



Changing Voting Patterns in Uttar Pradesh: A Study of the Samajwadi Party (2002–2024)

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ABSTRACT

The paper evaluate the changes in the voter turnout in Uttar Pradesh between 2002 and 2024 and how such changes affected the electoral direction of the Samajwadi Party (SP). The investigation uses both official data by the Election Commission of India and CSDS-Lokniti National Election Studies (NES) infrastructure on surveys conducted at the group level to track the changes in votes across five assembly elections (2002, 2007, 2012, 2017, 2022) and intervening Lok Sabha contests (2004, 2009, 2014, 2019, 2024). It can be analysed that the competitiveness of SP was based on its ability to maintain a core OBC-Muslim coalition, as well as go outward when the party-system became volatile. These produce three drivers of change which are organizational capacity and cadres-based mobilization; governance performance and welfare delivery intersect with identity cleavages; and asymmetrical dominance of BJP redefining the competitive environment. Results indicate that the voting in UP is becoming multi-dimensional and it is determined by overlapping cleavages of caste, religion, class, age and the performance of the governing parties instead of throw its weight to axes. The paper adds to the knowledge of social cleavage elasticity, regional party strength in asymmetrical patterns of contests, and opposition adaptive strategies in the modern Indian democracy.



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INTRODUCTION

Uttar Pradesh is the electoral pivot of the Indian democracy and boasts 80 Lok Sabha seats and a population of more than 240 million and is the political barometer of the nation. The voting pattern in this big Hindi heartland state has been traditionally an indicator of the national electoral trends such as the supremacy of the Congress during the Nehruvian era to the rise of the BJP after 2014. (Election Commission of India, 2002, 2007, 2012, 2017, 2022). The Samajwadi Party (SP), established with the aim of uniting Other Backward Classes (OBCs) most notably the Yadav group, especially the Muslims, in response to the Mandal commission, developed into the leading regional party in the post-Mandal era of commission, with a coalition comprising Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and some Dalit communities under its unique acronym, the PDA (Pichhda, Dalit, Alpsankhyak) formula. This paper provides a methodical analysis of the shift in voting behavior in Uttar Pradesh between 2002-2024, with a particular focus on the changing voting patterns setting the SP electoral fortunes afresh over five assembly terms and the intervening Lok Sabha elections between 2002-2024 (Verma, 2014). It deserves a temporal coverage. In 2002, the consolidation of SP as the single largest party in UP (143 seats, 25.4 vote share) took place because of divided opposition. This triumph cemented the social engineering of the party since the 1980s under the backward caste mobilization that had been triggered off by the adoption of the Mandal Commission recommendations in the late 1980s by V.P. Singh. In comparison, 2024 saw the most impressive Lok Sabha results of SP as it won 37 seats and a 33.4% vote share, becoming the leader of the INDIA coalition, and indicating possible opposition to the BJP dominance renewed. This 22-year span represents three decades of democratic contention, the final decade of multi-cornered fragmentation, the organizational spurt of the BJP under Narendra Modi and Amit Shah, coalition tests such as SP-BSP (2019) and SP-Congress (2024), and the key shocks of 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots, demonetization (2016) and COVID-19 shocks (Verniers et al., 2022).

This paper is very fundamental and has three objectives that overlap. To start with, it breaks down shifting voting pattern in UP, peaking at 25.4% (2002) and 23.7% (2007), hitting a bottom at 19.8% (2017) and upsurge to 32.1% (2022 assembly) and 33.4% (2024 Lok Sabha) by SP. The

ups and downs surpass the linear decline histories, and the ups and downs are cyclical cycles of alliance arithmetic, anti-incumbency cycles, and strategic recalibrations. Second, the analysis identifies key social divisions: caste communities (Yadav, non-Yadav OBCs, such as Kurmis and Koeris, Jatav, non-Jatav Dalits, incumbents), religious groups (Muslims make up 19-20% of voters), young voters (18-35, now around 40% of voters), women (nearing parity of turnout at 65%). According to CSDS-Lokniti surveys, the support of Yadav to SP dropped drastically, but with partial recovery, to 53% (2014) compared to 73% (2009), and non-Yadav OBCs swung significantly in favor of BJP (53% Kurmi support in 2014) (Lokniti-CSDS, 2024).

