



Caste, Coalition, And Campaigns – Reassessing The Politicization Of Caste In India’s 2024 General Elections

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Abstract: The General Elections of 2024 in India reinforced the argument around the role of caste and its impact on politics. Many researchers argue that majoritarian nationalism and welfare-driven political measures have weakened the foundation of caste mobilization, but the studies around India’s elections paint a different scenario.

This paper reassesses the role of caste in 2024 in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections in India and renders caste as a system through which political negotiation and social justice take place. It incorporates the state-level analysis of the Bharatiya Janata Party rallying for Dalits and OBCs in Uttar Pradesh, with studies around Dalit and Muslim voting behaviour.

The findings show that caste holds an important position within the framework of Indian politics, but it is remodeled via coalition building, voting behaviour and campaigning. The ruling NDA government’s push to unite the upper caste under the wave of Hindutva faced limitations due to constitutional barriers, while the Opposition INDIA Bloc rejuvenated the social justice discourse and successfully consolidated Dalit and minority votes. The electoral results of Uttar Pradesh show the rise of caste politics over its decay.

By analyzing the caste politics of the 2024 General Elections, the paper presents Caste as a central factor of electoral competition within political parties in India.

Index Terms – Caste, Caste Politics, General Elections 2024, BJP, INC

I. METHODOLOGY

The study uses a ‘**Qualitative Analysis**’ approach to analyse the politicization of caste in India’s 2024 General elections. The main aim is to reinterpret different patterns of caste mobilization, voting behaviour and strategies used by political parties and to study how caste impacts contemporary politics, alliance formation, and campaigning strategies. As the research focuses on strategies and patterns of behaviours, a qualitative approach is used as it allows for in-depth analysis of political discourses.

It also includes ‘**Thematic analysis**’, through which the analysis of secondary data of scholarly research articles and news articles is conducted. This involves identifying repeating patterns of arguments and themes within the debates among scholars. It helps in consolidating arguments across texts on similar topics and the contrast between their arguments on that.

II. INTRODUCTION

To analyse the role of caste in the General elections of 2024, one must examine by not viewing caste in linear terms of social identity. Rather, it is seen as an adaptive factor within the political process that engages with different institutions and perspectives. This chapter discusses three core themes that allow us to analyse caste as a strategy and framework within the 2024 electoral outcome.

2.1 Politicization of Caste

The first core view is around the politicization of caste. Vernier's notes political parties cannot afford to discard caste as a political tool because it is the primary mechanism through which voters demand representation and social justice, and this proves how it has established itself within the framework of electoral democracy (Verniers, 2025). It is an electoral competition that has made caste into a political instrument.

2.1.1 Electoral Mobilization through Caste - Political parties arrange their vote base by reaching out to them via their community leader, and organizations representing them. Verma and Rahul explain that parties treat their candidates as the principal tool for such outreach. They do so with the expectation that their demographic profile will help in appealing to them. Kumar further states that parties often are forced to diversify their candidates' profiles to reach underrepresented groups like MBCs (Most-Backward Classes) and non-Jatav Dalits to show caste inclusion in their political aspirations. Therefore, caste is embedded within the party's structure and campaigning strategy.

2.1.2 Candidate Representation - Caste plays an important role in the candidate selection of political parties. Verniers states that the ticket distribution and alliance formation within the parties and among parties show demographic caste constitutions. Parties do this based on the 'social profile of their voters' within a parliamentary constituency, with an expectation that voters might expect a candidate from the same caste as themselves to represent them and issues in the government (Kumar, 2025). The INDIA bloc imitated BJP's strategy of assimilating the backward segments of the lower caste. In UP, the Samajwadi Party gave a chance to candidates of different minority backgrounds including non-Yadav and MBCs, than their traditional preference of Muslim-Yadav candidates (Verniers 2025). This is reflected in the election results, as for the first time Lok Sabha has approximately 26% of MPs from the OBC category, which is at par with Upper-caste MPs, which is at 25.8% (Verniers, 2025).

2.2 Coalition Formation

The second core view focuses on alliance formation, especially around the BJP's strategy in UP.

