Change over from 2019	Congress allies
240 (36.56%)	-63 (-0.8%)	52 (6.99%)	99 (21.19%)	+47 (+1.7%)	98 (12.56%)

Source: Election Commission of India, Lokniti-CSDS Data Unit

IS THIS A NATIONAL VERDICT?

The 2024 Lok Sabha election verdict is far from being a national one, as it reflects a significantly fragmented electorate. The BJP's status as the largest party, despite losing 63 seats, underscores its persistent nationwide appeal. However, the Congress and its allies have also made significant inroads, marking a pronounced return to coalition politics, with regional parties like the Samajwadi Party, Trinamool Congress, and DMK playing pivotal roles in shaping the outcome. This shift reaffirms the dynamic fabric of Indian democracy, where diverse voices and regional aspirations continue to shape the political landscape.

Table 2: States where BJP's performance dipped

State	Seats won in 2024	Seats won in 2019	Seat Change	Vote share in 2024 (%)	Vote share in 2019 (%)	Swing (%)
Uttar Pradesh	33	62	-29	41.36	49.56	-8.2
Maharashtra	9	23	-14	26.17	27.59	-1.42

West Bengal	12	18	-6	38.74	40.25	-1.51
Bihar	12	17	-5	20.52	23.58	-3.06
Karnataka	17	25	-8	46.09	51.38	-5.29
Rajasthan	14	24	-10	49.22	58.47	-9.25
Haryana	5	10	-5	46.10	58.02	-11.92
Jharkhand	8	13	-5	44.55	50.96	-6.41

Source: Election Commission of India, Lokniti-CSDS Data Unit

Table 3: States where BJP's performance improved

State	Seats won in 2024	Seats won in 2019	Seat Change	Vote share in 2024 (%)	Vote share in 2019 (%)	Swing (%)
Odisha	20	8	12	45.41	38.37	7.04
Telangana	7	4	3	35.19	19.45	15.74
Chhattisgarh	10	9	1	52.65	50.70	1.95
Kerala	1	0	1	16.67	12.93	3.74
Madhya Pradesh	29	28	1	59.28	58.00	1.28

Source: Election Commission of India, Lokniti-CSDS Data Unit

Table 4: Congress improved its overall performance as compared to 2019 but insufficiently

State	Seats won in 2024	Seats won in 2019	Seat change	Vote share in 2024 (%)	Vote share in 2019 (%)	Swing (%)
Uttar Pradesh	6	1	5	9.46	6.31	3.15
Telangana	8	3	5	40.10	29.48	10.62
Kerala	14	15	-1	35.05	37.27	-2.22
Bihar	3	1	2	20.52	7.7	12.82
Manipur	2	0	2	47.59	24.63	22.96
Karnataka	9	1	8	47.39	31.88	13.51
Rajasthan	8	0	8	37.93	34.24	3.69
Haryana	5	0	5	46.10	28.42	0.17

Source: Election Commission of India, Lokniti-CSDS Data Unit

THE DISAGGREGATED VERDICT

The 2024 Lok Sabha elections showcased stark variations in the BJP's performance across states. The saffron party suffered significant losses in key battlegrounds this time as compared to 2019. In Haryana where BJP had won all the 10 seats in 2019, it lost half of them in 2024 with about 12 percent dip in its vote share. In Rajasthan, a similar discontent with the party's governance led to a reduction of 10 seats for the BJP, with a 9.2% drop in its vote share. In Uttar Pradesh, the BJP's seat tally fell from 62 in 2019 to 33 in 2024, a loss of 8.2% vote share, driven by anti-incumbency and strategic opposition alliances (**Table 2**).

On the flip side, the BJP gained ground in states like Telangana where the party increased its vote share by 15.7% even if it translated into a gain of only 3 seats, which reflects BJP's rising appeal in this southern state. In Odisha, BJP won 20 seats out of the total 21, garnering a 7 percent swing in its favour, signalling an expanding foothold in the traditionally BJD-dominated state. BJP was also able to carve out some base for itself in Kerala by winning one seat in 2024 as opposed to its complete absence in the state in 2019 (**Table 3**).

For the Congress, the 2024 elections marked modest gains across several states. In Manipur, from no seat in 2019, the grand old party won both the seats this time, also increasing its vote share by almost 23 percent. This largely owes to the massive dissatisfaction in the electorate as a result of the ensuing ethnic unrest in Manipur. In Karnataka, the party achieved a remarkable swing of 13.5%, contributing to its gain of 8 seats. Similarly, as compared to its 2019 performance, Congress improved its vote share by almost 13 percent in Bihar and 10.6% in Telangana. Congress leveraged its alliances effectively, underscoring its capacity for regional adaptation. However, the party's loss of one seat with 2.2% dip in vote share in Kerala limited its resurgence, contributing to leaving it short of reclaiming national dominance (**Table 4**).

NATIONAL VERSUS REGIONAL PARTIES

The 2024 verdict reinforces the pivotal role of regional parties in shaping India's electoral dynamics. States like Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal exemplify the growing clout of regional players. For instance, the Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh achieved a remarkable swing of 15.6%, increasing its seat tally from 5 in 2019 to 37 in 2024. Similarly, the Trinamool Congress consolidated its position in West Bengal, gaining 7 additional seats with a 2.5% swing in its favour (**Table 5**). In Tamil Nadu, the DMK retained its dominance

despite losing 2 seats. Meanwhile, Andhra Pradesh witnessed a resurgence of the Telugu Desam Party, which gained 13 seats despite losing 1.7% of its vote share, which reflects a localized discontent with the ruling YSR Congress. These outcomes highlight a federalist turn in Indian politics, where regional priorities increasingly shape the broader national narrative.

Table 5: Performance of regional parties in their respective regions

State	Party	Seats won in 2024	Seats won in 2019	Seat Change	Vote share in 2024 (%)	Vote share in 2019 (%)	Swing (%)
Uttar Pradesh	Samajwadi Party	37	5	32	33.60	17.96	15.64
West Bengal	Trinamool Congress	29	22	7	45.75	43.28	2.47
Tamil Nadu	Dravida Munnetra Kazagham	22	24	-2	26.91	32.76	-5.85
Andhra Pradesh	Telegu Desam	16	3	13	37.88	39.59	-1.71
Bihar	Janata Dal (United)	12	16	-4	18.50	21.81	-3.31
Maharashtra	Shiv Sena (UBT)	9	-	-	16.73	-	-

Source: Election Commission of India, Lokniti-CSDS Data Unit

HOW DIFFERENT SECTIONS OF VOTERS VOTED?

Looking across the social groups, it emerges that BJP secured higher proportion of votes from most of the groups. The BJP retained strong support among Hindu Upper Castes, winning 53 percent of their votes, reflecting its longstanding appeal among this demographic (**Table 6**). Similarly, close to half of the Lower OBCs (49%) and Adivasis (48%) as well as two in five Upper OBCs (39%) voted for the BJP, marking the party's success in consolidating its influence among backward and tribal communities. Close to a third of Dalits (31%) also supported the BJP. However, the support of these communities also showed a slight lean towards the Congress, as nearly a quarter of Adivasis (23%), and about one in five Upper OBCs (20%), Lower OBCs (18%) and Dalits (19%) voted for the Congress. In addition to this, Congress party

received significant support from religious minority groups: more than one-third of Muslims (38%), one-fourth of Christians (25%), and 30 percent of Sikhs voted for the Congress. This stark polarization underscores the BJP's dominance among Hindu groups while minorities leaned heavily towards the Congress and its allies, possibly driven by concerns over religious inclusivity under BJP rule.

Table 6: Social Groups - Who voted how?

Social Groups	Congress	Congress Allies	BJP	BJP Allies
Hindu Upper Caste	14	7	53	7
Hindu Upper OBCs	20	15	39	9
Hindu Lower OBC	18	7	49	9
Hindu Dalits	19	13	31	5
Hindu Adivasis	23	8	48	3
Muslims	38	27	8	2
Christians	25	7	14	14
Sikhs	30	2	10	1

Source: National Election Study 2024 conducted by Lokniti-CSDS, all figures are in percent

Furthermore, the voters across the economic spectrum leaned more towards the BJP than the Congress. The saffron party resonated the most with the affluent, 41 percent of those who belong to the upper economic class, voted for the BJP, likely owing to its economic policies, such as tax reforms and business-friendly regulations (Table 7). However, despite dissatisfaction with inflation and unemployment, BJP's pro-rich skew became moderate in these elections, as more than a third of voters from poor (37%), lower (35%) and middle (35%) economic classes also voted for the BJP. On the other hand, economic stratification did not play any defining role for the Congress despite its promises of welfare and job creation, signalling that perhaps, religious and community identities are the more pertinent factors in consolidating its voter base. However, it emerges that Congress allies are more popular than the BJP ones across various classes.

Table 7: Classes - Who voted how?

Classes	Congress	Congress Allies	BJP	BJP Allies
Poor	21	14	37	6
Lower	22	14	35	6
Middle	21	13	35	8
Upper	22	10	41	7

Source: Source: National Election Study 2024 conducted by Lokniti-CSDS, all figures are in percent

HOW SUPPORT BASE OF PARTIES HAVE CHANGED OVER THE YEARS?

The BJP's consolidation of OBC votes since 2014 remains evident, with 43 percent of OBCs voting for the party in 2024 (**Table 8**). However, this marks a slight decline from the 44 percent of the OBC vote it secured in 2019. The marginal dip in the BJP's share could indicate growing disenchantment within sections of the OBC electorate, likely due to unmet expectations. On the contrary, the support for Congress among the OBC community has plummeted since the BJP gained power at the Centre in 2014, but the grand old party, though lagging behind, improved its share among OBCs to 19% in 2024, up from 15% in 2019. This trend suggests that while the BJP continues to benefit from its pro-OBC stance, including caste-based welfare schemes, Congress's strategy of forming regional alliances and emphasizing caste inclusion is beginning to pay dividends.

Table 8: Support of OBCs

Year	Congress	BJP
2014	15	34
2019	15	44
2024	19	43

Source: Source: National Election Studies 2014-2024 conducted by Lokniti-CSDS, all figures are in percent

Long-term trends indicate a steady rise in the BJP's support amongst the Dalit since 2014. Dalit support for the BJP increased from one-fourth in 2014 to one-third in 2019. During the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the support of this critical voter group for the BJP stands at 31 percent. This marks the second

consecutive general election where the BJP has maintained over 30 percent support among Dalits (**Table 9**). However, the slight decline in 2024 (31%) compared to 2019 (33%) suggests that the party's ability to further expand its Dalit vote base may be plateauing. The Congress's share, on the other hand, has stagnated at 19 percent indicating its limited traction within this demographic. This continues a long-term trend of diminished Dalit backing for the party since its peak in the 1990s when it commanded over 30% of Dalit votes.

Table 9: Support of Dalits

Year	Congress	BJP
2014	19	24
2019	20	33
2024	19	31

Source: Source: National Election Studies 2014-2024 conducted by Lokniti-CSDS, all figures are in percent

The BJP has increasingly garnered the support of tribal communities since its coming to power in 2014. Tribal support for the BJP surged to 48 percent in 2024, continuing an upward trend from 44 percent in 2019 and 38 percent in 2014 (**Table 10**). This represents a remarkable gain of 10 percentage points over the past decade. The Congress, on the contrary, witnessed its tribal vote share decline to 23% in 2024, down from 31% in 2019 and 38% in 2014. The Congress's declining tribal support reflects its inability to counter the BJP's inroads, resulting in a 15-point drop since 2014. This shift in tribal loyalty marks a significant realignment in favour of the BJP, while the Congress struggles to retain its historical base in this demographic.

Table 10: Support of Tribals

Year	Congress	BJP
2014	28	38
2019	31	44
2024	23	48

Source: National Election Studies 2014-2024 conducted by Lokniti-CSDS, all figures are in percent

Upper Caste Hindus have remained a steadfast support base for the BJP, with its vote share rising slightly from 52% in 2019 to 53% in 2024 (**Table**

11). The Congress, while improving marginally from 12% in 2019 to 14% in 2024, continues to trail significantly. This reflects a consistent trend over decades, as the BJP has maintained dominance among Upper Caste Hindus since 1996, peaking at 53% in the current election. This enduring support for the BJP among Upper Caste Hindus aligns with the party's emphasis on Hindu nationalism and its rhetoric to appeal to this group's cultural and economic interests. The Congress's modest gains could reflect a slight backlash against the BJP in certain regions, though its outreach to this demographic remains limited.

Table 11: Support of Upper Caste Hindus

Year	Congress	BJP
2014	13	48
2019	12	52
2024	14	53

Source: Source: National Election Studies 2014-2024 conducted by Lokniti-CSDS, all figures are in percent

The Muslim vote remains heavily polarized, with the BJP stagnating at 8 percent in 2024 among this demographic, mirroring its 2019 performance (**Table 12**). The Congress, meanwhile, has seen its share stabilize at 38 percent in 2024, recovering from a dip to 33 percent in 2019. This indicates that the Congress successfully consolidated the Muslim vote, leveraging regional alliances and narratives of inclusivity. This consistent polarization also reflects enduring concerns among Muslims about the BJP's policies and rhetoric. However, despite its inability to expand its appeal among Muslims, the BJP's consistent 8 percent share reflects pockets of minority support, particularly in regions where economic factors or welfare measures may outweigh communal considerations.

Table 12: Support of Muslims

Year	Congress	BJP
2014	38	9
2019	33	8
2024	38	8

Source: Source: National Election Studies 2014-2024 conducted by Lokniti-CSDS, all figures are in percent

The BJP maintained a strong base among upper middle-class voters, getting 41 percent of their votes, though this marked a slight decline from 44 percent in 2019 (**Table 13**). Among the middle class, support for the BJP also fell from 38 percent in 2019 to 35 percent in 2024. These trends suggest that while the BJP remains dominant among affluent voters, concerns over inflation and unemployment have led to a slight erosion in its support among the middle class. However, the party retained its strength among poorer voters, increasing its share marginally from 36 percent in 2019 to 37 percent in 2024.

Table 13: Support for the BJP among different classes of voters

Classes	2014	2019	2024
Poor	24	36	37
Lower	31	36	35
Middle	32	38	35
Upper Middle	38	44	41

Source: Source: National Election Studies 2014-2024 conducted by Lokniti-CSDS, all figures are in percent

When one looks across the matrix of urbanity, it emerges that BJP is consistently more popular than the Congress across villages, towns and cities. In villages, the BJP retained 36 percent of the vote in 2024, a marginal decline by one percent from 2019 (**Table 14**). Meanwhile, the Congress improved marginally by one percent from 2019 (19%) to 2024 (20%). In towns, the BJP saw a sharper drop from 41 percent in 2019 to 37 percent in 2024, while the Congress made significant gains, rising from close to one-fifth (17%) in 2019 to one-fourth (25%) in 2024. In cities, the BJP maintained its urban vote share at 38 percent, while the Congress saw a slight decline of three percentage points from 2019 to 2024. These figures indicate towards the Congress's improved performance in semi-urban areas, while the BJP continues to enjoy the unwavering support of its urban voter base.

Table 14: Support for Congress and BJP in Cities, Towns and Villages

Area	Congress			BJP		
	2014	2019	2024	2014	2019	2024
Village	19	19	20	30	37	36
Town	20	17	25	34	41	37
City	18	26	23	32	38	38

Source: Source: National Election Studies 2014-2024 conducted by Lokniti-CSDS, all figures are in percent

VARIATION IN VERDICT IN DIFFERENT STATES

Why BJP did well in Odisha, but not in West Bengal?

Table 15: The Verdict in Odisha

Odisha			
	Congress	BJP	BJD
<i>Overall</i>	13.14	45.41	37.46
Upper Caste	5	49	42
OBC	8	50	40
Dalits	(16)	(46)	(38)
Adivasis	(23)	(42)	(27)
Muslims	(30)	(15)	(55)

Source: National Election Study 2024 conducted by Lokniti-CSDS, all figures are in percent

Table 16: The verdict in West Bengal

West Bengal			
	Congress	BJP	TMC
<i>Overall</i>	15.54	38.74	45.75
Upper Caste	4	42	43
OBC	5	58	29
Dalits	(2)	(48)	(39)
Adivasis	(1)	(66)	(27)
Muslims	(8)	(7)	(73)

Source: National Election Study 2024 conducted by Lokniti-CSDS, all figures are in percent

Odisha proved to be a significant success for the BJP in the 2024 elections, where it secured 45.4% of the overall vote share and won 20 out of 21 seats. However, the saffron party could not perform so well in the state of West Bengal where TMC maintained its dominance and secured the highest proportion of the vote share. How can this contrast be understood? In Odisha, the BJP maintained a clear edge over Congress and BJD in mobilising the support of upper castes (49%), OBCs (50%), Dalits (46%) and Adivasis (42%) in its favour (**Table 15**). However, the Muslim support in Odisha was split between BJD (55%) and Congress (30%), leaving the BJP (15%) to trail far behind.

West Bengal, on the other hand, presented a contrasting picture, with the BJP winning 12 seats and 38.7% of the overall vote share, trailing behind the Trinamool Congress (TMC), which secured 45.8% of the vote share and 29 seats. Among OBC and Adivasi communities, the BJP substantially dominated over TMC with 58 and 66 percent of the votes, respectively, but it struggled significantly among the Muslims, where the TMC maintained a clear edge. More than seven in ten Muslims (73%) voted for the TMC, as compared to only seven percent who voted for the BJP (**Table 16**). TMC's stronghold among Muslim voters kept BJP at bay in West Bengal, which has 27 percent of the Muslim populace in India, as opposed to a mere 2.2 percent in Odisha.

Why INDIA alliance did better in UP but not in Bihar?

Table 17: The Verdict in Uttar Pradesh

Uttar Pradesh		
	SP+	BJP
<i>Overall</i>	43.53	43.69
Brahmin	19	72
Yadav	82	14
Kurmi-Koeri	34	51
Other OBC	34	54
Jatav	(26)	(24)
Other SC	(55)	(28)
Muslims	(92)	(2)

Source: National Election Study 2024 conducted by Lokniti-CSDS, all figures are in percent

Table 18: The verdict in Bihar

Bihar		
	RJD-INC	BJP+
<i>Overall</i>	31.35	47.21
Brahmin	7	36
Yadav	73	27
Kurmi-Koeri	19	67
Other OBC	14	54
Chamar	(44)	(57)
Other SC	(42)	(59)
Muslims	(87)	(12)

Source: National Election Study 2024 conducted by Lokniti-CSDS, all figures are in percent

The INDIA alliance outperformed expectations in Uttar Pradesh, securing a nearly equal vote share to the BJP (43.5% INDIA vs. 43.7% BJP); whereas in Bihar, it fell significantly short, with 31.4 percent compared to the BJP-led alliance's 47.2%. The key difference lies in the alliance's ability to consolidate caste and community-specific votes in each state. In Uttar Pradesh, the Samajwadi Party (SP) successfully mobilized Yadavs (82%), other SCs (55%) and Muslims (92%) in its favour (**Table 17**). This consolidation of scheduled castes and Muslims allowed the INDIA alliance to narrow the gap with the BJP, which retained its dominance among Brahmins (72%), Kurmis-Koeris (51%) and other OBCs (54%).

Conversely, in Bihar, while the RJD retained its dominance among Yadavs (73%) and Muslims (87%), the alliance struggled to extend its appeal to other OBCs and Dalits. The BJP capitalized on this fragmentation, securing 67 percent of Kurmi-Koeri votes and 54 percent of other OBC votes (**Table 18**). This stark contrast in performance highlights the INDIA alliance's inability in Bihar to replicate the broad coalition-building strategy it achieved in Uttar Pradesh.

Why Congress did well in Rajasthan, but not in Madhya Pradesh?

Table 19: The verdict in Rajasthan

Rajasthan			
	Congress	BJP	Others
<i>Overall</i>	41.07	49.22	11.1
Upper Caste	23	65	9
OBC	38	59	3
Dalits	(46)	(37)	(17)
Adivasis	(35)	(46)	(14)
Muslims	(68)	(14)	(19)

Source: National Election Study 2024 conducted by Lokniti-CSDS, all figures are in percent

Table 20: The verdict Madhya Pradesh

Madhya Pradesh			
	Congress	BJP	Others
<i>Overall</i>	32.5	59.2	8.3
Upper Caste	33	62	6
OBC	35	57	8
Dalits	(36)	(53)	(11)
Adivasis	(24)	(71)	(5)
Muslims	(86)	(6)	(6)

Source: National Election Study 2024 conducted by Lokniti-CSDS, all figures are in percent

Congress's resurgence in Rajasthan, where it secured 41 percent of the vote share, contrasts sharply with its underperformance in Madhya Pradesh, where it garnered only 32.5 percent compared to the BJP's dominant 59.2 percent. The primary distinction lies in voter sentiment and demographic shifts. In Rajasthan, Congress performed strongly among Dalits (46%) and Muslims (68%), consolidating these vote banks effectively (**Table 19**), whereas the BJP retained dominance among Upper Castes (65%) and OBCs (59%).

In Madhya Pradesh, however, the BJP's dominance among key demographics was overwhelming. The party secured 71 percent of the tribal votes in Madhya Pradesh, in comparison to the 46 percent in Rajasthan. This polarisation of tribal vote in the favour of BJP significantly contributed to Congress's underperformance in Madhya Pradesh as it houses 21 percent of the Adivasi population of the country as compared to 13.5 percent that resides in Rajasthan. Furthermore, while Congress performed well among Muslims (86%), this group was insufficient to counterbalance the BJP's widespread support across other demographics (**Table 20**).

WHY INDIANS VOTED THE WAY THEY DID?

Economy takes centre-stage

Table 21: Reasons for not wanting incumbent government to secure another term

Reasons for not wanting incumbent government to secure another term	Percentage (%)
Price Rise/Inflation	30
Increasing Unemployment	27
Falling/Decreasing Income	8

Source: National Election Study 2024 conducted by Lokniti-CSDS, all figures are in percent

Table 22: Party preference according to perception regarding household financial conditions

Those who said their household financial conditions...	Party Voted for in Lok Sabha 2024			
	Congress	Congress Allies	BJP	BJP Allies
<i>Overall</i>	21	13	37	7
Improved	15	9	48	9
Remained Same	26	12	33	4
Worsened	29	24	17	4

Source: National Election Study 2024 conducted by Lokniti-CSDS, all figures are in percent

Even as the BJP retains power at the Centre for a third consecutive term, its failure to secure a clear majority on its own points to some pertinent reasons of discontent among the Indian electorate. The data highlights economic discontent as a key factor influencing voter dissatisfaction. Thirty percent of the respondents cited price rise/inflation as the top reason for not wanting the incumbent government to secure another term (**Table 21**). A similar proportion (27%) pointed towards the increasing unemployment as the primary reason of disenchantment with the BJP, while eight percent reported falling incomes as their primary grievance. These numbers underscore that economic challenges remained central to voter discontent, even as the BJP sought to emphasize other narratives such as national security, development or Hindu nationalism.

The prominence of these issues reflects growing frustration among middle and lower-income groups, potentially contributing to slight erosions in BJP's voter base in the economically strained classes.

Furthermore, voters' electoral choice shifted based on their financial circumstances. Among those who felt that their household financial conditions had improved, nearly half of them (48%) voted for the BJP, while only 15 percent chose Congress (**Table 22**). Among this group, the support for the allies of both BJP and Congress was equal (9% each). On the contrary, voters who perceived their financial conditions to have worsened showed stronger support for the Congress (29%) and its allies (24%), with only 17 percent voting for the BJP and just 4 percent backing its allies. However, among those who reported that their financial status had more or less remained unchanged, a third (33%) supported the BJP, while a fourth (26%) supported the Congress. This trend reveals that the BJP's economic messaging resonated with wealthier and economically stable voters, while Congress capitalized on dissatisfaction among those facing financial hardships. The stark contrast between the BJP's 48 percent support among those with improved financial conditions and merely a 17 percent base among those with worsened conditions underscores the centrality of economic performance in shaping voter behavior.

THE LEADERSHIP IN QUESTION

Table 23: Perception of corruption as a factor in BJP's decline in North India

What People think...	(%)
BJP is more corrupt today...	22
BJP was more corrupt before...	12

Source: National Election Study 2024 conducted by Lokniti-CSDS, all figures are in percent

Table 24: Perception of ED raids by the BJP government on opposition leaders

ED raids by incumbent government on Opposition	(%)
For political vendetta	35
Working as per law	31

Source: National Election Study 2024 conducted by Lokniti-CSDS, all figures are in percent

Corruption emerged as a significant factor influencing voter perception in North India, where the BJP faced notable setbacks. According to the data, more than two in ten respondents (22%) believed the BJP to be more corrupt today than it was in the past, as opposed to the 12 percent who thought the party was more corrupt before (**Table 23**). These numbers point towards the growing concerns about the BJP's integrity and governance under its current tenure, which may have contributed to anti-incumbency sentiments in key states such as Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Haryana. While these numbers may not reflect an overwhelming majority, they underscore an increasing discontent that the opposition also tried to leverage to challenge BJP's claims of clean governance.

The role of investigative agencies in Indian politics has become a contentious issue, particularly during the BJP's tenure. When asked about the Enforcement Directorate (ED) raids targeting opposition leaders, more than a third of the respondents (35%) felt these were conducted for political vendetta, while a slightly lesser proportion (31%) viewed them as lawful actions (**Table 24**). These figures highlight a notable level of skepticism among the electorate regarding the government's use of investigative agencies and other state institutions.

Table 25: Modi continues to hold sway among voters, though noticeable dip in popularity

Post-Poll	Modi's popularity among voters (%)
2014	36
2019	47
2024	41

Source: Source: National Election Studies 2014-2024 conducted by Lokniti-CSDS, all figures are in percent

Table 26: Voter loyalty among BJP supporters

	Would have voted for the same party	Would have voted for a different party
<i>Overall</i>	50	24
Among BJP voters	56	25
Among voters of BJP allies	58	27

Source: National Election Study 2024 conducted by Lokniti-CSDS, all figures are in percent

Table 27: Voter perception of Modi's image due to BJP recruiting corrupt defectors

Recruiting corrupt defectors	(%)
Has dented Modi's image	61
Has not dented Modi's image	19

Source: National Election Study 2024 conducted by Lokniti-CSDS, all figures are in percent

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's standing among the electorate remains pivotal to the BJP's fortunes. In a decade of his tenure, Modi's popularity continues to be viewed favourably by more than two-fifth of the voters (41%), however, it has also witnessed a noticeable decline of 6 percentage points in comparison to the 2019 elections (47%) (**Table 25**). This drop reflects waning enthusiasm for Modi's leadership, potentially due to economic challenges like inflation and unemployment or regional discontent with governance. However, it is also important to note that Modi's current popularity remains higher than the level he registered in 2014 (36%), underscoring his continued influence in the Indian political stage, with substantial support across demographics.

Voter loyalty is often a barometer of a party's stability, and the BJP has retained a significant portion of its core support base. Among BJP voters, more than half (56%) expressed their intention to vote for the party again, while a fourth (25%) also indicated a willingness to switch allegiances (**Table 26**). A somewhat similar trend emerged for the BJP allies too. Nearly three in five voters (58%) supporting BJP allies expressed loyalty, with more than a quarter (27%) open to exploring alternatives. These figures reveal a strong but not impervious base for the BJP and its coalition partners. The quarter of voters open to change represents a crucial segment that opposition parties could leverage, especially pivotal in closely contested constituencies.

The BJP's strategy of recruiting defectors, some of whom face allegations of corruption, has sparked debate about its impact on Prime Minister Modi's image. According to the survey, three-fifths of the respondents (61%) felt that this move has dented Modi's reputation as a champion of clean governance, while one-fifths (19%) believed it had no impact (**Table 27**). This sentiment reflects a perception that Modi's anti-corruption stance, a key pillar of his appeal, may have been compromised by the party's electoral strategies, and contributed to disillusionment among BJP voters.

Electoral Outcome of Lok Sabha Elections in Madhya Pradesh 2024: Explanation of Continuous Ascendance of BJP

Prof. Yatindra Singh Sisodia¹

ABSTRACT

A well-known illustration of the premise of a stable two-party framework for government is Madhya Pradesh. The elections of the last three decades provide evidence of the existence of party political rivalry. The Indian National Congress (INC) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have proven to be the two winnable parties in the state. The INC had controlled Madhya Pradesh politics until the 1990s in Lok Sabha elections. The BJP has governed the state for the past 20 years. One after another, the election results have amply demonstrated this. To evaluate the nature of the competition and the variables influencing the results of the elections, this paper ventures to analyse state electoral politics with a particular emphasis on the Lok Sabha elections of 2024. The Madhya Pradesh Lok Sabha elections of 2024 took place against the backdrop of the 2023 Assembly election, in which the BJP received an extraordinary mandate. The primary factor behind this explosive success was Modi's magnetism, which the party's grassroots members helped to further solidify and bolster. The exodus of the leadership of Congress from the state to the district level immensely contributed to the weak performance of the party. This paper explains why the BJP performed so admirably in Madhya Pradesh's 2024 Lok Sabha elections. The paper analyses issues in the election campaign; the verdict; and responses to various socio-economic factors in the Lok Sabha election 2024.

Keywords: *Madhya Pradesh, BJP, Congress, BSP.*

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Madhya Pradesh¹ is a classic example of the thesis of a stable two-party political competition (Yadav & Palshikar, 2009). This fact of party-political struggle is demonstrated by the elections over the past thirty years. Madhya Pradesh is still one of the biggest states in India in terms of both territory and population, even after Chhattisgarh was created. The state elects 29 members to the Lower House (Lok Sabha) and 11 to the Upper House (Rajya Sabha) of the Indian Parliament. There are 230 seats in the State Legislative Assembly for Madhya Pradesh. The Indian National Congress (INC) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have been the two "winnable parties" in the state. The INC has controlled Madhya Pradesh politics up until the 1990s. Even though the state has a sizeable population of the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) and a sizeable presence of middle/intermediate castes, the lower castes' support-based parties have not succeeded in galvanising their votes. The BJP challenged the Congress's domination of politics in the state. With its sizable population of socially marginal communities, particularly the SCs and STs, successive state governments led either by Congress or the BJP have always focused on state-sponsored social reform measures and welfare schemes (Gupta, 2005). However, the state has been ruled by the BJP for the last 20 years. The election outcomes have clearly shown this, one after another.

