

Symbolic Mobilisation to Verified Delivery Youth Political Judgement in India, 1984–2026

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Abstract – Indian politics is changing its medium of political consent its construction, testing, and withdrawal. This article analyzes the shift from mass mobilization, which has been consolidated since 1984, rooted in religious beliefs, to digital political participation, led by young people, and what this transition implies for society, the economy and democratic quality. The method used is a qualitative, multi-source, comparative desk study, which involved historical process-tracing in the case of India, and pattern comparison in the case of the seven countries between 2019 and 2025. The analysis is anchored by three indicators the fall in the number of seats won by the ruling party in the Lok Sabha from 303 in 2019 to 240 in 2024, including losing the seat of the newly consecrated temple, a population estimated to be close to 90 crore (900 million) online in 2024, and that the youth make up about 83 percent of the unemployed in India, according to a 2024 joint labour study. The main conclusion is that the decline has not occurred in the observance of religion among the young Indians, but in the criterion of political judgement has shifted towards actual delivery. Although symbolic politics has been vanquished, its payoffs decrease after its delivery. There is a mechanism-level account of the contribution that is useful for parties designing communication, regulators formulating rules on synthetic media and citizens evaluating claims in everyday political communication.

Keywords: Political communication, religious mobilisation, digital democracy, Generation Z, electoral behaviour in India, digital public infrastructure, misinformation and electoral integrity, comparative protest movements.

1. INTRODUCTION

The party which had been ruling India for 10 years with a single-party majority, on 4 June 2024, got 240 seats in the Lok Sabha, compared to 303 seats in 2019. The results declared that day included the result for Faizabad, an Uttar Pradesh constituency which houses Ayodhya, where a temple had been consecrated, as long promised in the party's political programme. The seat was lost. The state count went down from 62 to 33. These figures are not interpretations but are from the official record of the seventeenth and eighteenth general elections.

That one juxtaposition promise fulfilled and constituency lost is the starting point for this article. It is not to be interpreted as an indication of the end of religion in the public sphere of India. The survey results released in the last ten years are invariably high and have remained steady even among the youngest of Indian population. What the juxtaposition implies is more limited and more intriguing that the political impact of a symbolic pledge differs before and after the pledge is kept, and that a big, young, and well-connected electorate has started to test the pledge against a second criterion, as well as the first.

That second test is bracketed by two demographic facts. As per the data prices in India are among the lowest in the world and India has one of the largest online population of around 90 crore (900 million) in 2024. Meanwhile, approximately two-thirds of Indians are below the age of 35, and the number of Indians born between 1997 and 2012 are more than 37 crore (370 million). A society where most of its citizens are young, and most young citizens are connected, is a society that produces, discusses, and withdraws political consent in other ways than the twentieth century.

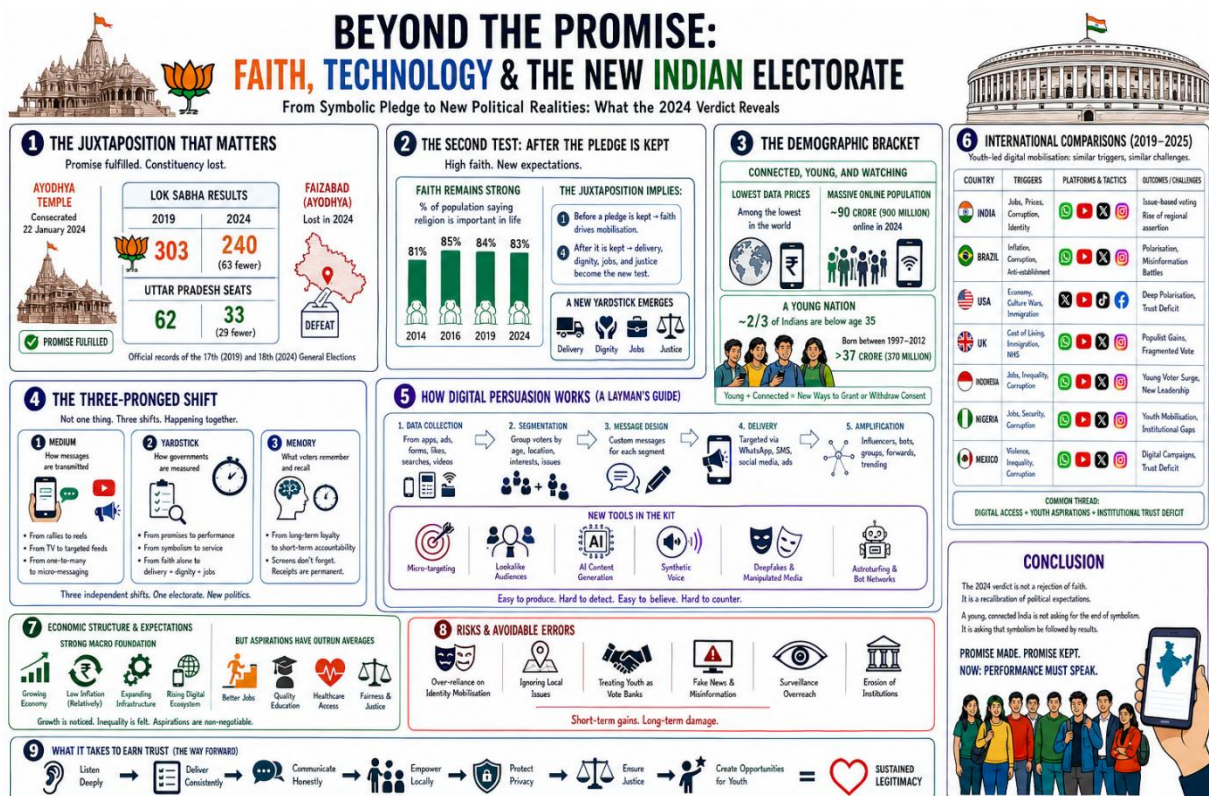


Fig -1: Beyond the Promise Faith, Technology & The New Indian Electorate

The main thesis of this work is intentionally low-key in one sense and high key in another. It's modest in that it doesn't pretend that technology has replaced faith, it would not be able to stand up to the evidence. It's ambitious because it suggests a three-pronged shift, the medium by which political messages are transmitted, the yardstick by which governments are measured, and the memory that voters have of what was promised. These changes are unrelated and the fact that they all happened together is more easily accounted for than the idea that they all happened because of one thing.

There are three returns to be expected from the following. The first is a mechanism level description of the creation of faith-based mobilisation, its effectiveness, and its limitations. The second is a layman's guide to the technical means now being employed in political persuasion, from the dividing of voters into segments to the synthetic voice, so that a non-specialist might be able to spot them in action. The third is a comparative frame seven countries between 2019 and 2025 saw digital mobilisation among youth with similar triggers and similar challenges in the wake of the mobilisation. From the historical foundations to the logic of communication, from the digital architecture to the requirements of the youngest voters, from international comparison to economic structure, risks, and a set of avoidable errors.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE ARTICLE

There are eight stated aims of this article.

1. To map the historical process of faith-based mass mobilisation in India from 1984 to 2024, and to look at organisational and communicative processes that facilitated its electoral outcomes, instead of taking its outcomes as a given.
2. To explain why symbolic politics can be said to reach a saturation point and to determine the structural not moral factors that make a fulfilled promise have less mobilizing returns than an unfulfilled one.
3. To record the technical architecture of the current digital political engagement in a non-technical way, including voter segmentation, test messaging, encrypted distribution, recommendation dynamics, automated translation, and open-source verification.
4. To examine the employment figures of the post-1997 Indians, the protests and policy debates, and to see if the priorities are religious, ideological, or administrative.
5. To identify common triggers, the common tools, and the common post-victory challenges of Indian developments by comparing with youth-led mobilisation in seven countries between 2019 and 2026.
6. To analyse the economic and social impacts of digitised politics, such as the campaign-services industry, the attention economy, financing of political campaigns, macro-economic effects of transparency and social stability and economic activity associated with pilgrimages.
7. To point out avoidable mistakes for political actors of all parties expressed as institutional lessons which can be learned by all parties and at all levels of government and not as accusations against any person.
8. To provide a reform agenda based on evidence in the areas of disclosure of paid political promotion, synthetic media, protection of connectivity, and maintaining offline channels for citizens not included in the digital population.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research type of this study is qualitative, multi-source, comparison, and analysis of desk study. It does not require the use of primary fieldwork.

Design. The design is a mixture of two well-known designs. The first is historical process-tracing, which involves a single country and a time of 40 years (India, 1984–2025) and reconstructs a series of events and then identifies the causal mechanisms that connect them. The second is cross-national pattern comparison (2019–2025) where the question is whether the same outcomes are the result of similar conditions in different institutional contexts. Process-tracing provides depth and pattern comparison provides discipline against explanations that are only Indian.

Data types. The analysis is based on eight types of published material national post-poll election study series, official election commission statistical reports, national labour-force and employment survey publications, joint publications by international labour bodies and national development institutes, government publications on policy-institution projections on platform-based work, published transaction

statistics on national payments and digital identity systems, internet-shutdown monitoring reports produced by digital-rights organisations and annual international digital news-consumption surveys, and peer-reviewed literature on political communication, protest diffusion and digital democracy.

Analytical procedure. There are 4 steps that were followed in order. The chronological reconstruction was performed first, to determine what happened and when, and dates were assigned to each event. Second, mechanism identification was a question about the production of each of the observed outcomes, distinguishing between organisational, communicative, material, and technological causes. Third, cross-case pattern matching was used to determine if the mechanisms identified occurred in the comparison countries. Fourth, implication mapping identified the consequences in three areas society, economy, and institutions and attributed a label to each implication, either observed, probable or speculative.

Verification protocol. All numerical statements were verified using two or more independent sources. Figures are given with year of reference. When there are conflicting sources or when methodology is in question, the discrepancy is indicated in the text and not simply glossed over. Triangulation was not possible with estimates and therefore they were not included.

Reflexivity. The author is not a part of any political party and does not endorse any party. Descriptions of campaign strategy are analytical, and are not endorsements or accusations of improper motive, but are based on published evidence of observable behavior.

Restriction(s) that are admitted at the beginning. No survey data and no interview data is available. Throughout the survey results on youth voting are preliminary and subject to sampling and question wording. Platform recommendation behaviour is proprietary and therefore cannot be independently audited, meaning that there is a hard limit on what can be claimed in terms of algorithmic effects. Lastly, there are a few events in 2026 that are so recent that they have not yet been evaluated.

4. THE HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

4.1 How a Fragmented Majority Was Assembled into a Political Constituency

What ailed any party in India which wanted to build a base of most of the Hindu community was not the lack of numbers but the lack of unity. The caste and jati divisions are vertical divisions within the Hindu society, the language is a horizontal division, and the regions, sects and ritual practices are further divisions. A Marathi cultivator, a Tamil professional and a Bhojpuri labourer were united in religious identity but had little in common in terms of everyday political concerns. This fragmentation worked in favour of a wide-ranging centrist party that was able to form governments of groups of people, rather than a party that would attract most people, 40 years after independence.