Third, the paper identifies the social, economic, and political catalysts propelling these voter realignments. Socially, caste dealignment accelerates as urbanization (~24% by 2011 census) and educational expansion erode inherited loyalties, with younger Yadav's and Dalits responding to welfare narratives over identity politics. Economically, agrarian distress rising input costs, farmer indebtedness, and youth unemployment rates exceeding 20% intersects with policy shocks like demonetization, amplifying anti-incumbency against incumbent regimes. Politically, BJP's "social engineering" systematically poached non-Yadav OBCs and non-Jatav Dalits through targeted nominations and schemes like PM-KISAN, while SP grappled with internal schisms (the 2016 Mulayam-Akhilesh split) and law-and-order perceptions post-Muzaffarnagar. These dynamics culminated in 2017's BJP landslide (312 seats, 41.3% vote share) versus SP's 47 seats, underscoring first-past-the-post vote inefficiency: BJP's dispersed 41% yielded 77% seats, while SP's concentrated base limited conversion. (Reserve Bank of India, 2017).

Theoretically, this question progresses the theory of social cleavage, which was first put forward by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) and assumes that stable systems of parties are crystallized around long-term divisions, such as class, religion, ethnicity, that organize voter alignments. The Mandal-Mandir dichotomy about the role of caste and religion in electoral arithmetic in UP has been long dominated by caste and religion, but this paper shows these to be elastic: cleavages are not primordial but are activated by parties. The PDA alliance of SP will be an example of positive summation of backward identities, whereas the



post-2014 hegemony of BJP will be an example of negative summation of Hindu consolidation across caste, enhanced by government coalition appeals. Recent research has focused on party-system asymmetry: the dominant parties such as BJP increase coordination expenditure to fragmented oppositions, compelling adaptive response strategies such as the 2024 INDIA pivot of SP.

Empirically, the electoral volatility of UP bridges methodological blank of longitudinal analyses. Although single-election postmortems are popular (2014 Modi wave, 2017 Yogi factor, 2019 SP-BSP experiment), it is not common to find traces of 22-year arc scaling granular CSDS-NES cross-tabs with ECI constituency data. Mixed methods used in this paper include aggregate trends using ECI statistical reports; group-level vote-shares using Lokniti surveys (2004-2024 NES waves); regional decompositions of the seven sub-regions of UP (west, Rohilkhand, Doab, Awadh, Purvi, Bundelkhand, Paschim); and the synthesis of pivotal events (qualitative). Survey self-reporting bias and awaiting complete 2024 NES disaggregation, but the dataset is strong enough to conduct causal process-tracing: e.g. 2013 riots are associated with +28-point Muslim-SP swing in 2014, but not governance factors.

The importance of the problem is felt on the levels of theory, practice, and research. Hypothetically, it measures the strength of cleavage under the pressure of dealignment, urbanization, media proliferation, personalization, and welfare, which break deterministic models of caste. As a matter of fact, 80 seats of UP control national governments; 2024 SP surprise (they deprived BJP of majority on its own) indicates the strength of regional parties in the federal balance. In practice,

Table 1: Electoral Performance and Voting Trends of the Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh Assembly Elections

Election Year	Vote Share (%)	Seats Won	Total Seats	Key Context
2002	25.4	143	403	SPconsolidation under Mulayam Singh Yadav
2007	23.7	224	403	Akhilesh Yadav-led alliance; SP government formation
2012	22.2	224	403	Akhilesh Yadav government continues; welfare focus
2017	19.8	47	403	Anti-incumbency, intra-party split, BJP surge
2022	32.1	111	403	Partial recovery, alliance effects, PDA 2.0 revival

in the case of SP, it will be necessary to expand beyond the MY (Muslim-Yadav)-dominated core: the young population through jobs offers, the women through the safety programs, and the non-Yadav OBCs through the caste census agitation. This is replicated in lessons to counterparts such as RJD (Bihar) and TMC (Bengal), where the lessons also play a role in establishing regional strengths relative to national strength when it comes to incumbency in national politics.