In order to evaluate the nature of the competition and the variables influencing the election results, this paper analyses state electoral politics with a particular focus on the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

ISSUES IN ELECTION CAMPAIGN (2024)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's considerable popularity helped the BJP

1 The Madhya Pradesh as of today is territorially a conglomeration of Madhya Bharat (a union of states in the Malwa Plateau region), Vindhya Pradesh (a union of states in the Vindhya Mountain region) Bhopal (a centrally administered princely state) and Hindi-speaking portion of the Central Provinces. Malwa region occupies a plateau in western Madhya Pradesh. Over the centuries, the region has developed its own distinct culture, influenced by the Rajasthani, Marathi and Gujarati cultures. Agriculture is the main occupation of the people of Malwa. Malwa has been a traditional stronghold for the BJP since the time of Jansangh. Mahakoshal lies in the upper or eastern reaches of the Narmada River valley. It has Satpura and Maikal ranges of deep forests and also major rivers namely Narmada and Tapti. Vindhya Pradesh was created in 1948 from the territories of the princely states in the eastern portion of the former Central India. It was named for the Vindhya Range, which runs through the centre of the province. It lies between Uttar Pradesh to the north and Mahakoshal region to the south.

run a strong and well-organised campaign in Madhya Pradesh during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. The campaign was led by prominent figures who spoke at multiple public gatherings throughout the state, including Union Home Minister Amit Shah, BJP President JP Nadda, and Defense Minister Rajnath Singh. Both Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and state BJP Chief VD Sharma were actively involved; Yadav led 58 road shows and attended more than 180 public gatherings. The BJP's aim to weaken the Congress's hold on the area was demonstrated by their significant organisational efforts, which included micro-booth management and a target of enlisting one lakh Congress workers, especially 50,000 from Chhindwara. This aggressive approach, coupled with Modi's appeal, enabled the BJP to sweep the state and wrest Chhindwara from Congress (Deccan Herald, 2024).

The BJP's strategy for the election was to emphasise the achievements of the Narendra Modi-led national government. The consecration of Ram Mandir, the abrogation of Article 370 in J&K, and the introduction of new welfare programmes (such as Antyodaya Anna Yojana, Ujjawala, Jan-Dhan, Pradhan Mantri Aawas, MGNREGA, NRLM, etc.) were among the topics that dominated the BJP campaign. With cadres, the party leadership also raised concerns about cultural nationalism and majoritarianism. In Madhya Pradesh, the BJP's electoral apparatus skillfully persuaded voters that the Modi administration had improved India's international standing. The party's rank and file also raised concerns about the Citizenship Amendment Bill's implementation and the promise of a \$5 trillion economy. This election was fought against the backdrop of the 2023 Assembly elections, in which the BJP performed remarkably well. The leadership of the BJP purposefully decided, to centre their campaign around Modi's personality cult.

However, the Congress campaign lacked both plan and strength. Rahul Gandhi held five rallies, but Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra spoke at just one each. This was insufficient to offset the BJP's extensive reach. The ineffective state leadership of the Congress, particularly Kamal Nath, was criticised for concentrating too much on Chhindwara in an effort to ensure his son's victory. When Jitu Patwari, who lost the 2023 Assembly elections, was viewed as an inept leader and was not accepted by senior party members, more internal strife emerged. Internal strife and a lack of strategic direction allowed the BJP to dominate the state (Economic Times, 2024).

Using issues like youth unemployment, the caste system, inflation, economic woes, constitutional protection, the reservation system, etc.,

Congress led the campaign. Nyay Patra (manifesto), which promised an opulent doll-out package, did not reach or appeal to the potential voter base in an anticipated manner. Due to a weak organisational structure, the party's rank and file were unable to properly respond at the booth level to the several talking points that the BJP used to successfully block the Congress in Madhya Pradesh. Unfortunately, a substantial portion of Congress party officials at all levels—from the block to the district to the state to the national—left the party and joined the BJP. These leaders included senior party office bearers including three sitting MLAs, and multiple Congress candidates who fought in the 2023 Assembly elections. This departure shattered the morale of the party workers. Veteran leaders like Kamal Nath and Digvijay Singh were forced to remain in their parliamentary constituencies. The new state leadership was effectively established and tasked with leading the campaign after just a few months of exposure to the 2023 Assembly elections, but there was not enough time to allow the entire state to participate. A well-organised, cadre-based party that could ensure micromanagement at the booth level faced off against the Congress party, which lacked organisation and resources.

It was necessary to create a considerably more expansive, flexible utterance that would spread to party cadres and reach a wider audience, but the Congress campaign operated in a stereotypical fashion utilising the same political narrative and metaphors. The Samajwadi Party obtained a seat as the INDIA alliance partner in Khajuraho but had her nomination rejected, and the official Congress candidate from Indore withdrew his nomination, bringing the total number of seats up for election to 27. The strategic choice by the BJP leadership to focus the campaign around Modi was very advantageous to the party. The Madhya Pradesh Lok Sabha 2024 elections may have taken on a presidential structure with the slogan "*Modi ki Guarantee*".

The BJP's decision to replace 16 candidates and repeat 13 from the 2019 elections demonstrates a strategy that strikes a balance between change and stability. Retaining a sizeable percentage of incumbents indicates that the party was optimistic about these candidates' abilities, perhaps relying on their existing support base and local clout.

In contrast, Congress chose a more drastic revamp, changing a substantial 24 candidates and retaining only three of the 2019 candidates. This dramatic reorganisation demonstrated a determination to change the party's direction and an admission of its poor performance in the prior elections. The choice to change so many candidates was made in response to the pressing need for fresh leadership and revitalised tactics in the areas where the party has either

struggled or lost ground.

This extensive replacement suggested that the Congress reacted to Madhya Pradesh's changing political climate, perhaps as a result of internal evaluations of the party's prior shortcomings. However, there were hazards associated with such a big shift as well since fresh candidates found it difficult to establish the reputation, trust, and recognition that their predecessors had earned over time. The party's strong reliance on new members suggested a larger attempt to counter the BJP's hegemony, but it also highlighted the difficulties Congress had preserving organisational continuity and utilising established political connections.

THE VERDICT (2024)

The voting turnout stayed at 66.87%, a 4.29% decrease from 2019. In contrast, the Congress's (32.44%) and BJP's (59.27%) vote difference rose to 26.83% in the 2024 election. Despite Madhya Pradesh's reputation as a traditional BJP stronghold, the state's Congress party has never seen the same kind of destruction as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The triumph of one party nearly immediately impacts the other major adversary due to the state's bipolar political system (Sisodia, 2022). With the exception of 2009, when the Congress took 12 of the 29 seats, the BJP routinely secured a majority in Madhya Pradesh in eight of the nine Lok Sabha elections held between 1996 and 2024. But because it was held in the context of the 2023 Assembly election, where the BJP managed to retain political power now for 20 years, the 2024 Lok Sabha election was especially significant.

The BJP achieved its most victorious outcome in Madhya Pradesh since its founding in the 2024 Lok Sabha election, taking 29 of 29 seats (Table 1). Isolated BSP strongholds may be found all over the state, particularly in Vindhya Pradesh and Chambal, which are next to Uttar Pradesh. However, outside of these areas, the BSP's base has not grown sufficiently to make the party competitive (Pai, 2003). The BJP won by a relatively smaller margin in parliamentary constituencies where the BSP was well-represented. In the Morena and Satna seats, the BSP garnered a substantial share of the vote, far exceeding the margin of victory.

Table 1: Madhya Pradesh Lok Sabha Elections of 2024, 2019, 2014, 2009 and 2004: Comparison of Results

Party	2024		2019		2014		2009		2004	
	Seats Won	Vote (%)	Seats Won	Vote (%)	Seats Won	Vote (%)	Seats Won	Vote (%)	Seats Won	Vote (%)
BJP	29	59.27	28	58.00	27	54.03	16	43.45	25	48.13
INC	-	32.44	1	34.50	2	34.89	12	40.14	4	34.07
BSP	-	3.28	-	2.38	-	3.79	1	5.85	-	4.75
SP	-	-	-	0.22	-	0.75	-	2.83	-	3.20

Source: CSDS Data Unit

Table 2: Victory Margins of BJP and Congress in 2024, 2019 and 2014

Victory Margin (Votes)	2024		2019		2014	
	BJP	Congress	BJP	Congress	BJP	Congress
5 lakh and above	6	-	3	-	-	-
4 - 4.99 lakh	6	-	4	-	2	-
3 - 3.99 lakh	3	-	10	-	5	-
2 - 2.99 lakh	4	-	5	-	9	-
1 - 1.99 lakh	6	-	5	-	8	2
Below 99,000	4	-	1	1	3	-
Total	29	-	28	1	27	2

Source: CSDS Data Unit

According to the results of the 2024 election, the BJP's lead over the Congress in terms of vote share grew to 21.83%, setting a new record for the party in Madhya Pradesh's electoral history. This election's result was notable for the state in terms of win margin, ranging from over 4 lakhs on 12 seats, compared to only 2 seats in 2014 and 7 seats in 2019 (Table 2). Thus, in the Lok Sabha election, the BJP did exceptionally well throughout the state.

Table 3: Region-wise Lok Sabha Election 2024 Results

Regions	Total Seats	Voter Turn out (%)	BJP		Congress		BSP		Others	
			Seats Won	Vote (%)	Seats Won	Vote (%)	Seats Won	Vote (%)	Seats Won	Vote (%)
Chambal	4	62.29	4	53.45	0	38.74	0	5.33	0	2.48
Vindhya Pradesh	8	58.92	8	59.60	0	26.06	0	7.55	0	6.79
Mahakoshal	6	71.32	6	56.80	1	35.74	0	1.81	0	5.65
Malwa North	7	71.04	7	66.76	0	27.48	0	1.19	0	4.57
Malwa Tribal	4	73.47	4	54.29	0	40.50	0	0.90	0	4.31
Overall	29	67.04	29	58.00	1	34.50	0	3.28	0	5.00

Source: CSDS Data Unit

The BJP won a bigger share of the vote in each area. Nonetheless, Chambal and Malwa Tribal were the two areas where the major political parties had a somewhat narrow vote share. The BJP had a noticeable presence in Vindhya, Mahakoshal, and Malwa North. The BJP had further solidified its vote share in all three regions, which was remarkable (Table 3).

RESPONSES TO VARIOUS SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS

The two political parties focused their tactics on gaining support from important socio-economic segments. In the survey, electorates with different levels of educational access had shown different voting preferences. This is clearly shown in Table 4. Regardless of educational attainment, the BJP performed better than the Congress in terms of support. Unlike previous elections, the Congress has received support from the less educated and/or uneducated. Furthermore, it is important to remember that previous Madhya Pradesh election studies have also found a similar tendency (Ram Shankar & Sisodia, 2009; Sisodia, 2014a). The recent election has simply made the trend in favour of the BJP even more obvious.

Table 4: Support for Political Parties across Education Levels in 2024 Elections

Education	BJP	Congress	Others	n
Non-Literate	69	25	6	79
Up to Primary	64	32	4	199
Upto Matric	57	34	9	264
Up to Intermediate	57	33	10	104
College & above	55	35	10	99
Total	60	32	9	745

Note: Figures in per cent (except n).

Source: CSDS-Madhya Pradesh NES Post-Poll Survey 2024; Weighted Data Set (n=745).

Table 5: Support for Political Parties across Locality in 2024, 2019 and 2014 Elections

Locality	BJP			Congress			Others			n		
	2024	2019	2014	2024	2019	2014	2024	2019	2014	2024	2019	2014
Rural	62	57	55	29	33	35	9	10	14	527	690	777
Urban	53	60	52	41	39	35	6	1	16	238	251	296
Total	59	58	54	33	35	35	8	7	11	765	941	1073

Note: Figures in per cent (except n).

Source: CSDS-Madhya Pradesh NES Post-Poll Survey 2024; Weighted Data Set (n=765); CSDS-Madhya Pradesh NES Post-Poll Survey 2019; Weighted Data Set (n=941); and CSDS-Madhya Pradesh NES Post-Poll Survey 2014; Weighted Data Set (n=1069).

Madhya Pradesh is predominantly a rural state; less than 28% of the state's total population lived in urban areas as per the 2011 census. According to conventional wisdom, support for the Congress is centred in rural areas, whereas the BJP is predominantly an urban phenomenon. However, based on the outcomes of the most recent elections, this viewpoint has not received much support lately. The BJP has recently done exceptionally well in rural regions while simultaneously holding firmly to urban seats (Sisodia, 2019b). The BJP managed to take a 33% lead in rural areas in the 2024 elections (Table 5). The party not only performed extraordinarily well in rural regions but also kept complete control in urban areas.

Table 6: Support for Political Parties across Gender in 2024, 2019 and 2014 Elections

Gender	BJP			Congress			Others			n		
	2024	2019	2014	2024	2019	2014	2024	2019	2014	2024	2019	2014
Male	59	63	51	31	33	35	10	4	13	393	482	576
Female	60	53	57	34	36	34	6	11	9	372	459	496
Total	59	58	54	32	35	35	9	7	11	765	941	1069

Note: Figures in per cent (except n).

Source: CSDS-Madhya Pradesh NES Post-Poll Survey 2024; Weighted Data Set (n=765); CSDS-Madhya Pradesh NES Post-Poll Survey 2019; Weighted Data Set (n=941); and CSDS-Madhya Pradesh NES Post-Poll Survey 2014; Weighted Data Set (n=1069).

Support for the parties does not differ significantly by gender. In fact, in earlier elections, the BJP had almost equal support from men and women. In general, women seemed to favour the BJP a little more than men did, but men's affinity for the party was still evident. Additionally, the study revealed that both male and female support for the BJP was substantially higher than in any prior election (Table 6).

Table 7: Support for Political Parties among Different Age Groups in 2024, 2019 and 2014 Elections

Age	BJP			Congress			Others			n		
	2024	2019	2014	2024	2019	2014	2024	2019	2014	2024	2019	2014
Up to 25 years	68	62	61	23	30	24	9	8	15	99	164	225
26-35 years	54	62	53	36	35	35	10	3	12	249	274	334
36-45 years	59	57	53	33	32	37	8	11	10	171	254	250
46-55 years	61	54	50	32	40	39	7	6	9	137	112	150
56 years & above	61	50	54	36	40	44	3	9	6	94	139	110
Total	59	58	54	32	35	35	9	7	11	750	939	1069

Note: Figures in per cent (except n).

Source: CSDS-Madhya Pradesh NES Post-Poll Survey 2024; Weighted Data Set (n=750); CSDS-Madhya Pradesh NES Post-Poll Survey 2019; Weighted Data Set (n=939); and CSDS-Madhya Pradesh NES Post-Poll Survey 2014; Weighted Data Set (n=1069).

The survey data indicates that the BJP gained overwhelming support across all age categories, which helps to determine whether there is a generational divide in BJP support base (Table 7). Furthermore, among older age groups, the difference between the Congress and the BJP was comparatively smaller (Sisodia, 2014b). However, the BJP's popularity was more noticeable and far higher among those under 35 and first-time voters. It should be clear that the victor must have made a name for itself across the board. However, younger generational groupings were more eager to back the BJP.

Table 8: Support for Political Parties among Different Economic Classes in 2024, 2019 and 2014 Elections

Economic Class	BJP			Congress			Others			n		
	2024	2019	2014	2024	2019	2014	2024	2019	2014	2024	2019	2014
Upper	61	67	55	34	25	29	5	8	16	44	273	58
Middle	53	59	53	42	33	36	8	7	11	179	207	569
Lower	57	53	56	35	38	32	8	9	12	179	302	372
Poor	62	56	49	28	37	47	10	7	4	395	273	76
Total	59	58	54	33	35	35	8	7	11	763	942	1075

Note: Figures in per cent (except n).

Source: CSDS-Madhya Pradesh NES Post-Poll Survey 2024; Weighted Data Set (n=763); CSDS-Madhya Pradesh NES Post-Poll Survey 2019; Weighted Data Set (n=939); and CSDS-Madhya Pradesh NES Post-Poll Survey 2014; Weighted Data Set (n=1069).

There is a class component to the Congress's defeat as well. The BJP managed to regain the support of the weaker segments, which had drastically declined during the last Assembly election, while also retaining a considerable share of the votes among the economically affluent sectors. Similarly, Table 8 demonstrates that BJP support was fairly constant across all economic levels. The poor have historically supported the Congress (Manor, 2004; Sisodia, 2022; Sisodia & Jha, 2024). That has not happened this time, though, the BJP has maintained its base among the wealthy while garnering a significant amount of support among the impoverished.

SHIFTING THE BASIS OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

In elections, caste and community have different functions. The electorate is the second; the candidates and parties are the first. To gain favour, the former

portrays themselves as champions of social and economic causes. At the same time, the latter dimension symbolises the base of support for the parties (Sisodia, 2014a). A clear social coalition in favour of the two parties has been formed, as seen by the social composition of the state's constituencies for the two major candidates. It is essential to look at how castes and communities vote in elections. Table 9 depicts the social chemistry that led to the election result.

Table 9: Vote by Social Background in 2019, 2018 and 2014 Elections

Caste	BJP			Congress			Others			n		
	2024	2019	2014	2024	2019	2014	2024	2019	2014	2024	2019	2014
Brahmin	69	83	56	12	17	22	19	-	22	32	82	101
Rajput	73	72	69	25	28	27	2	-	4	51	105	121
Other Upper Caste	74	60	71	16	40	21	11	-	8	19	25	48
Yadav	65	50	70	27	24	16	8	26	14	49	46	43
Other OBC	67	69	66	25	27	20	8	4	14	235	286	260
SC	53	38	43	36	50	42	11	12	7	122	129	170
Bhil	68	50	59	31	50	39	1	-	2	72	48	44
Gond	75	41	54	25	39	43	-	20	3	8	49	87
Other STs	71	55	54	17	31	34	12	14	12	70	94	73
Muslims	6	33	8	86	67	92	8	-	-	71	55	92
Others	49	26	56	35	48	22	16	26	22	37	19	36
Total	59	58	54	32	35	35	9	2	24	766	938	1075

Note: Figures in per cent (except n).

Source: CSDS-Madhya Pradesh NES Post-Poll Survey 2024; Weighted Data Set (n=766); CSDS-Madhya Pradesh NES Post-Poll Survey 2019; Weighted Data Set (n=939); and CSDS-Madhya Pradesh NES Post-Poll Survey 2014; Weighted Data Set (n=1069).

There seems to be division within each caste group. OBCs are more likely to support the BJP (Table 9). SCs are also more in favour of the BJP than they were in previous elections. The tribal communities, like as the Gonds, Bhils, and other STs, also have a strong BJP inclination. The BJP now has a far larger

base of support among the higher castes. However, this election demonstrates that the BJP has effectively shifted support from the OBC and ST to the Upper Castes, which has been extremely advantageous to the party. Table 9 depicts the vote by social background for the preceding three elections, clearly indicating that the social churning and vote consolidation have occurred progressively.

Table 10: Support for Political Parties among Different Media Exposure Groups in Lok Sabha Election 2024

Media Exposure Groups	BJP	Congress	Others	N
High Media Exposure	71	26	3	61
Moderate Media Exposure	58	38	4	157
Low Media Exposure	56	38	6	312
No Media Exposure	61	23	16	236
Total	59	33	8	766

Note: Figures in per cent (except n).

Source: CSDS-Madhya Pradesh NES Post-Poll Survey 2024; Weighted Data Set (n=766).

Notably, 71 per cent of respondents with extensive media exposure expressed a strong preference for the BJP. Significant support for the BJP was seen even among respondents with limited (56%) and moderate (58%) media exposure (Table 10). The BJP was more popular, even among those who were not exposed to the media (61%). Therefore, when political parties develop storylines for the media, especially on social media, and presume that voters would comprehend them, it seems as though they are working for the BJP.

CONCLUSION

The outcome of the state election in Madhya Pradesh explains the Congress's resounding loss. The entire election was a presidential contest, and the Congress was too weak and scattered to challenge Modi's narrative, analogy, and language. It was not helped by the Congress's organisational shortcomings, which were exacerbated by the departure of important leaders. Indeed, the BJP has recently succeeded in raising a sizeable base of committed voters in Madhya Pradesh above the winnability threshold. The BJP's campaign strategy was unparalleled and completely different. Madhya Pradesh polls have consistently followed the national trend, and the 2024 Lok Sabha elections were no exception (Sisodia; 2014a, 2024). This election was undoubtedly held to reinforce the mandate of the central government. In reality, voters of all

genders, castes, classes, and regions backed the BJP because they were so captivated and won over by Modi's charisma. Even political heavyweights like Digvijay Singh and Kamal Nath, who had spent years cultivating and expanding the electorate, were swayed by this thunder in Madhya Pradesh. The party suffered greatly as a result of the departure of Congress leadership during the election. As a result, the BJP won every seat, with Madhya Pradesh recording the biggest victory margin.

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Elections in Chandigarh Union Territory: A Longer View with Focus on the 2024 Elections

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ABSTRACT

Election studies in India have focussed on the constituent states as the units of analysis for the discussion on electoral trends and outcomes. There has not been attempt to undertake constituency specific analysis. The Union Territory of Chandigarh, the capital of Punjab and Haryana, has been a Lok Sabha constituency since the reorganisation of Punjab in 1966. However, there has hardly been much focus on the study of the electoral politics of this small but significant constituency. The article presents a longer view of the parliamentary elections held in Chandigarh Union Territory since the first such election was held in 1967. After profiling the making of this “wholly new city” of post-colonial India, it mentions the significant trends, which have been visible in these elections, and finds continuity in the 2024 general elections. The discussion in the article suggests that Chandigarh has had its own specificity in electoral terms, be it the electoral issues or electoral choices, which makes it an outlier, when compared with the way electoral politics unfolds in Haryana and Punjab.

Key Words: *Chandigarh Union Territory, Parliamentary Elections, 2024 Election, Electoral Trends*

India, being a federal parliamentary democracy, consists of as many as twenty-eight constituent states and eight union territories. Large or small, they all have their own political specificities, which qualify them as autonomous electoral units. This has been especially so after the decline of the Congress party and the rise of the regional parties. The emergence of coalition governments both at the federal and at the state levels made the state “the relevant unit at which politics was conducted and was intelligible as well” (Yadav & Palshikar, 2006). Sifting through the election studies, one finds that the academic focus has been mostly on the constituent states even in an “all-India” analysis. Cross-state comparisons have also been attempted (Palshikar, 2013). Union territories except Delhi, however, have received scant attention

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in election studies.¹ Also, constituency level studies have been missing in the academic writings on elections. Chandigarh Union Territory (Chandigarh hereafter) is no exception to it. This article makes an attempt to fill in this gap by discussing the long-term electoral trends and outcomes in the elections held in the single parliamentary constituency of Chandigarh. It then moves to focus on the 2024 Lok Sabha election in Chandigarh to discuss whether this particular election showed the similar trends or not.

PROFILING THE PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY

The parliamentary constituency has a space of 114 square kilometres. It currently has 6.59 lakh registered voters. The union territory is divided into the city and the villages. The city of Chandigarh, inaugurated in 1953 by the then President of India, was designed by Le Corbusier, a French architect. The city has the distinction of being the first wholly planned city of an independent India.² It stands out for being among a “a very few towns constructed entirely as a unit on virgin soil.” As a result, it was thought “possible to construct the town with a minimum of attachment with the past.”³ This “totally new city”, created on “a clean slate”, was built to serve the purpose of rebuilding the “lost identity of Punjab which had lost its capital to Lahore, at the time of partition and (also) to resettle the refugees who were coming from across the border” (Kalia, 1987). The new capital city of post-colonial Punjab was to “display an Indian modernity distinct from and free of the colonial version” (Khilnani, 1999). The city as such was viewed as “an expression of the nation’s faith in the future.”⁴ The uniqueness of the city was also in the fact that it was not planned to act as a satellite to existing large cities (New Delhi) or to subserve the needs of a large industry (Bhilai, Durgapur) but as a fully autonomous city, complete in all respects to serve the needs of its residents (D’Souza, 1976).

However, the city was not visualized to be an industrial or commercial hub like nearby older cities like Ludhiana or Jalandhar in the state of Punjab. The

1 The two special issues of *Economic and Political Weekly* have essays on the 2024 general elections. They either focus on specific states (Vol LIX (38), September 21, 2024) as units of analysis or takes up all-India analysis (Vol LIX (48), November 30, 2024). <https://www.epw.in/journal/2024/38>; <https://www.epw.in/journal/2024/48> (both accessed on 10 December, 2024).

2 Bhuvneshwar and Gandhi Nagar, the capital cities of the states of Odisha and Gujarat followed.

3 Pierre D. Jenneret, another French architect associated with the making of the city, quoted in Chandigarh Architectural Museum.

4 Nehru quoted in Khilnani, p.131.

city planned by Corbusier for a half a million people was originally intended to be “solely a seat of government”, to be inhabited by serving and retired civil servants, professionals, and a large class of their service providers, also mostly from the government sector (Sharma et al, 1999). It was only in the subsequent years that industrial areas catering to the ancillaries were added in the then remote eastern periphery of the city adjoining the villages. Apart from the secluded capitol complex, arrayed around a central square, which was to have the secretariat, assembly, high court, and the governor house, the city was to have a residential area originally divided in to thirty sectors. The hierarchy that pervades seemingly homogenous middle class in India was starkly reflected in the way the sectors were situated and the plots were numbered in the planned city. The low numbered northern sectors had the larger plots, to be inhabited by high-ranking bureaucrats, politicians and top professionals (mostly lawyers), whereas the high numbered southern sectors were for the middle-middle and lower middle class. The same pattern was visible within each sector also, the lower the number, the larger the plot. The original master plan of the city while obliterating the possibility of aggregation of a particular caste or religious group in one particular locality as happens in the old cities of India, did create a class division by making the income/status level as the criteria for distributing the housing plots (D’Souza, 1976). The city has expanded now to fifty-six sectors, but barring the new sectors, which have mostly three storied flats, this pattern remains visible in all the sectors. As Khilnani succinctly put it, “every Chandigarh address thus echoed fairly precise information about its owner’s standing in the bureaucratic and economic hierarchy” (Khilnani, 1999).

The left-over villages nestled within the city parameters form the colonies. These villages have remained intact as in the second and third phase of the making of the city, only agricultural lands were acquired due to villagers’ protest. There are still a few slums left in the UT, mostly on the periphery now. Many former slum dwellers have been allotted low-income flats by the administration on rent. The sectors have come up in phases as the city has grown. Sectors are inhabited by the middle classes, though in each sector there is a particular block having a segment that houses economically weaker people. The sectors and the plot size are markers of a resident’s status in this class-conscious city, as the older sectors having larger plots are populated by upper middle class/original settlers, whereas the new sectors are inhabited by the middle-middle class. The lower middle class live in the villages and urban slums nestled within the perimeter of the union territory, which are called colonies. Slums are inhabited by poor, mostly migrant labourers. The twenty-five colonies also have a sizeable number of migrants, many descendants of

the workers who came to build the city from different parts of India in the 1950s and did not return. Ironically, in the planned city, there was no space earmarked for the actual builders of the city; hence the slums came up in the then vacant spaces. There are still urban villages on the periphery of the city, but farmers have left farming, though they do rear milch cattle. Over the last six decades, there has been a continuous influx of migrant labour from economically poorer states. As a result, more than half of the electorates of the union territory now live in the colonies, villages, and slums.

CHANDIGARH ADMINISTRATION

Chandigarh, the first planned city of an Independent India, was originally built as the capital of post-partition Punjab, as mentioned above. It became the joint capital of Punjab and Haryana after the linguistic reorganisation of Punjab in 1966 and was also accorded the status of a union territory. An assembly constituency till then, it was upgraded as a parliamentary constituency. Chandigarh union territory does not have a legislative assembly. Since there is no legislative assembly, there is no representation of Chandigarh in Rajya Sabha. It has a municipal council, which has 35 elected members from as many wards. Nine members are nominated by the Chandigarh administration. Elections to the council are contested on party lines. The member of parliament (MP) from Chandigarh is the ex-officio member of the council. The mayor is elected every new year, voted by all the council members as well as the MP. The Chandigarh administration is headed by the chief administrator, who happens to be the ex-officio Governor of Punjab. The union territory, in the absence of an elected government, is administered by the chief administrator who is assisted by an advisor, invariably a senior civil servant from the AGMUT cadre, appointed by the centre on deputation for a fixed tenure. The administration is in effect run by the bureaucrats, coming on deputation to the city from the state cadres of Haryana and Punjab in a fixed ratio and also the ones belonging to AGMUT. Municipal Council has limited authority and is rendered ineffective due to factionalism even within the same party members.

ELECTIONS IN CHANDIGARH: TRENDS

A closer look at the electoral verdicts reveals several common trends. (Kumar, 2024) First, in fifteen Lok Sabha elections held so far in the union territory, the Congress has won eight times, whereas the Jana Sangh/BJP have won five times (**Table 1**). The Janata Party (Jana Sangh being a constituent) and Janata Dal candidates won in the 1980 and 1989 elections. All the winning

candidates have been from national parties. The only state party candidate to win ever was from the Lok Dal, which was then in alliance with the Janata Party, in the 1977 election. Only once, in the 1980 election, an independent candidate came second (**Table 2**). The electorates' preference for the national parties can be attributed to the non-provincial character of Chandigarh union territory (Chandigarh hereafter), which has people not only from the neighbouring states but also from faraway states. Also, Chandigarh sectors have an overwhelming presence of white-collar upper-caste-middle-class citizens, who invariably prefer a national party, as per poll surveys.