Religion was the one identity which transcended those divisions. The mobilisation of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, from 1984 to 1992, transformed a vague cultural identity into a political identity. The rath yatra of 1990 led by L. K. Advani, which traversed several states till it was called off in Bihar, had served as a mobile mass-communication machine in an era when satellite TV was not available in most homes. It inspired local involvement at each of its stops, and it gave rise to a common story that could be carried out over language lines. Official returns are the record of the electoral trajectory. The Bharatiya Janata Party won 2 Lok Sabha seats in 1984, 85 in 1989, 120 in 1991, 161 in 1996 and 182 in 1998. To blame this increase entirely on the temple movement is simplistic, there were other factors in the same period that contributed to the decline of one-party rule, the disintegration of the opposition after 1989, the restructuring of caste politics after the adoption of the Mandal Commission recommendations and

economic liberalisation from 1991. All these advancements would have been advantageous for an organized opposition party, no matter its ideologies.

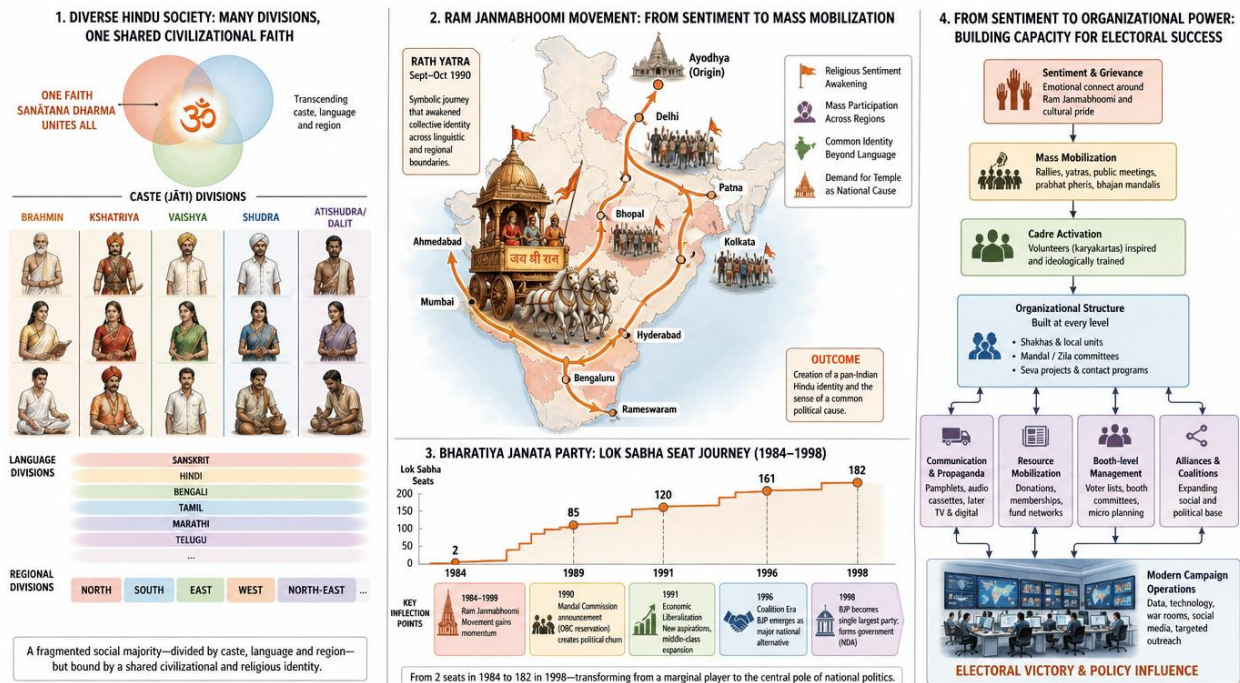


Fig -2: The Historical Foundation

These other factors did not provide the movement with durable organisational capacity, which is what the movement brought. Mobilisation led to the creation of volunteers, local committees, distribution networks, and habits of participation, which were not specific to the campaign. Sentiment creating movements lose momentum, structure creating movements retain momentum. This is the historical precedent for all that came next, and the party's ability to develop one of the world's biggest digital campaign operations. The implication forward is that any political organization that wants to have a similar impact must put money into structure as well as just message. Sentiment created in one election cycle is like a waste of money. But after organisation is built, compounding not emotion is what has been responsible for 40 years of growth.

5. ORGANISATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE WHY PRE-POLITICAL SOCIAL PRESENCE OUTPERFORMS ELECTION-SEASON CAMPAIGNING

Often electoral analysis starts from the moment an electoral campaign is declared. This blurs the most significant factor in Indian party competition the amount of time an organisation spends in a community before it calls for a vote.

The parent socio-cultural organisation of the governing party has been in existence since 1925 and claimed more than 73,000 branches of it in 2024, which are in every neighbourhood. It is surrounded by a network of affiliated organizations in school education, trade unionism, tribal welfare and student

representation and disaster relief. A number of these have been in operation for 50 to 70 years. Much of their work is not electoral but is based on running schools in areas where the state does not provide relief after floods, earthquakes, etc., union work among students on campus, hostel accommodation, and coaching. This is what political sociologists refer to as pre-political presence, which is institutional interaction with citizens in a continuous manner, beyond the asking.

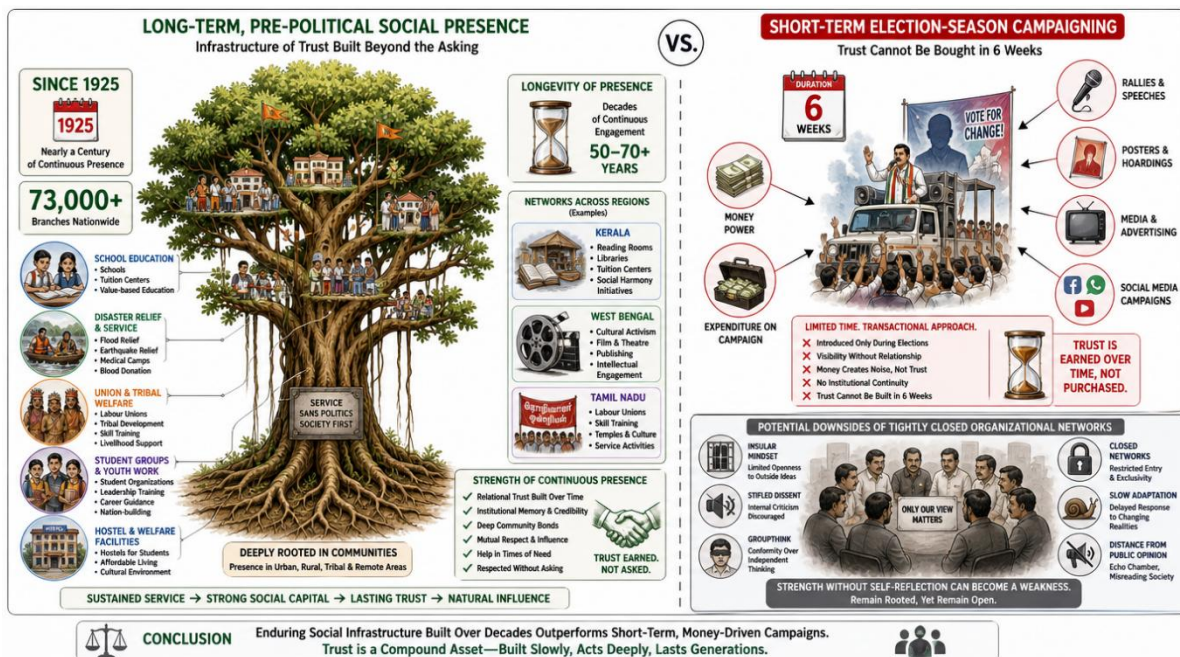


Fig -3: Organizational Infrastructure

The electoral implications of that are that the relationship already exists when the campaign starts. Trust doesn't need to be developed in 6 weeks, it needs to be awoken. The arithmetic of anyone who wants to match this reach on an electoral timetable on a budget is impossible, as the input is time, not money. The opposing side's argument should be given consideration. It is not a unique characteristic of one tradition to be pre-political. Unions, cooperatives, and reading rooms were established in Kerala and West Bengal, while cultural associations, cinema and language activism in Tamil Nadu created a similarly dense network in the second half of the twentieth century by the left parties in both states and the Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu. The general proposition is supported by the fact that where those networks weakened as in West Bengal post-2011 electoral collapse followed within a decade. There are several religious and community welfare groups of all faiths that serve similar purposes but have no electoral aims. The mechanism is thus general, and not partisan.

Some kind of restriction should be made known. High levels of organisation can lead to insularity, which can stifle dissent within the organisation and slow down the organisation's ability to recognise changing public opinion. Focusing on mobilisation can be at odds with feedback. The general rule for any political formation at anytime, anywhere, is that credibility is built up in the years when there is no risk. Parties that are only present during campaigns are at a disadvantage and no amount of advertising in the last month will fill a gap that has been decades.

6. THE COMMUNICATION LOGIC OF SYMBOLS WHY EMOTION TRAVELS FASTER THAN ARGUMENT

Symbolic communication has three attributes which are not found in policy communication. Does not involve any reading or writing. Does not involve sense of numbers. Does not need to have any previous knowledge of institutions. A river, a flag, a temple, a colour or a slogan has an immediate meaning that transcends language barriers. A fiscal argument does Not.

This is significant in a nation like India, where in the 2011 Census, the literacy rate was about 74 percent and were understanding of the argument of budget or macroeconomics is limited in all democracy, including India. A symbol thus is not a tool for reasoning, as much as a viable means of communication for people who are not reached by formal argument. Two additional techniques are used that enhance symbolic communication. The first is grievance framing, or the notion that a group is historically wronged, culturally ignored or misunderstood and unfairly treated. The results of many experiments in political psychology, across a range of countries, have shown that perceived deprivation is more effective in mobilising involvement than perceived gain. The rhetorical construction of a numerical majority as culturally under-recognised is analytically intriguing because it is a transformation that takes place by turning size into emotion, and vice-versa size doesn't make for emotion, and emotion doesn't make for size.