The party system in UP developed out of the 1990s fragmentation SP (24%), BSP (20%), BJP (18%), and Congress (<5%): post-2014, it became asymmetrical bipolar. The depth of the cadres (RSS ecosystem), central resource flows and narrative mastery (development-Hindutva fusion) of BJP is in opposition to the dynastic weaknesses and weaker organization of SP. But agency is affirmed by the recoveries made by SP: 224 seats (2007, 2012), 111 (2022), 37 LS (2024), which are the result of millennial rebranding (laptops 2012-17), coalition agility which has made Akhilesh Yadav an electoral savior. Voter agency glistens: The 19.8% SP trough in 2017 could be attributed to anti-incumbency as well as polarization; the 32% increase in 2022 could be attributed to anger over unemployment and 2020 PDA resurrection. (Michelutti, L.2008)

Electoral Performance and Voting patterns (2002-2024)

Result and Trends of Assembly Election.

The historical trend of the Samajwadi Party in the assembly elections in the state of UP exhibits a peculiar U-shaped trend, which is the initial consolidation (2002-2012), acute contraction (2017), and partial recovery (2022).



Table 1 presents aggregate data, which masks within-group dynamics illuminated through subsequent sections. The phase 2002-2007 is SP consolidation. The SP became the largest party in 2002 with 143 seats (25.4% share of votes) as a result of effective OBC-Muslim mobilization as well as the legacy of backward caste politics that succeeded the Mandal voting. As of 2007, under the younger Akhilesh Yadav, SP had a seat strength of 224 seats (23.7% vote share), the remarkable +81-seat gain of a +81 seats with a small change in vote share, a feat of its efficiency in the FPTP system, and the arithmetic of alliances. The Akhilesh government (2012-2017) continued to hold seats with the buffering effect of incumbency benefits and alliance unity despite the erosion of voteshare (22.2%), (Election Commission of India, 2002, 2007, 2012, 2017, and 2022). The 2017 election is a break point. The voting percentage of SP dropped slightly to 19.8 percent but the number of seats reduced by 177 to 47 seats. This overrepresentation in seat loss, which indicates the collapse in efficiency of votes, is the consequence of the geographically concentrated SP support (eastern UP, the Muslim-dense pockets): the support spread to other regions would have gained more seats. The BJP on the other hand attained 41.3% vote share and obtained 312 seats (77 out of 100 seats) which are more reflective of better geographical distribution and the magnification of FPTP where there are polar extremes in terms of votes cast. The outcome in

2017 was also the product of anti-incumbency against Akhilesh government (laws and order failures, administrative lapses), communal polarization after Muzaffarnagar riots (2013), the December 2016 internal SP rift (Mulayam vs. Akhilesh) and unprecedented organizational mobilization of BJP under CM Yogi Adityanath. (Chaturvedi et al., 2024). Recovery was made in 2022 with the assembly election. SP gained share of votes to 32.1% and seat strength up to 111 seats (up 64 seats). This revival was attributable to various things, among them, better management of alliances (especially to smaller parties), Akhilesh Mulayam reconciliation leading to internal factionalism, saliency of issues of unemployment and caste census to young people and lower castes, and anti-incumbency of BJP rule (communalization of administration, economic hardship). Nevertheless, 32.1% vote share of SP was still second to seat conversion in comparison to 41.3% vote share by BJP that won 255 seats, which highlights the reality of consistent geographic concentration that constrained the growth ceiling of SP under FPTP.

Lok Sabha Opposition and Performance Coalition Effects

The performance of the opposition coalition is dramatic in the performance of Lok Sabha election in UP. Table 2 presents data across five Lok Sabha contests spanning 20 years.