Second, Chandigarh, a small city but with a cosmopolitan character, invariably gets impacted by national issues and events. Despite being the capital city of Punjab and Haryana since 1966, the regional issues and party politics related to the two states have hardly had any visible impact. It is only the 'national' leaders and not the regional leaders who campaign, despite the fact that most of these state-level leaders reside in the city, many having their own houses. Also, being a modern city of the Nehruvian era, Chandigarh sectors have never witnessed elections being fought openly over divisive primordial issues like caste, religion or region. Even the colonies and slum politics, having large migrant population from Hindi speaking states, remain largely immune from caste politics. For them, it is more the effectiveness of the delivery of public goods and services by a particular party regime and also the connect with the party candidate that matters.

Third, scanning the electoral verdicts shows that the party, whose candidate has won in the union territory in a particular election, succeeded in forming the government on its own or in coalition at the federal level. The exceptions so far have been the 1967, 1999 and 2024 elections. Proclivity to vote for the party expected to form the government at the centre is largely due to the 'satellite' character of the politics and economy of Chandigarh. Being a central government-funded city, inhabited by numerous central government officials/professionals, centrally funded institutions, and administered by the centre, the middle-class voters tend to make a rational/pragmatic choice, to be on the right side of the winnable party at the centre.

Fourth, the candidates being set up by parties have invariably been connected with the city, either as its residents or having studied in the city's educational institutions or worked as a professional. Every successful contestant has had a connection with the city in some or other form. Even those who have lived in the city, then moved away to pursue their professional/political career, carry the burden of being labelled as an outsider.

Fifth, despite being the capital city of the two states whose governments are in perpetual contention over the status of the city or even about claiming more official spaces or key administrative positions in the Chandigarh administration for their state cadre officers, electorates in this city state appear to be living in secluded political space, and oblivious to the politics of Punjab and Haryana. Besides the national campaign issues, there are only local issues like the regularisation of the violation of building bylaws, the property tax rates, conversion of leasehold properties, drinking water supply, maintenance of parks, drainage systems, development in the colonies etc. that received much attention during the election. This may be partly due to the absence of a legislative assembly in Chandigarh like Puducherry, a long-term local demand.

THE 2024 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

Dissecting the verdict in the 2024 elections showed that it confirmed the above trends, except the electoral outcome. This time also the main contest was also between the candidates put up by two national parties, namely the Congress and the BJP, though like in the past, the BSP did put up its own candidate also. The AAP, which had an impressive run in the 2014 elections, this time was backing up the Congress. Manish Tewari and Sanjay Tandon, the two candidates, respectively from the Congress and the BJP, had city connections, having houses in the city's older sectors. Both studied in the city schools and the university, and have been active in the city's student politics. Also, both candidates belong to families, which have been active in Chandigarh politics. Since Tewari had later moved to Delhi as a practising Supreme Court lawyer, he was dubbed as an outsider by his opponents, despite him repeatedly reminding everyone that he was born in the city unlike other winning candidates in the past. Same was true for his opponent. This tag of being an 'outsider' was one of the factors that was held against him earlier also when he wanted the party ticket in the last two elections from Chandigarh. He had refused to contest for any other seat in the 2014 election, citing his bad health. Pawan Bansal, a resident of the city and three times MP, got tickets both times. Tandon, who resides in the city and has been the BJP city head for ten years, had the advantage of being a 'city boy', an 'insider', claiming during his interviews to know thousands of city dwellers by name. Ironically, Tandon was also thwarted in his last two attempts to get the party ticket, as other faction leaders within his party opposed him. The factional dispute allowed Kirron Kher, an 'outsider', to get the party ticket though she also had the city connect, having studied in Panjab university.

Like in the past, the BJP tried to whip up support amongst the residents, like in other parts of the country, over national issues like corruption, dynastic parties, national security, India being the fifth-largest economy, abrogation of Article 370, Ram Mandir, uniform civil code, Vikshit Bharat, and about 'Modi guarantees' for the colonies and slums. Its national leaders like Yogi Aditya Nath and Amit Shah held the election meetings. Tandon also invoked the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, though unlike the last two elections he did not campaign in Chandigarh. Tandon in his campaign which was mostly in the form of small meetings, questioned Tewari's sincerity as a representative for frequently shifting his constituencies (Ludhiana and Anand Sahib), his lack of accessibility and perceived arrogance. Tewari, a more articulate and seasoned orator, being a former national spokesperson of the Congress, harped upon both the national and local issues. Holding a copy of the Indian constitution like Rahul Gandhi during his campaign meetings and city walks, again small ones, like in the past, he raised concern about the future of democracy and the need to safeguard the diversity of the country. He repeatedly raised the alleged tampering of votes in the recent election for Mayor. He also flagged his experience of being a two-time active member of the parliament and a union minister, contrasting it to the administrative and legislative inexperience of Tandon.

Tewari by winning the election created an upset, as there was a clear perception, whipped up by the media and the party itself, about Tandon winning parliamentary elections with an overwhelming majority. The urban aspirational middle classes/upper castes living in the sectors were expected to vote for the winning party, as had happened in the past. However, this did not happen. Tewari got significant votes from all the sectors, including the posh sectors to which he belongs having a house, and in many other middle and lower-middle class sectors, he had a lead over Tandon. In colonies and villages, Tewari was always expected to have an edge due to the rising prices, lack of employment opportunity, farmers' antipathy towards the BJP. The alliance with the AAP also helped, as in the 2014 elections, the party candidate Gul Panag had done exceedingly well though in the 2019 election, the party did not do well. More recently, in the local elections for the municipal council held in 2022, AAP emerged as the largest party. As for the deep factional politics that has always prevailed in the Chandigarh units of both the BJP and Congress, both contestants hardly received much support from other faction leaders of their own parties.

Finally, the most important factor that caused the defeat of Tandon was the lack of performance of the former BJP MP and councillors from his party. Chandigarh's electors living in sectors were certainly very unhappy about the overall decline of the city, once considered the cleanest and most liveable city in the country. The decline has been in terms of the failure to develop IT and tourism sectors, to attract corporate investment. Civic facilities also went down, reflected in traffic woes, erratic drinking water supply, drainage system breaking down. Bureaucratic inertia in execution of the smart city project and implementing the city master plan was also highlighted. He also supported the AAP agenda of making Chandigarh a city-state like Delhi, so that Chandigarh can have a legislative assembly. He also promised to provide free electricity for low-income groups. Tandon, being identified with the ruling dispensation, found it hard to defend the past ten years' dismal performance of the Chandigarh administration or his party's MP and councillors. Though to his credit, he lost only by a slender margin of 2504 votes. It would be interesting if Tewari, his party not being in power at the centre, would receive the centre's help. As an able parliamentarian, he is, however, expected to raise the issues related to Chandigarh in the Parliament and in other forums. In the 2024 sessions of the Parliament, for instance, he asked questions pertaining to the Panjab University, its long impending metro project, and also the concern about the rapid urbanisation in the Union Territory and its suburb township causing adverse impact on the ecological balance, biodiversity and level of water table in the "city beautiful" (MP Manish Tewari questions rapid urbanisation happening around Chandigarh in House, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The discussion in the article refers to the trends in the electoral politics of the Union Territory with focus on the 2024 elections. It shows that after becoming a separate administrative entity, Chandigarh has transformed into a distinct electoral entity, having its own specificities in terms of electoral issues and choices. Chandigarh stands as an outlier when compared with the nature and determinants of politics of Punjab and Haryana.

Table: 1 Election Result for Lok Sabha Elections: Chandigarh Constituency 1967-2024

Year of Lok Sabha Election (Total Seat-01)	Voter Turn Out	Party Name									
		INC		ABJS (1967-71)/ BJP (1984-2019)		IND		Others			
		Seats contested/ won	Votes polled %	Seats contested/ won	Votes polled %	contestants/ won	Votes polled %	Seats contested/ won	Votes polled		
1967	65.36	1/0	23.04	1/1	48.70	6/0	2.56	1/0(SWA)	20.87		
1971	62.92	1/1	66.85	1/0	23.31	08/00	9.63	-	-		
1977	67.40	1/0	28.37	-	-	7/0	3.18	1/1 (BLD)	66.13		
1980	63.93	1/1	49.65	-	-	35/00	33.02	1/1(JNP) 1/0 (INC(U))	9.30 7.22		
1984	68.93	1/1	66.02	1/0	5.60	30/0	4.82	1/0	23.56		
1989	65.67	1/0	40.22	1/0	12.26	19/0	3.26	01/01(JD)	42.05		
1991	57.84	1/1	35.86	1/0	28.80	46/0	4.12	1/0(JNP), 01/01 (BSP)	23.48 4.71		
1996	58.41	1/0	29.79	1/1	39.05	35/0	3.14	1/0 (BSP) 1/0 (SAP)	4.10 17.59		
1998	53.69	1/0	38.70	1/1	42.36	1/0	1.57	1/0 (SJP(R))	14.57		
1999	48.35	1/1	47.00	1/0	45.07	10/0	3.15	01/01(BSP)	2.75		

2004	51.14	1/1	52.06	1/0	35.22	10/0	3.42	1/0 (BSP), 1/0 (INLD)	2.31, 6.61
2009	65.51	1/1	46.87	1/0	29.71	8/0	1.87	1/0 (BSP)	17.88
2014	73.71	1/0	26.84	1/1	42.20	8/0	1.87	1/0 (AAP) 1/0 (BSP)	23.97 3.51
2019	70.61	1/0	40.35	1/1	50.64	13/0	1.03	1/0(AAP) 1/0 (BSP)	3.02 1.6
2024	67.98	1/1	48.22	1/0	47.67	16/0	2.62	1/0 (BSP)	1.49

Source: Election Commission of India

Table 2: List of Winning and Runner Up candidates in Chandigarh (1967-2024)

Year of the Election	Winning Candidate/Party	Runner up Candidate/ party
1967	Shrichand Goyal (Jana Sangh)	Amarnath Vidyalankar (Congress)
1971	Amarnath Vidyalankar (Congress)	Shrichand Goyal (Jana Sangh)
1977	Krishna Kant (Lok Dal)	Sat Pal (Congress)
1980	Jagan Nath Kaushal (Congress)	Ram Swarup (Independent)
1984	Jagan Nath Kaushal (Congress)	Harmohan Dhawan (Janata Party)
1989	Harmohan Dhawan (Janata Dal)	Jagan Nath Kaushal (Congress)
1991	Pawan Kumar Bansal (Congress)	Satyapal Jain (BJP)
1996	Satyapal Jain (BJP)	Pawan Kumar Bansal (Congress)
1998	Satyapal Jain (BJP)	Pawan Kumar Bansal (Congress)
1999	Pawan Kumar Bansal (Congress)	Krishan Lal Sharma (BJP)
2004	Pawan Kumar Bansal (Congress)	Satyapal Jain (BJP)
2014	Kirron Kher (BJP)	Pawan Kumar Bansal (Congress)
2019	Kirron Kher (BJP)	Pawan Kumar Bansal (Congress)
2024	Manish Tewari (Congress)	Sanjay Tandon (BJP)

Source: Election Commission of India

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An Historical Account of Political Sloganeering in India

Dr. Raushan Thakur¹

ABSTRACT

Political slogans are succinct and notable expressions that intend to communicate a message or set up an agenda. These slogans have significantly influenced the body politic of Indian elections over the years. During the 1970s, Congress used the eye-catching slogan “Garibi Hatao” to promote its vision to eradicate poverty. This slogan became exemplary symbolic of then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi which aided massively in her re-election to the power in 1971. Likewise, Narendra Modi’s slogans “Abki Baar Modi Sarkar” and “Sabka Sath Sabka Vikas” became a catchword during the 2014 election. India has already witnessed multitude of inventive, humorous, and unforgettable slogans throughout elections. The intensity in campaign arises from the slogan warfare, when one faction tries to devise a counter-slogan to ridicule and disparage the other party’s slogan, thereby transforming it into a competitive electoral contest. The efficacy of a slogan is significantly influenced by its framing and agenda-setting capabilities. Framing denotes the concept that a slogan serves as a succinct mode of communication, functioning as a messaging system; while agenda-setting pertains to the identification of public concerns and the influence on public opinion. Certain slogans have had successful outcomes historically while others have failed dismally, noted more for their ostentation or indiscretion. However, the significance of slogans as a prevalent form of political communication is undeniable. This paper explores the degree of interference of political slogans in an electoral discourse of India by trying to map out the historical evolution of political sloganeering in Indian elections. The paper follows historical, archival and discourse analysis method in order to contextualise and decode the linguistic use of slogans.

Keywords: Political Slogans, Elections, Campaign, Lok Sabha, Political party, Discourse

POLITICAL SLOGANS

Slogans are crucial instruments that facilitate the construction of a political narrative (agenda-setting) in every electoral contest. The persuasive

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and tactful use of language through compelling and witty slogans is a critical element in the politics of democratic nations. Political slogan is undeniably seen as a decisive instrument, subtly shaping individuals' perceptions within a socio-political context (Sardoc & Prebilib, 2023). A slogan is an intriguing instrument for evoking emotions in the audience's psyche. In political warfare, a memorable and rhyming slogan may establish a new 'political dimension' in electoral politics and serve as a catalyst for shaping the ideology of electorates (Song & Gee, 2020). The distinguishing element that sets slogans apart from other types of verbal persuasion is their conciseness, just like the Vedic Mantras. Understanding the substance of the phrase needs clarification. The essence is mostly utilitarian, that is to accomplish certain tasks. Its purpose is not to inform or elucidate, but to incite. Conversely, the slogan functions via language; thus, it often includes an instructive component and even a justificatory aspect (LU, 1999). Slogans have consistently served as rallying cries that connect with the populace during elections. These slogans encapsulate the aims and commitments of political parties, evoking emotions and inspiring optimism. Slogans encapsulate history, and history is fundamentally composed of slogans. They are carrier of ideologies which promote collective sentiments and forge aspirations of the times they are contextualised in. All slogans operate on the dual principles of 'communication' and 'representation', engaging with the intricate relationship between subjective goals and objective historical facts (Stacul, 2018). During the pre-Independence period in India, the majority of slogans were motivated by nationalist emotions that resonated with the collective identity and aspirations of the populace, seeking to galvanise a mass movement to dismantle British rule. Although they tended to homogenise the intended audience during this period, few scholars observe that 'political' and 'socio-economic' slogans of the post-Independence era mirrored contemporary reality and often appealed to regional and sub-regional identity ambitions.

POLITICAL CAMPAIGN AND SLOGANS: THROUGH THE HISTORICAL LENSE

The evolutionary journey of India from being a small independent nation to world's largest democracy is a testament to its resilience and adaptability. Over these decades, the socio-political landscape has undergone several changes reflecting shifts in society, technology, and voter expectations. The development of political campaigns in India, from plain slogans of the past to the data-driven tactics of today, provides an intriguing look at how electioneering has changed to suit the demands of an emerging nation (Varughese & Semetkob, 2022). In the early years of independence political campaigns in India were

characterized by their simplicity. The electorates were predominantly rural, with low literacy rates and limited avenues of communication like radio and newspaper were available. Under these conditions political slogans emerged as the mainstay of political communication. These slogans were memorable, emotionally charged, and was reflective of people's aspirations. For instance, the Congress party's slogan, "Garibi Hatao" (Eradicate Poverty), used during the 1971 elections, were inclusive of the aspirations of millions and became synonymous with Indira Gandhi's populist policies (Ashraf, 2000). Similarly, "Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan" reflected the nation's pride in its defence forces and agrarian roots.

As Indian democracy evolved and matured throughout the period of 1970-1980, the political landscape took a significant turn. The advent of television, along with the extensive proliferation of radio, revolutionised the dissemination of political messages. Leaders such as Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi acknowledged the influence of mass media and adeptly used it to engage with millions of people. Campaigns began the amalgamation of speeches, interviews, and even songs that were disseminated nationally. This marked the start of increasingly advanced campaign tactics. Although slogans remained essential, there was an increasing focus on constructing robust narratives around candidates. The communication grew more unified, with leaders guaranteeing that their fundamental message was reiterated across various media platforms. The 1990's saw a substantial transformation in the evolution of political campaigns due to the emergence of regional parties paving way for the rise of identity politics. With the advent of coalition government, campaign techniques needed to adjust to a more fractured electorate. Although slogans remained important, there was a heightened emphasis on tackling regional and community-specific challenges. Campaigns grew more targeted, addressing the distinct issues of various states, castes, and groups. This era was notable for the emergence of political coalitions and the need for more sophisticated techniques to manage the intricacies of coalition politics. Next in line was the emergence of digital technology, which significantly transformed the demeanour of political campaigns in the country. Data-driven, tailored micro-campaigning and social media involvement became important features of electoral campaigns (Mishra, 2024). The emphasis has shifted from broad slogans to intricate techniques targeting certain voting demographics. The use of big data and artificial intelligence enables campaigns to identify swing voters, forecast election results, and allocate resources with unparalleled accuracy. The notion of a "campaign season" has almost vanished in the current political scene. The emergence of 24/7 news networks, social media,

and real-time communication has made political campaigning a perpetual endeavour. The next section of the article will deal with the different phases of sloganeering in India.

SLOGANEERING IN THE FIRST PHASE (1952-1967)

The Congress adopted “self-reliance” as its motto during India's first election in 1952 (Park, 1952). In 1957, it was the ‘industry’, regarded as the “temples of modern India” while in 1962, the emphasis was laid down more on India’s position within the international community (Guha, 2002). The symbol of the Congress was a ‘pair of bullocks’, carrying a yoke, which was representative of the fact that Indian economy was largely dependent on agriculture. The Congress posters included prominent images of Nehru besides the one-liner statement, “Vote for the Congress if you desire a progressive, robust, and secular state (Park, 1952).” Posters depicting two bulls and yokes were affixed on the sides of tongas, vehicles, local stores, and train compartments (Guha, 2002). In contrast, Opposition parties raised the issues pertaining to socio-economic conditions of people like ‘poverty, food’ and ‘housing’ in their campaign slogans. The issue of rehabilitation of Hindus who came from Pakistan after facing exodus were also highlighted by Shyama Prasad Mukherjee led Jan Sangh. Another kind of campaigning involved the use of processions for carrying out political messages. A notable variant of the procession was the ‘Prabhat Pheris’ which was used in the state of Punjab. In the early morning, they canvassed, singing religious hymns and concluding with “Vote for Jan Sangh” (Weiner, 1954). Congress also organised ‘Prabhat Pheris’ as part of their campaign and the members of party sang bhajans used by Mahatma Gandhi during his morning prayers. Congress party's ‘Prabhat Pheri’ performed “Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram” and “Vaishnav Jan to Tene Kahiye Je” to engage people and solicit their support in the election (Guha, 2002).

Political statements were made through public meetings and slogans being the superlative method of oral propaganda was used to set up a poll agenda. The slogan ‘Kaam Do, Makan Do, Varna Gaddi Chod Do’ (‘Give Work, Give Houses, or Quit the Government Chairs’) and ‘Congress Ne Kya Kiya? Desh Ko Barbad Kiya’ (‘What has the Congress Done? Ruined the Country’) were used by the then Socialist Party against the Congress (Fickett, 1973). On the other hand, Congress in order to garner some votes in the name of Mahatma Gandhi used slogans like “Kharo Rupayo Chandhi ko, Raaj Mahatma Gandhi ko”. However, it also faced stern criticism from Communist party

that raised issues of prevailing poverty and unemployment in the country and used witty one-liner “Desh Ki Janata Bhukhi Hai, Yah Azadi Jhuthi Hai” in its campaign trail. Communists argued that political independence will have little significance if the people of the country are not fed properly. Another slogan that gained huge prominence in election was when Ambedkar lost Lok Sabha election to Kajrolkar. P.K. Atre, swiftly formulated a slogan that gained significant popularity throughout the campaign. The slogan was in Marathi: “Kuthe to Ghatnakar Ambedkar, Aani Kuthe ha Lonivikya Kajrolkar,” which translates in English as “Where is the eminent Constitution maker Ambedkar and where is the inconspicuous butter-seller Kajrolkar?” (Ranade, 2019) The election loss of Ambedkar was unexpected, given the disparity in stature and political acumen between the two; nonetheless, Kajrolkar, by his tenacity and will, demonstrated that an ordinary individual had the capacity to yield shocks.

During the early years, the electoral symbol of Congress was a ‘pair of bulls’, while the symbol of Jan Sangh was ‘lamp wick’. Both the parties had a verbal exchange mocking each other’s party symbol. While Jan Sangh gave the slogan- “Dekho Deepak Ka Khel, Jali Jhopri, Bhaag Gaye Bail” (Bhambhri, 1957). Congress countered it with- “Is Deepak Main Tel Nahi, Sarkar Banana Khel Nahi”. The issues of mass level poverty and unemployment caused due to the partition, issue of refugee resettlement was the core agenda of Jan Sangh. Similarly, the issue of Kashmir was at the forefront of political debate as Article 370 was inserted unconstitutionally into the Indian constitution. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee critically questioned Nehru over the exclusion of Jammu and Kashmir from the President’s authority and the Congress’s acquiescence to the need of a special permit for entry into Jammu and Kashmir (Ganguly, 2017). He also questioned why Jammu and Kashmir had a “Sadar-e-Riyasat”. In this backdrop after J&K’s merger into Indian Union was passed, a slogan was coined by Jan Sangh and later adopted by Praja Parishad, “Ek Desh Mein Do Vidhan, Do Pradhan Aur Do Nishan Nahi Chalega” (Ganguly, 2017).

It was during the general elections of 1962 when health emerged as a big political issue. Suitable to the Hindutva politics of Jan Sangh, they came up with slogans that highlighted the need for promotion of health awareness. One popular slogan coined by them was “Jana Sangh Ko Vote Do, Beedi Peena Chhod Do; Beedi Mein Tambaku Hai, Congress Wala Daku Hai” (Vote for Jana Sangh, Stop Smoking Bidi; Bidi has tobacco, Congressmen are Dacoits). The Jana Sangh more than doubled its tally to 35, from 14 in 1962 but was nowhere close to forming a government while the Congress lost 78 seats (Pillai, 1966). Congress managed to form the government for the third time on

its own and maintain its electoral supremacy, however it was plagued by early indication of internal discord within the party. Other developments that shaped the political landscape of India during this period were, emergence of regional parties, successive wars with China and Pakistan and continued allegiance of India towards NAM principles to guide its foreign policy. While Nehru endorsed Panchsheel principles and emphasised cooperative relationship with China, which was embodied in the slogan “Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai”, the preceding event of 1962 Sino-Indian War delivered a massive blow to this type of foreign policy (Madhok, 1967). It became largely clear that Nehruvian principles is no guarantee to safeguard India’s security and that defence and military capabilities needs to be prioritised on an urgent basis. The Nehruvian idealism suffered a massive blow and he was at the receiving end of Jan Sangh who severely criticised and coined the slogan “Wah Re Nehru Teri Mauj, Ghar Me Hamla Bahar Fauj”. Later, in 1965, Pakistan captured Kanajarkot in Kutch and Government of India thought to make peace arrangements with Pakistan (Erdman, 1999). Jan Sangh strongly condemned the act and subsequently planned for countrywide mass demonstration. Demonstrations were held against the Kutch agreement and slogan: ‘Fauj Na Hari, Kaum Na Hari, Haar Gayi Sarkar Hamari’ (Neither our army nor our people were defeated, but the government was defeated) was used to showcase the inefficiency of Indian government (Maxwell, 1999).

In 1965 Lal Bahadur Shastri in his attempt to energise the masses of India made special reference to soldiers and farmers. In his speech at Ramleela Maidan he gave the slogan “Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan” to encourage the soldiers to defend the country and the farmers to do efficient and effective agriculture to relieve India of its import dependence (Kochanek, 1966). This slogan gave a renewed impetus of infantile democracy which was plagued with various issues like the ongoing conflict in Kashmir, failed crops due to poor rain and subsequent food crisis. It was after this slogan that India witnessed major developments like green revolution in states like Punjab and Haryana. This successful campaign returned Congress to power in 1967. The slogan “Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan was later modified by Atal Bihari Vajpayee to “Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan, Jai Vigyan” to emphasise on the importance of science and technology. This was further improved by, Narendra Modi who incorporated research into it and modified it as “Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan, Jai Vigyan, Jai Anusandhan” (PTI, 2019).

SLOGANEERING IN THE SECOND PHASE (1967-1984)

The General election of 1967 is an important landmark in Indian electoral polity as it marked the beginning of post Nehruvian era. The election witnessed exceptionally weak political campaigning from Congress which brought down its tally to 283 seats from 361. Congress projected itself as a necessity and prerequisite for development of the country and pronounced slogan: “Progress through Congress”. It was courageously countered by communists who reversed it to mean choose between either “Congress or Progress”. Another major slogan of the time was built around the issue of Cow Protection which was also picked by Congress to avoid any Hindu polarisation by Jan Sangh who at that time was leading this issue to corner Congress in upcoming elections. Jan Sangh’s slogan “Gau Hamari Mata Hai, Desh-Dharm Ka Nata Hai (The Cow is our mother, The Bond of Nation and Religion)” fuelled the cow protection movement. Indira Gandhi hit back with her slogan “Vote for Calf and Cow, Forget all others now” (Front Matter, 1971). Interestingly the actual symbol of Congress, pair of bullocks, was dropped by Indira Gandhi when she made her separate faction away from Congress. Jan Sangh continued its opposition and popularised its slogan: “Har Hath Mein Kaam, Har Khet Mein Pani” (Job for Every Hand, Water for Every Farm). At the same time, Atal Bihari Vajpayee was gaining popularity among the cadres of Jan Sangh. In 1968, he was elected as the party’s president. Thereafter, in one of the conferences, popularising the leadership credentials of him, the party workers began chanting during his election rallies: “Pradhan Mantri Ki Agali Bari, Atal Bihari, Atal Bihari”. Jan Sangh from the very beginning had apprehensions against the ill-nexus of ‘Congress, Communist and Muslim League’ as they worked together in trio. Jan Sangh sarcastically jibed at the trio and coined the slogan- “Tin Tilange, Karte Dange” which meant that these parties hamper the social fabric of the country by inciting violence and riots.

In 1971, Jan Sangh’s manifesto’s tagline was- ‘Declaration of War against Poverty’. The party promoted this idea through popular slogans like “Jan Sangh ka Arthik Program- Har Muh Ko Roti, Har Haath Ko Kaam” (Manifesto, 1971). Later they popularised the ideograph “Indira Hatao” (Remove Indira) which was later reworked and rephrased to “Indira Hatao, Desh Bachao”, which meant remove Indira and save the country (Narain, 1971). Congress on the contrary went along with its all-time popular narrative of “Garibi Hatao”. The slogan “Garibi Hatao” instantly became popular as it was able to make inroads among the masses and Congress was able to gain a lot of political dividends out of it. The issue of poverty and hunger was politically significant

as is evidenced from the fact that statistically 55% of India's population was reeling below the poverty line at that point of time. Further to counter attack the opposition's poll narrative the slogan was remodelled to "Garibi Hatao, Indira Lao, Desh Bachao" and "Vo Kehte Hai Indira Hatao, Mai Kehti Hoon Garibi Hatao" (Prashad, 1996). Indira Gandhi was politically aware about the ground reality; therefore, she deliberately took upon herself, trusted her charismatic leadership skills and encased on her mass popularity. It was for the first time that a personality-based slogan was used coercively in an Indian election. Another significant achievement which defined Indira Gandhi's tenure was disintegration of Pakistan. The Indo-Pak war in 1975 led to the carving out of independent Bangladesh. Soon afterwards, one of the most controversial yet spectacular slogan emerged which is: "India is Indira and Indira is India" (Jones, 1985). The slogan equated the personality of Indira Gandhi to the nation's image and identity at large. Autocratic, imperious and populist are the few adjectives which could possibly define the slogan. Apart from such sloganeering, the socialist discourse remained at the political helm of affairs. Meanwhile, Ram Manohar Lohia, considered as a staunch socialist, advocated for 60% reservation in education and employment for women, Adivasis, Shudras, and Dalits in his campaign. The slogan "Sansapa Ne Bandhi Gaanth, Pichda Pave Sau Me Sath" created by Karpoori Thakur, continues to resound throughout elections in majority areas of the Hindi heartland states (Yadav, 2010).

The Bangladesh Liberation war elevated Indira Gandhi's political clout and power within and outside Congress. The dynamics of Congress also changed, sycophancy became the norm and every opinion was put to scrutiny against the larger cause of consolidating Indiras' status within the Congress. The "authoritarian streak" within Indiras' India became obvious however, she could not rein in political dissent growing within the country. It was during this period that Jayaprakash Narayan, steered a student led agitation against the Bihar government and gave call for "Total Revolution". The electoral malpractices and Indira Gandhi's disqualification led to the imposition of emergency, suspending all civil and constitutional rights of the people. This completely paralysed the democratic functioning of institutions, political opponents were put behind bars without any trial, tens and thousands of people were harassed in the preceding months, compulsory sterilisation program was launched on the pretext of family planning and population control (Kaviraj, 1986).

The sloganeering during this period was greatly influenced by these political developments. As opposition gathered momentum post emergency,

anti-Indira slogans were popularised and exhortations were made like- “Indira Hatao, Desh Bachao”. Later on, the sterilization campaign launched by the Congress in a bid to control population growth were targeted by the opposition by coining slogans like- “Zameen Gaye Chakbandi Mein, Makan Gaya Hadbandi Me, Dwar Khadi Aurat Chillaye, Mera Mard Gaye Nasbandee Mein” (Land was lost in Consolidation, House was lost in Demarcation, the Woman standing at the Door shouted, My Husband was lost in Sterilization)” and “Nasbandee Ke Teen Dalal, Indira, Sanjay aur Bansilal” that echoed the streets of towns and villages across the country (AsianetNews, 2020). These slogans charged the political atmosphere against the Congress and Indira Gandhi had to eventually lose power.

The post emergency election held in 1977 witnessed slew of slogans that directly targeted the credentials of Indira Gandhi. Here are few of the slogans- “San Satattar Ki Lalkaar, Delhi Mein Janata Sarkar” (The call of 1977, Janata Party government in Delhi); “Sampoorn Kranti Ka Nara Hai, Bhavi Itihaas Hamara Hai” (Total Revolution is the Slogan, The Future History is Ours); “Faansi Ka Phanda Tootega, George Hamara Chhootega” (The noose will break, our George will be released) (Shukla, 2014). It was accompanied by slogans like- “Yeh Dekho Indira Ka Khel, Kha Gayi Shakkar, Pee Gayi Tel”, “Jali Jhopdi, Bhage Bail, Yeh Dekho Deepak Ka Khel” (Ved, 2019). The Congress party countered it with coining the slogan- “Is Deepak Mein Tel Nahin, Sarkar Chalana Khel Nahin” (Shukla, 2014).