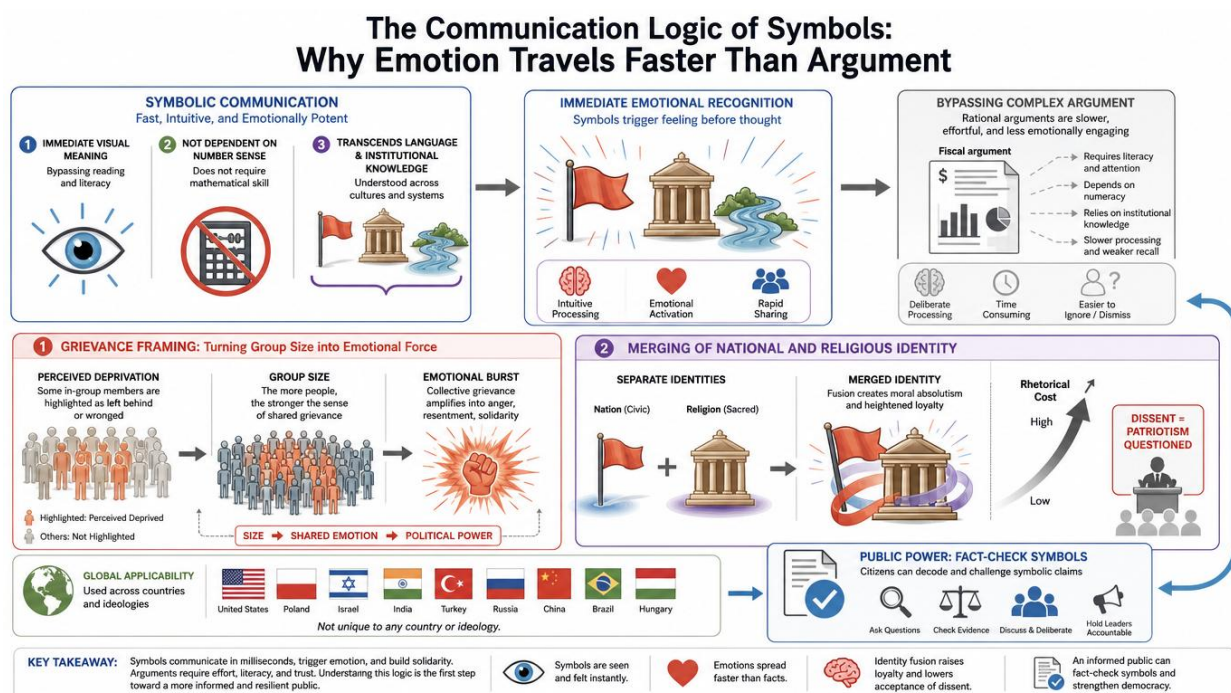


Fig -4: The Communication Logic of Symbols

The second is the merging of the national and religious identity. Where such fusion occurs, one may be able to criticize a government's policy and still be able to criticize the nation and, in the end, the nation's criticism may be the same as criticism of faith. The rhetorical price of dissent escalates commensurately, and opposition is forced to devote argumentative effort to proving its patriotism before it can have a say in opposition to a policy. None of this is Indian and it would be idiotic to call it Indian. The national and religious symbolism combination has been recorded in the discourse of the United States, Poland, Israel, Turkey, Russia, Brazil, and Hungary to name only a few nations, and is employed both by parties on the left

and the right of the ideological spectrum. It has also been used by those who in India call themselves secular, and who have made their own extensive use of religious imagery, visits to temples and appeals to caste-community.

The counter argument is symbolic politics is not inherently deceptive. Symbols can convey authentic shared identity and labeling them as manipulation is another way of condescending to voters. The implication for the future is that symbols will continue to be a crucial element of political communication. The novelty is that a united public now has the power to check symbols against documents on the spot and in a few minutes, which increases the accounting for symbols that do not tally with the records.

7. THE DUAL ENGINE WHY IDENTITY ALONE WAS NEVER SUFFICIENT

One of the common mistakes in the analysis of Indian politics post 2014 has been to give religion an exclusive credit for the electoral victories. This is not reflected in the record. This was a time of an unusually high growth in the provision of targeted material and when the two together emotional belonging and tangible receipt provide a much better explanation than either one alone.

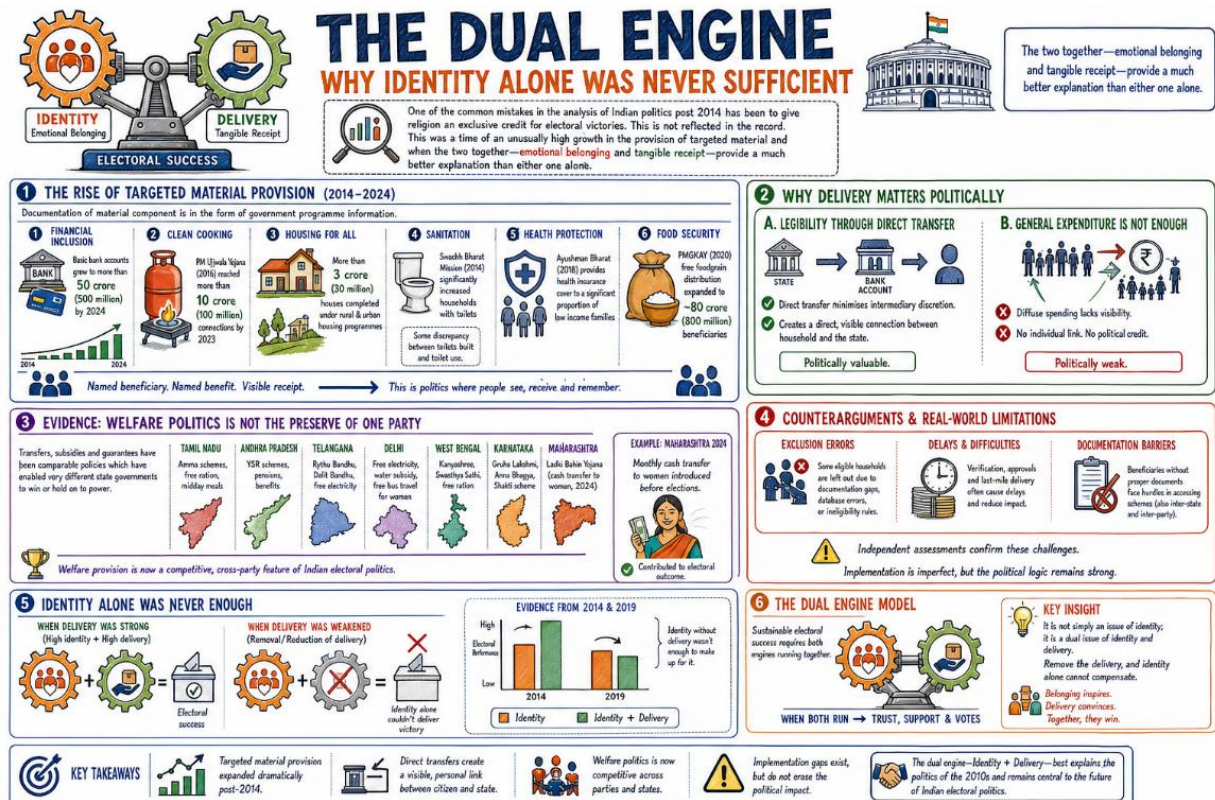


Fig -5: The Dual Engine Identity Alone was Never Sufficient

Documentation of material component is in the form of government programme information. By 2024, the number of basic bank accounts had grown to more than 50 crore (500 million) from a financial inclusion campaign that was initiated in 2014. A subsidized cooking gas connection programme that was started in 2016 had more than 10 crore (100 million) connections in 2023. More than 3 crore (30 million) houses have been completed in a rural and urban housing programme. In 2014, a national sanitation

awareness campaign significantly contributed to an increase in the number of households with toilets, and there has been some discrepancy between the number of toilets built and independent estimates of toilet use. Since 2018, there has been a publicly financed health insurance scheme, which covers a significant proportion of low income families. The free foodgrain distribution, which was launched in 2020, when the pandemic hit, has since been expanded to approximately 80 crore (800 million) beneficiaries.

There are two aspects of this provision which are politically relevant. First, most of it is identifiable on an individual basis a named benefit, which can be seen on a bank statement or in some object that is delivered. Second, most of it is directly transferred, thus minimising the discretion of the intermediary. Whereas legibility provided by direct transfer provides a connection between a household and the state, which is politically valuable, generalized public expenditure is not. Empirical evidence and counterargument are important. It is not just one party that can achieve welfare electoral success. The outcomes of transfers, subsidies and guarantees have been comparable policies which have enabled very different state governments in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Delhi, West Bengal, Karnataka, and Maharashtra to win or hold on to power. One recent example out of many is the annual assembly elections in Maharashtra, which were held in 2024, after the government introduced a cash transfer scheme to women every month. It is now a general characteristic of the electoral politics in India, not the prerogative of any tradition, that welfare provision is a competitive practice.

Independent assessments have also found exclusion errors, and delays and difficulties in delivering the scheme to beneficiaries without working documentation also inter-state and inter-party. The obvious implication is that it was not simply an issue of identity, it's a dual issue of identity and delivery because when you remove the delivery, as they did in 2014 and 2019, there isn't enough identity to make up for it.

8. THE SATURATION PROBLEM WHAT HAPPENS TO A MOVEMENT AFTER ITS PROMISE IS FULFILLED

In movements that are centered around an unfulfilled commitment, there is a structural challenge not necessarily related to the commitment itself. Anticipation mobilizes. Completion does not mobilise in the same way as does completion. It's an observation about the process of organizing, and a description of how social movements can work, and in fact, how many social movements in many countries and for many issues can work... and it shouldn't be interpreted as a statement about any belief or any decision.

Specific Indian evidence for 2024. The consecration of the Temple at Ayodhya took place on 22 January 2024. During the general election in April–Jun 2024, the ruling party had lost the Faizabad constituency where Ayodhya is located to Samajwadi Party. It lost 33 seats in Uttar Pradesh in 2024 as compared to 62 in 2019. Nationally, it gained 240 seats compared to 303 in 2019, and once again was by far the biggest party, but not big enough to have a single-party government for the first time since 2014.

A lot of care must be taken with the interpretation of this. Local issues were mentioned in Faizabad, such as land being acquired for infrastructure surrounding the temple complex, homes and shops being displaced, and issues of compensation which are administrative, not religious. The arithmetic of caste in eastern Uttar Pradesh (UP) changed and it was widely believed that the opposition's campaign about constitutional protection for reservations had swayed voters of the Scheduled Caste. The result is largely down to the completion of the temple and to overread a single constituency result would be to overstate this. The uncertainty posed by post-poll survey work hasn't been resolved.

The safer interpretation of this is comparative. This demobilization problem is found in many political movements: when a movement is formed to achieve a single goal, that goal's attainment tends to

demobilize the movement. The organisation then either establishes a new goal, makes a shift to a delivery-based appeal or contracts. This has been seen in independence movements, civil rights movements and single-issue referendum and constitutional reform movements around the world.

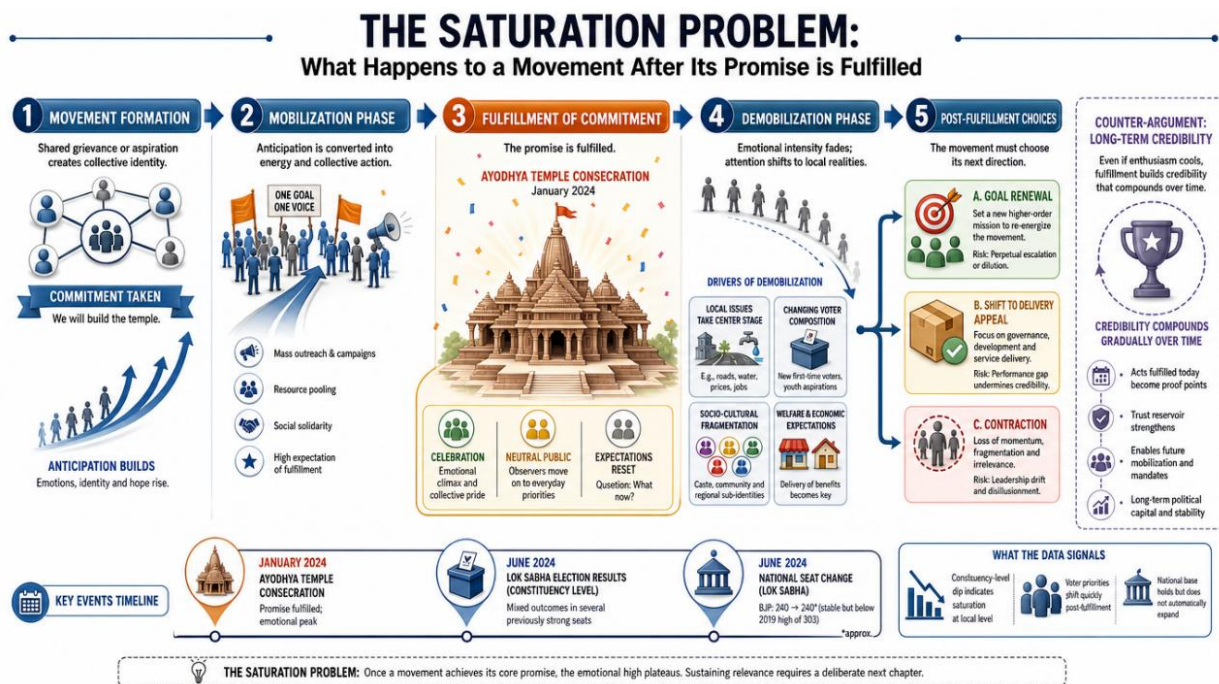


Fig -6: The Saturation Problem

However, there is also a counter argument, in that satisfied commitments can foster longer-term credibility, even if they do not yield any immediate electoral benefit, and that the extent of credibility can only be judged over time. The forward implication is that all political formations need to make plans for after the promise is fulfilled. Symbols are not the only ones to be committed to the question is what the symbol becomes when it is fulfilled.