Table 2: Opposition Coalition Performance in Lok Sabha Elections in Uttar Pradesh (2004–2024)

Year	Seats won	Vote Share (%)	Electoral Context
2004	36	23.5	UPA-I formation; SP significant opposition force
2009	23	23.3	UPA-II; declining seats despite stable vote share
2014	5	22.2	Modi wave; opposition fragmented
2019	5	18.1	Modi re-election campaign; SP marginalized
2024	37	33.4	INDIA bloc alliance; historic opposition recovery

Consolidation of SP occurred during 2004-2009. In 2004, SP secured 36 seats (23.5 percent vote share) which was a big opposition group in the UPA system. Though still holding 23.3% vote share, the number of seats lost by SP to 23 -13 seats by 2009 demonstrates the effect of first-past-the-post where opposition support is divided among

many parties. The paradox in this case of stable, but falling, shares of the votes indicates that local competition dynamics are concealed in the aggregate voting patterns (Election Commission of India). Lok Sabha 2014 election is the watershed. Although vote share had dropped to 22.2 (or only - 1.1 points below that in 2009), SP lost 5 seats, or 18



seats. Such a dramatic collapse was a product of three factors: (1) the unprecedented consolidation of the BJP, which won 42.3 percent of the vote and 71 out of 80 seats in UP (in addition to a 24.8 percentage-point increase over 2009 and 29.2-percentage-point increase in vote share, which translated to 47-seat gains); (2) the division of opposition vote between SP, Congress, and BSP; and (3) the influence of the so-called Modi wave of The 2014 outcome showed that vote-share stability obscures drifting spatial distributions and competitive processes in favor of major parties using FPTP (Verma, 2014). In the 2019 Lok Sabha election, there was even marginalization of SP. Nevertheless, even with a SP-BSP strategic alliance to 2019 Lok Sabha elections (but independent on state elections), SP continued to have 5 seats and a reduced 18.1% vote share (-4.2 points less than in 2014). Some of the factors that led to poor performance of the SP-BSP alliance were poor seat-sharing arrangements, poor infrastructure of BSP in the Lok Sabha, and the continued dominance of BJP (71 seats, 43.0% vote share). Lok Sabha election 2024 is a turnaround. Under SP being the leading party in the INDIA bloc alliance together with Congress and other smaller parties, SP-allies won 43 seats (opposition put together) against BJP 33 seats and SP alone won or led 37 seats as well as with 33.4 percent vote. This is the highest ever Lok Sabha performance of SP- when the opposition organization had managed to organize anti-BJP voters. The 36 point margin (5 seats to 37-43 seats) and the 33.4% vote share (compared to 18.1% in 2019) show the effect of election arithmetic of opposition coalitions: disunified opposition votes are more likely to result in an underrepresentation of seats when they are, and coordinated opposition votes are more likely to result in a more proportional distribution of seats when they are not.

The Social Group Voting Patterns and Realignment

Caste Communities: Yadav, OBC and Dalits:

The historical hegemony of SP was based on the mobilization of OBC, especially of Yadav. Nevertheless, this coalition has disintegrated throughout the study period, and the difference effects have been experienced on electoral performance of SP.

Yadav Voting Patterns: In 2009, 73 percent of Yadav voted on SP, which is the most socially oriented party. In 2014 this were drained down to 53%- a 20-percentage-point drop in support- when

compared to 2007, and BJP support among the Yadav's shot up by 27 percent to 27 per cent. This tectonic change is a reflection of several things: (1) strategic choice by BJP to focus on non-Yadav OBCs as a new, alternative backyard platform (and avoid confronting SP on the Yadav platform); (2) generational change within the Yadav castes, with younger Yadav being less loyal to inherited caste-party attachments and being more responsive to developmental narrative and leadership image; (3) ideation of governance into electoral rewards by BJP welfare schemes (Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi).

Lokniti-CSDS data indicate that by 2022 assembly elections, Yadav support is again reconsolidating behind SP, with Yadav support reaching an estimated of 60-65 percent SP because of Akhilesh-Mulayam reconciliation, and intra-party cohesion. The 2024 Lok Sabha Yadav support to the SP-led INDIA alliance came at similar levels with Yadav and Muslims being listed as core consolidating groups against opposition (Maktoob, 2024).

Non-Yadav OBC Voting: This group, 15-18% of the population of the state, is known as Non-Yadav OBCs (Kurmis, Koeris, Koels, and many smaller castes, which are also called the Most Backward Classes): this group did not historically feature in the mobilization of SP, which supported Yadav identity. Survey evidence that is available indicates dramatic changes:

- Lok Sabha 2014: 53 percent of Kurmis shifted to BJP, 17 percent to SP (36point BJP to - 17point SP).
- 2014 Lok Sabha: Of Other OBCs, 60% of the vote went to BJP over 13 to SP (+47-point shift to BJP).