The Janata Party used the catchphrase “Sinhasan Chhodo, Ki Janta Aati Hai” (Abandon the Throne, the Public is Coming) warning the Congress government about the anguish of general public. Further battle cry such as “Gaai Ko Chara Nahi, Uske Bacche Ko Doodh Nahi Aur Congress Ko Vote Nahi” and “Congress Ki Kya Pehchan, Bhookha Nanga Hindustan” were prominently used to put allegation regarding corruption and state of hunger during Indira’s regime. Another appealing slogan used by Jan Sangh was “Deep se Deep Jale, Vote se Desh Bane” which suggests that India’s hope is only its people because they are sovereign and powerful entity. The slogan “Save Democracy” was used by Janata Party to make people conscious about their democratic right and liberties. As one can observe that Dictatorship, fear of the future, public violence and Murder of democracy related slogans were used in a sarcastic manner during the poll rallies to expose the authoritarian functioning style of Indira Gandhi.

Indira Gandhi fresh from her electoral defeat contested from Chikmagalur (in Karnataka) Lok Sabha constituency in 1978. The slogan “Ek Sherni,

Sau Langur; Chikmagalur, Chikmagalur” (One Tigress versus Hundreds of Chimpanzees) was chanted across the region that aimed to take a jibe at the infighting that had become public between the various constituent parties of the Janata coalition. Other slogans such as “Jaat Par Na Paat Par, Indira Jee Kee Baat Par, Muhar Lagegi Haath Par” and “Indira is India and India is Indira” also rose to popularity. The Janata Party experiment miserably failed and it imploded from infighting. Then in 1980, Congress came up with the slogan “Sarkar Vo Chune Jo Chal Sake” (Elect only that government which holds the capacity to properly function and govern). This phase can be summed as a period of personalised political campaign in which nationalist sentiments were evoked through the use of sarcastic yet articulative issue-based sloganeering.

SLOGANEERING IN THE THIRD PHASE (1984-1999)

The electoral landscape of India during this period was marked by uncertainty following Indira Gandhi’s assassination in 1984. Waves of sympathy that followed her assassination brought resounding support for her heir, Rajiv Gandhi. During this period, a poignant slogan emerged: “Jab Tak Suraj Chand Rahega, Indira Ji Ka Naam Rahega” (Brass, 1986). The slogan played a crucial role in Congress securing a resounding victory by securing 404 seats out of 514 Lok Sabha seats. Rajiv’s political journey began with Congress karyakartas extending their support to his Prime Ministerial candidature by chanting “Utha Kar Dono Hath Hai, Rajiv Ji Ke Sath Hain”. However, soon later he faced severe opposition during his first tenure besides allegations of kickbacks in a defence deal. In 1989 election, Congress used generic slogans that were centred around developmental issues and leadership style. Catchphrases like- “Rajiv Gandhi Ka Elan Sabko Roti, Kapda aur Makan (Rajiv Gandhi has pledged food, clothing and housing for all)”, “Toofan Me, Aandhi Me, Vishwas Rajiv Gandhi Mein” (Be it a Hurricane, be it a Storm, our faith is in Rajiv Gandhi), “Sthayi Sarkar, Majboot Hai Desh, Sabhi ki Pragati Hamara Uddesh” (Stable Government, Strong Nation, Everybody’s Prosperity our Mission) were used in a very assertive manner during the campaign trail.

While VP Singh led National Front used slogans like “Rajiv Bhai, Rajiv Bhai, Tope Dalale Kisne Khayi” which translates to Rajiv please tell who swallowed the commission in the gun deal making an indirect reference to kickbacks in the infamous Bofors Deal. The opposition was adamant on targeting the ruling government stating that Rajiv Gandhi took a bribe of Rs. 64 crores. More such slogans like “VP Singh Ka Ek Sawal, Paisa Khaya Kaun Dalal”, “Galon Me Jo Lali Hai, Topon Ki Dalali Hai”, “Rajiv Gandhi Kaun Hai,

Moresco Ka Chor Hai” and “Naani Yaad Aane Lagi Hai, Kursi Ab Jaane Lagi Hai” were used to the tooth and nail by the opposition parties. On the contrary “Raja Nahi Fakir Hai, Desh Ki Taqdeer Hai” were coined by his supporters to showcase VP Singh as a common man who can change the destiny of India.

VP Singh then became the Prime Minister in 1989 with the support of BJP and other regional parties. The first project which he undertook was the implementation of the Mandal Commission report giving reservations to OBC’s. This decision witnessed a lot of criticism and VP Singh- a royal scion of the Manda estate became a villain for the unreserved category. The slogan “Goli Maro Mandal Ko, Is Raja ko Kamandal Do” was popular during the agitation in the early 90s. Implementation of Mandal commission benefitted regional leaders and it paved way for the emergence of backward caste politics in the country. Mulayam Singh in Uttar Pradesh and Lalu Yadav in Bihar became the face of it. Mulayam Singh joined hand with Kanshiram to overpower Kalyan Singh in Uttar Pradesh. Mocking the populist narrative of BJP which was centre around RamJanambhoomi movement, a very famous slogan “Mile Mulayam Kanshi Ram- Hawa Mein Udd Gye Jai Siya Raam,” was coined by SP-BSP alliance (Duncan, 1997). The saffron party countered it with, “Mit Gaye Mulayam Kanshi Ram- Sada Rahenge Prabhu Shri Ram.” While for Lalu Prasad Yadav, his supporters popularised the slogan- “Jab Tak Rahega Samosa Mein Aalo, Tab Tak Rahega Bihar Mein Lalu”.

Electoral Campaign in 1991 soared to another level because of the several burning issues that arose from ‘Mandal-Masjid and Market’. Congress therefore contextualising the whole situation came up with slogans that ranged from diverse subjects of ‘sacrifice’, ‘stability’, ‘future of India’, ‘unity’, ‘inflation’. Here are some of slogans that were disseminated by the party: “Aadhi Roti Khayenge, Rajiv Ko Layenge”, “Maa Bete Ka Balidan, Yaad Kareng Hindustan”, “Vote Stability, Vote Congress-I”, “Samay Ki Pukar, Sthayi Sarkar”, “Bharat Ka Bhavishya Hai Dao Par, Mohar Lagao Hath Par”, “Rajiv Ka Sandesh Ek Rahega Bharat Desh”, “Ye Kaisi Sarkar Aayi, Kamar Tod Mehangayi Laye”, “Vapas Lao Congress-I, Na Jaat Par Na Paat Par, Sthirtha Ki Baat Par, Mohar Lagegi Hath Par”.

Conversely, BJP portrayed itself as a cultural nationalist party and embarked the electoral journey from Rath Yatra that took place between Somnath to Ayodhya under the leadership of Advani. BJP stood for ‘Ram, Roti aur Sthirta’ while Congress countered it with “Ram, Rahim, Rozi aur Roti”. Slogans such as “Sabko Parkha, Humko Parkho” were developed but the larger poll narrative and sloganeering revolved around the issue of Ram Mandir. Several slogans

were used during the entire course of campaign which helped to mobilize and polarize the Hindu community. ‘Jo Hindu Hit Ki Baat Karega, Vahi Desh Par Raaj Karega’, ‘Ram Rajya Ki Oar, BJP Ki Oar’, ‘Jai Siya Ram’, ‘Pet Me Roti, Mann Me Ram, Tabhi Jagegi Rashtra Shakti’, ‘Kasam Ram Ki Khate Hai, Mandir Vahi Banayenge’, ‘Baccha Baccha Ram ka Janambhoomi Ke Kaam Ka’, ‘Raj Tilak Ki Karo Tayari Aa Rahe Hai Bhagwadhari’, ‘Ek Hi Nara Ek Hi Naam, Jai Shree Ram Jai Shree Ram’. Slogans had an emotive appeal that apparently helped BJP in consolidating Hindu vote bank.

In 1984, upon the establishment of BSP, the party’s founder, Kanshiram, formulated the slogan- “BSP Ki Kya Pehchan, Neela Jhanda Hathi Nishan.” The ‘elephant’ symbolised the ‘Dalit community’, while the ‘blue flag’ represents the ‘blue sky beneath which all individuals are equal’ (Kumar, 1999). “Vote Hamara, Raaj Tumhara Nahin Chalega” and “Jiski Jitni Sankhya Bhari-Uski Utni Bhagidari” were among the slogans that were floated extensively to socially unify and politically assert as a community. Another slogan “Baba (Ambedkar) Tera Kaam Adhura, Kanshiram (BSP founder) Kareng Poora” was coined when party was in a nascent stage. The endeavour was to present Kanshiram as the legitimate successor of Ambedkar. In pursuit of building strong Dalit base, a controversial slogan was pronounced: “Tilak, Tarazu Aur Talwar, Inko Maro Joote Chaar” (Gupta, 2009). The slogan urged Dalits to dismantle upper caste supremacy. The party established its presence in the state politics and it gradually started efforts to broaden its support base. And to do so, the party had to reach out to the other communities. BSP then repudiated and completely disowned the slogan ‘Tilak, Taraju aur Talwar’, asserting that it was not an official party slogan but rather the creation of few miscreants.

BSP also coined the slogan “Brahmin, Thakur, Bania Chhor, Baki Sub Hain DS-4”, which called upon the Muslims and other socially backward castes to come under one umbrella (TeltuMbde, 2014). Inevitably, BSP softened its stringent anti-upper caste position, and in 2002, it devised the casteist slogan- “Brahmin Saaf, Thakur Half, Bania Maaf (Baniyas have been pardoned, Thakurs can be forgiven but Brahmins would be finished)”. Mayawati lately adopted politics of social engineering thereby coined several catchphrases like- “Hathi Nahi Ganesh Hai, Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh Hai (BSP’s election symbol also represents Hindu god Ganesh)”; “Brahman Shankh Bajayega, Hathi Badhta Jayega” (TeltuMbde, 2014). Subsequently, later on Mayawati also coined slogans “Jiski Jitni Sankhya Bhaari, Uski Utni Bhagidari” and ‘Jiski Jitni Hai Taiyari, Uski Utni Hissedari” which translates to representation in ticket distribution and sharing of power will be as per the support of the particular

caste in terms of number of votes (Gundimeda, 2014). However, the slogans created by the BSP prior to elections, ranging from a purely casteist “Tilak, Tarazu aur Talwar, Inko Maro Joote Char” to the all-encompassing “Sarva Samaj Ke Samman Mein Behenji Maidan Mein,” not only highlights the transformation in the party’s ideology but have consistently played a crucial role in mobilising its support base.

SLOGANEERING IN THE FOURTH PHASE (1996-2014)

The election campaign in 1996 was a two-way contest between P.V. Narsimha Rao’s economic reforms vs BJP’s Hindutva Politics where BJP coined the slogan ‘Bari Bari Sabki Bari, Abki Bari Atal Bihari’, whereas Congress slogan was ‘Jaat par na paat par, Mohar Lagegi Hath Par’, BJP managed to form the government but it sustained for 13 days. In 1999 election, Atal Bihari led campaign against Congress used his corruption free and statesman image to full effect, coining the slogan ‘Jancha, Parkha, Khara’, subsequently copying and remodelling the slogan of Lal Bahadur Shastri’s ‘Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan’, Vajpayee added a word to the phrase making it ‘Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan and Jai Vigyan’ (Nayar, 2005). The 1999 election also saw a ruthless face-off between two opposite personalities. The debate of ‘Videsi’ (Sonia Gandhi) vs ‘Swadeshi’ (Vajpayee) gained huge momentum. The supporters of BJP started coining new slogans in late 90’s such as “Party ke Teen Dharohar, Atal, Advani Aur Murli Manohar”. Further the developmental model of BJP’s rule was reflected through the slogan “Atal, Advani Kamal Nishan, Maan Raha Hai Hindustan”.

However, in the 2004 election, BJP used the slogan “India Shining” that miserably failed to yield favourable political outcomes for the party. The assurances of a dynamic and progressive India failed to resonate with the populace. Conversely, Congress vigorously contested the election and formulated- “Congress Ka Hath, Aam Admi Ke Sath” as its election motto. The election campaign, centred on the middle class, targeted urban India, which was the BJP’s core support base. The campaign aimed to portray “development” and “growth” as the hallmark characteristics of a burgeoning India (Rangarajan, 2005). This was notably endorsed by the business elite, urban residents, working individuals, and other ambitious segments of Indian society seeking to instill confidence in the Indian economy (Sáez, 2004). Nevertheless, significant portions of the rural populace and those grappling with livelihood challenges saw little significance in the “shining” motto. Agrarian misery and escalating inequities negatively impacted the rural

economy and its buying power; “development” had overlooked them, and the gleaming image of India advancing did not inspire much excitement among them (Yadav, 2004). This was apparent in their voting decisions. Contrary to all predictions, NDA was ousted from power in 2004, leading to the ascendance of the UPA government. The 2009 general elections were fiercely fought in which Congress-led UPA concentrated on its accomplishments of its five-year rule, that included “Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme” and the “Right to Information Act” (Suri, 2008). UPA’s campaign was largely built on the notion that the election is a battle between “secular and liberal nationalism” versus “narrow communalism” of BJP.

“Sonia Nahi Ye Aandhi Hai, Dusri Indira Gandhi Hai” was the slogan of the Congress, whereas BJP’s slogan was “Majboot Neta, Nirnayak Sarkar” (Strong Leader, Decisive Government). The campaign of BJP focused on weak leadership of Congress and termed Manmohan Singh as the weakest and most inefficient Prime Minister of India. The issue of Pakistan sponsored terrorism and threat to India’s National security were also raised by BJP. However, the entire campaign was subdued and cautious in many ways as there were no major issues and controversy in the election. Even though we do not see a “wave” of support in favour of Congress, neither was it met with resounding resistance in the poll battlefield. The 2014 election was preceded by the “India Against Corruption” movement, spearheaded by Anna Hazare in 2011. The problem of corruption emerged and subsequently became a prominent factor in determining the country’s electoral polity. The campaign initiated in Delhi had a profound and enduring influence on the perceptions of individuals, particularly among middle-class urban voters. The corruption charges were already levelled against Congress in the ‘allocation of Coalgate’, ‘2G scam’ and ‘Commonwealth Games’. Several slogans such as ‘Anna Hazare Nahi Aandhi Hai, Vartman Ka Mahatma Gandhi Hai’, ‘Sonia Jiski Mummy Hai, Vo Sarkar Nikkami Hai’, ‘Kyu Paisa Paisa Karti Hai, Lokpal Se Darti Hai’ gained huge momentum through the movement.

SLOGANEERING IN THE FIFTH PHASE (2014-2024)

The 2014 Lok Sabha election is considered as a watershed moment in India’s electoral history. The emergence of Narendra Modi, supported by a revitalised BJP, dismantled several power structures in Delhi, resulting in a significant political transformation as the saffron party swept the nation. NDA secured an impressive 336 seats in the Lok Sabha. In 2014, the BJP secured electoral victory with a series of compelling slogans that criticised Congress

while simultaneously promising the nation a new age of “Vikas” and “Acche Din”.

Modi’s “Abki Baar Modi Sarkar” came with catchphrases such as “Bahut Hua Kisaano Pe Atyachar, Abki Baar Modi Sarkar”, “Bahut Hui Mehngai Ki Maar, Abki Baar Modi Sarkar”, “Bahut Hua Rozgar Ka Intezar, Abki Baar Modi Sarkar”, “Bahut Hua Naari Par Vaar, Abki Baar Modi Sarkar”, “Bina Captain Ki Team Khayegi Maar- Isliye Abki Baar Modi Sarkar”, “No Corruption, No Bhrastachar- Isliye Abki Baar Modi Sarkar”, “No Gundagardi, No Maaramaar- Isliye Abki Modi Sarkar” (Chatterjee, 2019).

The chants inundated city billboards, newspapers, television advertisements, and several other venues, with Narendra Modi and other BJP leaders such as Advani and Amit Shah also appearing on certain posters. The Congress slogan “Har Hath Shakti, Har Hath Tarakki” failed to resonate with people and did not attain the same level of popularity as the BJP ones. Congress resorted to its established strategy of appealing to the common citizen, however they remained dissatisfied. Economic Growth, Corruption and Inflation were the central theme of BJP’s campaign in the election. This was the first instance of BJP advocating for a “Congress-Mukt Bharat”, pledging to electorally wipe out Congress party from the country. The saffron party diminished Congress to just 44 seats in the elections, marking a historic low for the nation’s grand old party. Modi devised the phrase “Acche Din Aane Wale Hai” as a key campaign initiative, promising favourable days to India’s aspiring electorate.

Modi also used metaphoric analogies like “56 Inch Ki Chati”, “Na Khaunga Na Khane Dunga”, “Unki Soch Hai Vansvaad, Hamari Soch Hai Rashtravaad”, “Maa Bete Ki Sarkar (Government of Mother and Son)”, “Desh Ko Shashak Nahi Sevak Ki Zaroorat”, “Ve Naamdar Hai Aur Mai KaamDaar Hu”, “Vikas Bhi, Imaan Bhi Aur Garib Ka Samman Bhi”, “Mamooli Chai Vala, Garib Maa Ka Beta”, “Unke Liye Ganga Ek Nadi Hai, Mere Liye Ganga Maa Hai” to boast about his strong credentials of being a staunch nationalist whose political life is meant only to serve the people (Sinha, 2017). Modi deliberately chose to contest from Varanasi primarily because he wanted to engage in Hindutva politics by consolidating the core Hindu voters in the Hindi heartland states of India and eventually it paid political dividend for the party. However, the campaign of BJP was a mixture of Hindutva and developmental politics. Modi eloquently described and delivered his developmental model by using bit-sized slogans while using phrases such as: “2 Z: Zero Defect, Zero Effect”; “3D: Development, Demography, Dividend”; “3S: Skill, Scale, Speed”; “3W: Roadways, Railways, I’ways”; “4P: People, Public, Private, Partnership”; “4T:

Technology, Transport, Tourism, Travel”; “5F: Farm, Factory, Fiber, Fashion, Foreign”; “Minimum Government, Maximum Governance” (Sinha, 2017). All this one liner had a synchronising impact on the mass populace.

Besides emphasising on the failures and misrule of Congress led UPA government, BJP’s slogans portrayed Modi as a possible remedy for all the existing problems. Some slogans such as “Modi Lao Desh Bachao”, “Desh Mein Mehanga, Bhrashtachar Mitana Hai to Modi Ko Jitana Hai” were straightforward while others like “Jitega Yuva, Badlega Bharat” were designed to galvanise young voters (Tripathi, 2013). Modi’s campaign rallies were usually met with people chanting “Dekho, Dekho Kaun Aaya, Bharat ka Sher Aaya”, while delivering his speech slogan renting the air was- “BJP ko Jitayenge! Jitayenge, Jitayenge. Modiji ko Pradhan Mantri Banayenge, Banayenge Banayenge” (Tripathi, 2013). One of the rallies were named as “Vijay Shankanaad” (victory bugle) in Uttar Pradesh which depicted the confidence and enthusiasm among the karyakartas of saffron party. This rally was held much prior to Modi being designated as the BJP’s Prime Ministerial Candidate. While during Faizabad riots, one heard the provocative slogan- “UP Bhi Gujarat Banega, Faizabad Shuruwat karega”, while Muzaffarnagar riots saw the clarion call- “Desh, Bahu Aur Gay Ko Bachana Hai to Narendra Modi ko lana hai” (Tripathi, 2013).

The campaign also included slogans with casteist connotations. During the beginning of the “Samajik Nyay Yatra” (Social Justice for OBC’s), Samajwadi Party resurrected a historical slogan formulated by socialist thinker Ram Manohar Lohia: “Samajwadiyon Ne Bandhi Ganth, Pichhde Pawein Sau Mein Saath” (Socialists have committed to securing 60% quota for OBCs). SP also focused on slogans like “Desh Bachao, Desh Banao” to underscore Hindu-Muslim solidarity. Conversely, Mayawati coined- “Jiski Jitni Bhagedari, Uski Utni Hissedari”, advocating for the allocation of power and electoral seats proportional to population of the community. She also evoked BSP founder “Kanshiram Teri Nek Kamai, Tu Ne Soti Qaum Jagai” (Kanshiram’s accomplishment is that he enlightened the Dalit community). Supporters and karyakartas of BSP equated her to the Hindu deities and chanted “Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Kumari Mayawati Kumari Mayawati” in few of the rallies. From “Tilak Tarazu aur Talwar, Inko Maro Joote Char” to “Hathi Nahi Ganesh Hai Brahma Vishnu Mahesh Hai,”. It is noteworthy of the fact that BSP has always been recognised for developing impactful slogans that not only facilitates electoral victories and expands its voter base but also mirrors its political ideology.

On the other hand, Congress used slogans to promote its transformative and landmark legislative enactments such as the “Food Security Act” and the “Land Acquisition Law”. During the “Dhanyawad Rally” (thanksgiving) Rahul Gandhi urged the populace to commit to “Bhar-Pet Roti Khayenge, Congress Ko Vaapas Laayenge” (vote for the Congress and eat to your stomach's content). A faction of Congress sought Priyanka's leadership. A billboard in Allahabad stated: “Maiya Ab Rehti Bimar, Bhaiya Par Badh Gaya Bhaar, Priyanka Karo Prachaar, Congress ki Sarkar Banao Teesri Baar”, which translates to “Mother is unwell, Brother is overburdened, Priyanka, campaign for Congress to secure a third term.” Congress also responded to the BJP's nationalist discourse with “Kattar Soch Nahi, Yuva Josh” (not extreme ideology but youth empowerment). Despite being visible across several platforms, the campaign did not attain the success that the BJP's slogans experienced during the lead-up to the Lok Sabha elections. During Lok Sabha election in Bihar, various slogans were used both by JDU and BJP to project Nitish Kumar as an effective mass leader who had remarkably worked for the development of the region. Slogans like- “Jhaanse Mein Na Aaye, Nitish Ko Jitaye”, “Bihar Me Bahar Ho, Nitishe Kumar Ho”, “BJP Karegi Pehla Kaam, Jungle Raj Pe Poorna Viram”, “Janta Hai Tayar, Parivartan Lega Bihar, Abki Baar Bhajpa Sarkar” were used in the campaign. While, RJD took a dig at the NDA by coining “Apradh, Bhrashtachar aur Ahankar, Kya is Gathbandhan se Badhega Bihar”.

Modi stormed the national stage with the promise of ‘Acche Din’ and ‘Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas’, these phrases resonated and grasped the minds of voters who ached for leader with the will to provide good governance and fight corruption which was the major issue and challenge at that time. Although in his re-election in 2019, the poll narrative and sloganeering entirely changed and got shifted to National security. Upon the completion of its first year in power, Modi government promulgated the motto “Saal Ek, Shuruat Anek (One year but many beginnings).” In the second year, the slogan was “Mera Desh Badal Raha Hai, Aage Badh Raha Hai (My country is changing and progressing),” which continues to be one of the most favoured mantras among the BJP's organizational cadre and leaders. The conclusion of the government's third year was commemorated with the slogan “Saath Hai, Vishwas Hai, Ho Raha Vikas Hai (We are together and have faith, development is taking place)”, whereas the conclusion of the fourth year saw Modi unveil a video concluding with the tagline, “Saaf Niyat, Sahi Vikas (Clean Intentions, Good governance)”. Prior to the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, two slogans predominated the BJP's campaign: “Phir Ek Baar, Modi Sarkar” (A Modi government once again) and

“Namumkin Ab Mumkin Hai” (Jenkins, 2019). The former derives from the BJP's successful 2014 slogan, which the party believes bolstered its position and resonated with the electorate.

Rahul Gandhi targeted Modi government ferociously during the course of campaign by referring it to be “A Suit Boot Ki Sarkar”, which translates to “Government of the rich and Government for the rich”. There was a constant attempt to paint Modi as a friend of big corporates and enemy of the poor farmers. BJP cautiously reacted by calling itself not as a ‘Suit Boot ki Sarkar’ but as a “Soojh-Boojh ki Sarkar” which translates to a “Sensible and Matured Government”. Congress then launched “Chowkidar Chor Hai” campaign to target Modi. But the political acumen of Modi eventually turned the “Chowkidar Chor Hai” pitch of the Congress on its head. Modi the challenger had given himself the tag of “Chowkidar” in 2014, promising voters that he would neither take bribes nor allow others to do so (PTI, 2019). “Chowkidar Chor Hai” was a direct attack on that promise by Gandhi as he alleged crony capitalism and corruption in the Rafale Jet deal. The agenda of Congress was to tarnish the image of corrupt free Modi government. Congress had ill-intentions to make Rafael issue as big as Bofors scam, but it failed miserably in succeeding it. Supreme Court’s clean chit to the government in Rafael deal dented the campaign of Congress party. Meanwhile, Modi used this as an opportunity to establish counter narrative to galvanize party’s cadre. In this regard, Modi added ‘Chowkidar’ before his name on all the social media platforms, after which his entire cabinet colleagues Arun Jaitley, Sushma Swaraj, Nirmala Sitharaman, Rajnath Singh and dozens of other ministers adopted the prefix to their social media handles. In the first fortnight, an estimated two million Indians followed suit. Then there were the songs and ads on the Chowkidar theme which rejuvenated the entire campaign discourse.

The campaigning in 2019 election can be classified in two distinct phases- Pre and Post Pulwama attack in Kashmir. Pre-Pulwama attack had completely different tone of the campaign where BJP was focusing more on its achievements of past five years; whereas post-Pulwama attack BJP’s poll strategy solely focused on the national security. Post surgical strikes, BJP took upon the mantle of aggressive nationalism by coining several slogans such as-

“Mai Desh Nahi Rukne Dunga, Mai Desh Nahi Jhukne Dunga”,

“Jitega Desh, Harega Aatankwad”,

“Dushman Ke Ghar Me Ghuskar Aatankiyo Par Prahar, Phir Ek Baar Modi Sarkar”,

“Jhuk Gaya Pakistan, Laut Aaya Desh Ka Veer Jawan”,

“Aatankvadiyo ko Muhtod Jawab, Phir Ek Baar Modi Sarkar”,
“Har Har Modi, Ghar Ghar Modi, Bam Bam Modi”,
“Surgical Strike Kar Dia Hai Chaar, Abki Baar Chowkidar”,
“Lahar Nahi Lalkar Hai Phir Ek Baar Modi Sarkar Hai”,
“Rahul Ka Aatanki Hai Yaar, Abki Baar Modi Chowkidar”,
“Daagdar Nahi, Danddar Sarkar, Phir Ek Baar Modi Sarkar”,
“Sava Sa Crore Hai Uska Parivar, Phir Ek Baar Chowkidar” (Thakur, 2020)

BJP saw political opportunity in using Balakot airstrikes to its electoral advantage. The politicisation of Pulwama significantly influenced popular sentiment, contributing to its electoral triumph in the 2019 election. Modi’s rhetoric statement “Pakistan Ko Ghus Ke Mara” (We entered Pakistan and took revenge) emerged as the dominant discourse, eclipsing all other campaign issues. By the time the ballots were cast, Rahul Gandhi’s prior comments about Modi, notably “Chowkidar Chor”, had diminished and became electorally inconsequential. The ‘Brand Modi’ triumphed, with the BJP securing 303 seats of its own in the election.

Then came the Parliamentary elections of 2024 where BJP set an ambitious target of more than 400 seats and thereby coining the slogan “Teesri Baar Modi Sarkar, Ab Ki Baar 400 Paar”. Although there is a primary tagline, parties such as BJP and Congress use additional slogans to enhance their poll campaign. The BJP emphasised “400 Paar” and “Modi ki Guarantee”, whilst the Congress underscores its “Nyay” and guarantee initiatives, including the “Ghar Ghar Guarantee”. BJP just like before approached the election by emphasising Modi-centric personalised campaign, promoting Hindu nationalism (with the building of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya), and depicting India as a nation destined for a more prosperous future. The INDIA coalition, spearheaded by the Congress, aimed to frame the election as a referendum on India’s democratic destiny, highlighting concerns of fairness and redistribution within a more unequal society. The electoral competition between both the parties intensified significantly when Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that, if elected, the Congress would allocate public assets to Muslims. Lalu Yadav in his campaign speech made a personalised remark on Modi and said that “Modi had no family, to which Modi replied that the ‘whole country is his family. BJP leaders promptly appended the prefix “Modi Ka Pariwar” to their social media profiles, which rapidly garnered extensive popularity. However, it did not create the same buzz and lacked clarity as “Mai Bhi Chowkidar” campaign of 2019. In an election characterised by unforeseen developments and notable setbacks, BJP had one of its most humiliating defeats in Uttar Pradesh,

conceding the Faizabad Lok Sabha seat to the SP. The loss in Ayodhya, a seat of significant symbolic and political relevance to the BJP, indicates a change in the region's political dynamics and perhaps conveys a larger message from the people. Ayodhya has historically served as a stronghold of the BJP's political narrative, intricately linked to the party's socio-cultural identity since the Ram Janmabhoomi agitation. The slogan "Jo Ram ko Laye Hain, Hum Unko Layenge, UP Me Fir Se Hum Bhagwa Lehrayenge" succinctly embodied the BJP's campaign. The populist slogan fell flat and did not convert into the votes. The culmination and sanctification of the Ram Temple were pivotal to this storyline, with Modi personally participating in the consecration ceremony. BJP used this event to enhance its electoral chances, anticipating a substantial advantage from the temple's symbolism and the developmental measures it undertook in the region. BJP's slogan "Mandir Vahi Banayenge" was always countered by opposition with the rhetorical war-cry: "Mandir Wahin Banayenge, Lekin Tareekh Nahin Batayenge." The Opposition parties continued to mock the BJP, which vowed to build the Ram Temple in every election manifesto but failed to do so. Finally with the construction of Ram Temple, the poll narrative around it came to an end. Samajwadi Party's slogan "Is Baar, PDA Sarkar (Pichhda, Dalit, Alpsankhyak)" significantly influenced the consolidation of Muslims, Dalits and Yadavs in the Hindi heartland state of Uttar Pradesh. Although, BJP became the single biggest party, their campaign in 2024 proved counterproductive. BJP's over-ambitious slogan "Ab Ki Baar, 400 Paar", which sought over 400 seats for NDA coalition, adversely affected voters, as they thought that such a substantial majority would facilitate unlawful alterations in the Constitution of India. The opposition's entire campaign focused on creating false perception that if voted to power Modi will change the constitution and stop the reservation policy. To some extent, they achieved electoral dividend by creating such narrative. In contrast, BJP's campaign aimed to secure a third term by emphasising on issues like good governance, dynamic foreign policy and effective social welfare programs. Moreover, Modi fulfilled several campaign commitments, including the abolition of Article 370, the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, and the enactment of Citizenship Amendment Act.