9. THE EMPLOYMENT QUESTION WHY A SALARY SLIP NOW OUTWEIGHS A SLOGAN

One thing has been found in most of the labour studies conducted in recent years that unemployment in India is a malady of the youth in an alarming proportion. In 2024, an international labour organisation and a national development institute released a joint report, which stated that youth make up nearly 83 per cent of the unemployed in India. The same study indicated the counter-intuitive finding that unemployment is higher among the educated; in 2022, only about 29 percent of graduates without jobs, compared to about three percent of those who cannot read or write.

Such an inversion is of a political nature and will be decisive. A family who invests in education will be expecting a return on their investment. Failure to receive the return does not lead to disappointment: it is a disappointment that is personal, specific, and related to institutions that made promises they failed to keep. Politically active unemployed graduate is a different actor than the underemployed agricultural labourer because of his/her literacy, connectivity, spare time and the ability to organize.

The size of the formal public sector jobs market gives an idea of the competition. For about 1.1 lakh (110,000) posts, more than 2.3 crore (23 million) applications were received during the recruitment cycles in 2018 of railway posts. Similar ratios have been documented for state police officers, clerical and or teaching staff in various states. The numbers are supplied by the recruiting organizations and may be updated from time to time.

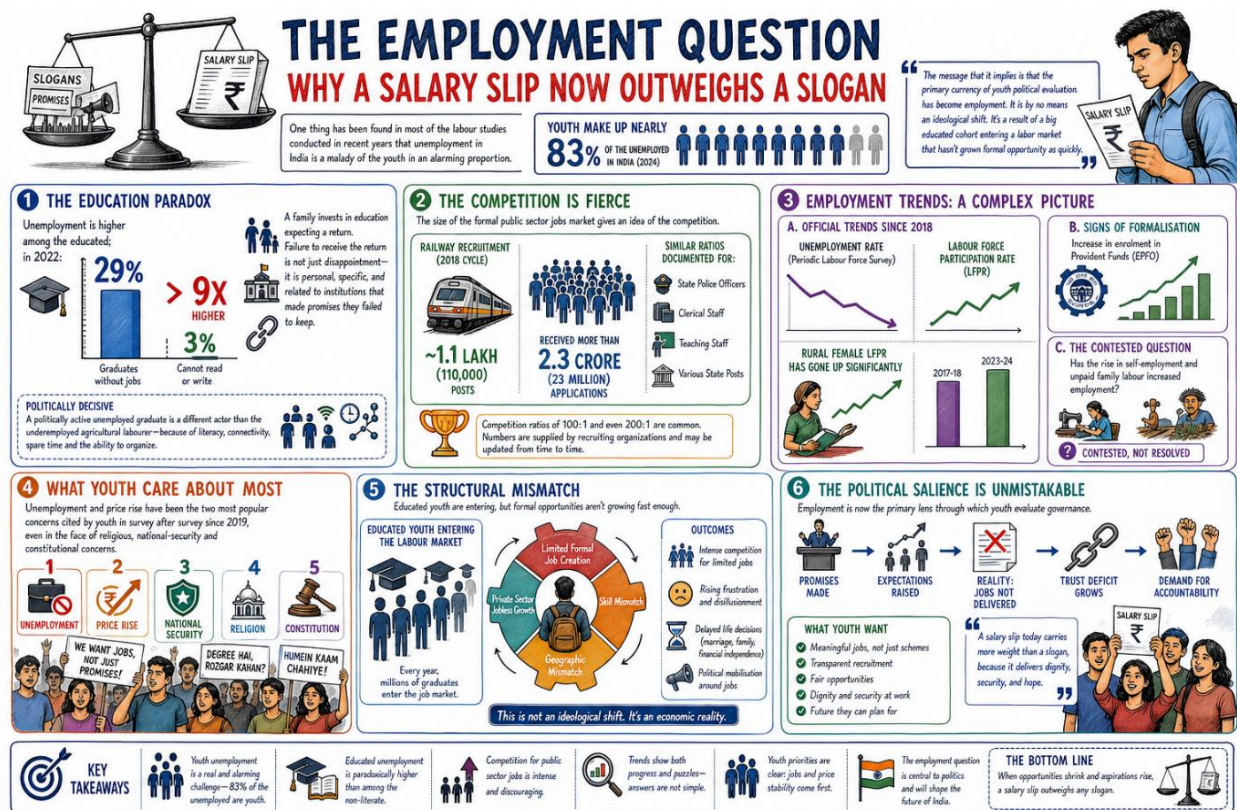


Fig -7: The Employment Question Why A Salary Slip Now Outweighs A Slogan

There are several qualifications required. Since 2018, the official headline unemployment rate has decreased and the labour force participation rate (LFPR) has gone up, especially for rural females, from the periodic labour force surveys. There have been formalization indicators based on increased enrolment in provident funds. Independent economists have asked themselves if the rise in self-employment and unpaid family labour should be interpreted as an increase in employment, like jobseekers would think. This is a real and unresolved methodological question, which is here marked as 'contested' but not as resolved.

The one thing that is not in question is the political salience. Unemployment and price rise have been the two most popular concerns cited by youth in survey after survey since 2019, even in the face of religious and national-security and constitutional concerns. The message that it implies is that the primary currency of youth political evaluation has become employment. It is by no means an ideological shift. It's a result of a big, educated cohort entering a labor market that hasn't grown formal opportunity as quickly.

10. TRUST SHOCKS RECRUITMENT REFORM, EXAMINATION INTEGRITY, AND THE POLITICS OF THE ASPIRANT

At some point employment anxiety turns into political anger: when the process of gaining employment is seen as unfair. Here are three episodes from 2022 that demonstrate how quickly this conversion takes place.

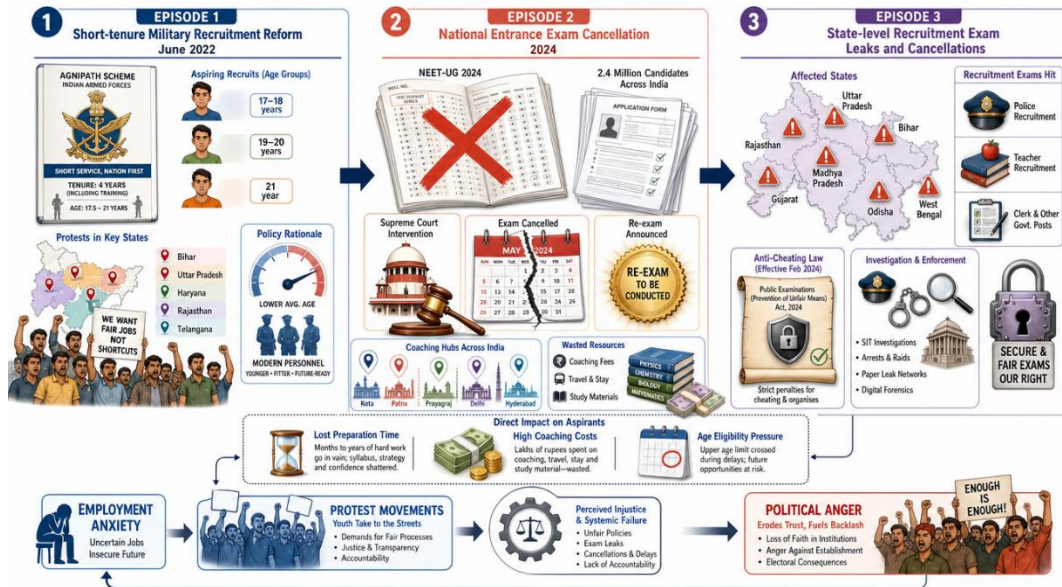


Fig -8: Trust Shocks Requirment Reform

The first was the announcement in June 2022 of a restructured short-tenure military recruitment scheme, which saw most recruits, for the first time, not be awarded pension and permanent-service benefits. There were protests in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Telangana, with young people in many instances having been waiting to be recruited for years. Significantly, many of the protests took place in areas which have traditionally high enlistment rates and strong votes for the ruling party. The communication process of the change to affected aspirants was widely criticized, even by members of the governing coalition, although the government had been able to provide a defensible policy rationale it was necessary for the armed forces to reduce the average age of the personnel, and it was necessary to modernize the personnel profile.

It was the cancellation of the country's entrance exams in 2024. The Supreme Court was called upon to intervene in issues of irregularities that arose in the national medical entrance examination conducted in May 2024, and resulted in litigation, re-examination for some candidates and cancellation of a separate national exam to determine eligibility for medical education. There were about 24 lakh (2.4 million) candidates who had appeared in the medical entrance exam that year. The third is the reoccurrence of leaks of recruitment examination at state level. In Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Gujarat, and West Bengal, under the governments of various parties, the recruitment of police constables, teachers and clerks have been cancelled. This is not a problem with a particular political entity, it is a problem of examination administration throughout the country, and it must be judged accordingly. Organised cheating in public examinations is recognised at the highest level with Parliament enacting a law in February 2024 to establish offences for such cheating.

It is not an ideological matter for the aspirant when it comes to examination integrity. A Year of preparation, a Year of coaching costs, and a Year of age limit eligibility is lost for a cancelled examination. The constituency is large and geographically concentrated in coaching centres of cities like Kota, Patna, Prayagraj, Delhi, and Hyderabad, making it a very easy constituency to organize. The forward implication is that administrative competence in recruiting has become a first order political variable. There is nothing more likely to turn supporters into opponents than a few failures.

11. THE MEDIA SHIFT WHY A PRIME-TIME CONSENSUS CANNOT REACH AN AUDIENCE THAT DOES NOT WATCH PRIME TIME

Broadcast TV is a medium that is one to many and a few have control of that medium. This is where its political usefulness comes in, as it could provide an opportunity for a 'national conversation' at a set time. That segment still has significant market share in India and television continues to be the most viewed news medium in general. However, it is not as strong among Indians under 25. News consumption surveys conducted annually across the world have revealed that for most younger Indians, the internet including short video and social sites has overtaken television for news access, particularly in this age group, which has seen the TV share drop year on year.