2.2.1 Integration of backwards within OBCs – The BJP strategizes to consolidate Hindu votes across different caste groups by incorporating the backwards caste within the OBCs, who lacked representation (Lerche, 2025)

2.2.2 Decline of Dalits alignment - Internal differences occurred within the Dalit communities, and votes were segregated. While non-Jatav Dalits continue to support the BJP, many shifted towards the opposition alliance in the election (Lerche, 2025).

2.2.3 Upper-Caste domination decline - The BJP-led NDA bloc works under the framework of upper caste dominating the politics. But due to economic issues, especially within the middle-class upper caste Hindu voters, they aligned themselves with the opposition.

2.3 Campaigning

The third core view analyses the campaigning strategies of the political blocs.

2.3.1 Muslim Votes - In UP, parties assimilated Muslim votes in Muslim majority constituencies by conscious candidate selection. This reinforced identity-based factors in campaigning (Mundhe, 2024).

2.3.2 Fear of Rights - Dalits experienced anxiety regarding the constitutional stance of the BJP regarding their safeguards and policies (Mundhe, 2024). The INDIA bloc's campaigning focused on protecting the Constitution, which, for minorities, is the document that protects their interests. Therefore, a division within the Dalits was seen as many aligned with opposition parties in the states of UP and Maharashtra.

These core themes provide a structured approach to analyzing caste in the 2024 election. Caste has worked as a driver for alliance formation, policy making, and political institutions to take into account.

III. CASTE AND COALITION IN THE 2024 GENERAL ELECTIONS

In this section we are assessing the role of caste and its manifestations in coalition formation and strategies of political parties.

3.1 The BJP-led NDA (National Democratic Alliance) Model in 2024

Since the ruling government, the BJP-led NDA has been in power since 2014, it has used the strategy of increasing its vote base beyond its upper caste voter base. In UP, it used this plan to consolidate non-dominant OBC communities and groups within the Dalit sections into their coalition of Hindutva supporters. The BJP has been able to do so by its effective and strong outreach initiatives at grassroots level by its members, strategic ticket distribution and giving important leadership positions to leaders of backward communities of OBC and Dalits within the party.

This model has delivered them with extremely satisfactory results in the 2014 and 2019 elections of the Lok Sabha, with them getting 282 and 303 seats, respectively. But this did not work for the 2024 elections, as Lerche states a decline in the support of minorities in UP. While the support of the upper caste remained stable, the decline in votes amongst the minority groups cost them seats in UP and within the Lok Sabha. In 2024, a true coalition government was established with Telegu Desam Party (TDP) and Janta Dal (United) (JD(U)) providing support to form the government and BJP's seat declined to 240 alone.

The reason behind this was rising unemployment, economic burdens and lack of programs addressing the needs of the middle class, according to scholars, which the BJP failed to address, causing them to lose seats. Though the NDAs' advertisement increasingly focused on welfare initiatives and their achievements, the lack of accountability by the government caused the bloc to weaken. This didn't mean the BJP's decline in caste politics in campaigning but showed the weakness of the cross-caste vote base structure.

3.2 INDIA (Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance) Bloc model in 2024

The 2024 elections saw the revival of the opposition alliance UPA (United Progressive Alliance) as the INDIA bloc. In the state of UP, the alliance between SP and INC (Indian National Congress) holds great significance and Lerche points towards SP's successful consolidation of their Yadav vote base alongside INC's OBC and Dalit vote base in UP. Unlike previous election periods, where caste-based parties competed against each other, a coordinated unison was seen across the parties of opposition. Dalit voters who supported the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) shifted towards the SP-INC alliance in UP, unlike going towards the NDA. Mundhe stated that several Dalits voted for opposition parties rather than sticking to their preferred caste-centred parties previously.

The INDIA Bloc's political campaigning heavily relied on emphasizing constitutional protection and the assertion of social justice, which conformed with marginalized sections who feared for their constitutional safeguards and reservation policies. This does not extinguish the caste factor within the politics of opposition; rather, it positions itself against the demands of rights and accountability.