CONCLUSION

Slogans can primarily be categorised into four types- Political slogans, Identity based slogans, Issue-based slogans and Personality based Slogans. The first phase can be seen as a phase of politico-social-economic sloganeering in which maximum impetus was laid down on the basic social needs and

requirements of the general populace. While in the second phase we see more of a personalised campaign that were based on the doctrine of individual identity assertion. It was the period when Indira Gandhi rose to power and tried to project herself as “India is Indira and Indira is India”. Similarly, during the emergency period, issue-based slogans were created to safeguard the constitutional rights of the citizens. The third phase of sloganeering paved way for socio-cultural-religious proclamation of identity politics in India where Mandal-Masjid and Market phenomenon emerged in the political scene. The fourth phase largely depicted the economic slogans of the time by focusing on the achievements of the respective governments. From wilted slogan of “India Shining” that brought disappointment to the BJP to Congress’s slogan of “Congress ka Hath Aam Aadmi ke Sath” this phase was marked with simple yet impactful slogans. Finally with the rise of BJP in 2014, we are again witnessing a slew of slogans that have spiced up the campaign communication. From ‘Abki Baar Modi Sarkar’ to ‘Acche Din Aane vale Hai’ slogans reverberated the minds and captured the imagination of electorates. Modi’s phase of sloganeering can thus be labelled as a blend of Nationalism fused Leadership centric slogans.

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BJP Manifestos: What Changed between 2014 and 2024?

Prof. Sangit Kumar Ragi¹

ABSTRACT

In 2024, the BJP fell short of a majority but formed the government at the centre. Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister for the third consecutive term. The success of the BJP is attributed to the charismatic leadership of Modi and the organizational and electoral strategy of Amit Shah which have been talked about a lot in media. What has been less talked about are the manifestos of the BJP whose careful and in-depth analysis reveals how it changed the electoral strategy and tuned the issues in response to changed situations. This article analyses three manifestos of the BJP i.e., 2014, 2019 and 2024 in a comparative framework beginning with the design of the cover page to slogans and issues and seeks to underline how the BJP shifted the strategy and issues for the electoral successes that followed. It goes to suggest that the BJP lost its script in using the turf of the caste which was not its strong ground and, instead of setting the agenda, exhausted its electoral campaign in responding to the allegations of the opposition.

Key Words: *BJP, Modi, Hindutva, Ram Mandir, Vikas and Virashat*

INTRODUCTION

The politics of India in the last four decades has evolved and revolved around the issues and agenda of the BJP. The BJP, which is the reinvention and revival of the Bharatiya Jan Sangh, which merged itself into the Janata Party for a short term, kept Hindutva at the core of its ideology. Protection, preservation, and extension of the Hindu culture and civilization; protection against onslaught coming from non-Indic religions through religious conversion, a powerful self-reliant economy and military prowess were the cornerstones of the party's ideology which made it different from other political formations (Puri,1980). The abrogation of Article 370, protection of the cow, stoppage of religious conversions, the uniform civil code, promotion of Hindi, Sanskrit and other Indian languages, were some of the key cultural-political agendas of the Bhartiya Jan Sangh which it reiterated again and again in it

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manifestoes (Party Documents, 1951-1972). ‘Jahan Huye Balidan Mukherjee Ye Kashmir Hamara Hai’ was the slogan that the Bhartiya Jan Sangh (BJS) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) took to the masses for years (Pathak, 2023). Issue of the protection of cows and the campaign against the Bangladeshi infiltration, religious conversions continued to find a place in the manifestos of the BJS and the BJP for decades. The cow protection campaign in which Sadhus participated in large numbers with the BJS also could not become a national outrage despite the killing of Sadhus by the police in protests in Delhi, and the BJS failed to create political capital out of it. The BJS faction, which had merged into Janata Party, finally came out to form the Bharatiya Janata Party in 1980 with Atal Bihari Vajpayee as its first president in Mumbai. BJP, which experimented with Gandhian Socialism, relegating Deendayal Upadhyay Integral Humanism to a margin, fared poorly in the election of 1980 and then in 1984 when the party got only two seats in the Lok Sabha.

The fortune changed only after the Rajiv Gandhi government at the centre turned the judgement of the Supreme Court on the Shah Bano case to appease the radical elements within the Muslim society; and to assuage the feelings of Hindus, got the lock of the Ram Temple opened through a judicial verdict in 1989 (Mishra, 2000). The BJP aligned itself with the Ram Temple Movement and combined it with the national security issue of the changing demography of several states of India that was rooted in infiltration from Bangladesh as well as the call of Swadeshi to make India self-reliant again (Pai, 1998). These issues hit the Congress very hard electorally. The buckling under the pressure of radical Muslim organizations convinced even the fence sitters that the party did it all for Muslim votes. They saw merit in the BJP arguments of the Congress playing the policy of Muslim appeasement to seek their support in elections. But the opening of the gate of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, as a strategy to balance the politics, proved very detrimental to the party as the Muslims shifted their loyalty to the regional leaders like Mulayam Singh and Lalu Prashad Yadav who were extremely vocal in favour of the Muslims on the issue of Ayodhya. Lalu Prashad Yadav stopped the Rath Yatra of Advani in Bihar and Mulayam Singh ordered to fire bullets at Kar Sevaks while crossing Sarayu to enter Ayodhya for Kar Seva (Dutta, 2019). Mulayam became Mulla Mulayam for Hindus but a hero for the Muslims. So was the case with Lalu Prasad Yadav who, for the Muslims, emerged as the true warrior of secularism and the Congress paid the price of getting relegated to the margins in both Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Hindus, on the other hand, gravitated towards the

BJP. This gave the BJP an edge in politics and it emerged as the largest party in the Lok Sabha and formed the government which lasted for 16 days only in absence of support from any other parties. The BJP again formed the government which lasted for 16 months with the support of its allies. However, the important point to observe here was that the party, which was untouchable for the non-BJP political formations, won friends in the parliament. But the government could not complete its full term. Even in the third term, the BJP had no majority on its own but Vajpayee ran a successful coalition government which could last for a full term. But the party decided to go for early polls due to a massive mandate in the Assembly elections of MP, Chhatisgarh and Rajasthan in November 2003 (Singh, 2013). However, the party lost to the Congress, which could not cross even 200 seats in the parliament, but formed a coalition government under the leadership of Manmohan Singh in 2004 and then in 2009. Advani, whose image got dented because of depicting Jinnah as secular during his visit to Pakistan, was the PM candidate of the NDA but the BJP further went down to 114 seats in the parliament (Rai, 2006).

The last two years of the Manmohan Singh government were charred by massive corruption charges in defense deals, license allotments for mines, commonwealth scams and for many more such wrong reasons which captured national headlines and badly dented the image of the government. Swami Ramdev and Anna Hazare's movement against corruption and black money became the talk of the town and the villages (Anikivi, 2015). The BJP supported this movement both overtly and covertly and the clean image of Manmohan Singh eventually got tarnished in the eyes of the masses.

It was amidst the scams and the policy paralysis, the unemployment and inflation, the frequent terror attacks in the country and the absence of a credible leadership that the opportunity was born for the BJP, in general, and Narendra Modi, in particular, to exploit the situation (Palshikar, 2014). The BJP and its leader Narendra Modi succeeded in dethroning the UPA government. The people gave a clear mandate to the BJP and it was the first time after a gap of 36 years that a political party singularly got the majority in the Lok Sabha, though the BJP formed the government with its coalition partners. 'Acche Din Aane wale Hain' (Good fortunes are to come) became a national slogan in no time (Pinto & Kar, 2014). A corrupt and a weak government charge that the BJP levelled against the Manmohan Singh government was well received by the people which can be measured from the fact that the Congress party could not win even 10 percent of the total strength of the Lok Sabha and therefore could not be entitled to the position of the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha (Sen, 2014).

The BJP not only repeated its success in 2019 but crossed over 300 seats on its own strength and secured over 374 seats with its allies. The nationalist euphoria, generated from the attack on Pakistan in response to the Pulwama attacks, largely worked in favour of the BJP. But the 2024 parliamentary elections, which were initially being seen as a cakewalk and a smooth sailing for the party, which claimed to get 370 seats on its own and over 400 with its allies (*Abki Bar Char Sau Paar*), fell flat (Hali, 2024). The BJP could barely manage to get 240 seats; though with the support of old and few new allies, it came into power for the third consecutive term. In a way, this was also a historic achievement as after the Covid pandemic, no government in the world could win the election. They were defeated all over, even in the first world. In that sense, Modi becoming the Prime Minister was indeed a success. To unpack this further, the present paper is a qualitative comparative analysis of the three BJP manifestoes i.e. of 2014, 2019 and 2024 in terms of understanding the ideology, the organization, the issues and leadership styles so as to know first, whether there has been a shift in the position of the party and second, how the BJP has kept its electoral strategies changing in order to connect with the masses.

As the leadership style has been the most popular issue talked about even by the opposition, it would be worth to start from here. The opposition has been attacking the PM that his style of functioning is that of a dictator and he pushes the agenda without consulting the opposition (PM Modi Behaving Like a Tin-Pot Dictator: Derek O'Brien, 2024). He does not respect the opposition government and does not even consult them. This seems far from the truth. The PM has always prioritized cooperative federalism and has the distinction of not dismissing any opposition government on this pretext or the other. He has always given an audience to the opposition leaders, including Mamta Banerjee, who did not lose any opportunity to use the most undignified terms for the PM. But within the BJP, he certainly has emerged as the tallest and the most unchallenging leader. And it is visible everywhere- from the manifesto to the speeches of the leaders who attribute everything to the leadership of Prime Minister Modi.

BJP UNDER THE MODI LEADERSHIP

Thus, the first most visible change in the BJP has been the leadership. In 2014, the leadership of Narendra Modi was challenged by none other but his mentor Lal Krishna Advani who despite doing very poor in the 2009 election, again wanted to be projected as the Prime Ministerial candidate of the BJP.

His people in the parliamentary board were very vocal against Narendra Modi. They did not want him to be declared as the Prime Ministerial candidate. Those who are privy to the internal news within the BJP know it very well that Sushma Swaraj, an Advani loyalist, who later became the foreign minister in the Modi government, vociferously opposed Modi's candidature. In another case, Modi had donated Rs 5 Crores to Bihar to fight against the flood in the state and the posters of Modi-Nitish were pasted on walls all over Patna where the BJP national executive members were assembled and Nitish Kumar was to host a dinner in their honor (Nitish Returns Rs 5 crore Gujarat Aid, 2013). Despite being part of the NDA, Nitish abruptly not only declared to decline the donation but in order to snub Modi, he cancelled the dinner too (When Nitish Cancelled The Modi Dinner, 2014). Reports later came that it was done on the behest of the Advani camp.

But Modi had the full backing of the RSS. Therefore, despite the opposition from the Advani camp, Narendra Modi became the in-charge of the election's campaign of 2014 and subsequently the Prime Ministerial candidate of the BJP (Asrar, 2014). For the first time, a sitting Chief Minister of a state who was reckoned to be a provincial leader, had made an orbital jump and was challenging the settled leadership of the party's national leaders. Narendra Modi, by then, had become the poster boy of the ideology of Hindutva and was running a successful government in the state whose model of development earned the appreciation from all quarters, not only in India but from abroad too.

Through the reality of vibrant Gujarat, Narendra Modi crafted a new image of himself as a forward-looking, development-oriented leader as opposed to the typical branding of him as a communal Hindu leader by the opposition who had gone to the extent of writing to the US government to refuse the VISA to him so that he may not visit the USA (Lakshman, 2016). However, by 2013, Narendra Modi had already established several milestones, one after another, to be emulated by the other chief ministers of India. Shining wide roads and state highways, growing industrial complexes, water canals and irrigation facilities, the reality of accessing electricity 24x7, 100 per cent electrification and electricity reaching all villages had earned him a rare distinction of an achiever and a performer among the comity of chief ministers and leaders who are largely known for politicking and inefficiency (Narayan, 2014). The annual investment meets of Gujarat became international news. It had become the favored destination for people in business. The SMS of Modi to Ratan Tata to shift the Nano car factories to Gujarat in wake of Nandigram and Singur

controversy had caught the national and international attention (Tata Motors Ltd Shifted To Gujarat From Singur Because of Law And Order, 2011).

And, therefore, the declaration of Modi as a Prime Ministerial candidate of the BJP electrified its cadres and those of the RSS's hardcore followers who were unhappy with the BJP after Advani's fiasco in Pakistan on the issue of Jinnah. BJP cadres wanted a change, a leader who could push the nationalist agenda. So did the RSS, which had seen how the Congress government attempted to implicate its leaders in the terror attacks. This was the same time when the term 'Bhagwa Aatankwad' was coined by the Congress to advance the arguments that it is not only Muslims who indulged in terrorism and terror attacks but even the right-wing organizations engaged in attacks against Muslims (Dharmani, 2013). Digvijay Singh launched the book which hypothesized that Mumbai attack was the handiwork of the RSS (RSS & 26/11: Digvijay Flags It Off Again This Time In Mumbai, 2010). The organization now needed a powerful leader who could galvanize the masses and cherish the ideology of Hindutva. The organization had no faith in Advani who was forced to resign as the president of the party. Needless to say, Advani was not even consulted and the BJP declared Narendra Modi as the Prime Ministerial candidate in the Goa conclave in 2014. The script was already decided and done with, which is evident from the fact that before the elections could be declared, Modi had already done one round of election rallies in over 114 constituencies of India (Narendra Modi's Electoral Milestone: 437 Rallies, 3 Lakh km, 2014). And his meetings drew a huge crowd. The response of the crowd, with echoes of chants and cheers of 'Modi-Modi' for a few minutes, the moment Modi arrived on the dais or rose to address the audience, showed the connect that he had established with the masses and it was certainly not orchestrated in any sense of communication. Modi followed the policy of consensus and team leadership in his approach.

The cover page of the BJP manifesto of 2014 had all three stalwarts and former presidents of the party such as Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Lal Krishna Advani and Murali Manohar Joshi along with the incumbent president Rajnath Singh (BJP Manifesto, 2014). The first three were the undisputed top three leaders of the party for whom there was a popular slogan "Bharat ke Ye teen Dharohar, Atal Advani Murali Manohar." (Tiwari, 2014). Besides them, all the four Chief Ministers of the BJP ruled states were on the front page along with Sushma Swaraj and Arun Jaitley. Jaitley was an Advani man in Delhi but he had stood like rock behind Modi, assisting him in the legal matters. These Chief Ministers were charismatic leaders and had considerable following and

organizational control in their states.

This got replaced now in 2019 and the 2024 respectively. Modi, by now, had become a brand for the BJP who between 2024 and 2019 won state after state. Narendra Modi had chosen to contest from Varanasi to influence the voting in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. And it paid well. In the parliamentary elections of 2014, Nitish Kumar had dissociated from the NDA and fought elections alone. The result was clear. People voted Modi and JD(U) was defeated badly. This forced Nitish Kumar to come back to the NDA fold and form the government with the BJP in the state. The BJP, along with its allies, won over 73 seats in Uttar Pradesh in the parliamentary elections of 2019 and defeated the Congress-SP combined, reckoned to be a formidable one in legislative Assembly elections of 2017. There were many new states where the BJP had never come in power but won the elections and formed the government in states like Assam, Tripura, Haryana and it also bounced back into power in Karnataka as well as in Maharashtra with its ally Shiv Sena had become a big brand and his presence in the elections made a huge difference as the BJP snatched victory from the jaws of possible defeat in some of the legislative assembly elections in states (From Economy to Politics: How India has Changed during 9 years Modi Government, 2023). The result was that it finally marked the end of the Advani-Joshi era of the BJP, who were then sent to the *Margdarshak Mandal* and a new team of leadership came up in the BJP (BJP parliamentary board rejigged; LK Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi dropped, 2014).

In 2019, there was no more photographs of Advani, Joshi or Rajnath Singh or even the Chief Ministers of the BJP states, though in the 2024 party manifesto, Jagat Prakash Nadda figured (BJP Manifesto, 2019). The absence of the photo of the BJP president Amit Shah in the 2019 election manifesto was not because Amit Shah, out of respect, did not want his photograph to be with Narendra Modi; it was because the party wanted to ride on the credibility and popularity of the Prime Minister which was unchallenged despite the Rafael controversy and Rahul Gandhi's aggressive tirade against the Prime Minister with the slogan "Chowkidar Chor Hai" (Chowkidar chor hai' new slogan in India: Rahul Gandhi, 2018). People did not believe it. Further, Modi has never been discourteous like Indira Gandhi in public with the constitutional dignitaries and even in the party, he has never sought to bypass the protocol. On several occasions, he said that when he was made the election in-charge, he used to report every day in the evening to the then president of the BJP, Rajnath Singh.

Though it sent the message to the political commentators and the opposition to press the charge that a one-man show had now engulfed the BJP which used to take pride in collective leadership but this was purely a strategy of the BJP to cash in the popularity of the PM. Rahul Gandhi and the opposition called him Shahanshah (emperor) and a dictator but it did not dent the image of the PM (Shahenshah enacted a law in Parliament against truck drivers, says Rahul Gandhi on truckers strike over criminal laws, 2024). The Congress raised the issue of Rafael in hopes that as Bofors had worked for the opposition in denting the image of Rajiv Gandhi, 'Chowkidar Chor hai' will do the same against Modi on the issue of the Rafael jet fighters' purchase from France. But the surveys published by agencies showed that the PM's popularity was not just intact but went up marginally (Narayan, 2019).

The second change was the tagline of the BJP- 'Shreshtha Bharat with Sabaka Sath Sabka Vikas' (BJP Manifesto, 2019). The manifesto of 2019 carried this but in the 2024 manifesto, it was missing. Further, the cover page of the election manifesto of 2014, which was titled as 'Ek Bharat, Shrestha Bharat', was changed to 'Sankalp Patra' in 2019 and 'Modi ki Guarantee' and 'Phir Ek Baar Modi Sarkar' in 2024 (Venniyoor, 2024). In the 2014 manifesto, the photographs of the founding icons of the Jan Sangh such as Shyama Prashad Mukherjee and Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay were placed on the second page of the manifesto. But they did not figure at all in the election manifesto of the BJP in 2019 and 2024. Does this mean that the party discarded these icons or moved away from the ideology which these stalwarts cherished and propagated? Or did Modi deliberately did so to prove that he was larger than these icons?

The speech of the Prime Minister on the occasions of the birth anniversary of both Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay and Shyama Prashad Mookerjee do show that it was not ill-intended but it was just to cash in the rising international image of the PM in the elections. In the 2014 manifesto, there was a preamble underlining the commitment to certain goals and values such as to promote a vibrant participatory democracy, a pro-active, pro-people and transparent governance, promoting a globally competitive economy, connecting villages and providing them quality life with all basic and modern amenities and to create a 'Brand India' (BJP Manifesto, 2014). There was no such pledge in the 2019 and 2024 manifestoes which directly came to the issues at hand after messages of the Prime Minister and the incumbent and former President of the BJP, Rajnath Singh, who was the chairman of the Manifesto committee (Rajnath to head BJP's LS manifesto committee; Sitharaman made convener, 2024).

The slogan ‘Sabka Sath and Sabka Vikas’, which was the tagline of the BJP on the front page of the 2014 manifesto, was missing on the cover pages of the manifestoes of 2019 and 2024. The coinage of the term was intended to break the post-Godhra image of Narendra Modi in order to stop the polarization of the Muslim votes against the party and to assure the Muslims that the coming of the BJP into power was not going to harm the interests of the Muslims. Zafar Sareshwala, who was a prominent Muslim businessman and an intellectual from the state of Gujarat, became a popular TV face in those days. He was invited on almost all channels and spoke in favour of Modi in the press, highlighting how communal riots had become alien to the state and the Muslims’ prosperity went up in Gujarat under the leadership of Modi (Wajihuddin, 2013). The Sacchar Committee and Rangnath Mishra Committee reports, which stated the poor conditions of Muslims in the left and Congress governed states, provided political ammunition to the BJP to attack the opposition that they did not aid and assist the Muslims by promoting their education and wealth but only exploited their presumed fear of the BJP for electoral gains (Unnithan & Mishra, 2006). Although by 2019, Modi subsequently became as much accessible to Muslims as he was for any other community and ensured that nothing was done to harm them physically yet, he did not walk the extra mile, like the Congress, to assuage their identity feelings. And he publicly but politely declined to wear the skull cap when a Muslim person attempted to place it on his head on the dais of a function (Langa, 2011). The opposition criticized and alleged that this act of Modi was a disgrace to the community and was not secular in intent (Unnithan, 2018). The BJP countered this by arguing that if the Muslims cannot place *Tilak on their forehead* quoting Islam, and yet, they are secular, why is it essential for a Hindu to wear the skull cap to be secular? (Mahmood Madani backs Narendra Modi for not accepting skull cap, 2014). Modi always drew a line between governance and politics. In governance, he ensured that no Muslim fell victim to the state apparatus but in politics, he refused the Congress style of wearing the skull cap and throwing Roja-Iftar parties to the Muslim elites to make inroads in their constituencies for electoral purposes. But he always attended the functions of the Bohra Muslims of Gujarat and appreciated their contribution to the economy of the state, thus, standing apart from the other political parties via his divergent approach (Saiyed, 2023).

Before ‘Sabka Vishwas’ became the catch line to reach out to the Muslims in 2019, the BJP, on the instructions of the Prime Minister, had launched a programme to reach out to the Muslims and share the vision of the PM. In the parliamentary board meetings of the party, he cautioned the leaders

of the BJP who loosely spoke against the Muslims. The Muslims were the disproportionately larger beneficiaries of the programmes of the policies of the government, like the Ujjwala Yojana or the Prime Minister Awas Yojana (Minority communities benefitted most from welfare schemes under Modi govt, 2023; Ujjwala has led social change, 45% of beneficiaries dalits and tribals: PM, 2018). He hoped that the Muslims, who were beneficiaries of the government policies, could be drawn towards the BJP. And therefore, he asked them to work with him. Further, he raised the issue of the Pasmada Muslims who constitute the largest proportion of the overall Muslim community but are poor, illiterate and deprived. It was interpreted as a clever political design to divide the Muslim community so that they could not make a united choice against the BJP. The BJP also hoped that a big chunk of the Muslim women would vote for the party to showcase gratitude in return for making triple Talak or Talak-e Biddat, an illegal and a punishable offence. The BJP propagated that it intended for the liberation of Muslims women and their children from being tortured by their husbands who could, at any time, divorce their wives in one go for want of new and young wives. Muslim women celebrated it and appreciated it also. The BJP expected that it would bring a change in the voting patterns of Muslims. The Muslim women would vote for the party; if not all but certainly a substantial proportion of their population. But the voting pattern showed that irrespective of the social and sectorial subdivisions within the Muslim community, they voted against the BJP (Mandal, 2024). And the BJP feedback system made it known to the Prime Minister who, in the second leg of the election campaign of 2024, started making scathing attacks against the mindset of the Muslim community without naming the Muslims (PM Modi made Islamophobic remarks in 110 campaign speeches: Human Rights Watch, 2024).

As the BJP campaign of 2014 was aimed at defeating the opposition and form the government, the manifesto started with those issues which were very close to the heart of the people. The party depicted the UPA-I and UPA-II regimes, as the 'Decade of Decay'(BJP Manifesto, 2014). As scams, corruptions, price rise, unemployment, the issue of black money and policy paralysis were the rallying points for the people against the government, the manifesto of 2014 started with these issues. The Anna Hazare movement against corruption and black money had generated a mass hysteria against the government in which Narendra Modi appeared as a beacon of light. His statement that if black money parked in the foreign countries was brought back, everyone will be getting 15 Lakhs in their account, became an election issue (PM Modi's promise of 'Rs 15 lakh in each account' an idiom: Amit Shah,

2015). This continued to be a discussion point for years to come and later on, the opposition twisted it to suggest that ‘look how the Modi Guarantee is an empty slogan as he could not deliver on the commitment to give 15 lakhs to all Indians, neither could he bring back the black money of Indians stashed in the foreign banks’. The BJP had also accused the Congress government of not maintaining the double digit growth rate, which was at the time of the Vajpayee government, that nose-dived to 4.8 percent during the UPA regime, promoting ‘jobless growth’ (No reform in UPA growth story as GDP up just 4.8 per cent, 2013). The manifesto promised to transform the employment exchange into a Career Centre and assured a corruption free government, self-employment, technology enabled e-governance, policy and technology driven minimum government and maximum governance etc. These were very catchy assurances and a completely new narrative for the Indian electorates which focused on the vision of a developed India. And, people believed Narendra Modi because he had cultivated such an image of a deliverer in Gujarat as the Chief Minister.

The 2019 and 2024 manifestos also talked about these issues but they were more in the form of what had been done and achieved so far, and what it intends to do in the next five years to come. As the Pulwama issue had generated anger against Pakistan and Modi responded to the issue by striking at Balakot in Pakistan, a mood of national masculinity in favour of the BJP had already swelled. The BJP sought to cash it in the 2019 elections and therefore it started the manifesto with the caption ‘Nation First’; a commitment which the BJP and the BJS had spoken of always. Zero tolerance against Terrorism, primacy to the National Security, self-reliance in the defence sector, combating Left wing extremism, Citizenship Amendment bill to tackle the illegal infiltrators from Bangladesh- these occupied the first few pages instead of a talk on price rise and unemployment which figured in the 2014 manifesto (BJP Manifesto, 2019). ‘Make in India’ in the defence sector was projected to tell the electorates how the Congress party neglected the security of the country and how the BJP was committed to make India a strong nation both economically and militarily.

In the 2019 Election manifesto, special reference was made to the manufacturing of the most modern weaponry systems like AK-203 automatic rifles in factories at Amethi (BJP Manifesto, 2019). But by 2024, the issues had changed, and the issue of defence got placed on page 38 of the manifesto, where it extensively mentioned how the BJP government worked hard to keep the defence of India strong and far more robust. It recalled the surgical strikes of 2016 and the air strikes of 2019, the creation and appointment of the Chief of the Defence Staff, which no previous government dared to do, and

the robust infrastructure along the Indo-Chinese border to match the prowess of the enemy which remained neglected for decades under the leadership of the Congress party (BJP Manifesto, 2024). Modi earlier had introduced the concept of treating the last village along the borders as the first villages of India and was committed to the laying of the optical fiber, to providing 24x7 electricity and availability of the basic amenities in these border villages so that the people of these villages don't fall prey to the Chinese rumors and tactics. It also mentioned the elimination of Left-wing extremism. In the 2024 Election Manifesto, the party placed the statistical data before the country that there was a 71% reduction in insurgency in the North-East and 52 percent reduction in the left-wing extremism (BJP Manifesto, 2024). It also placed the abrogation of Article 370 as one of the major achievements of the government and highlighted how the state (presently a UT) has returned to normalcy after a substantial reduction in terror activities (BJP Manifesto, 2024). On 25th January, the Home Minister had held a press conference in which it was stated categorically that after the abrogation of Article 370, there was no case of stone pelting in the valley, there was reduction in terror activities and casualties from both the civilians and the armed forces (Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation, Press Information Bureau, 2024). The manifesto of 2024 also talked about the Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Register for the Citizen, both of which are intended at going hard on the illegal infiltrators and aim at sending them back to their countries, including the Rohingyas from Burma.

DID BJP SIDELINED THE ISSUE OF RELIGIOUS CONVERSION?

Another shift in the BJP manifesto was the absence of any direct mention of any opposition to the religious conversions and the use of the term cultural nationalism which had been a term perennial to almost all the manifestos of the BJS and BJP. This term was replaced by the 'preservation and promotion of civilizational ethos and cultural heritage and its ancient wisdom'(BJP Manifesto, 2019). Thus, the party firmly made it clear that it would not sideline its cultural and ideological agenda. The manifestoes of 2014 and 2019 clearly mentioned the BJP's commitment to building the Ram Mandir at Ayodhya and in the 2024 Manifesto, it proudly owned the fulfilment of its commitment on the subject. The party clearly stated that unlike the Congress it does not see the 'cultural values' as hurdles to the progress of modern India but as being 'essential to our future' (BJP Manifesto, 2019). In line with this, the party committed to both the protection of all Indic languages and dialects and the promotion of Sanskrit for which it announced 100 Panini fellowships. In

the 2024 election manifesto, the BJP coined a very popular phrase- ‘Virasat Bhi, Vikash Bhi’ in which it elucidated how it renovated Kashi, Kedarnath and Ujjain Mahakal temples besides many others. It remained, however, silent on the complete liberation of the Kashi and Mathura temples. The manifesto of 2019 promised to ‘conserve Bharatiya Faith and Bharatiya culture’(BJP Manifesto, 2019).The spirit of opposition to religious conversion of Hindus was very much enshrined in it. Obviously, it was intended to send a message to the Hindus that the BJP was conscious of the concerns of the Hindus that the religious demography in several states of India was and is being changed by design to change the political and cultural narrative of the state and it will do its all to stop it.