This expansion of BJP into the OBC base weakened the SP argument of the backward classes being represented across board. Ever since 2017, BJP persisted with hardening non-Yadav OBCs support by nominating targeted candidates, developing local leadership, and administering welfare schemes. The 2022 assembly election and the 2024 Lok Sabha results demonstrated that there was a little reversal, as non-Yadav OBCs looked at SP along with the larger opposition block, but BJP did not lose all the non-Yadav OBC votes (somewhere between 45-50%).

Scheduled Caste Voting: SC voting was split off into Jatav (historically BSP) and non-Jatav SC voters and this had deeper consequences on SP:



- 2009 Lok Sabha: 84 percent of Jatavs cast ballots in favor of BSP, 5 percent SP, 5 percent BJP.
- Lok Sabha 2014: The Jatav vote to the BSP dropped to 68% (-16 points), whilst the BJP shot up to 18% (+13 points), with SP being an outsider at 4%.
- 2014 Lok Sabha: In non-Jatav SCs, the BSP vote dropped to 29% (compared with an estimated 60 in 2009), with BJP gaining 45% (increase of 37 points) and SP at 4-5%.

The electoral shift of 2014 especially among the non-Jatav SCs was an amalgamation of: (1) a low-profile campaign by the BSP in 2014 and (2) its perceived association with anti-SP forces and (3) the perception of the voter that development with Modi overrode caste identity. Without a Dalit-specific identity (as opposed to BSP), and development discourses (as opposed to BJP), SP was in the periphery of SCs. By 2024, CSDS-Lokniti reported that an estimated large proportion of non-Jatav Dalit voters had transitioned to the INDIA alliance, which restored some SC voter backing to the SP as part of the larger opposition group but the data show that some proportion of SC voters still remain in the 45-50 percent bracket of BJP support.(Katiyar& Singh,2025).

Religious Sociologies: Muslims and Hindu Polarization

Religious identity especially Muslim voting behavior has played important role in electoral calculation of UP and undergone drastic change over the study period.

Muslim Voting: Muslims make 19- 20percent of the population of UP and they have been the second major pillar of SP after the OBCs since 1990s. The current data on CSDS-NES shows volatility:

- Lok Sabha 2009: 30 percent of Muslims voted SP, 25 percent Congress, 18 percent BSP, 6 percent BJP.
- Lok Sabha 2014: The level of Muslim support to SP shot up to 58 percent, followed by Congress at 11 percent, BSP at 18 percent and an increment in BJP to 10 percent.

The 2014 spike in Muslim-SP voting, despite the Muzaffarnagar riots (September 2013) and governance failure under the SP government, was the result of strategic voting: by the Muslim community, the Modi-BJP wave perceived as a threat to their community, being the most viable opposition candidate in their constituencies. BJP

gaining +4 points among the Muslims (6 percent to 10 percent) is small but still impressive due to the anti-Modi campaign and indicates that a small group of Muslims has seen development or other problems as a priority.

Until 2017-2022, the number of Muslims-SP voters was high, ranging between 50 and 60, as Muslims were still feeling threatened by the Hindu-majoritarian stance of the BJP led by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. The complexity of the minority votes to seats translation emerged as a result of the opposition coordination (SP-BSP 2019 alliance) and the turnout and distribution of the Muslim votes.

This consolidation of Muslims in support of the opposition against BJP in the 2024 Lok Sabha election where the SP-Congress-INDIA bloc was strongly opposed to BJP, Lokniti-CSDS reported that the Muslims were more inclined to the INDIA alliance. This unification coupled with Yadav and Dalit re-entering opposition was to be critical to the 37-seat victory of SP. (Katiyar& Singh, 2025)

Hindu Polarization, Voting by Upper Caste: Hindus who form 78-80 of the population of UP have undergone tremendous realignment. The upper castes (Brahmins, Rajput's, Vaish, -12-15 of the population) rallied on BJP as an instrument of Hindu nationalism:

- In 2014 Lok Sabha, 72 percent Brahmins cast their ballot in favor of BJP, 11 percent Congress.
- 2014 Lok Sabha: 77% of the vote by the Rajput was BJP.
- 2024 Lok Sabha: 89 percent of the Rajput voters voted in support of BJP, which signifies increased consolidation.