These developments do not mark a return to the pre-2014 political period or an end to the Hindutva-based vote consolidation by the BJP, instead 2024 elections reflect realignment within the common masses. Therefore, coalition formation in 2024 showed the continuous importance of caste in both alliance-building and voting behaviour. Both blocs used their own unique strategies to assimilate their vote bank, but their effectiveness varied across regions in India.

IV. CAMPAIGNING NARRATIVES

In this section we are analyzing the campaigning objectives, issues and ideologies forging narratives for both the NDA and INDIA Bloc.

4.1 Social Justice as an Electoral strategy

The 2024 General elections were not only shaped by coalitions and candidate selection but by narratives built by the parties themselves. One of the most important narratives was the demand for social justice in the national governance and policies. Verniers discusses that caste re-emerged in public demands via constitutional and institutional demands of reforms rather than traditional caste-based rhetoric. Issues such as the caste census, representation, and atrocities against minorities and their backwardness in the nation-building were highlighted by the people and parties of the Opposition bloc in the campaigning.

4.2 Constitution as key driver

The majority of the opposition's political messaging was around the protection of the constitution, which impacted the choices of many. The Constitution holds a special place amongst the Dalits, SCs (Scheduled Caste) and STs (Scheduled Tribes), which brought them together to fight for their aspirations, protection, and rights as they feared the NDA's candidates' hostile advocacy around the amendment of the Constitution.

4.3 Majoritarian Hindutva Fragmentation and Minority Consolidation

The BJP's Hindutva-based politics continued and remained a central characteristic of its campaigning across northern states of North India like UP, Bihar and Haryana. Lurch highlights the parties' continued use of Anti-muslim political messaging in mobilizing their voters. While this united Hindus across caste groups, it also caused assimilation of Muslim's votes. Mundhe examines the opposition parties like SP and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), placing Muslim candidates in Muslim majority constituencies, and voters of that demographic voted for them. They did not assimilate because of identity alone this time, but because of fear of their rights and security.

The 2024 elections portrayed different competing narratives and factors than a single principle that led the parties or blocs previously. The importance of these narratives lies in their power to reshape voting behaviour, public opinion, and political strategies, which the opposition took advantage of. While the opposition linked caste concerns with constitutional safeguarding, it positioned their social justice within the sphere of national politics, and the BJP's use of Hindutva continued to have a stable upper-caste Hindu communities' support across caste, despite its decline. Therefore, campaigning narratives show how caste operated within different layers of different concerns by different groups.

V. The Analysis of Outcomes of the 2024 General Elections

The 2024 General elections outcome revealed that while caste remained a dominant factor, it also interacted with other factors, which gave a more dynamic and multilayered perspective to analyze the outcomes.

5.1 Economic factor in Dissatisfaction

One of the most important outcomes of the analysis of the 2024 elections is the impact that economic dissatisfaction has on the results. Lerche, in his work, discussed the rural regions of UP in terms of declining wages, rising unemployment and agricultural support mismanagement as one of the shaping factors behind the downfall of NDA's votes amongst the lower income households across caste lines. This shows the socio-economic hierarchies within caste groups. Marginalized communities like the Dalits and OBCs work in the informal sectors in India and were experiencing financial problems with rising food and fuel prices under the NDA government (Lerche,2025). The result not only reflects class-related factors but also the positioning of these caste-based groups within the socio-economic structure of class in the Indian economy.

5.2 Caste-based voting beyond traditional parties

In the 2024 elections, the weakening of caste groups voting for specific caste-based parties in the elections. Political parties like the BSP in the UP failed to consolidate the votes of their traditional vote base, and the INC and SP gained their votes alongside diversifying their candidate profile to appeal to a larger vote base. This proves that caste identity can no longer guarantee success to caste-based political

parties and their loyalty to them, as its now conditional. Though caste remains significant, political victory is now uncertain because of their shifting loyalty. This account shows how caste group mobilization can affect the electoral performance of the political parties that represent them.