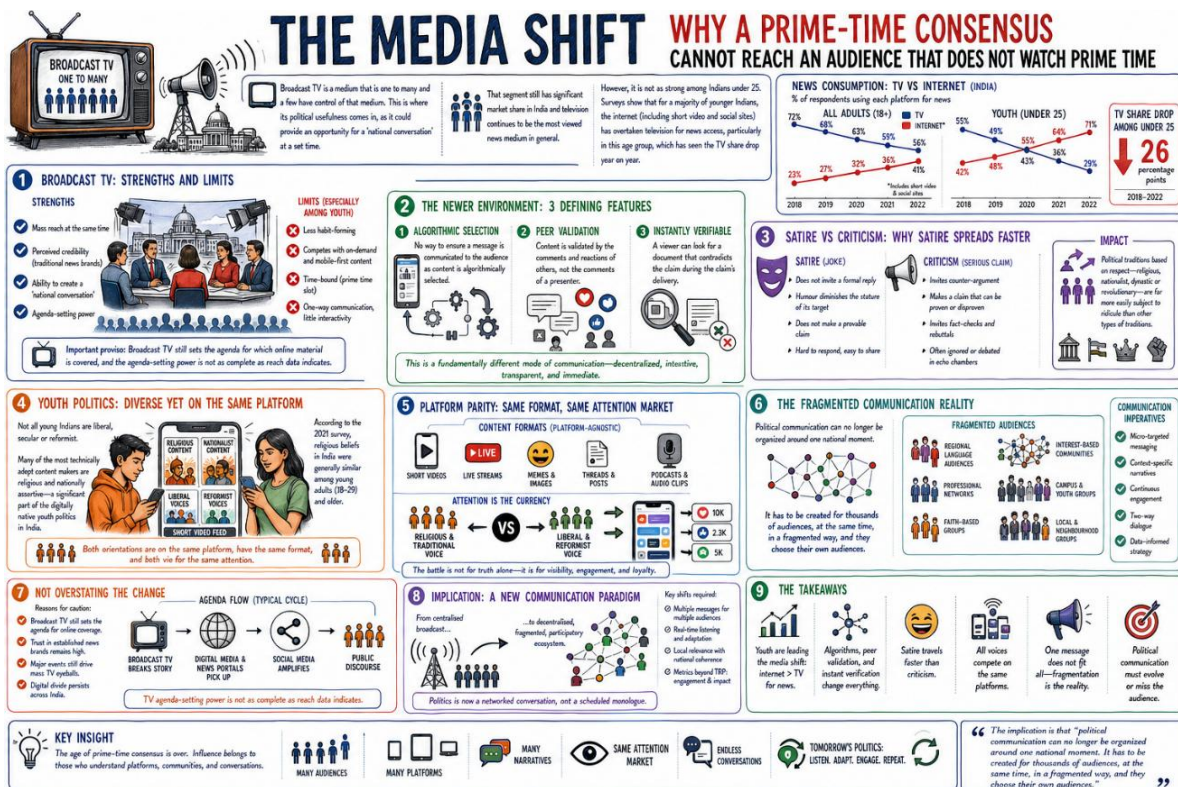


Fig-9: The Media Shift

Three things make it the newer environment stand out. There is no way to ensure that a message is communicated to an audience as the content is algorithmically selected. It is peer validated, meaning it has the comments of others when it comes to the claim, not the comments of a presenter. And it's instantly verifiable A viewer can look for a document that contradicts the claim during the claim's

delivery. This is not the same mode of operation as satire as it is with criticism. It doesn't invite a formal reply, a joke does. Humour diminishes the stature of its target but does not make a statement that could be proven or disproven, making it hard to respond and easy to share. Political traditions that are based on respect, either religious or nationalist, either dynastic or revolutionary, are far more easily subject to ridicule than other types of traditions.

An important proviso must be noted, however, as often as the other conclusion is drawn. Not all the young Indians are liberal, secular or reformist. Many of the most technically adept content makers are religious and nationally assertive, a significant part of the digitally native youth politics in India. According to the latest survey available in 2021, religious beliefs in India were generally similar among young adults aged 18-29 and older. Both orientations are on the same platform, have the same format, and both vie for the same attention. But there are strong arguments against over-stating the change, one is that broadcast TV still sets the agenda for which online material is covered, and the agenda-setting power is not as complete as reach data indicates. The implication is that political communication can no longer be organized around one national moment. It must be created for thousands of audiences, at the same time, in a fragmented way, and they choose their own audiences.

12. THE TECHNICAL ARCHITECTURE OF DIGITAL POLITICS WHAT THE TOOLS ACTUALLY DO

In the modern world of campaigning, it is important to be familiar with what instruments are 10 of them are described here simply.

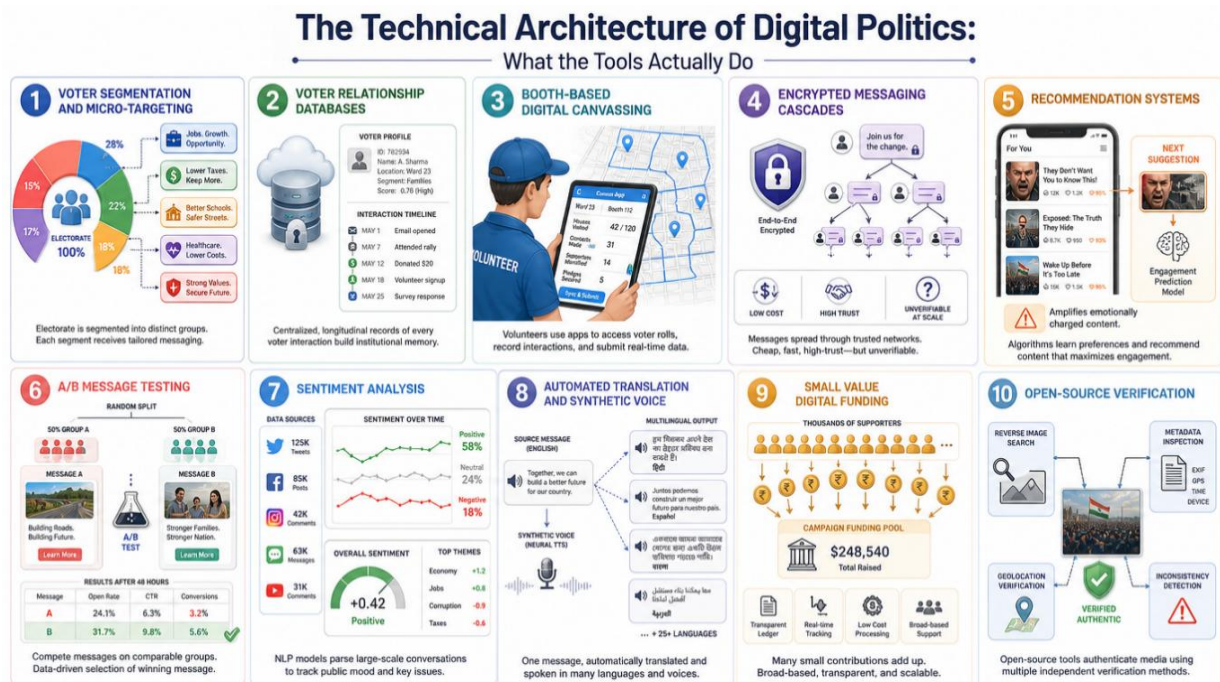


Fig -10: The Technical Architecture of Digital Politics

Voter segmentation and micro-targeting involves dividing up an electorate into smaller groups of people with certain characteristics e.g. age, occupation, location, language, enrolment on welfare schemes and

communicating a different message to each group. This power is the power to drop the national slogan, to replace it with thousands of calls, which are sounded at the same time.

Voter relationship databases use commercial customer-management techniques in the realm of politics and track all interactions with a household. The ability is institutional memory, a canvasser in 2029 knows what was discussed in 2024. A booth-based digital canvassing system gives each volunteer a page of the electoral roll, usually 30–60 voters and they do reports via a mobile app. The capability is quantifiable (ground) operations, and estimates are replaced by counts.

Encrypted messaging cascades is a nested group distribution of material. Capability is low cost and deniable and high trust distribution, but encryption also causes external verification to be prevented that is why it has been linked to rumours propagation. Recommendation systems determine what the next item a user is likely to be interested in. The ability for campaigns is no-cost amplification of emotionally charged content material. The danger is that it is not for accuracy but for emotion. A/B message testing is sending two versions of a message to similar audiences and keeping the one that works better. The capability is empirical persuasion, rhetoric no longer is a matter of judgement, but it is now a matter of measurement.

Sentiment analysis can analyze massive public postings to make judgment on the opinion trend on an issue or on a candidate. The capability is early warning and accuracy in writing in Indian languages and mixed scripts is limited. Automated translation and synthetic voice enable the reproduction of one recorded message in a multitude of languages in the same speaker's voice. Twenty-two is the number of languages that have been scheduled in the country and the same capability is unprecedented in a country where the technology to impersonation is addressed later in this article. A small value digital funding, which involves few hundred rupees from a huge number of supporters. The capability is a funding base not reliant or limited by a small number of big donors. Ordinary citizens can use open-source verification reverse image search, metadata analysis, shadow analysis, and geolocation to determine if an image or video is what it purports to be. The counter argument is none of these tools will ever replace organisation. If it's sent to the right person but the person doesn't move, it is not doing anything.

13. DIGITAL PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE RISE OF THE RECEIPT-EXPECTING CITIZEN

The biggest political shift in India in the last 15 years may have been accomplished by no party. Administered by administrative plumbing.

The parts have now been introduced. By 2024, more than 138 crore (1.38 billion) people had been issued their national digital identity numbers under the national digital identity programme which has been operational since 2010. The unified real-time retail payments system, which was introduced in 2016, has handled over 1,800 crore (18 billion) transactions in a month in 2025, and the number of transactions is continually adjusted upwards. A direct benefit transfer (DBT) architecture is one that transfers subsidies and entitlements into bank accounts from over 300 central schemes. Government maintains a digital repository of certificates and licenses which can be retrieved. The digital commerce open network that was inaugurated in 2022 aims to unite the buyer, seller and platform. During 2021 and 2022, more than 200 crore (2,000 million) verifiable vaccination certificates have been issued.

This is a subtle and important political issue. These systems educate citizens to a specific expectation that a transaction will have an immediate, personally verifiable confirmation. Either the payment was

successful or it was not and the results are back in seconds. A citizen, who is used to such a standard, does the same elsewhere. Seventy years of a public office's response to the question the file is under process' is contrasted with the response of a three-second confirmation, which is found wanting.