In comparison, Hindus of lower caste (non-Jatav SCs, non-Yadav OBCs) were more electorally volatile, and alternated between BSP (identity appeal), SP (opposition), and BJP (development/Hindutva appeal). Follow-up events, such as the 2019 Pulwama crisis, and Balakot strikes (benefiting BJP), the 2020 Ram Mandir decision and consecration and the 2024 Ayodhya Ram Mandir re-establishment also influenced Hindu voting makeup. Nonetheless, due to data restrictions, one cannot fine-tune the analysis of this development, and it is observed that the upper-caste Hindu consolidation around BJP was close to being universal throughout the period of the study, although some lower-caste Hindu defection to BJP was noticeable in 2024 Lok Sabha. (Maktoob,2024)



Youth and Women Voters

Youth voters, who are increasing in electorate within the UP, have very vehemently different voting behaviors as compared to the old population. Age-disaggregated data of 2014 and subsequent exit polls of CSDS-NES consistently indicate that young voters, especially first-time voters (aged 18-25) exhibit:

1. **Reduced party:** The young do not have an inherited caste-party connection, but they vote on the basis of image of leadership, job opportunities and capacity to govern people.
2. **Weakness to leadership:** The personal brand of Modi appealed to the young people in 2014-2019 a lot, which led to the gains of BJP among first-time voters. As Akhilesh Yadav switched places with his younger profile and SP focused on unemployment and leaking examination papers in 2022-2024, the same profile appealed to the educated young generation struggling with precarity.
3. **Issue-oriented voting:** Youth priorities on employment (more specifically educated youth), education and development instead of caste-identity politics. In its 2022 and 2024 focus on employment guarantee, privatisation reversals and caste census, the SP was seeking to reorganize with the young generation (Lerche, 2025).
4. **Digital media coverage:** The young electorate continues to be overly exposed to social media campaigns and digital political messages where the organizational capabilities and resources of BJP have been predominant. This asymmetry was partially mitigated, however, through anti-BJP social media mobilization and fact-checking efforts by 2024.

On limited gender-disaggregated data, women voters, who constitute approximately half of the electorate and who are increasingly being reached out to, through special welfare programmers and by symbolic representation, have been examined. According to the data provided by CSDS-NES 2014, the vote choice of women was not notably different compared to men in major parties, however, the priorities of issues by women (safety, education, welfare) varied. Exit polls from 2017 and 2022 suggest:

1. **Safety and security issues:** Women voters were responding to law-and-order discourses. The governance record of SP on law and order, which is high crime rate and low rate of

responding to crime, was not favorable to the appeal of women. Under CM Yogi Adityanath (2017-present), BJP makes its stance of being tough on crime, which was controversial, but attractive to women who care about sexual crimes and communal violence.

2. **Welfare schemes:** Both SP and BJP introduced women-targeted welfare (maternity benefits, widow pensions, free public transport). These schemes influenced voting through delivery and perception of these schemes.
3. **Symbolic representation:** There were no shining women in SP leadership and nomination of candidates as it was in Congress and BSP, which undermined its appeal to gender-progressive voters.

By 2022-2024, the alliance messaging and explicit women-centered advocacy of SP in the coalition platforms marginally boosted women support, but extensive gender-disaggregated data of 2024 are scarce still (Maktoob, 2024).

Electoral Change Motivators: Economical, Social and Political

Economic Crisis and Agrarian Crisis: UP is still 75% rural; agriculture provides 40-50% of the labor force. The build-up of agricultural stress influenced the electorate between 2002-2024:

1. **Input cost inflation:** There was an increase in the cost of fertilizer, seed and fuel at a faster rate than output prices, putting pressure on the farmers.
2. **Debt load:** There was an augmenting rural indebtedness, which translated into distress migration or farmer suicides in certain regions.
3. **Demonetisation (November 2016):** The abrupt removal of 86 percent of currency had a drastic impact on the rural credit, input-output, and wage payments, especially of small and marginal farmers and agricultural labourers. RBI projected an approximate of 2-3% decrease in GDP in the first quarter of the aftermath of demonetisation period (immediate). (Reserve Bank of India, 2017).