Modi, otherwise also, led by example. He showed that it was not essential to discard the religious identity in order to be secular even if you are the head of the government, something which the Nehruvian secularism had sought to underline. He visited almost all the important temples of India and his media team ensured that it was shown on the TV, if not broadcasted live. This was before 2014 and it continued even to this election. In the 2019 elections, on the last day of voting, he went to Kedarnath and sat for meditation for hours and it was telecasted live (Chowrasia,2024). In 2024 also, he went to Kanyakumari in Kerala and chose the famous temple there at Vivekanand Rock for 24 hours of meditation (Chowrasia, 2024). The opposition criticized it on the grounds that it was intended to influence the Hindu voters in the election. But this was not the first time that Modi had resorted to his commitment to the faith he believed in and flaunted his Hindu identity. The saffron dhoti with the yellow kurta and the tripund on the forehead gave several chances to the photographers to capture this image on their cameras. He reached out to the masses through the twitter message that on the suggestion of the spiritual gurus he would undertake a special 11-day ritual before participating as *Yajman* in the consecration ceremony at the Ram Temple at Ayodhya (PM Modi Begins Special 11-day Ritual Before Opening of Ram Temple in Ayodhya, 2024). He was not shy of his Hindu identity. Rather he flaunted his identity during all Pujas- whether it was the inauguration of the Kashi Vishwanath temple or while performing Puja in the temples of the South (Kumar, 2023).

Interestingly, the 2014 election manifesto dedicated one page to addressing the concerns of the minority. The issues discussed there in demonstrate that ‘minority’ means Muslims as the manifesto talked about issues that largely dealt with the Muslims such as Madrasa modernization, empowering Waqf boards and taking steps ‘to remove encroachments from the unauthorized occupation

of Waqf property’ (BJP Manifesto, 2014). Conversely, the government in its third term has tabled bills in the Parliament to make changes in the Waqf Board laws, to preserve and promote Urdu etc. It also highlighted that it will ensure that there is no place for ‘perpetrators or exploiters of fear’ (BJP Manifesto, 2014). Interestingly, the 2024 manifesto talks about minorities again but it mentions linguistic minorities; it does not talk about religious minorities. In the 2019 elections manifesto, there was no separate page or headings on the minorities. Accordingly, there was no discussion on Madrasa education or preservation of Urdu. On the contrary, the manifesto talked about working towards the implementation of the Uniform Civil Code. In the 2024 election manifesto as well, no page or even a single paragraph is dedicated to the substance which could give the sense of Muslim appeasement. On the contrary, it went hard on the practice of Triple Talak by calling it a ‘barbaric act’ and how the BJP emancipated the Muslim women from this medieval barbarism (BJP Manifesto, 2024).

The BJP manifesto of 2024 did not use the term ‘Muslim’ at all except for this one instance in which it talked about how the practice of Triple Talak was stopped by the BJP government for the benefit of the suffering Muslim daughters. The BJP had hoped that this would help in bringing the Muslim women to its fold and expected that they would vote for the party. But the voting pattern of Muslims as such completely belied this hope. Muslims en-bloc voted against the BJP not as usual but far more aggressively than earlier (Sharma & Kidwai, 2024). On the contrary, the Congress party used the term minority 15 times in their manifesto and promised several social, economic and cultural policies for them in case the party was voted into power. Minority for the Congress, for all practical purposes, means Muslims only. It used this term 18 times in 2014 and 11 times in 2019 (Congress Manifesto, 2014-2024).

One reason why the BJP succeeded in 2014 was because of the promise to change the country and it had made an emotional appeal to the electorates to give it five years, as they have voted for the Congress for over 50 years and it had stayed in power. The first three pages mentioned price rise, unemployment, jobless growth, corruption, black-money, poor delivery, policy paralysis and the BJP manifesto promised to deliver on these issues if voted to power. The Prime Ministerial candidate Narendra Modi, who led the election campaign, invoked and addressed the aspirations of the young people and impressed upon them to compare how our leaders failed the nation in the last 70 years. The younger generations, exposed to the developed countries of Europe and America through the world of the internet, could easily connect with the

accusations of Modi. In the 2014 manifesto, Murali Manohar Joshi echoed Modi's election speech that democracy and demography were dividends and instead of crying on it, they need to be used for the good of the nation. And the only way was to educate, skill and make them employable (BJP Manifesto, 2014).

This led to programmes and projects like 'Skill India' and 'Start up India', Mudra loans, loan to street vendors; funding young entrepreneurs accordingly became the pathways to employment generation. The 2014 election manifesto promised to make India a 'knowledge powerhouse' and committed to take up the skill enhancement in mission mode through 'skill mapping', the launch of National-Multi Skill Mission, responsive industry-responsive manpower, vocational training etc. (BJP Manifesto, 2014). Modi emphasized on self-employment through the start-up programmes and it paid off well as well. In the last 10 years, India could be home to 115 unicorns i.e. the companies which have a valuation between 1 billion to 10 billion (Mitter, 2023). In the 2019 election manifesto, it informed that 17 crore entrepreneurs had availed the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana and it aimed to increase it to 30 crores in the times to come (BJP Manifesto, 2019). It also promised to start the 'Seed Start-Up Fund' with Rs 20000 crore to empower the youth entrepreneurs (BJP Manifesto, 2019). Modi bypassed the traditional pathways and sought to write a new grammar of development which attracted criticism as well. He focused on Swadeshi with modifications with the sole purpose of making India as a manufacturing hub and positively impacting the global trade to Bharat's benefit (Nandi, 2024). Therefore, be it defence or the toys industry or the semi-conductor clusters, he emphasized on indigenous production. For instance, from the contract to the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) to the manufacturing of the combat aircraft to starting work in all the ordinance factories is a case in point.

After 'Nation First' that dealt with security of the country, the first issue which the election manifesto of 2019 discussed was the issue of the farmers with the caption reading as "Doubling Farmers Income". This topic ran into a few pages in which the BJP promised to initiate several policies and welfare schemes for the farmers which intended to increase the productivity of the crops to ensure the maximum profit. 'Pradhan Mantri Kishan Samman Nidhi', which was restricted to the farmers having 2 acres of land, was now extended to all farmers; pensions for all marginal farmers who crossed the age of 60, crops insurance policy, Kishan credit facility and many more such plans and policies for the farmers were announced in the manifesto (BJP Manifesto,

2019). It talked of sufficient warehouse facilities for the farm products, not only on highways, but also close to the villages so that there is no wastage of the crops the farmers have produced and so that they could sell them at their ease. It also covered issues like the digitization of the land records intended at reducing the land disputes in villages and the Blue Revolution to promote fisheries and so on. But there was no discussion on the Minimum Support (Price MSP) in the manifesto, neither in 2014 nor in 2019, though Modi as a Chief Minister in Gujrat had backed the Swaminathan Committee reports on the MSP (Prabal, 2024).

In the 2014 election manifesto, a discussion on agriculture was started at the bottom of page number 27 and ran over the entire page 28. It talked about 'increased investment in agriculture and rural development', promised to expand rural credits and 'increase the farmers' income' but did not make any pledge to implement the Swaminathan report (BJP Manifesto, 2014). In the 2024 election manifesto, it is mentioned that how there has been an unprecedented increase in the MSP for major crops and it committed to follow this into the future also. But again, instead of being led by the masses, the party decided to follow the fair principles of financial prudence. It listed out how the BJP government assisted the farmers by giving them Rs 6000 every year as part of the PM Kishan Samman Yojana. It mentioned about schemes like fair insurance of crops and quick payments to the farmers in case of damage to their crops, the launching of Krishi satellite and the positioning of Bharat as a nutri-hub in the times to come (BJP Manifesto, 2024). It also listed out how much the BJP government did for the farmers and how committed it is to their betterment. But it resisted the option of bending before the illogical demands of the farmers that wished to coerce the government to make the MSP legally binding for all crops. It genuinely wanted to change the farm sector by bringing in the three farm laws, making it more market oriented but they had to be withdrawn due to the farmers' protests. The Prime Minister made it clear that these laws were withdrawn not because they were bad but simply because the farmers were on the roads. And this is no more a hidden fact that both the Aam Adami Party and the Congress had their minds behind it to seal the political fortunes of the BJP.

In fact, by the time the BJP entered the parliamentary elections in 2024, it hoped that the performance and delivery will work for the party in the election combined with the emotional euphoria that the Ram Temple had generated a few months back. This was not without reason. In the last ten years, over 50 crore people were linked to the banking system through the Jan Dhan Account

(PMJDY Accounts Cross 50 crore, Deposits Exceed Rs 2 lakh crore, 2023). Money was being transferred directly to the same number of people. 80 crore or even more than that were getting free rations since 2020 (Free Ration To The Poor Will Be Extended For 5 years, 80 crore will Benefit: Modi, 2023). 34 crore citizens were given health insurance under which they could avail treatment up to Rs 5 Lakhs, four crore beneficiaries got pukka houses and 14 crore received fresh drinking water through the Jal Jeevan Mission, 25 crores came out of poverty, 10 crore women benefited from the Ujjwala Yojana. 11+ crore benefited from the Kishan Samman Yojana (Negi, 2024). The list is too high to accommodate all statistics and arguments here.

But what was the most striking feature of the manifesto of 2024 was that it was Modi centric. Modi was given a place in the manifesto of 2014 only two times followed by 33 times in 2019 and 73 times in 2024. Critics, even from within the Sangh Parivar, raised the voice that individual-centric policy and programmes do not go in consonance with the style of functioning of the RSS and its ancillary organizations (Vaidya, 2024). But the matter of fact is that be it 2014, 2019 or 2024, it was the Modi-Shah duo who led the campaign and took the party to the victories through the electoral strategy. Yogi Adityanath, Shivraj Singh Chauhan and Hemant Biswa Sharma really worked as second engines or double engines. The BJP sought to make the parliamentary elections a form of presidential one. The campaign of the party had hoped that the beneficiaries would do good for the BJP by showing their support but that did not happen. The BJP failed to get the number which it had in the 2019 elections.

CONCLUSION

In the 1990s, the politics of the country had four discernable strands, all four cross-cutting each other. There was a Mandal movement which aimed at giving primacy to the caste politics. Second was the Mandir movement, which sought to unite Hindus, and it countered the first one. The third was Swadeshi and it called for economic nationalism on which both the left and the right converged. And the fourth was the policy of the free market which sought to get rid of the license permit raj and de-bureaucratize the domains of economy. The beauty of Narendra Modi was that he merged all four streams into one and made the party almost invincible. He redefined social justice by really giving a dignified life to the citizens of Bharat in the form of giving them houses, toilets, free ration and Chulha for cooking and an adequate representation in the council of ministers to the people who were at the margins of society in terms

of the social and political domains. It dented the caste politics which reflected in the BJP victory in UP and Bihar. Further, he continued to be the poster boy of Hindutva through the building of the Ram Temple, the renovation of Kashi and the Ujjain temple and many such initiatives. Thirdly, he never shied away from foreign investment and always welcomed the foreign companies to invest in Gujarat but at the same time he never left any opportunity to make 'Make in India' a true campaign on the ground. He called upon the people of the country to use Swadeshi to the maximum extent possible. The breaks in the supply chain during the Covid pandemic and the Indo-China tensions in the 2020s had made him realize that depending on others would be catastrophic for the national interest.

The BJP sought to reinvent and project itself as a centrist party in the election manifesto of 2024. It attempted to break the typical image of a Brahman Bania urban centric cow belt party. For the first time, in its manifesto, the party openly mentioned that in the cabinet formation, it would give 60 percent representation to the MPs coming from the OBC, SC and ST communities. When the cabinet formation was made, the party had projected that it had given a fair representation to the sections of society which, so far, were not represented and were at the margins in terms of the decision making at the highest level. If one compares the caste representation in the cabinet of the Manmohan Singh government to that of the BJP, the latter's claim was not untrue. In 2014, before going to elections, there were only two members from the SC community, Sushil Kumar Shinde and Mallikarjun Kharge whereas one from the OBC community- Veerappa Moily in the UPA II government led by the Congress party. Contrary to that, in the Council of Ministers of Modi, there are 29 OBC ministers including 2 from SEBC, 10 from the SC community and 5 from the ST community. Never in the history of India was such a large representation given to these sections of the society. But this too did not work for the BJP. These ministers could not counter a false campaign that the victory of the BJP in the 2024 election would end the reservations for the Dalits and the backward castes. It is here that the BJP made the mistake. Caste is the turf of the regional parties. The BJP was destined to fail after it ignored Hindutva and nationalism as the core of its election agenda. In fact, it failed to set the agenda, which it did in 2014 and 2019. This time, its entire campaign remained focused on countering the Congress and the opposition on issues such as the reservation and the supposed threats to the Indian constitution. And thus, it lost the plot of victory.

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Digital Spaces and Political Mobilisation

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ABSTRACT

The 21st century has ushered in an unprecedented era of digital transformation, fundamentally altering how society organizes, communicates, and engages in political discourse. This paper examines how digital spaces have reshaped political mobilization, particularly in the Indian context, where traditional hierarchical frameworks are being challenged by new forms of digital engagement. Through an analysis of the 2024 Indian General Elections, the study explores how political parties have adapted their mobilization strategies to leverage digital infrastructure within a competitive electoral framework. The paper demonstrates how digital spaces witness and further a kind of 'stalagmite mobilization', contrary to Nettl's (1967) traditional conception for developing countries, as digitalization enables mainstream political participation beyond physical boundaries. Drawing on Habermas's (1991) conceptualization of the public sphere and Chadwick's (2017) hybrid media systems, an attempt is made to examine how digital platforms facilitate the transformation of constructed narratives into perceived reality through algorithmic amplification and affective resonance. While digital spaces create new opportunities for political engagement and innovative approaches to e-governance, they simultaneously present challenges through misinformation, surveillance, and digital divides which necessitates the reconceptualization of political mobilization even more.

Keywords: *Digital Spaces, Political Mobilization, Platform Governance, Algorithmic Mediation, Digital Public Sphere, Digital Transformation, Political Communication, Digital Legitimation, E-panopticon, Digital Governmentality*

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Note: This research paper is drafted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the ICSSR-sponsored Major Research Project titled 'State, Market and Digitalisation: A Study of Digital Democracy and Exclusion in India'. The authors acknowledge the financial support provided by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), Ministry of Education, Government of India for this research work. However, the authors are responsible for the facts so stated, opinions expressed, and conclusions drawn.

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has ushered in an unprecedented era of digital transformation, fundamentally altering how society organises, communicates, and engages in political discourse. The technology-driven 'Information Age' saw a proliferation of computers and information devices and was enabled by a network of satellites and broadband fibre optic cables, paving the way for 'the rise of the network society' (Castells, 2011). Technology is society made durable (Latour, 1991) with agency digitised. The Internet creates a virtual landscape with new technology, a space which becomes personal, political and ideological. It blurs the traditional "organically social" notion and emerges as a non-place (Auge, 2009) of concealed identities and anonymity. Building on the foundation of technological advancement and network society, political organisations and movements adopt strategies to leverage digital infrastructure in a competitive electoral framework guided, sustained and influenced by digital spaces (Neudert & Marchal, 2019). Digital spaces may be defined as 'mathematized' spaces structured by algorithms, networks, and data flows. It is devoid of embodied spatial experience of "being together" in terms of bodily proximity (Hardesty & Sheredos, 2019). It concerns digital technologies and how people interact with them and through them (Benyon, 2014). Digital spaces enable virtual interactions mediated by technology, forming communities based on algorithmic connections and shared digital experiences, fundamentally transforming how bonds are formed and maintained.

Political participation is the cornerstone and essence of democracy. Different voices and opinions influence the voting behaviour and ultimately the policies of the government. Political participation of people does not only refer to their voting in elections, but is also expressed through public debates, campaigning, gatherings, newspaper articles, protests, joining political organizations, advocating for specific policies or issues etc. The digital spaces today re-vitalize civic engagement in politics in an unprecedented way. With the rising popularity of social media platforms, people engage in political discourse, disseminate information and mobilize support and connect for various political causes. The digital spaces present a unique paradox as the traditional dichotomy between the 'real' and 'fake' becomes obsolete in this context, as the virtual may not be tangible but cannot be disregarded as a mere simulation. The transformation of political mobilisation in digital spaces represents not a departure from reality but rather an expansion of what constitutes political reality in the contemporary era. Political mobilisation refers to the act of "organising groups, social networks, crowds, and social units for political goals" to garner and manage

the support of people on an issue or multiple issues (Oberschall, 2011). Nettl defines political mobilization as the 'collective and structured expression of commitment and support within society' (Nettl, 1967). Political mobilisation in the digiscape witnesses the coordination of virtual communities, online campaigns, and digital activism within algorithmically mediated platforms like Twitter (X), Facebook, WhatsApp, etc. in contrast to traditional forms of crowd management and crowd sourcing. A platform ecosystem is a collection of networked platforms that are governed by a specific set of mechanisms which influence daily activities, in turn altering social order and the fundamental organisation of societies (Keskin, 2018). Emerging deterritorialized culture represents a fundamental reimagining of political reality and not just a tactical shift. The “technological acceleration, acceleration of social change, and acceleration of the pace of life” for the sustenance and maintenance of “socioeconomic and institutional status quo” (Rosa, 2017) is manifested in the creation of a hybrid political landscape where digital spaces serve as legitimate and powerful arenas for political discourse and organisation.

Mass mobilisation, as traditionally practiced by political parties in India, operates through a hierarchical, top-down framework where parties exercise significant control over political action, henceforth, mass mobilisation cannot be equated with mass participation. Political mobilisation in developing countries is from the top of the institutional ladder towards downwards exhibiting top-down mobilisation (stalactite mobilisation) instead of upward towards authority from the bottom (stalagmite mobilisation). But the current regime in a developing country like India's goes beyond Nettl's idea of mobilisation and the stalagmite and stalactite conceptualisation. Digital spaces witness and furthers a kind of stalagmite mobilisation, contrary to what Nettl envisaged for developing countries, as through digitalisation, mobilisation does not remain peripheral or physical. It is out there and becomes the digitally induced mainstream political mobilisation which is more towards mass participation. This kind of political mobilisation in the digital space becomes a stronger transmitting source of transformation in modern societies, whether through messaging applications like WhatsApp or through other social media platforms like Twitter (X), Facebook, YouTube, etc. Political parties have adapted to platform-specific features such as Instagram reels for youth engagement, YouTube Live for interactive sessions, Twitter Spaces for political debates, WhatsApp Communities for grassroots organisation, etc. They act as a tool that helps organise, influence, and manage political mobilisation because of their accessibility, instantaneous flow of information, and reach, allowing mass participation.

Information achieves viral status rapidly, demonstrating what Jenkins, Ford & Green (2013) call 'spreadable media'. Digital platforms hence become political tools and political arenas which influence political processes and shape government policies and strategies. The role of platforms in political mobilisation extends beyond mere communication channels. Political participation through digital spaces takes a different form in obtaining support and mobilising funds, projecting the reach of the digital logic of power. As Van Dijk et al. (2018) argue, platforms have become infrastructural to political communication, creating "platform governance" through rules, algorithms, and policies that shape political discourse and mobilisation patterns. The collection and analysis of user data represents a new form of power- knowledge in the Foucauldian sense where political behaviour is simultaneously monitored and shaped. Platform algorithms create e-panopticons where users' political expressions are constantly monitored and regulated. In India, this digital governmentality manifests in state- sanctioned platform surveillance through *Information Technology [Intermediaries Guidelines (Amendment) Rules] 2018*, content regulation through *Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023* (DPDPA), and algorithmic control of political narratives. Political discourse also becomes subject to platform-specific disciplinary mechanisms with the due consent of the state, from content moderation to algorithmic amplification. This creates new forms of 'governmentality' (Foucault, 2007) where political behaviour is shaped through digital architectures rather than direct control.

Lloyd Rudolph and Susanne Hoerber Rudolph's seminal work, *The Modernity of Tradition* (1967) offers an extensive analysis of political mobilisation categorised into three types: vertical, horizontal, and differential mobilisation. Each of these forms continues to develop in the modern digital environment while preserving its essential attributes. Vertical mobilisation, defined by conventional authority frameworks, functions via established hierarchies in which traditional notables attain political backing. This kind of mobilisation is fundamentally dependent on hierarchical organisation and interdependent connections. In the contemporary platform society, while digital platforms have altered the methods of vertical mobilisation, the fundamental notion of hierarchical control persists in many political organisations in the form of party-controlled social media channels, official digital communications, verified political accounts and centralised digital campaigns. Horizontal mobilisation offers a more equitable framework, whereby class or community leaders and their specialised organisations facilitate political support. Such a classification disrupts hierarchies, resulting in the creation of newer patterns of

socio-political division. The introduction of digital platforms has substantially facilitated horizontal mobilisation, encouraging the establishment of peer-to-peer networks, social media movements, digital grassroots organising, hashtag activism, etc. Differential mobilisation, possibly the most sophisticated of the three, comprises political parties and integrative frameworks engaging distinct groups via numerous pathways. This method combines ideology, emotion, and curiosity to elicit both direct and indirect support. In the digital age, differentiated mobilisation has emerged via cross-platform engagement, algorithmic targeting, data-driven campaign strategies and customised political messaging across several platforms.

The Indian General Elections, 2024 witnessed the emergence of social media platforms as key combat zones for parties as these platforms enable the quick dissemination of messages, news and political commentary to enable communication, engagement and debate in real time. It served as the mega stage for a showdown between #PhirEkBaarModiSarkar and #HathBadlegaHalaat. The Bharatiya Janata Party maintained a dominant position in terms of social media presence and reach with a staggering 23.54 percent, exceeding the reach of major opposition parties including Congress, AAP, and Trinamool Congress combined as of April, 2024 (Paliwal, 2024). The consistent updates and streaming of Congress's *Bharat Jodo Yatra* and *Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra* were orchestrated to weed out Rahul Gandhi's image of a *shehzada* (prince) and assert him as a compassionate leader catering to the grassroots of the country's centre to the peripheries. On the other hand, the now ruling party, BJP, engaged in the live streaming of every political rally, event and roadshow attended by the Prime Minister to showcase him as a dedicated, relentless, and determined *karmath* (hardworking). Additionally, social media campaigns like #MainBhiChowkidar or #BharatJodoYatra pivoted an immersive experience for citizens and non-residents (Indian diaspora) to transform from being passive content viewer and content consumer to a content creator who feels connected to the ongoing movements occurring in real time. Such a shift is indicative of how the voting population engaged with the political processes at play henceforth propelling a dynamic and an interactive democratic discourse. Moreover, such campaigns are particularly effective in capturing the attention of undecided and swing voters.

Digital spaces emerged as the site for neo-social movements in the 21st century based on its potentiality to strengthen collective political mobilisation and transform how individuals share information or organise movements and protests particularly through targeted messaging that can reach specific

demographic groups through carefully crafted language, rhetoric, and emotional appeals. The modern political landscape in India demonstrates Chadwick's concept of hybrid media systems where both traditional media and new media not only coexist but actively shape and influence each other in facilitating political communication. This is evident in how various political parties in India like Congress, BJP, AAP, etc. have adapted their communication strategies. A radio programme, *Mann Ki Baat*, where the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi addresses the country on matters concerning national interest in its episodes, is also available in various channels and platforms like government websites, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter (X), etc. Inputs and suggestions of the citizens are taken for the address through the Narendra Modi App, MyGov Open Forum and a toll-free number making individual personalised engagement and experience possible. This is testimony to the hybrid logic of operation as it combines both traditional and new media forms for its dissemination and circulation. Similarly, Congress party's *Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra*, a physical political rally aimed at seeking justice for social, economic and political issues and atrocities that plague the country witnessed widespread digital engagement and circulation because of its strong cross platform digital presence. The social media depiction of Rahul Gandhi projected the opposition leader as a people's leader walking hand in hand with the masses across the Indian subcontinent as he capitalised on the speak on camera format. Both Narendra Modi and Rahul Gandhi maintained traditional political messaging while adapting to the digital platforms. One can observe that such a hybrid approach fundamentally reshapes how political parties manage and curate their mobilization strategies, blending physical presence with digital engagement allowing the movement to resonate both on the ground and in virtual spaces. It also impacts how political mobilization has evolved from traditional patterns.

The BJP showcases a bottom-up approach (stalagmite mobilisation) and the Congress party, a top-down structure (stalactite mobilisation), with respect to political mobilisation. Such techniques supplemented and influenced by technology helps tailor a digital narrative in a political discourse. The BJP with the help of *NaMo* App built on a digital feedback loop has propounded an assessment mechanism that seeks feedback about the proficiencies and competencies of local MP's (The Economic Times, 2023). BJP's emphasis on community- based networking and grassroots organisation is indicative of a traditional stalagmite mobilisation. Their approach has leveraged WhatsApp groups and social media networks like Facebook and Twitter (X) to amplify their traditional strength in ground-level organisation and extend its scope to

expand their digital reach, impact and influence. BJP's IT cell manages over 50 lakh WhatsApp groups that allows for the rapid dissemination of party narratives and mobilization directives from the top-bottom or bottom-top ladder. The party page has 21.6 million followers on Twitter (X) and 7.5 million on Instagram as of 7th April 2024 (Paliwal, 2024).

The Indian National Congress, on the contrary, is a hierarchically structured party (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024) that follows the top-down approach with a central leadership at its topmost rung. It has manoeuvred its mobilisation technique and political strategy given the prospects and challenges so presented by digitisation. The Congress party spent 70 percent of its campaign funds on social media advertisements during the 2024 elections, marking a 10 percent increase from 2019 (Teks Academy, 2024). The increase in investment is visible through targeted social media campaigns across platforms, multimedia content production, and enhanced digital infrastructure for volunteer coordination. It not only used data analytics to identify and amplify Gandhi's key messages, but it also deployed a well-equipped team to generate viral-worthy content suiting the party's narrative and strategy. While PM Modi took frequent jibes at Rahul Gandhi as '*pappu*', '*fuse tube light*' or '*shehzada*' to reinforce prevalent beliefs of Rahul Gandhi being an incompetent and naive political leader; the Congress fought the rhetoric by projecting Gandhi has a fierce force to be reckoned with to rebuild the party's and its leader's image. The manufactured "*Pappu*" image was fought with relentless direct engagement of Gandhi with the masses, and it adopted an aggressive media strategy by focusing on key issues that concerned the citizens like inflation, unemployment, etc., consequently making a shift from making personal attacks to addressing governance issues to fight the alleged perception of disconnection, alienation, and disassociation between grassroots and the leadership of Congress.

It is imperative to note that historically, political rallies functioned as a tangible display of political presence and public engagement; however, digital spaces, in today's informational society, become crucial arenas for contested political narratives where traditional power structures and hierarchies are simultaneously challenged and reinforced through novel forms of political communication and mobilisation. The hyper-visibility of *Bharat Nyay Yatra* on social media rather than traditional mainstream media reflects a thoughtful endeavour to confront the prevailing digital narrative of elitism and isolation. The Congress implemented a multifaceted approach to amass social media reach and increase engagement with Rahul Gandhi interacting with the public through a 'speak to the camera' format on a range of sociopolitical issues,

demonstrating the party's recognition of the transformative potential of digital spaces' in democratic participation and its ability to overcome traditional barriers— economic, educational, and geographical—that historically limited political engagement, creates more accessible and participatory channels for democratic discourse. Papacharissi's (2015) concept of affective publics explains digital platforms' role in emotional political engagement. Modi's *chaiwala* narrative and nationalist messaging create emotional resonance through digital storytelling, while Rahul Gandhi's direct digital interactions generate emotional connections transcending traditional communication.

Digital spaces represent a new form of a deterritorialized networked public sphere marking a shift from Habermas's (1991) conceptualisation of a traditional bourgeois public sphere (coffee houses, salons, etc.) to virtual platforms leading to the creation of a technologically mediated lifeworld. Discourse here is not shaped by human actors alone but by technological infrastructure as well. It is marked by spatial and temporal compression with influx of information in a nonlinear sense. Such compression of time and space creates the need for instant responses and constant engagement for increased reach and its maintenance. This correspondingly alters fundamental political decision-making that may bypass traditional and calculated deliberative processes. Real time reactions and comments become binding regardless of the transient nature of viral movements that emerge and dissipate quickly. The digital news cycle and social media reactions create a perpetual presence where political narratives must be constantly managed.

The digital public sphere represents both a fulfilment and shift of Habermas's vision. The digital transformation of the Habermas's conceptualisation of the public sphere presents a fundamental shift from rational-critical debate, particularly in terms of how public opinion is formed, made to sustain and circulated. Many times, public opinions so created are not premised on facts. Fact refers to a statement that can be proved to be true or false while opinion involves expression of feelings that cannot be proven as facts as they may be based on lies or emotions intended to deliberately mislead and set narratives. Digital spaces thus become a medium wherein political opinions are constructed and lies or deceptions become truth or reality through digital legitimation. Publicity in digital spaces can be critical to encourage rational debate or manipulative to further mass manipulation in the Habermasian sense. This process manifests distinctly in Indian political discourse. For instance, the construction and circulation of Rahul Gandhi's *pappu* image for supposedly being naive or dumb or Modi's *chaiwala* narrative indicates how digital spaces

facilitate the transformation of constructed narratives into perceived reality through:

- Algorithmic amplification as the repeated sharing and engagement with these narratives creates platform-specific visibility where certain characterizations gain prominence through technical infrastructure rather than merit and its factuality.
- Affective resonance as the *chaiwala* narrative, for instance, connects individual identity to larger mass; and
- Digital legitimation as the *Modi ka parivar* response by BJP leaders to Lalu Prasad Yadav's *no family* criticism for Modi, illustrates how digital spaces enable rapid narrative construction and counter-narrative deployment operate in the hybrid system.
- Creation of echochambers (through generative Artificial Intelligence, i.e., AI) to reinforce uncritical acceptance, limiting exposure to diverse perspectives.
- Primacy to viral content over verified facts by digital architecture.
- Rapid spread of misinformation, disinformation and deepfakes through spreadable media like WhatsApp.

