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Topic of Research: Dynamics of Voting Patterns in Delhi: A comparative study of Parliamentary and Assembly Elections since 2004

Abstract

This research presents a detailed study of electoral behaviour in Delhi, primarily focus a comparative analysis of Lok Sabha and Assembly elections from 2004 to the present. It highlights voting patterns, the vote shares and strategies of major political parties, and the factors influencing them. Its objective is to gain a better understanding of the evolution of politics within an urban setting and their role in democracy. The research draws on political discourse analysis and empirical field data, reviews the trends and shifts in voting behaviour over the past twenty years, in relation to the changing patterns of political discourses, governance performance and socio-economic changes. The study, looking at the electoral path of Delhi from the Congress's era of dominance to the rise of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the resurgence of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the 8th Legislative Assembly election, gives interesting inputs into the process of political realignment in an urban democratic scenario.

The findings indicate that the political transition in Delhi from Congress–BJP duopoly to AAP's governance-centric politics is part of a larger trend in India's urban democracy, where voters are increasingly giving up identity-based and symbolic political orientations in favour of evaluative, performance-oriented decision-making. Voters are increasingly judging political actors on the basis of governance, credibility, accountability and policy outcomes rather than on traditional loyalties. This is evident in the increasing use of issue voting, split-ticket voting, and the varying expectations voters have of state and national elections. This is also reflected in the 2025 Delhi Assembly election where the BJP secured a majority in the Assembly despite having a vote share marginally higher than the AAP. The FPTP system can convert relatively small changes in the perception of the government's performance and political trust into major variations in seat share.

- Delhi's voting patterns since 2004 reveal a consistent divergence between Parliamentary and Assembly outcomes, shaped by two distinct but overlapping logics of electoral choice. In Lok Sabha polls the electorate has reacted mostly to national leadership, macro-level narratives and party performance at the Centre. This is reflected in the Congress sweep of

2004 and 2009 under the UPA followed by the decisive consolidation of the BJP from 2014 to 2024 when it won all Parliamentary seats. In contrast, Assembly elections have been more about local governance, welfare delivery and state level leadership. However, the Congress ruled dominant till 2013 under Sheila Dikshit, but the emergence of the Aam Aadmi Party changed the political landscape of Delhi. The AAP's 2015 and 2020 victories were a manifestation of the consolidation of a state-level mandate based on service delivery, sectoral reforms and its ability to mobilise both the middle- and low-income urban segments. The continuing divergence between parliamentary and assembly results suggests the emergence of an electorally conscious citizenry that draws a clear line between national and subnational interests. While the 2025 Assembly election saw the BJP return to power, this shift continues to align with the broader pattern of alternating preferences across electoral tiers rather than a stable partisan realignment.

- The rapid change in voting patterns in Delhi is a result of the unique interplay of demographic fluidity, differentiated political expectations and the hybrid institutional context of the city. The Delhi electorate is characterised by continuous migration, proliferation of lower- and middle-income settlements and changing caste- regional profiles, resulting in an urban electorate that is highly responsive to political changes and issue-based appeals. This demographic churn is added to by the fact that voters make their judgment about Parliamentary and Assembly elections in different terms. AAP has also helped to adjust this volatility by refocusing the voters' concept about transparency, welfare delivery and participatory governance, thus speeding up the change of partisanship. All these together create a politically assertive and electorate that is amenable to recalibrating its choices across electoral cycles, leading to the fast and frequent changes in the Parliamentary and Assembly results in Delhi.
- The AAP breaks the existing Congress-BJP hegemony and reshapes the contours of urban voting, which alters the voting pattern and the political dynamics of the capital. AAP's re-negotiated demands from the voters in different class groups, particularly from the lower income groups, migrants from Purvanchal, unauthorised colonies and parts of the middle class of the city. The success of the AAP was also contributing to the trend of people voting differently at different levels of the elections as AAP's governance in state elections was gaining popularity while the BJP was doing well in the national elections. AAP also forced other parties (particularly BJP) to rethink their approach with micro-targeting, multi-layered approach to narrative messaging and more heavy investment in booth level mobilisation. AAP has had two impacts: one, by shifting the discourse and norms of urban

democracy in Delhi towards delivery and accountability; and two, it has exposed the fragility of a movement party in a competitive metropolitan region.

The findings of the thesis validated the hypothesis of the study as “Delhi voters have become politically mature and discriminating and they have started to view voting not merely as a mechanism for electing representatives but as a mechanism for evaluating governance and hold it accountable”. But the study also identified that maturity did not erode the power of electoral strategy as campaign tactics, micro-targeting, and digital networking still mattered a great deal for voters, as demonstrated by the BJP's targeted mobilization and booth-level strategies.

This study concluded that Delhi's political arena was not only a space of electoral contestation, but a reflection of the broader evolution of urban democracy in India. This transformation led to a “new political discourse in which the state/citizen relationship has become more open, participatory and policy oriented.” Delhi was thus not just the capital of India, but also a ‘urban laboratory model’ of Indian democracy, where political legitimacy depended on the process of implementation of political promises and manifestos, rather than on the promises themselves, and where the outcomes of these measures had a significant impact on voting. This study also underlined a ‘discursive-performance paradigm’ in the study of Indian urban democracy, demonstrating that ideology was no longer the only determinant of political competition and voter behaviour in contemporary metropolitan politics, but was now complemented by language, organisational capacity and digital communication.

Keywords: Delhi Elections, Urban Democracy, Welfare Politics, Voting Behaviour, Split Voting, Electoral Realignment, Aam Aadmi Party, Public Policy, Digital Democracy