5.3 Questioning Leadership

Another outcome of the 2024 elections was the question around the PM Modi-led NDA government. While the ruling government had strong campaigning and a strong candidate lineup representing diverse communities, they won by narrow margins in certain states like Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, UP and Odisha. This proves that despite extravagant campaigns and strong candidates, parties cannot guarantee stable electoral performance. While caste is important for both the campaign and the candidate, the national leadership failed to address the real concerns of marginalized communities. Therefore, they were willing to go beyond their traditional choices and vote for progress and justice, which indicates a sign of mature electoral behaviour amongst the common masses.

Therefore 2024 elections show that while caste shapes the electoral outcomes of political parties, it does not do so in isolation. Things like economic challenges, leaders' accountability and minority voting behaviour reassessment contribute to the outcomes. This shows that caste interacts with diverse factors, rather than replacing them and reveals a multi-layered impact via its interactions in India.

VI. Reassessment of Politicization of Caste in the 2024 Elections

The paper presents analysis of coalition strategies, campaigning narratives, and electoral outcomes, which gives a holistic reassessment of the impact of caste in the General elections of 2024. Caste, rather than decline, showed dynamic changes, and the following shows an analysis of this transformation.

6.1 Caste manoeuvred from fixed bloc voting to strategic consolidation

The 2024 elections did not establish rigid caste-based voting groups for caste-centric parties; they reflected strategic re-consolidation of votes across alliances. Dalits and OBC in Uttar Pradesh showed changes in their electoral alignment in response to the economic and political grievances. Caste influenced voting, but it did not affect the result in isolation. A decline in the marginalized voters of BSP and BJP showed a decline in the loyalty of caste-based groups to caste-centric political parties.

6.2 Cross-Caste mobilization suffered setbacks for the BJP

The BJP's attempt to unify cross-caste Hindu votes faced setbacks in the 2024 election under the banner of Hindutva. While they retained stable support from upper-caste groups, several groups within their marginalized vote bank realigned against them. This portrayed that the national governance didn't account for their socio-economic concerns, and caste mobilization became conditional due to a lack of protection and assurances by the ruling government.

6.3 Institutionalization of Caste over Identity mobilization

Political parties of the opposition bloc emphasized constitutional protection and representation, which, according to Verniers, portrayed a shift from identity-based mobilization to Rights-based Institutional mobilization, where concerns around their representation, reservation and addressal of grievances were demanded by the public. It went beyond identity and demanded the protection of that identity.

6.4 Lower- and Middle- class realignment

The economic dissatisfaction amongst the middle- and lower-class sections across caste sections due to the rise in the cost of living and basic amenities showed an impact on the outcome. In the rural areas of UP, Lerche states the decline in wages, rising unemployment, and agrarian mismanagement caused a decline in support from the lower income groups. Here, we saw the intersection of caste with the broader scope of socio-economic classes within it that caused people to re-align themselves.

Therefore, the 2024 elections show a transformation in caste where Caste continues to shape the electoral competition, but it has diversified and indulged itself with different factors that impacted the results.

VII. CONCLUSION

The 2024 General Elections of India showed the revival of caste rather than its decline in Indian politics. It showed how caste can be strategically used by political actors in the process of elections. While under majoritarian Hindu nationalism under the umbrella of Hindutva and welfarism were in appeal in the past elections, the electoral developments prove that caste remains an important factor within the electoral competition in India regardless. Caste revitalizes itself in the form of voting behaviour, political alliances, and party campaigning narratives.

Coalition formation continued to reflect the strategic alignment of caste in the consolidation of communities and their realignment in the competition in the state of Uttar Pradesh. The BJP's strong Hindu voter base, spanning caste groups, remained important, but its realignment with the opposition faction showed the limits of loyalty, as economic hurdles and threats to constitutional safeguards influenced their voting behaviour. Campaigning narratives by the INDIA Bloc focused on protecting the Constitution and reviving the debate of social justice and representation of the marginalized in the state. This proved that strategic voting alongside identity didn't work in isolation but in coordination with the wider political debates of justice and inclusion in the process of election.

Therefore, the 2024 election shows a strategic transformation rather than a decline of caste. The elections reinforce that caste remains an adaptive and lasting element in Indian politics. It expresses itself across different parameters, but continues to influence the foundations of representation, justice, and competition within India's electoral democracy.

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