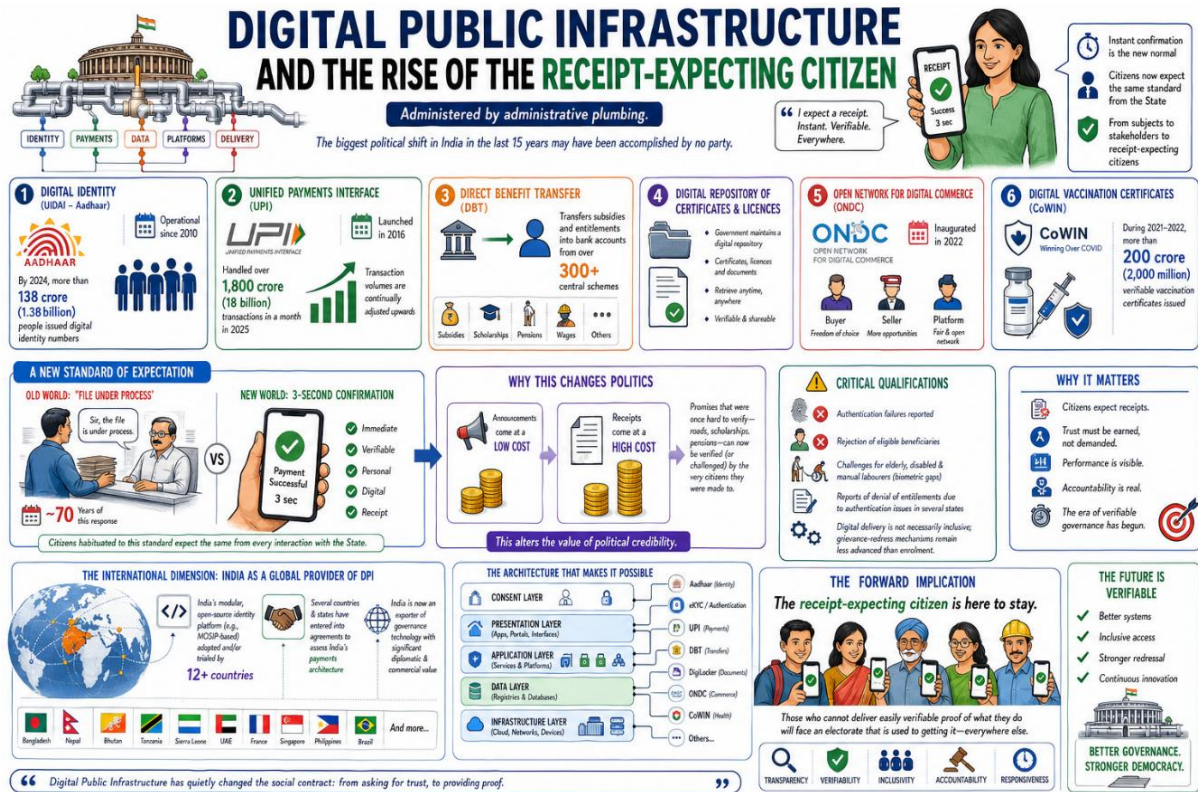


Fig -11: Digital Public Infrastructure And the Rise of the Receipt-Expecting Citizen

This alters the value of political credibility. Announcements come at a low cost, receipts come at a high cost. Political assertions which used to only be possible to disbelieve a road constructed, a scholarship paid out, a pension credited can now be doubted by the one to whom the promise was made. There are several qualifications that are necessary. Independent research has recorded instances of authentication failures, rejection of the eligible beneficiaries, and problems in the cases of the elderly, disabled and manual labourers whose biometric records are not captured. There have been reports of denial of entitlements due to authentication issues in several states. Digital delivery is consequently not necessarily inclusive and grievance-redress mechanisms are not as advanced as enrolment.

The international dimension has a great impact. A modular open-source identity platform built in India has been picked up and or trialed by over a dozen countries and some States have entered into agreements to assess the payments architecture. India is now an exporter of governance technology, that has diplomatic and commercial value. The forward implication is that the citizen expecting his receipt is a permanent thing. Those that cannot deliver easily provide proof of what they are doing will be faced with an electorate that is used to having it delivered everywhere else.

14. WHAT THE POST-2000 GENERATION IS ACTUALLY ASKING FOR

But caution should be exercised in reconstructing the priorities of a population of 37 crore (370 million) people, as no one survey reflects it. Based on published survey series, protest events and petition data and manifesto responses from 2019 to 2026, twelve recurring demands can be identified.

12 RECURRING DEMANDS OF INDIA'S POST-2000 GENERATION

Based on Survey Data, Protest Events & Petitions (2019–2025)



Source: Aggregated from National Surveys, RTI Analyses, Protest Events & Online Petitions (2019–2025)

Note: Illustrative summary of recurring demands.

Fig -12: 12 Recurring Demands of India's Post-2000 Generation

1. Dignified employment (not employment statistics) security, progression and wage income adequate for independent living.
2. Examination Integrity – Leak proof recruitment, report results within time limits and compensation if an application year is ruined due to cancellation.
3. Respected recruitment calendar–the advertised job positions are filled within the announced recruitment calendar. The successive Parliamentary replies have pointed out the existence of vacancy backlogs in the central and state services.
4. Platform-worker protection–social security, transparency of how allocation algorithms dispatch work and a minimum wage. In 2023, this was legislated in Rajasthan, and in 2025 in Karnataka.
5. Education to credible qualifications (vocational) not excessive degrees with no demand.
6. Affordable urban housing and city rent protection.
7. Mental health as public health with funded services not private service alone.
8. Resistance to air, water, and heat. Indian cities have been in the limelight for several years now as far as annual global air-quality rankings are concerned, and heat-related deaths have been on the increase in successive summers.

9. Privacy and restrictions on suspension of services on digital means. India had the largest number of internet shutdowns in the world over the last several years (up to 2024) as reported by monitoring organisations.

10. Visible and even-handed anti-corruption enforcement, across the board, regardless of political affiliation.

11. Merit rather than the right of birth. When it comes to anti dynastic sentiment in survey data, it's not just national parties that are in the hit list, it's regional parties, business and cultural industry.

12. Deliberation over Decrees: working committee scrutiny of bills, fewer bills passed without reference, regular press contacts by officeholders. Over the past Lok Sabhas with different government, the percentage of bills sent to the Parliamentary committees has been decreasing.

It is important to note a counterargument these priorities come from mostly urban, connected, educated respondents. Rural young Indians and young women especially value other aspects, such as access to transport, safety, and local employment. However, there is a clear trend. All these 12 questions are almost nonreligious or nonsecular. They are delivery questions and they are directed to any government at any time.

15. THE INTERNATIONAL PATTERN YOUTH-LED DIGITAL MOBILISATION BEYOND INDIA

There were seven countries that had a youth-led mobilisation in the period 2019–2025, which was digitally organised, and had sufficient similarities in its features to be comparable.

Chile, 2019–2021. Mass protests largely via messaging platforms and videos followed the metro fare hike in October 2019. In 2020, a plebiscite voted to have a constitutional convention, and then in his mid-thirties Gabriel Boric was elected president in December 2021. This shows that mobilisation and constitutional agreement are not the same thing as the two previous constitutional drafts were voted against in referendum in 2022 and 2023.

Sri Lanka, 2022 and 2024. Economic meltdown and shortages resulted in protest actions continuing into 2022, with President Gotabaya Rajapaksa fleeing the country and resignation in July 2022. In September 2024, Anura Kumara Dissanayake, head of a coalition which previously held three seats in the parliament, was elected president and his coalition gained a substantial parliamentary majority in November 2024.

Bangladesh, 2024. Since July 2024, a student protest against the public-service quota rules has turned into a nationwide protest resulting in significant loss of life. On 5 August 2024, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina stepped down from office and a caretaker government was established a few days later.

Kenya, 2024. On 26 June 2024, President William Ruto refused to sign the Finance Bill, following protests against the bill by mainly youth, who were not affiliated to any party, in June 2024. In historical terms, ethnic mobilisation which has been the mainstay of Kenyan politics did not polarise the movement.

Nepal, 2025. Limits on social media websites, coupled with widely circulated information about the difference between the lifestyle of politically connected families and the general economy, led to protests in September 2025. On 9 September 2025, Prime Minister K. P. Sharma Oli stepped down and Sushila Karki was tasked to run an interim government.

Indonesia, 2025. The withdrawal of the measures and the changes of the ministers was the result of protests over legislators' allowances in August 2025.

Madagascar, 2025. Protests for water and electricity failures have continued since September 2025 and resulted in the ousting of the president and the coming to power of a military officer which is not always a good thing.

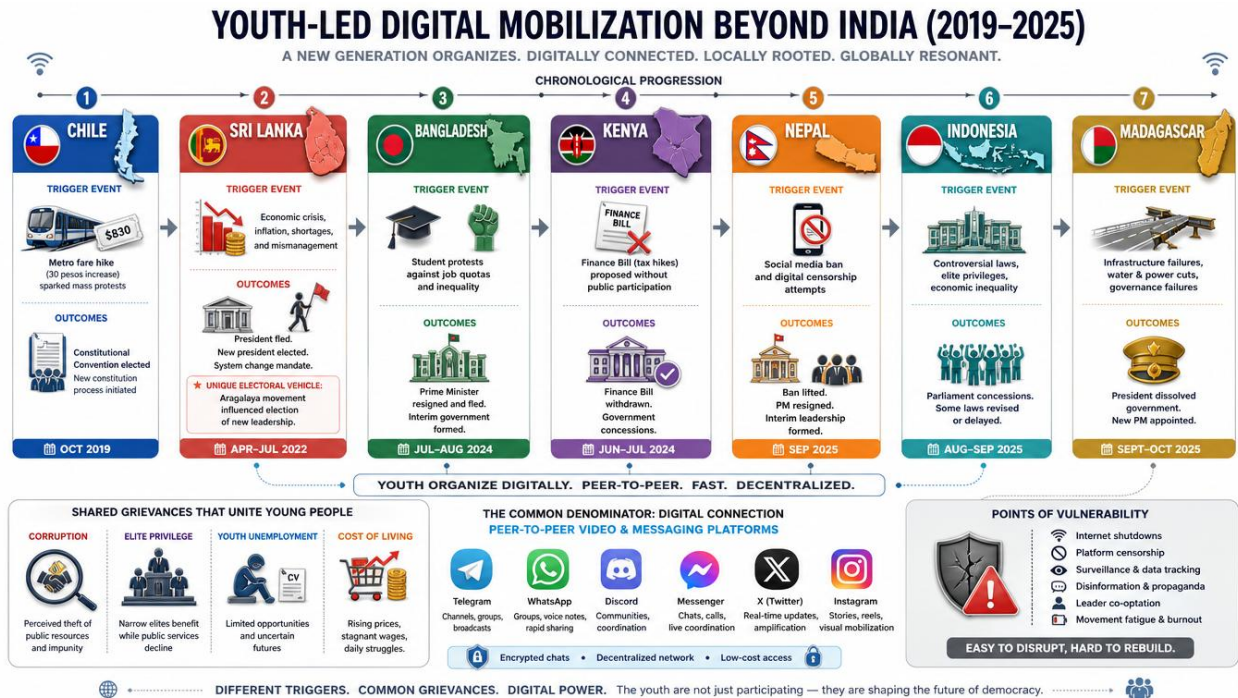


Fig -13: Youth-LED Digital Mobilization Beyond India (2019-2025)

What they have in common are the issues of corruption, obvious elite privileges, youth unemployment, and the cost of living, not religion, ethnicity or ideology. Peer-to-peer video is the common denominator of the shared tool. Both have the same vulnerability it is easy to remove, but difficult to be built as Egypt after 2011 proved. What made Sri Lanka's relative success was the development of an electoral vehicle and not being a protest.

16. BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC STRUCTURE BEHIND DIGITAL POLITICS

Digital politics is not free of charge and money traces incentives.

Since about 2013, an industry of political consultancy and campaign-analytics has emerged in India to provide survey research, constituency modelling, content creation, and volunteer management. Another accountability gap is its size estimates of which vary wildly, and no reliable, published estimate exists. Its customers are of all colors, and the same companies have been hired by both sides in various states.

One of the transparency challenges is with paid creator arrangements. Disclosure requirements are in place where political advertising is placed. However, no similar duty soundly exists in India for a content creator who has a huge following and gives an apparently opinion for which he/she has been rewarded. There is not a discernable difference between conviction and commerce. Some jurisdictions have started developing guidelines for disclosure of paid political content and India has consumer-protection guidance for commercial endorsements but not for political endorsements.

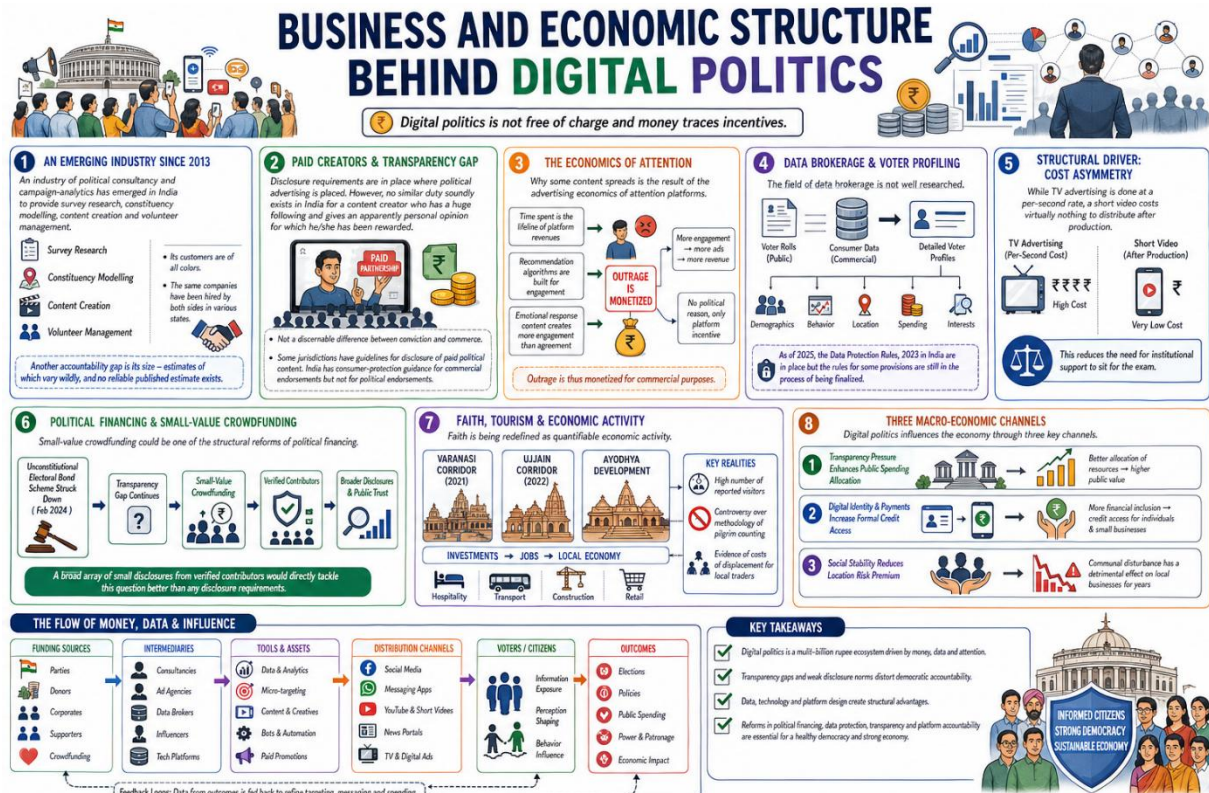


Fig -14: Business And Economics Structure Behind Digital Politics

Why some content spreads is the result of the advertising economics of attention platforms. Time spent is the lifeline of platform revenues, recommendation algorithm are built for engagement, and emotional response content is more effective at creating engagement than content that is creating agreement. Outrage is thus monetized for commercial purposes and there is no political reason for the platform. The field of data brokerage is not well researched. The voter rolls are public records and with commercially available consumer data, detailed voter profiles are created. As of 2025, the data protection rules of 2023 in India are in place but the rules for some of the provisions are still in the process of being finalized.

It is the structural driver: Cost asymmetry. While TV advertising is done at a per-second rate, a short video costs virtually nothing to distribute after production. This reduces the need for institutional support to sit for the exam. The small value crowdfunding could be one of the structural reforms of political financing. After the Supreme Court's February 2024 ruling that the electoral bond scheme was unconstitutional, the issue of the transparency of electoral contributions continues to be open and a broad array of small disclosures from verified contributors would directly tackle this question better than any disclosure requirements.

The other way in which faith is redefined is as quantifiable economic activity. The corridor development from Varanasi (2021) and Ujjain (2022) and the infrastructure development around Ayodhya are documented in the states as tourism investments that create jobs in the hospitality, transport, construction, and retail sectors. The number of reported visitors is high, but there is controversy over the methodology of pilgrim counting and evidence of costs of displacement for local traders. The three macro-economic channels are as follows: transparency pressure enhances public spending allocation

digital identity and payments increase the formal credit access; and social stability reduces location risk premium communal disturbance has a detrimental effect on the local businesses for years.

17. THE RISKS HOW DIGITAL POLITICS CAN DAMAGE THE DEMOCRACY IT CLAIMS TO RENEW

Architecture of distributed accountability distributes falsehood as well and it is not the technology that makes the difference.

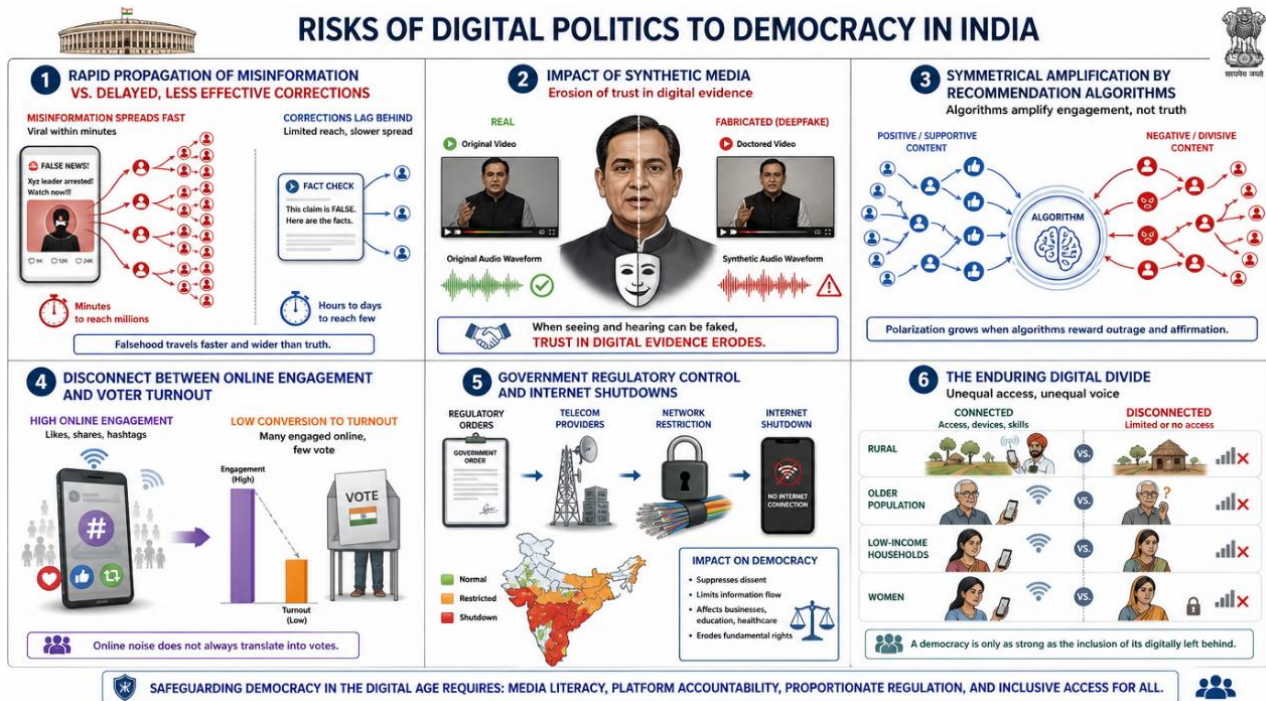


Fig -15: Risks of Digital Politics To Democracy In India

It's easier to propagate misinformation than it is to correct information. From 2017 to 2019, rumours have spread via forwarded messages that have been associated with mob violence in several Indian states and have been investigated by police. When it comes to Corrections, it's the same but with a delay, and to less of an audience, as retraction does not have quite the appeal as accusation. Independent fact-verification organisations have grown greatly but produce small amounts of content for a large quantity of fact-checked material.

Synthetic media has come. In the 2024 general elections, doctored voice and video clips of prominent political actors were disseminated in various languages and Election Commission gave out cautions on the topic. The crux of the issue is evidentiary. When the fabrication is convincing and cheap, I never said that becomes as unfalsifiable as is "here is the recording" to an ordinary observer. In a world where recorded evidence isn't cryptographically signed at the time it's recorded, or 'provenanced', the trust in recorded evidence even for honest participants falls.

Recommendation systems go off the deep end in all ways. Optimisation that brings forward a reformist investigation brings forward an incitement. The mechanism is symmetrical. Energy Online does not convert to votes. Historically Electoral Commission statistics revealed lower turnout in urban and rural

areas respectively and there has been a significant difference between the turnout of young people and other voters even though there have been extensive voter enrolment campaigns. A popular hashtag does not designate a polling agent or nominate or scrutinize a count.

There is significant regulatory control over the medium. The state has a lot of control over connectivity and content through a series of intermediary rules of 2021, data protection legislation of 2023, telecom legislation of 2023 and the powers of suspension provided in the telecom rules of 2017 and as per public-order provisions. India became the country with the maximum number of internet shutdowns in the world for several years in a row to 2024, with the square of internet shutdown orders from the administrations of the governments of several states. Digital participation is reliant on digital rights that can't be lost.

The digital divide is related to the emergence of new exclusion. In 2024, India's population is estimated to be over 140 crore (1.4 billion) with online users estimated to be near 90 crore (900 million), leaving about a third to two-fifths of Indians offline, who are disproportionately rural, older, poorer, and female. The flip side is that there were distortions with pre-digital media as well, such as the influence of the owner and restricted access. The risks mentioned herein are not new in nature but are new in form.

18. ERRORS TO AVOID A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR POLITICAL ACTORS, INSTITUTIONS AND CITIZENS

In the next 15 lessons, all political formations are targeted, as well as the institutions and citizens holding them accountable. Each of these statements is based on evidence presented above and stated as a lesson; not an accusation.