Such narratives may be premised on facts, fabrications or rhetoric, yet what might be perceived as truth may not be true at all and still be considered as legitimate based on digital circulation and emotional engagement rather than actual fact-checking. Digital spaces during elections, therefore, act as a tool and a weapon which both attacks and facilitates the core foundation of democracy and democratic processes. Falsified news has continued to grow in the digital era as the sources cannot be authenticated without necessary fact checks and have become politicised as they seem more real than the truth. Digital manipulation is concerning as misinformation and disinformation undermine the democratic process. Misinformation (false and inaccurate information) and disinformation (intentional spreading of false information to influence and manipulate other people's perception and the understanding of reality) pose a threat and emerge as new forms of distortion and colonisation that is detrimental for rational critical debate. Elections today, witness widespread use of AI which may emerge as a potential threat to democracy and electoral integrity. Creation of deepfakes to further manipulative publicity and its circulation as authentic shakes the basic tenet of fair elections. Indian elections witnessed deepfake videos being circulated of numerous leaders like Narendra Modi (BJP), Shivraj Singh Chauhan (BJP), Kailash Vijayvargia (BJP), Kamal Nath (Congress), etc

(Sharma, 2024). A deep fake video intended to deceive the masses also emerged of BRS leader KT Rama Rao asking his party supporters to vote in favour of Congress over his own party meaningfully (Biswas, 2024). With the advent of more sophisticated technology, the usage of AI to gain political mileage and traction will only get magnified. While the 2014 elections monetised on the hologram of Narendra Modi (Nelson, 2014) allowing his virtual presence across multiple locations simultaneously, 2024 elections saw more advanced usage of AI by various political parties to mark their presence and pervasiveness with the click of their phones, evading spatial boundaries making AI-generated content harder to distinguish from authentic communications.

Platform governance represents a new form of system colonisation of the lifeworld, where algorithmic logic and commercial imperatives potentially distort genuine democratic discourse and have deep-seated psychological impact on political behaviour and decision-making. The digital landscape as it exists today presents a mammoth challenge in terms of political content consumption and processing, creating a digital fatigue. Users are thrust with an unrelenting stream of political messages, updates, and discussions across multiple platforms simultaneously, leading to diminished emotional response and numbness to political stimuli. It also leads to a reduced ability to distinguish between significant and trivial political information. Unlike traditional media's periodic news cycles, digital platforms create an environment of constant political communication and information overload that affects attention spans, information comprehension and retention, and decision-making capacity. Digital spaces amplify cognitive biases while creating new ones based on digital interactions. The confirmation bias becomes more pronounced as users increasingly seek information that conforms with the existing political beliefs. Furthermore, the digital transformation of political mobilisation while expanding opportunities for participation, simultaneously creates new forms of exclusion through digital divide.

Participation gap in digital political spaces caused by variations in device ownership, internet connectivity quality, and the ability to engage with sophisticated political content directly creates a hierarchical order of political engagement. The chasm further widens with the rural- urban digital divide as rural areas continue to face bandwidth constraints that restrict participation in live political events and limit access to multimedia political content. However, digital spaces simultaneously enable what Fraser (1990) terms 'subaltern counterpublics' - alternative spaces for marginalised groups to formulate oppositional discourses and interpretations of their identities

and interests. These spaces facilitate new forms of lifeworld resistance through grassroots mobilisation, counter-public formation and resistance that Habermas saw as crucial for democracy, while potentially overcoming traditional barriers to political participation through technological mediation. The fundamental transformation in the base structure through technological infrastructure and platform ecosystems necessarily alters the superstructure of political communication and mobilisation in specific and polity in general. This dialectical relationship between base and superstructure in digital spaces creates a digital historical bloc where technological infrastructure, political practices, and social relations are mutually constitutive. The emergence of platform governance and algorithmic mediation represents not just a technical change but a structural transformation that reconfigures power relations and modes of political legitimation. This leads to a blurred distinction between facts and opinions in digital truth regimes which subsequently gets legitimation by means of its integration into broader political discourse. This structural transformation potentially facilitates what Pareto (1935) describes as the 'circulation of elites' in novel ways. Digital spaces enable new pathways to political influence through viral content creation, social media following, and digital organising capabilities. Traditional elite structures based on institutional authority or economic capital are challenged by emergent digital elites who derive their influence from mastery of platform dynamics and ability to shape online narratives. However, rather than a simple circulation, we witness what might be termed a hybrid elite formation, where traditional and digital forms of capital intersect and combine. Moreover, this transformation potentially leads to a paradigm shift of political mobilisation and public discourse in the Kuhnian (1962) sense.

CONCLUSION

Digital spaces remodel and reshape existing power relations and introduce newer forms of political capital based on digital influence and platform mastery. Temporally, time lag is reduced and the concept of time changes from a traditional polity to a digital polity because of the immediacy of digital interactions and intervention. Spatially, the traditional geographical and institutional boundaries bound by political power, action and influence are overpowered and manipulated by the deterritorialized digital spaces, creating new forms of political community and action. The influence of such a transition from the physical to the digital is not limited to bringing about changes to the conduits of political communication; rather, it also affects the way political reality is produced, experienced, and challenged. It alters how political

knowledge is produced and validated, marking a shift from institutional verification processes to networked legitimation. Political communications can now shape the outcome of elections. It shapes where messages are likely to make difference in the outcomes and accordingly filter bubbles are created by trained algorithms. This transformation of political mobilization in digital spaces represents a fundamental shift in how democratic discourse and political action operate in contemporary society. Virtual platforms serve as the kernel for an unprecedented momentum in political movements and participation, where messages and campaigns may spread rapidly across diverse audiences transcending physical boundaries. The power of digital mobilization lies in its ability to reach grassroots communities while simultaneously offering anonymous spaces for marginalized voices to participate in political discourse, effectively challenging Netti's traditional conception of stalactite mobilization in developing countries. Social media hashtag movements, from farmer protests to other social justice campaigns, demonstrate how digital activism can quickly crystallize into powerful forces of change shaped by algorithmic mediation and platform governance. While this has created new opportunities for political engagement and innovative approaches to e-governance, it also presents significant challenges like the spread of misinformation, surveillance concerns, and the manipulation of digital narratives which pose a grave threat to an authentic political discourse thereby necessitating the need for public policies in this regard.

The convergence of structural and psychological transformations in digital political spaces creates a complex ecosystem where traditional theories of political mobilization must be reconceptualized. The interplay between platform governance, psychological effects, and political behaviour, generates new forms of political reality that transcend the conventional understanding of political participation and engagement that enables democratization of information. It has created new avenues for political communication, mobilization and collective action; but the concern for misinformation, disinformation, polarization, surveillance and digital divide looms large.

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From Booth to Bot: Indian General Elections of 2024 and Artificial Intelligence

Sandhanee Deka and Syed Insha¹

ABSTRACT

The year 2024 marked a turning point in Indian democracy. The year did not just witness the general elections; Narendra Modi also marked history by leading as the Prime Minister for third consecutive time, being the second after Jawaharlal Nehru to do so, but more than that, the election results were celebrated all across the stratum, and technological tools became the handy guide for political communication and campaign by the majority of the political parties in the game. It depicts how India's democracy has not just evolved but matured. In 2021, Narendra Modi claimed India to be the 'Mother of Democracy,' tracing its ancient roots and glorious values, and 2024 elections revealed the modern characteristics of Indian democracy as the artificial intelligence became the renowned mode of political communication and campaign, making Indian democracy not just glorious but vibrant and competitive also. The article seeks to unravel the ways in which AI has been used in the general election of 2024, and presents a balanced perspective of positives and negatives of AI on Indian democracy. The article attempts to explore, first, how AI is revolutionising the electoral process by analysing the political campaigns, voter engagements, and government strategies of the 2024 general elections. Secondly, how AI offers both prospects and obstacles to India's democratic principles. Does it enhance transparency and combat misinformation? Or is it another tool that monotonises the interactive election process? The article follows a qualitative approach, relying on both primary as well as secondary data on AI and its integration into global electoral systems, particularly in India.

Keywords: *Election, artificial intelligence, democracy, campaign, communication, engagement, electoral process.*

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence implies developing computer systems to take decisions and perform the tasks by processing the data and acquired information.

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Techniques of machine learning, natural language processing are used to inbuilt abilities like learning, reasoning, understanding, and problem solving in computer systems. According to UNESCO's World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST) AI implies, "machines capable of imitating certain functionalities of human intelligence, including such features as perception, learning, reasoning, problem-solving, language interaction, and even producing creative work" (Xianhong, Neupane, Echaiz, Sibal & Revera Lam, 2019). Lately, Artificial intelligence (AI) has become an integrated part of our lives. From social media, virtual personal assistants like Siri, Amazon Alexa to autonomous vehicles, healthcare diagnosis and treatment, AI has replaced traditional mode and models to the revolutionizing ones. Liberal tradition has always been individual centric, regarding individual rational, decisive and bearer of natural rights which no artificial institutions of state or civil society can take away. The same liberal tradition evolved itself into a neo-liberal tradition recalling the limited intervention of state, leading the global yet interdependent world with its policies of liberalisation, globalisation and privatisation. The question is, are we generating something that is better than us (human) in form of AI? Are we trying to make machines better than us in issues of decision making, absorbing and interpreting data. Or most importantly if not in emotional or sensitive terms than can AI replace human in cognitive terms? Machines have learned to think, behave and interact like humans. In this view, this article attempts to explore the interactive and behavioural aspects of AI whilst analysing its role and influence in general election of 2024 in India.

Post-1990s witnessed the increased internet dissemination and also transformation of citizens into consumer. Individuals are lately attracted by not just the policies of government but also the packages and services the government promises to give. Political parties utilise various techniques to attract the people and traditional ways of election campaigns are now replaced by AI and modern modes of political communication. AI uses psychographic and behavioural profiles of people to understand their mindset and patterns of voting. Deepfakes and automated social media bots, X (previously Twitter) and Instagram polls are testimonials of how these technologies are becoming an integrated part of influencing and attracting the voters as well as manipulating and altering their opinions. The article is divided into three parts. First, an attempt is made to comprehend AI's integration into global electoral system. Second, AI and its influence in Indian Lok Sabha election of 2024 and lastly, AI's future and its prospects for Indian democracy.

India, today is not merely the largest democracy but also its democratic values are ancient as well as glorious. The growing integration of AI in India's electoral system, particularly in 2024 Lok Sabha election outlines how democracy will sustain in India in times to come. It is not a hidden fact that most political parties leverage AI to analyse voter behaviour and their inclinations. Through localised messages, polls, deepfakes in diverse languages, AI tools address India's diverse linguistic and cultural spectrum, making it an effective tool for political parties to grow their base and roots in every corner of India. Chatbots and AI driven apps are deployed to interact with voters, share the party's future prospects and plans, manifestos and also addresses queries and issues of common people. The integration of AI in electoral strategy was undoubtably visible in Lok Sabha elections of 2024 but its landscape has evolved significantly, particularly with the initiative of Digital India. The 'Digital India' initiative was launched in 2015, aiming to transform India into a 'digitally empowered society' and growing but 'knowledgeable economy' (Achievements made under Digital India Programme, 2022). The medium was to integrate the technological tools, including AI, into governance and electoral process of country. Digitalisation of electoral process in India can be traced back to the adoption of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) in the 1990s, replacing Voter Verified Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs). This transition was the initial development for incorporating more sophisticated tools in electoral processes. Similarly, Election Commission of India (ECI) also digitalised voter databases to improve the accuracy and accessibility of data. The machine learning algorithms were used to regularly update voter rolls, identifying the eligible and duplicate entries. From AI and digital tools assisting ECI and other institutions in their function of managing India's diverse database to AI becoming a handy tool of political parties in analysing voter's sentiments through media platforms, news outlets and online polls. Technology had undoubtably become accessible. It was Digital India initiative of government that has set the stage for AI to digitalise election process in India. But Indian General Elections of 2024 depict, now AI is more about leveraging efficiency, inclusivity and on the other hand, a tool to manipulate people and mobilise their sentiments.

AI in recent Lok Sabha Elections was primarily used to inform citizens and ended up shaping or altering their respective opinions regarding the political dynamics of the country. The objective was to provide access to high-quality information and represent the goals and plans of different political parties. For instance, AI led Digital India Bhashini is a language translation platform launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2022. It seeks to 'enable easy

access to the internet and digital services in Indian languages, including voice-based access, and help creation of content in Indian languages' (Digital India BHASHINI - India's AI-led language translation platform, 2022). This Digital Initiative was aimed to digitally include the masses, strengthening the participatory democracy in India. Suno India, Bolo India, Dekho India and Likho India are constituents of Bhashini platform, aiming to disperse digital content in native languages. The same tool of Bhashini is used by Prime Minister to deliver speeches in multiple languages, so that his words can attract wider audience, depicting the new modes of political campaigning (Gupta & Mathews, 2024). Similarly, AI powered robo-calls are used to deliver personalised messages to voters across the country in their respective languages. AI driven voice assistants and chat boxes are aimed to generate an interactive relation between political parties and voters but these platforms and constant triggering in daily lives of people is also a matter of ethical and privacy concern. People across the country were bombarded by personal calls and WhatsApp messages by different representatives of different political parties using voice cloning and lip sync software to deliver the party messages (Christopher & Bansal, 2024). But how AI became an integral part of electoral process worldwide? Is it a new development or was always existing in some way or the other in electoral processes across the world, particularly in India?

AI'S INTEGRATION INTO GLOBAL ELECTORATE SYSTEM

Democracy is the most celebrated form of government in the world today and free and fair elections constitute the part and parcel of thriving democracy. 2024 has been the "super election year" with more than 70 countries went to polls as claimed by UNDP (United Nations Development Programme, 2024). AI and machine learning have undoubtedly left their mark in this super election year. AI has already been influential in biotechnology, neurotechnology, robotics and lately in political domains too in forms of one of the modes of communication in electoral process. Political parties across the world are experimenting with the technologies and machine learning developments in their campaigns and voter outreach programmes. Technology has always been the integral part of electoral process since the advent of globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation. Different modes like e-voting and online polls have always been used to campaign, interact and mobilise the voters. But the advent of novel technological development in forms of AI ChatGPT, Copilot, Deepfakes, Voice cloning software have the tendency to impact the electoral process both in positive and negative terms. AI generative tools however, sought to make the whole electoral process effective, efficient,

transparent and most profoundly interactive. But these tools are got into the hands of local leaders in a way that depicts nothing but unethical utilisation of AI. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres in his address to Security Council asserted about the dual nature of AI. He argued, “The advent of generative AI could be a defining moment for disinformation and hate speech- undermining truth, facts, and safety adding a new dimension to the manipulation of human behaviour and contributing to polarisation and instability on a vast scale” (United Nations: Meeting Coverage and Press Releases, 2023).

AI is flexible in nature, available to public without any legal or economic measures. It eases the functions and work of people across the world, which made it also adaptable in nature. It does not just question technical, social or legal peculiarities but intends to integrate political actors and citizens and through its interactive models. Guterres urged the council to exercise AI whilst maintaining the transparency, efficiency, and accountability. However, does AI categorically bridges the economic and digital divide? AI as a technological development should not be just accurate but reliable also. If AI is to be used to bridge social, economic or digital divide, to cure diseases, for sustainable development measures, then how AI has been used in electoral process becomes significant constituent to comprehend as elections are the testing grounds of future promises and prospects.

Social media and AI have become significant actors in electoral process, widening the scope for citizens to not be just voters but ‘responsible’ voters and citizens. Digital era seeks to first provide election management bodies across the world the efficient mode to gather and manage the voter’s data and monitor the polls easily. Secondly, the political parties and politicians have got a new and attractive tool in their hands to attract people as it is now easy to communicate with voters and disperse the parties plans for future. UNESCO 2019 report on Elections and media in digital times identified the threats the digital era posed in electoral process (Xianhong et al., 2019). First, the spread of misinformation and ill-speech. Second, increase in violence and terrorization against media actors. Third, coercion and manipulation in electoral campaigning and political communication. All these issues pose serious threats to right to speech and expression, freedom of press and right to associate and move. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.10 asserted the significance of ‘ensuring public access to information and protecting fundamental freedoms according to the national and international agreements.’ In this view, it needs to be noted that AI is not just a common technological development but a tool possessing the capability of learning and developing itself. UNESCO’s

report on Elections in Digital India marks that, “the mechanics behind AI are quite straightforward: search engines and recommendation platforms identify personalised suggestions for products and services based on personal preferences and meta-data that has been gathered from previous searches, purchases and mobility behaviour, as well as social interactions” (Xianhong et al., 2019). However, there is no ethical or democratic control over how algorithms predict people’s preferences and behaviour. And the control over such algorithms makes any party an influential actor in elections as political leaders through deepfakes videos and automated robo-calls influence voters’ preferences in elections when voters don’t have any idea of how cloned and fake the calls and videos are. It leads to the social polarisation in society, wherein different groups are formed to support different political parties on the basis of any automated content which has full potential to be false (Helbing, Frey, Gigerenzer, Hafen, Hagner, Hofstetter, J. van den Hoven, Zicari and Zwitter, 2017). Different social media platforms engage the algorithms that seeks to provide controversial exchanges to generate likes and comments, ignoring the legitimacy of the content.

The information and debates in pre-election period influence the preferences and opinions of people. Disruptive practices through deep-fake videos or any other tool take away the people’s opportunity to rationally make a judgement. It requires genuine public debates to nourish the minds of people through reliable data and information. All the actors in electoral landscape like voters, electoral bodies, candidates and political parties then must play an important role in having the access and dissemination of reliable information. Whatever happens in elections has the capability to influence negatively or positively every other issue of human and financial resources, its supply and allocation, security and efficiency and so forth. Social media and AI provide common platform to political candidates to reach and engage with voters through modern modes of campaigning and communication. Citizens in return also have the opportunity to easily obtain the information and data that further helps them to take respective voting decisions. Social media and AI tools are also used for voter mobilisation, spread of hate speech, cyberespionage, data hampering, trolling and spreading misinformation. Although elections in every country are often guided by rule of law principles but social media and AI are not rule bound. Their use is not predictable and often results in arbitrating political violence and diverging social units. Digital campaigning is a result of dispersed use of social media and AI in elections. It allows the political actors to use digital platforms to campaign by ensuing advertising services from Google, Twitter, Meta and so forth. It is a positive outcome for electoral

participation as it is a cheaper and accessible mode to engage and interact with political contestants. But again, data mining, fake profiles in the process of campaigning enhance the misuse of online advertising strategies.

AI's integration in global electoral systems allows first, political parties and candidates to utilise AI algorithms to gather data about voters' demographics, preferences, voting behaviour. Political parties accordingly plan their campaigning strategies and target their audience more effectively. In Brazil, AI based analytics were used to understand public opinion before the elections, giving political parties an opportunity to shape their policies and prioritize key issues (Santini, Salles & Tucci, 2021). Secondly, AI generated tools can also predict the electoral outcomes with the help of polling data and people's social media responses. Different political parties also use AI chat boxes and virtual assistant to engage with voters on different social media platforms. These tools provide information and plans of political parties to people, enhancing voter participation. Estonia has integrated AI in its *i*-voting system to ensure effective online voting (Mulholland, 2021). Third, AI can also analyse any discrepancy and anomalies in data. So, AI generated tools can be utilised to prevent any fraud in electoral process. In 2021, Bihar Election Commission in India worked in collaboration with AI Staqu to analyse CCTV footage from counting booths to enhance transparency in its Panchayat elections (Ahaskar, 2021). AI generated tools are also employed to tackle misinformation. AI systems were used before the 2019 European Parliamentary elections to identify and block misinformation campaigns on social media. In India also, AI was used by election monitoring organizations to debunk viral misinformation in 2019. However, there are concerns of manipulation of electoral behaviour through AI generated deep fake videos. In United States presidential elections of 2016, one of the political consulting firms Cambridge Analytica misused the Facebook data to create political advertisements to influence voting behaviour of targeted audience. Messaging and propaganda, spread of misinformation, ethical concerns and regulatory challenges are other issues needs to be unravelled before AI becomes a legitimate source of information in electoral process worldwide. Thus, AI's integration into global electoral system is a double-edged sword. It undoubtedly offers efficiency and innovation in electoral process but also requires robust legal frameworks and ethical oversight to ensure that employment of AI upholds and not degrades democratic principles globally.

THEORETICAL ASPECTS ON DIGITAL POLITICS

The Politics encompass a wide range of phenomena and actions that are centred around people. This section will elaborate two logics on digital politics i.e., collective and connective action. Given the appropriate technological interaction, digital media networking plays a significant role in regulating socio-political issues. Digital media is a common tool used by individuals, civil society, organisations and many other actors to create networks for interactions and to communicate their views directly to the world. These two logics of collective and connective action depicts different dimensions of analysis. According to Bennett and Segerberg (2015), “the logic of collective action emphasizes the problems of getting individuals to contribute to the collective endeavour that typically involves seeking some sort of public good like democratic reforms that may better be attained through forging a common cause.” The importance of collective action is noticeable while bridging of differences among the organizational coordination, individual’s identity, resource allocation and so forth. Benett argues that, “connective action networks may differ in terms of stability, coherence and scale but they are organized by different principle. The Connective action networks are typically far more individualized and technologically organized sets of processes, that result in action without the requirement of collective identity framing or the levels of organisational resources required to respond” (Bennett et al., 2015). Whereas according to Benkler, “in digitally mediated social network, participation becomes self-motivating as personally expressive content is shared with, recognized by, others who in turn repeat these networked sharing activities” (Benkler, 2006). But all online communication does not work in the same way, for instance- the online newspapers, blogs, or political campaign sites make it clear that the logic of the organization centred brick-and-mortar world is often reproduced online, with little change in organizational logic beyond possible efficiency gains (Bimber & Davis, 2003; Foot & Schneider, 2006). In connective action, the starting point is self-motivated which is sharing of already internalized ideas, plans, images through networking sites like- Facebook, YouTube, X (previously Twitter) by commenting on the posts or re-tweets. Such networks are flexible, enabled coordinating adjustments and rapid action aimed at often shifting political targets, even cross-border boundaries in the process. As Diani argues, “networks are not just precursors or building blocks of collective action, they are in themselves organizational structures that can transcend the elemental units of organizations and individuals” (Bennett, Lang & Segerberg, 2014).

Democratic theorists have not focused much on the materiality of human affairs, whereas no entity matters in isolation instead attains meaning through numerous volatile relationships. Bruno Latour calls such multitudes of relations as action-networks and refers to the ways in which these various components of such a system affect each other as translations (Latour, 2005). Specialized AI has the ability to transform materiality of democracy by altering collective decision making and human participation, for instance- how people see themselves, what relationships they have, and what interactions their behaviour bring about, etc. The public-reason standpoint must acknowledge the point that, 'Technology is political,' especially in the sense that the material underpinnings of democracy matter for how the democratic ideals translates into practices and can survive (Risse, 2023). According to Risse, "technology explains how citizens get information that defines their participation, mainly restricted to voting and frees up time for social activities. AI improves procedural legitimacy through greater participation and increase the caliber of decision making as the voters are well informed" (Risse, 2023). From the internet's hardware to the organisations that manage domain names and the software that keeps the internet running smoothly, digital media have created an online communications infrastructure that powers our digital existence.

AI AND INDIAN GENERAL ELECTIONS 2024

With the use of AI, we are entering into a new era and will form the foundation in building our digital future. The Digital India flagship program was launched by Honorable Prime Minister Narendra Modi dated on 1st July, 2015 to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledgeable economy. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) of India envisions the AI program as umbrella endeavour leveraging transformative technologies to promote inclusivity, creativity and adoption for social impact. The four main pillars of "National Program on Artificial Intelligence" are as follows (National Program on Artificial Intelligence, n.d): National Centre on AI, Data Management Office, Skilling in AI, and Responsible AI. BJP has used AI for National Integration, for instance- launching of BHASHINI AAP by Honorable PM Shri Narendra Modi in July 2022, aiming to transcend language barriers, so that everyone can have the access of digital services in their respective languages. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech at the inauguration of the Kashi-Tamil Sangam cultural festival on 17th December 2023 in Varanasi was translated into Tamil using the BHASHINI AI tool (National Language Translation Mission). This app aims to provide technology translation services in 22 scheduled Indian languages.

The 2024 general elections in India showed an extensive use of AI technologies in various dimensions of election such as, poll campaigning, voter registration, ballot processing, spreading propaganda and so forth. Keeping in consideration of India's vast diversity and demographic compositions, AI is used to navigate through complexities and offer a nuanced understanding of voter preferences and behaviours. On an average an Indian MP represents constituencies with the number of eligible voters ranging from 1.5-2.5 million, which poses a "challenge for the candidature of MP to reach out to the voters at this scale and also effect the candidate's winning probability and voter's ability to make informed decision" (Dhanuraj, Harilal & Solomon, 2024). However, with the advent of technology the very idea of traditional public meetings has undergone changes, no longer constrained by geographical limitations. AI has been used extensively in this way.

ELECTION CAMPAIGNING

It is argued that, "the prevalence of social media powered by sophisticated AI algorithms became indispensable in terms of understanding and mobilising the demographics in the Indian election" (Pang, Chen & Jin, 2019). Governments and political parties rely heavily on technologies to raise awareness, that includes, voter registration rolls, the location of polling stations, polling schedules and polling results. According to Rebelo, some trends of AI used in Indian General Elections 2024 are as follows, "AI was used by the political parties for content creation, replacing the human survey callers; the translation capabilities of Generative AI make it particularly useful for political strategists to craft the entire campaign in local Indian language; AI voice clones and Official parties' social media handles used AI content to openly parody their rivals" (Rebelo, 2024). Social media platforms wired with highly sophisticated AI algorithms offer remarkable opportunities to political parties to provide personalized messages to voters and ensure last-mile connectivity. During the election campaigning, BJP member, Shakti Singh Rathore approached to Divyendra Singh Jadoun, who operates an AI startup in Rajasthan, to create a replica of himself to tell as many as people about PM Modi's programs and policies. Accordingly, Shakti Singh was instructed to look into the camera and speak as if the person is sitting right in front of him (Raj, 2024). Through Generative AI tool Shakti Singh could reach to maximum number of beneficiaries in a short period of time. Political Parties used AI to transmit personalized messages by cloning the voices of local politicians and delivering them directly to voter's phones (Anandi, 2024). This information is designed to elicit strong emotions, frequently translated into regional

languages, and emphasizes on building personal connection with prominent leaders, especially deceased politicians. AI is the constitution of computational systems with agency power to accomplish a goal (Filgueiras, 2022).

During the 2024 general election, BJP used the Sangathan Reporting and Analysis report or Saral App, to increase public outreach. The primary objective of the app is to digitalize all data and improve contact with party karyakartas by diffusing policies, expansion activities and programs of the party. The Saral App with more than 2.9 million Google Play store downloads described as an “election-winning machine” by the party’s head of information technology and social media division (Jaswal, 2024). To increase registration, grassroots karyakartas conducted door-to-door campaigns and held camps in the neighbourhood displaying posters carrying BJP’s logo. In addition to voter registration, they also helped people sign up for the app and promoted government welfare schemes in it. For instance, by utilising the data collected through the Saral app alongside other data like previous election results, the BJP segregates respective booths in a constituency as “safe,” “favourable,” “battleground,” or “difficult”, and devise campaigning strategies to turn “favourable” to “safe” and “difficult” to “favourable” (Jaswal, 2024). Thus, it is imperative to specify the democratic goods that need to be fortified in elections and three beneficial uses of AI (Mckay, Tenove, Gupta, Ibanez, Mathews, Tworek, 2024) that are, informing citizens, supporting deliberations (e.g. by helping to moderate or facilitate conversations among citizens), and improving political representation by making it easier for candidates and elected officials to communicate with voters and understand their preferences.

Filgueiras has identified both positive and negative impacts of AI on the society, such as: AI has the potential to accelerate digital transformation in society and on the other side it further creates trust and legitimacy issues on applying AI in different aspects of life (Filgueiras, 2022). Deepfakes are created through intense machine learning technique which trains neural networks by using AI tools (Whittaker, Letheren & Mulcahy, 2021). This product of AI technology combines, replaces, or superimposes various type of contents to produce a form of synthetic media that mystifies the distinction of authenticity. Along with manipulating personalised data, an incipient problem is the possibilities presented by the text and image produced content which further can be used for disinformation operations, inauthentic behaviour campaigns, and propaganda material (Dad & Khan, 2023). According to the Threat Report, 2021 coordinated inauthentic behaviour (CIB) campaigns in the past have relied on troll farms and ‘bots,’ consisting of both robot-generated and social media

accounts engaging in disruptive and disinformation operations in order to influence opinions, to attack opposition members, journalists and members of civil society, and to disrupt online discourse. Generative AI was used to spread disinformation during the election as seen in several instances, (Rebelo, 2024): the opposition party (Congress) had posted videos of Bollywood actors- Aamir Khan and Ranveer Singh with AI cloned voice tracks criticizing Modi overlaid on top of the authentic video footage; two manipulated videos- fake graphics and AI cloned voices of familiar Hindi news anchors were posted ahead of Delhi polls on General Elections 2024, delivering bogus reports that the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) west Delhi candidate was ahead in opinion polls; An AI voice cloning audio was leaked claiming to be a phone call between Swati Maliwal (MP of Rajya Sabha) and You Tuber Dhruv Rathee. However, experts were concerned that off-the-shelf AI editing tools are enable of creating 'cheapfakes' which are less convincing but easily accessible GenAI content that could flood the political zone (Rebelo, 2024).