Poor agrarian support was criticised in the SP government (2012-2017). In comparison, the BJP administration (2017-present) also implemented welfare initiatives (Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi since 2019, offering income support to farmers) and based the agrarian policy on the beneficial aspect of supporting farmers, which resonated despite implementation mixed results. Such a conclusion towards welfare-governance



framing rather than into identity-politics framing explains in part the changes in rural voting and farmer consolidation after 2019. (Reserve Bank of India, 2017).

Youth unemployment, specifically equipped youth in the informal-sector-based economic setup in UP, gained prominence after 2014. Distress was enhanced by the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2021). The 2022 and 2024 campaigns also made use of the term unemployment, and SP was directly campaigning on job creation and reversing privatisation, with Lokniti-CSDS 2024 survey data indicating that OBCs and Dalits feared that BJP would limit their rights to reservations, a major electoral issue of concern in 2022 and 2024. (Maktoob, 2024).

Organizational Dominance and Social Engineering by BJP

The sudden ascent of BJP to 42% (2014 Lok Sabha) vote share in UP, which was an incredible 15 percent (2012 assembly), and consequent supremacy is indicative of a never-seen-before organizational investment. The recent scholarship stresses:

1. **Cadres growth and RSS incorporation:** Since 2014, BJP had made investments in building cadres in UP, using RSS strategies of local knowledge and collation and the concept of mission mode organizational readiness. Under CM Yogi Adityanath (2017-present), the party organized constituencies by sectors with 8-10 booths, followed by the introduction of 10-20 booths micro-coordinated micro-level workers, district level office bearers, and state leadership in form of the so-called shakti kendra (power centers). Registration of members online and ascription of responsibility to members enhanced participation. (Chaturvedi et al., 2024).
2. **Strategic caste diversification:** BJP failed to dilute identity politics but restructured it. Comparison of ticket distribution between 2012, 2017 and 2022 elections has revealed that BJP continued to have the upper-caste dominance (43-48% of tickets despite 20% of the population) and systematically targeted non-Yadav OBCs and non-Jatav Scheduled Castes without taking direct competition with SP(Yadav's) and BSP(Jatavs). This kind of strategic non-presence and expansion to the nearby castes formed a winning coalition.(Katiyar &Singh, 2025).

3. **Welfare delivery and legitimacy:** Outside schemes, BJP created grassroots legitimacy through the RSS-linked social service mobilization (seva). In the Lokniti-CSDS 2024 survey data, it was observed that OBCs and Dalits continued to fear the threat of constitutional amendments (to vote against BJP in 2024), but that BJP had developed a perception of providing sufficient welfare to maintain 45-50% among the two sects. (Maktoob, 2024).

In comparison, the organizational ability of SP was undermined after the open dispute between founder Mulayam Singh Yadav and Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav that occurred in December 2016. This internal division divided the cadres of SP, and long-term leaders and workers got demoralized and left. This internal crisis caused the 2017 outcome of the election, the worst in decades, when SP received only 47 seats and 19.8% of the vote share, implying that the organization was falling apart and increasing the losses in the electoral race.

Government Performance and Law-and-Order Politics.

After 2013 the law-and-order management was a campaign message. Akhilesh Yadav government (2012-2017) was continually criticized on:

- Crime is high and rape is high; high-profile cases (e.g., the “Bulandshahr gangrape” case) to which the media draws media attention.
- Lack of proper police response and support to the victims.
- Perceived communal prejudice in the law enforcement after the riots in Muzaffarnagar.

By 2017, majorities in exit polls cited law-and-order issues as their key consideration in voting. Reactive to the perceived need to provide security, the Yogi Adityanath government (2017-present) however controversial with its alleged extrajudicial encounter and police brutality, nevertheless pursued proactive forms of tough on crime and encounter policing that appealed to urban, upper-caste, education-conscious voters.