Fig -16: Errors to Avoid A Practical Guide for Political Actors Institutions and Citizens

1. Don't consider a promise made as a permanent asset. There is an electoral half-life with symbolic completion plan the follow-up appearance after the delivery.



2. Do not make an announcement for an audited outcome. Share outcome data, as well as baselines and independent verification, NOT launch photos.
3. Never let recruitment and examination systems go awry. There is nothing more effective than this failure to turn a supporter into an opponent and this failure has been committed by many governments.
4. Online clapping is not organisation. Engagement metrics are not used to select booth agents or nominate.
5. Don't retaliate to online criticism with connectivity restrictions. Suppression has a quantifiable impact on grievance, while at the same time harming commerce, education, and health.
6. Don't allow unindicated political promotion that is paid for. Uniformly demand that creators and those that pay creators declare.
7. Refrain from using synthetics of any sort showing any player of any team in any manner for any purpose, even in a satirical way that might be confused as recording.
8. Never rule by decree and by partial discussions. Without committee scrutiny there is no legitimacy, without it there is credit to be recalled in the future.
9. Avoid considering dynastic selection as normal. Anti-inheritance feeling is across party lines, growing and hostile to both national and regional entities.
10. Include offline population in digitised delivery. Keep assisted and paper communications as permanent, rather than temporary means.
11. Avoid dominance of one identity axis being the sole one of competition. One axis politics narrows the scope of issues that can be dealt with by a system.
12. Don't mobilize anger; do not create an institution to carry anger. Removal is relatively simple but so is not the governing afterward.
13. Respect Local Government. National credibility now begins to be undermined at municipal level on the issues of water, waste, and air quality.
14. Don't view climate, air and water as "post-development luxuries" for a generation that is still projected to live in 2085.
15. Don't expect the next generation to act as the previous generation acted even though they have the same faith. Expectations have toughened among the political classes, and observance has continued to hold up.

The qualification is that these are lessons of governance and not of ideology, and that, if observed, it would be a benefit to every tradition.

19. WHOSE PARTICIPATION REPRESENTATION, GENDER, AND DISTRIBUTIONAL QUESTION

Any record of how political consent is created must also document who is in the creating. Two groups deserve particular attention. They are both large, both electorally significant and both are missing from most of the discussion on the temple technology dichotomy.

The first is with regards to religious minorities. The Muslim community makes up about 14 per cent of the population as per the 2011 Census. The proportion of Muslims in the Lok Sabha has consistently been less

than that percentage since Independence, peaking in the early 1980s and falling since then, the eighteenth Lok Sabha elected in 2024 has twenty-four Muslims members, about 4.4 per cent of the House. This under-representation extends back beyond the period covered in this report and has been maintained by governments made up by various parties. There are various arguments in the academic literature about the reasons for this, such as calculations by parties of candidate selection, constituency demography and that the Constitution does not have a reserving system for religious minorities. By contrast turnout among Muslim voters has, with few exceptions, been at or above the national average, suggesting that the problem isn't that of turnout but of representation. The necessity of the distributional point is analytical: a mobilisation strategy geared to a majority constituency has implications for the political incorporation of others; and a research study which only looks at the effectiveness of the mobilisation strategy only examines half the question.

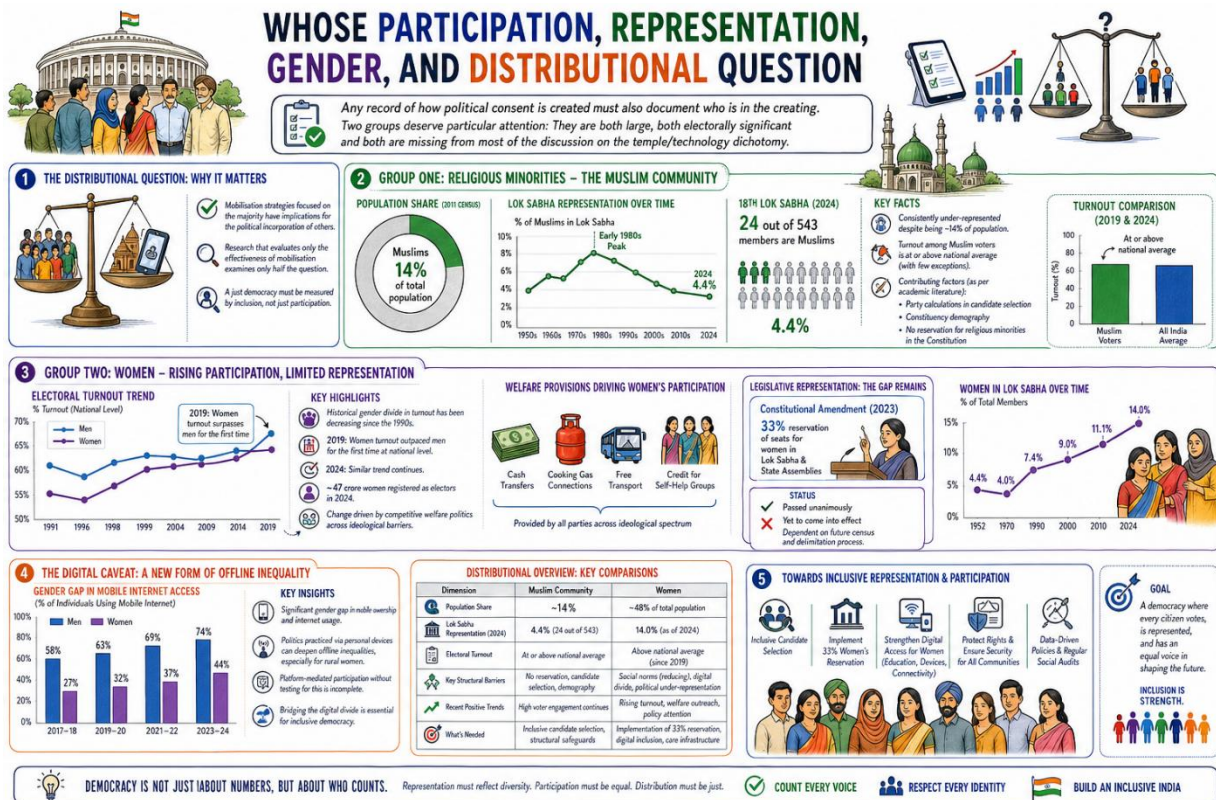


Fig -17: Whose Participation Representation Gender And Distribution Question

The second one is about women. In this instance the change is in the other direction and is one of the most important Indian electoral behaviour changes of recent times. However, the historical gender divide has been decreasing since the 1990s and in the 2019 general elections, the turnout of women outpaced that of men for the first time in the country, at the national level, with the 2024 election showing a similar trend, with approximately 47 crore women registered as electors. Targeted provisions, such as cash transfers, access to cooking gas, free transport, credit for self-help groups have been provided by all parties and several recent state outcomes have been credited at least in part to such provision. It is not the property of any tradition, but rather competitive welfare politics across the ideological barriers.



The legislative representation has not been in step. The constitutional amendment that was passed in 2023 to allocate 33% of seats to women was passed unanimously, but has yet to come into effect, as it depends on a future census and delimitation process. Both groups are subject to Digital Caveat. The gender gap in mobile Internet access in India has always been quite significant in terms of mobile device ownership and usage. Thus, politics practiced more via personal devices can result in a new form of offline inequality, especially for rural women. Platform mediated participation without testing for this is incomplete.

20. RESEARCH GAP AND LIMITATIONS

There are a few key questions for which the current state of scholarship offers no answers and confident assertion would be more harmful than honest lack of answers.

No longitudinal study on the same Indian young voters over time exists. Because all previous post-polls are cross section, sampling different people each time, it is not possible to reliably separate apparent generational change from life-cycle change. The twenty-two year old of 2014 is not the twenty-two year old of 2024 aged.

Researchers are still unable to understand how platform recommendation systems work. The operators can grant access to data on the amplification of contents, to whom and why, at their discretion. Hence, any claims that algorithms can have political impacts must be made from the observable, concrete product of the algorithm rather than from a look at the mechanism itself. The study of the content analysis of political material in other languages than English and Hindi is sparsely available in India. This loss is significant as most of the Indian political communication is in other languages.

In India there is no stringent measure of the conversion of online mobilisation into turnout. There is correlational observation and there is no causal identification. There is no reliable data on the amount of money spent on digital campaigning and creator remuneration as disclosure requirements have not been extended to most of this spend. In this article, the link between the use of digital public infrastructure routinely, and the change of political expectation is claimed as plausibility and indirect evidence. This has not been tried experimentally and is only to be regarded as a hypothesis.

While synthetic media has been documented during the 2024 cycle, Indian empirical research on the impact of synthetic media on voting behaviour is almost non-existent. The only thing that can be said in this article is what has been established. It doesn't show cause-and-effect relationships between any of the outlined mechanisms and any electoral outcomes. It is not conducting any survey so it can't measure any attitude. But it has not answered the controversial issue of youth voting direction, and it has marked that issue where it is relevant.

There are six research designs which could make a material difference to the field a multi-wave panel study of first-time voters from 2024 to 2034, a comparative content analysis, including at least eight Indian languages; a randomized field experiment to test the effect of digital mobilisation on registration and turnout, an audit-access agreement to allow independent analysis of political content amplification, a study correlating the intensity of use of digital public infrastructure with expectations of state performance, and a controlled exposure study on synthetic political media carried out within Indian ethical and legal boundaries.

21. CONCLUSION

The first model of Indian mass politics was a response to a profound question that was significant to the generation that was its recipient, What are we and what is our role in the nation's narrative, The answer was organisational competence, emotional exactitude and patience, and any take on its success as manipulation rather than competence is a misreading of the record. The emerging model poses another question: what has been delivered and can the delivery be verified. Both questions are fair. Just they pay off other abilities in the ones who want to have the office.

The evidence put together here does not corroborate the above assertion that the youth of India has become less religious. There has been repeated evidence of a comparable level of belief and observance in large survey programmes, among Indians under 30 as compared to their parents. The result seems to be that the place of faith in political judgement has shifted. There is a shift in the personalization of religion, so now fewer young voters view it as a justification for voting or not voting, and governance is becoming one of the few aspects they believe in as a reason for voting. The evidence in the pocket can be always reviewed with the help of the device carried in the pocket.

While it is true that the movement outlined in this article is one from religion towards secularism, it is also true that it is a movement from religion towards religion. Now, religiously assertive youth politics and politically reformist youth politics operate, use the same formats, and vie for the same attention on the same platforms. The shift is from institutional party-union-newspaper-broadcaster politics to platform party-creator-peer network politics. That migration is not a danger per se, nor is it necessarily a democratic process. Its impact will be determined by the speed of development of disclosure regulations, the standards of origin and the protection of connections and offline delivery channels.

The key question for the next decade is not then which symbol, or which one will lose its potency. But whether any political organisation the ruling party, its national rivals, a regional party or one that does not yet exist can turn the fears of a generation of more than 37 crore (370 million) young Indians into something that is costed correctly, visibly implemented and data-checked by the public is the real question. This will not just be a winning trait in elections; it will be a restoring trait of a working relationship between promise and proof by the parties. In terms of quality of democracy, that relationship is more important than which promises to win out in any cycle.

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