ETHICS IN AI APPLICATION: PREVENT MISUSE

One of the most important contemporary challenges, is to place governance within AI applications. While preparing for an "extraordinary" election on 16th February 2024, 20 top tech companies of the world met at the Munich Security Conference and signed an accord to address the risks presented to democracy by AI-generated deceptive election content (Singh & Roy, 2024). The Munich Accord, however, submits social media platforms and tech companies to a self-regulatory framework where they submit to two commitments: minimising the monopolisation of power associated with insertion of AI in electoral/political contest, and social resilience (Singh & Roy, 2024). The Munich Accord defines "Deceptive AI Election Content" as convincing AI-generated audio, video and images that deceptively fake or alter the appearance, voice, or actions of political candidates, election officials, and other key stakeholders in a democratic election, or that provide false information to voters about when, where and how they can lawfully vote (Munich Security Conference, 2024). In India, concerns have been raised about the impact of AI on voting integrity. This is due to the possibility of GenAI to deceive people with phony images, cloned voice calls which look real, and current authorised apps are not effective to distinguish between real and fake. On 3 March 2024, in the last formal meeting with his Council of Ministers, Prime Minister Narendra Modi alerted them to the dangers of deepfakes, asking them to be cautious as they approached elections to the Lok Sabha (Mishra, 2024). The Voluntary Code of Ethics (VCE) broadly covered five "responses" and "actions" that

the social media platforms agreed to take: voluntarily undertake information, education and communication campaigns to build awareness about electoral laws and other related instructions; create a high priority dedicated grievance redressal channel for expeditious action on cases reported by the ECI; develop a notification mechanism whereby the platforms could be notified by the ECI about potential violation of electoral laws; ensure “precertification” of all political advertisement from the Media Certification and Monitoring Committees; and facilitate transparency in paid political advertisements, including utilising their pre-existing labels/disclosure technology for such advertisements (PIB, 2019).

As included in UNESCO’s report on Ethics in AI, some of the values and principles related to use of AI tools are as follows: respect, protection and promotion of human dignity and rights as established by international law, including international human rights law, is essential throughout the life cycle of AI systems (UNESCO, 2022). Any individual or a community should not be harmed or subordinated, physically, economically, socially, politically, culturally or mentally during any phase of implementing AI tools. Governments, private sector, civil society, international organizations, technical communities and academia must respect human rights instruments and frameworks in their interventions in the processes surrounding the life cycle of AI systems and unwanted harms (safety risks), as well as vulnerabilities to attack (security risks) should be avoided and should be addressed, prevented and eliminated throughout the AI systems to ensure human, environmental and ecosystem safety and security. The UNESCO report also emphasizes upon adequate data protection frameworks and governance mechanisms which could established a multi-stakeholder approach at the national or international level, and will be protected and ensured by judicial systems, etc (UNESCO, 2022).

Furthermore, the Digital Personal Data Protection Bill of 2022 explicitly addresses the safeguarding of personal data pertaining to natural persons, that may be collected online or offline and subsequently digitized and utilization of such data is limited solely to lawful and consensual usage, breaching would cause penalties (Vig, 2024). While India has some legislation in place to combat deepfake technology, more precise measures are needed to adequately address the distinctive hurdles presented by the use of AI tools.

CONCLUSION

Artificial intelligence has become an integrated part of electoral process worldwide. India concluded its 18th Lok Sabha elections in 2024 and depicted

the dispersed use of social media and AI, transforming the traditional mode of political campaigning to digitalised one. AI was typically used in diverse political activities like campaigning, mudslinging and to connect and interact with voters. Deepfakes and automated calls were used to propagate the party messages to the voters. Deepfake popularly became the tool to bring dead politician into mobilisation activities, to influence and manipulate the voter's emotions. In one of the instances, the famous political party of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) authorised the deepfake video of former and late chief minister of Tamil Nadu, Muthuvel Karunanidhi, wherein he was seen interacting at DMK's youth wing conference. Similarly, voters were given calls from different representatives across the country to interact on local and concerning issues. Voters were not even aware that these automated calls and personalised videos were an AI impersonation.

The article has made an attempt to analyse dispersed use of AI in global electoral system, and how AI has been used by different political actors in 2024 general elections. AI powered tools like Bhashini and NaMo mobile app are the famous tools used by BJP since 2022. These tools helped political candidates to interact with citizens in their own languages. Similarly, short clips on social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram and X (previously Twitter) also attracted people across the country. Indian National Congress's video of cloned voice of Narendra Modi, critiquing his ties with famous Indian businessmen gathered the attraction of people. Similarly, BJP also grafted its own video, presenting Narendra Modi campaigning in streets and interacting with people. Thus, it is apparent that India has successfully integrated AI tools in its electoral process but these tools have been both advantageous and disadvantageous in indefinite ways. AI has been helpful in enhancing the voter outreach as it helped political parties to design tailored campaign messages. It ensured the better engagement between political candidates and voters. AI has also been used by political parties to track public sentiments on local as well as trending issues. It allowed different political parties to adjust their respective strategies in real time. AI has also been beneficial in improving the electoral processes as AI powered facial recognition or biometric systems streamlined voter verification to reduce the fraudulent practices in elections. AI-driven systems are capable to detect flag misinformation on social media. It curbs the spread of fake news that often influences the voter behaviour. AI has its own disadvantages too. AI is a threat to privacy as collection of voter data raise the issues of misuse of sensitive information. Similarly, political parties often misuse AI for spreading propaganda through deepfake videos to further mislead or manipulate voters. The major concern is that over-reliance on AI

for campaign or electoral purposes will reduce human involvement, and might lead to job or role displacement. Unequal access to AI technology also creates biasness as it tends to favour political parties that are tech-savvy. It potentially skews the fairness in electoral processes. AI has been a handy tool for political parties in India in electoral processes. It has undoubtedly the capability to influence the voters, especially the youth but ethical use of AI is necessary for sustenance of electoral democracy worldwide. In this way, this article is an attempt to comprehend the prospects of AI in electoral process of India by analysing the Lok Sabha election of 2024.

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Role of Regional Issues in National Party Manifestos: Review of Indian General Elections 2024

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ABSTRACT

The general elections which took place in India in 2024 highlight the increased salience of regional issues in the politics of the nation. According to the recent political developments in India, the major political parties such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC) have begun revising their election platforms to include more regional priorities, especially in the states, which are facing problems like agrarian crisis, ethnic conflict, water-sharing issues, economic disparities and so on. They have also added regional policy propositions to their agendas by emphasizing certain aspects like infrastructural development, agricultural reform, and social services, all of which are specific to states. This evolution of campaigning addresses both the regional concerns and the national scope of the country's politics, revealing the increasing intricacy of political participation in a federal democracy like India.

Keywords: 2024 General Elections, Regional Issues, National Political Strategies, BJP, INC

INTRODUCTION

The Indian general elections 2024 illustrated the complicated relationship between regional issues and national party manifestos. As the regional issues come more and more to dictate the national policy spotlight, political parties such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC) would have to walk through these and evolve priorities of India's distinctive electorate. India's established regime and diversity of politics are hard for national parties to address the regionally transplanted issues while putting forward a supposedly coherent national vision. Issues, like agrarian distress, scarcity of water, ethnic identity, and local economic development unquestionably concern the voters in particular states (Pai, 2020). National parties should customize their manifesto to an even greater degree to build national support throughout the diverse dispersed regions-by incorporating

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regional priorities in order to tackle issues like the water-sharing disputes and socio-political identity throughout Northeast India (Verma, 2022).

The manifestos for the elections of 2024 of the BJP and INC state that regional issues have taken precedence over the national party platforms. The BJP emphasized infrastructure and further corrective measures for Jammu and Kashmir, Northeast connectivity, and economically-backward states, while the INC has the agenda of agricultural reform in Punjab and Maharashtra (Sridharan, 2023). Both have expressly admitted the importance of caste-based and ethnic identity issues relevant to them in certain regions, INC promises to tribal communities in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, while BJP emphasizes the outreach to communities like that of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

REGIONAL ISSUES' PRESENCE IN NATIONAL PARTY MANIFESTOS

With general elections around the corner, there is a tendency among parties to stress regional issues in their manifestos. These regional-specific priorities—such as regional identity, economic problems, resource and environmental issues, border and security problems, autonomy and federalism as well as development—will universally be portrayed in national platforms on account of the above reasons. National parties frequently take into their fold state-specific problems to cater to pan Indian attractions for a larger number of voters. This strategy gives a glimpse into the changing face of Indian electoral politics, where a candidate is expected to address local needs alongside far-ranging generalizations. On the party erstwhile power equations in these states whereby regional parties have produced a side to their political strategies, if regional issues are incorporated, then the reach of that clout would be limited at bay.

DECENTRALIZED APPEAL: INTEGRATING REGIONAL IDENTITY INTO NATIONAL PLATFORMS

The variety of crucial politics in India provides national political parties with a range of decision-making challenges and opportunities, making regional identity an astute trick of integration into national agendas which better enables parties to touch upon local sentiments and depict cultural sensitivity. As Chhibber and Nooruddin (2004:535) pointed out, it is regional dynamics that conditions voter preferences since political affiliation is mostly tied to state-level concerns and cultural identity. National parties converge in such a way that the political message is accommodating to national unity and regional

autonomy by centering state-specific issues on an extended podium.

When dealing with regional issues such as water sharing discord, promoting local languages and cultural heritage, it is imperative for national political parties to adopt a decentralized perspective. For instance, in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, the water-sharing disputes of rivers like Cauvery are not only political but also emotional to the masses (Mohan, 2020). Water resource disputes create concern in state elections, leading national parties to concern themselves with these issues at the national level. Tackling these issues indicates a commitment to fair distribution of resources and acknowledgment of the sentiments of the regional electorate, which increases their attractiveness to the voters of the state.

Encouraging the usage of local languages plays an important role in unifying regional sentiment, since the constitution of India recognizes 22 official languages and the linguistic fabric is an integral part of the country's culture (Rajagopal, 2017). In Tamil Nadu, national political parties advocate for approaches that reward regions with different languages and allow education in native languages to safeguard languages and meet the needs of people. However, from an ethnic perspective, the concerns about language are helpful in building respect for different regions and inclusivity among the people (Ramaswamy, 2014).

In India, the national parties are emphasizing on safeguarding regional cultural heritage, especially in the case of Punjab where the practice of Sikhism and its local heritage plays an important role in the identity of the people. They are putting up measures that will ensure that sites of historical importance are maintained and that cultural events are encouraged, which in turn fortifies the local identity and showcases the importance of diverse regional cultures in the nation as a whole (Singh, 2019). This strategy of incorporating the regional issue within the national agenda fosters greater democracy in that it accepts and acknowledges the existence of different states within one country while at the same time bringing about a united national level that speaks to each region's concerns. According to Varshney (2000), as quoted by Rajeev, a country like India characterized by pluralism needs both unity and diversity for democracy and peace to take root.

RESOLVING REGIONAL ECONOMIC ISSUES

This research looks into the critical economic and regional problems of India, especially looking at the economic problems identified and the assertions

of political parties such as BJP and INC in response to these issues. Such responses incorporate measures meant to address agrarian crises, measures to curb unemployment, development packages focused on specific regions, and the establishment of special economic zones (SEZ) in backward areas.

The Indian economy can be referred to as the ‘melting pot’ as all states differ in growth and problems faced. Some states like Gujarat and Maharashtra are highly industrialized, whereas backward states like Bihar and Jharkhand, have historical, geographical and political impacts. Agrarian crises in Punjab and Maharashtra are caused due to excessive dependence on agriculture, less water, growing debts and restricted access to credit. (Bhattacharya, 2020). Poverty and mass migration in Bihar and Jharkhand can be attributed to high unemployment and lack of any significant industrialization. (Kumar & Sinha, 2021) Further, they explain that discrepancies in development across the regions can be ascribed to uneven resources, infrastructural and industrial development. States that are more developed industrially attract higher levels of investment, serving to increase the economic disparity with the lesser developed states even more. However, the North Eastern regions of India found confined development due to lesser industrialisation and lack of good infrastructural development (Das, 2019). The existing variation in the level of regional development has compelled the union government and the national political parties to implement regionally distinct economic policies for the attainment of sustainable development.

Agriculture in India, which provides a means of sustenance for millions, is under siege as it is faced with problems of high volatility in income, limited irrigation service, inflationary pressure, and farm credit which is excessive, resulting in an ever-increasing agrarian crisis in the states of Maharashtra and Punjab (Sharma & Singh, 2018). In the state of Maharashtra, the twin problems of drought and indebtedness have resulted in a high incidence of suicide among the farming population (National Crime Records Bureau, 2021). Punjab, earlier dubbed the “Granary” of India, is facing the challenges of depletion of groundwater and extensive use of chemical fertilizers – a factor which has reduced the quality of land and productivity (Singh, 2019). National political parties like BJP and INC have also come out with programs like PM-KISAN to alleviate the burdens of the farmers on a national level.

Opportunities for employment for youth in the agricultural states of Bihar and Jharkhand, which do not feature any favorable industrial environment, are elusive, and in fact, are responsible for a high rate of out-migration (Kumar, 2021). The vicious cycle of poverty in Bihar and Jharkhand is compounded

by the lack of educational infrastructure, lack of skill development, and lack of development by the local industries. As a result, a high level of youth unemployment coupled with socio-economic instability is greatly hindering the realization of full development. In every region, both BJP and INC have put forward regional strategies to tackle the challenge presented by unemployment, one of which focuses on skills' enhancement for the young population besides promoting and establishing SMEs. The BJP has launched Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana in Bihar and Jharkhand to help young entrepreneurs in these backward regions, while the INC has offered state industrial policies for these territories with job creation provision while retaining skilled human resources from those areas. Both are concerned with employment generation and development of industries in the respective states. (Government of India, 2022).

In most cases, the focus of regional economic policies in India is aimed at inclusion of development packages for backward regions such as North Eastern India and Bundelkhand which are rich culturally and ecologically but have suffered economic deprivation because of remoteness and poor connectivity (Das, 2019). Bundelkhand, which comprises regions in both Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, is also experiencing a hostile environment characterized by high levels of poverty, as well as scarcity and drought. Regional political parties are seeking to introduce development packages to enhance modern facilities such as transport, education and medical services in backward areas like the North East Frontier. These included the North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDs) by BJP and development grants of INC to encourage faster economic development and lessen the level of inequality across regions (Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, 2021).

As industrialization and investment in the backward areas of UP and Rajasthan is the need of the hour, both BJP and INC embrace SEZs. They come with tax exemptions, facilities, and easy bureaucratic procedures, thus appealing to domestic or overseas investors (Jain & Gupta, 2020). SEZs in the country have experienced progress. Most of its controversies evoke land purchase issues and forced removal of the occupiers, especially in rural areas. Mukherjee and Sahoo (2021) BJP and INC are more focused towards ensuring proper implementation of SEZs in order to avoid environmental and societal consequences which are unavoidable if industrialization is concentrated only on the capital city. Balanced Regional Development is the only possible response to most of the issues of such centripetal economic growth tendencies.

Parties at the state level, like the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra and the Rashtriya Janata Dal in Bihar, are in a better position than national parties at grasping the economic issues and finding their solutions at local level. They seek specific measures for states, such as direct help to farmers in the form of subsidies or investment in local industries and protection of jobs (Rai & Singh, 2021). For economic policies to be effective, both the regional parties and national parties should work together, because local needs cannot be met by only one party.

RESTRICTIONS AND RISKS RELATED TO RESOURCES AND THE ENVIRONMENT: REGIONAL DYNAMICS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF NATIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES IN POWER

The environment and the resources necessary for their practical use are important problems for India, since they affect people and ecosystems in particular regions. Issues endemic to certain regions such as floods, water deficiency, when one would think of Bihar, Assam, Tamil Nadu and even Delhi, there is very few national political parties that have not made regional environmental policies in their 2024 national conviction policy instruments addressing these issues. These policies are targeted towards specific regional challenges and seek to embrace the peculiar environmental realities of different regions.

The north-eastern Indian states of Assam and Bihar are under the threat of flooding due to heavy rainfall, geographical practices and the overflow of the Brahmaputra River. In these floods a lot of people drown or are rendered homeless and properties are destroyed. (Goswami, 2021). Similar situations are prone in the state of Bihar which strolls along the Indo-Ganges River basin. The area is prone to flooding and the inhabitants suffer, particularly when climate change aggravates the situation, increases rain and shifts the monsoon seasons.

In the southern part of India, Tamil Nadu, water scarcity is a serious issue because too much groundwater is being used, rain is unpredictable and most rivers such as Cauvery, which were mainly used for irrigation and drinking water, are dried up. (Vasudevan, 2020). The state is also facing recurring cycles of drought that are leading to crop failure and decreased food security. About pollution control, the national capital has become a serious health hazard to its inhabitants as it is one of the most polluted cities in the world. The key causes of these survival puzzles are waste gases, and solid particulates-producing

industries and burning of crops post-harvest (Sharma & Mandal, 2022) which cause smoke and dust which in turn cause respiratory and circulatory health complications. In the 2024 political situation, national political parties cannot afford to ignore such issues.

A COMPREHENSIVE UNDERSTANDING OF BORDER ISSUES AND REGIONAL SECURITY IN INDIA

Certain border states of India such as Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Arunachal Pradesh, and Assam experience specific types of security challenges due to their geographical position and geopolitical aspirations. Such areas are also confronted with issues such as infiltration, terrorism, and border management. The BJP has emphasized enhancing the security apparatus in these regions with special emphasis on effective regional security management in the year 2024.

Pakistan claims Jammu and Kashmir as its territory, which has made this region a hotspot for insurgent activities. The region is therefore prone to extremism and terrorism. The law enforcement agencies operational in the area have a duty to not only restore peace and order within the area but also protect the area from aggressors from outside (Chandran, 2020). Punjab, which shares a territorial boundary with Pakistan, has witnessed vices such as gun running, terror attacks and external sponsored insurgent activities. Even in the case of calm, the probability of chaos is very high and therefore, the government has to be on high alert for any possible threats (Singh, 2019). Another state, Arunachal Pradesh, a northeastern state, has its own problems with respect to the geography of the region where it is located next to China's territories, leading to infrequent standoffs and troop deployments. Assam is located in the northeastern part of the country, and it is also rife with militancy and ethnic strife, which further adds to the complexity of its security situation. Additionally, the state is faced with issues of illegal immigration, primarily from Bangladesh, which puts pressure on the local population and infrastructure and raises security issues (Bajpai, 2018).

Several national political parties, like BJP, are exploring region-focused strategic security initiatives in border areas such as Jammu & Kashmir and the Northeast, maintaining a focus on their safety as well as the preservation of national integrity ahead of the 2024 elections (Bhasin, 2021). The northeast unit of the BJP has been focusing on the enhancement of the border infrastructure systems, which includes construction of roads and installation of surveillance systems with the aim of quick mobilization of security forces

and prevention of infiltration. They further seek to neutralize ethnic conflicts through development initiatives and devolution of power to the local populace (Rai, 2020).

AUTONOMY AND FEDERALISM: A SHIFT IN POLITICAL DYNAMICS

The political argument in India is now based on autonomy and federalism, with the regional parties demanding an increase in the powers of the states. It is in national parties' manifesto for the elections of 2024 that importance of regional autonomy is being recognized. In most cases, the national interests do not outrun the regional interests, regional political parties are all more appealing. Federalism in India is a network of governance whereby power is distributed between the central government and states; however, spates of regional parties' developments have heightened tension. For instance, Trinamool Congress and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam are pro-federalism political parties claiming that it will be easier to meet varied needs and aspirations of people in the different cultural, linguistic and ethnic regions of India through localized systems rather than a unitary government, even with the enormous size of the country (Chandhoke, 2015).

National parties change their platforms in order to appeal to the electorate's increasing demands, which in most cases include federalism and regional autonomy. The Indian National Congress (INC) that has always advocated for strong central leadership has advanced amendments for safeguarding the rights of the states and called for state governments to participate in the formulation of laws governing issues such as regional development, education, and culture (Congress Manifesto, 2024). The INC is no longer while promoting state control approaches as it embraces the goal of achieving national integration without compromising regional interests.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), historically an advocate for the central government, has cleverly addressed the rise of regional issues emphasizing regional self-rule in its 2024 election manifesto (BJP Manifesto, 2024). The BJP's vocal position on respecting regional languages, traditions and practices is considered an appeasement tactic directed to the discontented regional forces especially in the regions where ethnicity and language have a significant role in politics.

India's political and social dynamics are rapidly changing as federalism and regional autonomy appear to be gaining ground. This is evidenced by the

rise of regional parties in response to what is seen as the central authorities overextending themselves. Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, for instance, have raised alarms about certain policies that would be incompatible with the regional needs (Kochanek, 2019). Regional autonomy in India denotes that states can exercise the local control of their governance systems but choose to remain in the larger umbrella of the national policies. The call for reforms in this governance structure is in tandem with the changing face of democracy. This is because, with the changing political and societal contexts, there is a need for more regional leaders and other stakeholders to be involved in order to address issues more effectively and be accountable (Singh, 2018).

CONNECTIONS AMONG REGIONS AND INFRASTRUCTURE: ADDRESSING DISPARITIES WITHIN INDIA

There are disparities in regional infrastructure within the nation, and states such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka seek better links, public transport, and infrastructure financing. Regional parties of India claim that national political parties always furnish regions with promises of infrastructural development within the regions in order to address the disparities and in accordance with the national economic development plans. Infrastructure in India's eastern and northeastern regions is relatively underdeveloped compared to the western and southern states that are otherwise fully developed. The economic development is also centered on western and southern regions, thus inhibiting growth of regions to the northeast and even the subsequent development of the nation (Sundaram, 2018).

Political parties in India are emphasizing on individual infrastructure projects to overcome the regional inequalities and encourage economic development. The undertaking of the project under Eastern Freight Corridor is that it will develop the transportation network in the eastern region, especially in Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal and so on, which in turn will reduce the costs and speed of movement of goods. The national basis focused on the construction of railroads, and the concept of "Dedicated Freight Corridors" focused on the construction of railroads in industrial states such as Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Uttar Pradesh. These are meant to enhance the logistics of the country and help the movement of goods in the country faster (Bhatia, 2019). Regional or local infrastructure development is considered very relevant towards the objective of national economic integration. Development of roads, railways and airports, for example, encourages the movement of people and goods, which is economic unification. This results in better access to markets,

creation of jobs, as well as industrial growth in the regions. New highways and expressways reduce the time taken to travel from one point to another, which greatly benefits the business and tourism industries in places like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka (Sundaram, 2018). Airport infrastructure investments planned in these areas will enhance connectivity to the international markets and help increase connectivity, export and trade opportunities with the international airports.

There are obstacles to the implementation of infrastructure projects such as limitations in funding, acquiring land, ecological issues, and political resistance. Most such large-scale projects will call for heavy financial backing and projects such as the Eastern Freight Corridor have suffered delays because of such factors. However, infrastructural development is still a very important objective for the successful utilisation of sustainable development activities (Bhatia, 2019). Many of these projects, due to their scope and size, require complex interactions between the state and the central government. As a result, inefficiencies and delays are commonplace.

ELECTORAL IMPACT OF REGIONAL FAVORITISM IN INDIA

Regional politics has become an important aspect of Indian electoral politics, affecting both national and state elections. In the past, national political parties advocated issues that were nation-based such as economic development, national defence and social development. This indicates a shift in ideology, where the campaigns tend to be more focused on the regions rather than the entire nation. This is due to the fact that country is politically and socio-economically different. It is becoming increasingly common among voters in India where several regions speak different languages, and have different cultures and economic activities. For this reason, regional issues are to be included in the Manifestos and campaigns of national political parties. It is possible to assist to regional party's appeal in the elections by localizing some aspects of the agenda of the national party. The more pronounced this change is witnessed in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Telangana, which are the states where voters are more inclined to support regional parties than the national parties (Chand, 2021).

To deal with the influence of powerful regional parties, national parties are now including more regional issues in their political discourses. These sociopolitical formations easily reach out to the voters since they cater for specific interests and needs within their respective regions. For example, in Tamil Nadu, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) deals with agricultural issues,

while in Telangana, the Congress Party campaigns on issues of local self-governance and statehood (Chakrabarty, 2023). The interference of regional issues in national party campaigns may also help to neutralize the regional supremacy in the regions where regional parties have been predominant. In the case of West Bengal, regional dynamics were leveraged successfully by the Trinamool Congress (TMC) through the promotion of regionalism and local development which attracted a significant portion of the electorate. National parties such as the BJP have resorted to making region specific pledges to mitigate the TMC's grip over the region (Patnaik, 2022).

With the advent of coalition politics in India, national parties cannot afford to ignore state level politics. Where regional parties have a strong presence, partnerships between national and regional parties have become the norm. This enables national parties to remain active in local elections while regional parties fight for the national interests. For example, the BJP has forged alliances with several regional parties in Uttar Pradesh, which has been vital (Chakrabarty, 2023). Regionalism may enhance support at the state level, but it carries the risk of weakening national principles, which could lead to loss of authority. It is imperative for national parties to adopt a strategy aimed at effective management of regional and national level matters for them to avoid disjointed messaging.

THE ROLE OF REGIONAL ISSUES IN SHAPING POLITICAL MANIFESTOS OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE GENERAL ELECTIONS IN INDIA, 2024

The 2024 Indian General Elections depict the picture of regional matters being more incorporated into the political agendas of the country. Major political parties such as the BJP, INC are confronting such issues as agricultural wilt, inter and intra-state water conflicts, ethnic/national identity, among others, attempting to reconcile their national outlook with regionally sensitive policies, which is a new phenomenon in Indian politics.

The article underlines the importance of national parties making efforts to address regional identity and these concerns as respective parties will speak to and engage the voters to strengthen the structure of federalism and cultural diversity in India (Chhibber & Nooruddin, 2004). In their party manifesto, the BJP and INC have employed linguistic and cultural aspects to engage with water disputes in states such as Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Particularly this is reflected in the new language policy in Tamil Nadu where speakers hold great values and pride in their language (Rajagopal, 2017). Regional culture

has always been incorporated into the national narratives in India to keep alive the spirit of federalism, plurality and democracy (Singh, 2019). Varshney (2000) supports this observation and claims that national societies usually balance both national and particular solidarity, which is vital for democratic continuity.

This piece scrutinizes the economic problems experienced in the case of many regions in India and how national parties have done regionalism to address the inequalities. Water scarcity in Punjab and Maharashtra leads to an agrarian crisis, with added factors such as debts and overdependence on agriculture, while Bihar and Jharkhand suffer from widespread unemployment (Bhattacharya, 2020; Kumar & Sinha, 2021). In Bihar and Jharkhand, for instance, the BJP and INC have brought forth economic initiatives such as Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana which addresses the issue of entrepreneurship in the region and industrial job policies (Government of India, 2022). The author argues that there is an urgent need for new policy measures. For example, the Special Economic Zones in Uttar Pradesh, which is among the least developed states in India, to assist in the development of industries and employment generation simultaneously (Jain & Gupta, 2020). There are also problems caused by the SEZs like relocation of people and environmental issues (Mukherjee & Sahoo, 2021). National parties are striving to ensure that there is fairness in the economic policies that are being used to encourage balanced economic development and increased development hardiness within regions.

The floods in Assam and Bihar, the water crisis in Tamil Nadu, and the air quality in Delhi are only some examples of regional environmental problems that have caused national concerns given their effects on the quality of life for the citizens (Goswami, 2021; Sharma & Mandal, 2022). Major national political parties like BJP and INC recommend environment-specific strategies for the states, such as watershed management, strategies for flood control, pollution abatement, and water harvesting measures to combat water shortage (Sarma, 2021; Vasudevan, 2020). Due to an acute problem of air quality, which Delhi experiences, there is the need for strict control of emissions, incorporation of clean technologies, all in the spirit of attaining development and also having an appreciation of the local environmental factors prevalent in a given country.

On the matter of security, border state regions of India, particularly Jammu & Kashmir and Assam, seem to draw conflicting responses, owing to their borders with other countries, and this is reflected in the beliefs of the ruling BJP party, whereby there will be heightened focus on border security

(Chandran, 2020; Rai, 2020). National parties tend to favour development of infrastructure and more militarised strategies to solve the challenges posed by regional insecurity. This road construction along borders is consistent with the BJP manifesto for the year 2024 that seeks to secure the periphery by building roads and surveillance systems and implementing other developmental activities that promote security and national integration.

The increasing emphasis on federalism and autonomy at the state level is underscored by the rise of regional parties that seek enhanced power for themselves, with parties like the INC in favor of even greater states' rights in some respects (Congress, 2024). It can be understood that the move towards regional autonomy instead of centralization is a response to petitions for a governing framework that is more proportionate to the regions of India (Chandhoke, 2015). The BJP and INC's manifestos have introduced concepts of regional identity and state-centric governance as a means of upholding the ideals of national integration and sub-nationalism in leadership appropriate to the social complexities of India.

Infrastructure development is the main agenda for national parties in a bid to solve the inequalities between regions. For example, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have adequate infrastructure while the northeastern and eastern areas are poorly connected, access which is vital for poverty alleviation through projects such as the Eastern Freight Corridor (Bhatia, 2019). Improvements in the transportation and airport facilities help integrate the economies of the regions into the other parts of the country and the world, thus facilitating industrialization and creation of jobs. Although challenges such as land acquisition and ecology will limit returns, this plan will ensure balanced development of the economy.

The article evaluates the impact of some factors on the dynamics of national elections with particular emphasis on how national parties are beginning to adapt to local issues in order to neutralize the growth of regional parties or regionalism sphere, particularly in regions with developed regionalism (Chand, 2021; Patnaik, 2022). There is a trend among national parties to take on board policies specific to certain regions in order to be able to cope with regional strength and remain in political competition during state elections. The politics of coalitions, which include not just regional parties but also national parties for the purpose of dealing with the local issues properly while advancing a national ethos, is becoming important. Managing regional interests in the context of national positivism can often be rather difficult, which illustrates the nature of the political scene in India.

CONCLUSION

The 2024 Indian General Elections demonstrates a tactical turn in the management of national manifests by other competitors such as BJP and INC. This has incorporated the regional aspects. This is because the country under discussion is multifaceted in its socio-political and economic factors where the voter choices have a huge regional factor. The national political parties appreciate elements such as regionalism, poverty, pollution, border concerns and provision of services to the locals. This in turn acknowledges the comprehension of local issues. This mechanism promotes active citizenship, fosters a spirit of federalism and promotes growth which is all inclusive. The demarcation between the regional issues and the central unity is a very encouraging growth in the politics of elections in India and may have such implications on the internal democracy and development in the regions for a long time. With the increasing scope of regional issues in national manifests, their effect on voter comprehension is better affected which is also an indicator of the capacity of the political structures in the country's democracy to respond to the changes in the clientele.

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ISSN:2583-004X

E-ISSN:2582-7154

RNI Reg. No: DELENG/2020/79638

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