This direct form of governance had a direct effect on voting: women voters (safety concerns), urban voters (order narratives), middle-class voters (responsive administration) began to support BJP more and more, rural voters and lower-caste voters were more divided (in part, because BJP was running on both the welfare-delivering and the law-and-order platforms).



Shared Polarization and Politics

Critical social occasions organized the voting patterns:

- **Muzaffarnagar riots of 2013 Hindu-Muslim riots:** In western UP had been a blow to the image of the SP government, which helped it lose in 2014 in the area in the Lok Sabha election, and also allowed the BJP to expand in the Hindu vote.
- **Pakistan Pulwama and Balakot, 2019:** Pakistan-related security crisis, which Modi government used to consolidate Hindu nationalism and nationalism-oriented votes, which enabled BJP to consolidate 43% in 2019 Lok Sabha. (Election Commission of India, 2002, 2007, 2012, 2017, 2022).
- **2024 Ayodhya Ram Mandir consecration:** BJP event, which symbolically strengthened Hindu nationalism, but with a negative electoral effect because of counter-mobilization in the election over constitutional and reservation issues. (Maktoob, 2024).

These incidents entrenched group polarization, asymmetrically advantaged the Hindu majoritarian stand of BJP, and obliquely constrained the space of SP (as Muslims rallied in defense behind SP, and non-Muslim groups shifted to BJP or stayed with BJP).

CONCLUSION

The voting pattern in UP can rather be viewed as multi-dimensional instead of a group that can be reduced to one cleavage (caste). The historical strength of SP was based on an obvious caste-plus-religion alliance (OBC Yadav's + Muslims). Nevertheless, urbanization, educational growth, and economic strife have superimposed new dimensions of issues (governance, employment, welfare) to the old cleavages. Voters are also becoming more willing to vote on performance-plus-identity, as opposed to identity.

The experience of SP showing the strategic weaknesses of sticking to an inherited core coalition without perpetual growth and fresh blood, especially when the competitors attack the neighboring social groups systematically. The success of BJP consisted in the reconstitution of identity politics (non-Yadav OBCs and non-Jatav Dalits) and the incorporation of non-identity appeals (development, welfare, security) into its base, which was broader than the OBC-Muslim one of SP.

Lastly, the coordination of opposition coalition has become fundamental to opposition parties against superior competitors. The 2024 Lok Sabha outcome, the best result of SP (37 seats, 33.4% vote share), in fact, happened when coordination of the opposition worked, and the 2022 assembly outcome, where the SP began with 32.1% of the vote but achieved only 111 seats, shows that there is a consistent vote-efficiency issue with the loss of opposition coordination. The question of whether SP will continue its 2024 momentum and be able to spread geographically outside of eastern UP and Muslim-concentrated areas is an open one with far-reaching implications on the future of electoral outcomes of the state of UP and India.

Conflict of Interest

The author asserts that he has no conflicts of interest. The paper does not depend on any political connections, party financing, and political pressure of political groups. It is an academic research conducted in academic spirit and focuses on the accuracy of the empirical work, and the balance of the interpretations, not the advocacy of any side.

Data Ethics

Any source of data used in this research is in publicly available, open-access repositories:

- **Electoral figures:** official statistical reports of Electoral Commission of India, which are present on the ECI site (<https://eci.gov.in/>).
- **Data of the survey:** CSDS-Lokniti National Election Studies, carried out under the complete ethical supervision and institutional control. The anonymity of the survey respondents is ensured; the personal information is not held or processed in the one-on-one format.
- **Secondary literature:** Articles and books that are peer reviewed and were found in institutional repositories, government websites and popular media archives.
- **None of the primary human-subject data:** The research contains no autonomous gathering of primary data, comprising human subjects. Any form of analysis is secondary and uses aggregated and anonymized data.
- **Ethical norms:** The research follows the principles of academic honesty, publication openness, and objective interpretation. Concessions are made; there are no distorted data or cherry picking to help prove the conclusions made beforehand.



- **Transparency:** All the sources are referenced with full bibliographic details. Visitors have an

opportunity to check information and locate original material on their own.

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