



RESEARCH PAPER

Political Culture and Voting Behavior in New Delhi: A Case Study of Aam Aadmi Party (2013–2020)

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ABSTRACT

The study analyses the transformation of political culture and voting behavior in New Delhi between 2013 and 2020 focusing on the emergence and rise of the Aam Aadmi Party. The aim of the research is to examine how voter preferences shifted in New Delhi politics and what factors contributed to the rise of Aam Aadmi Party. This is primarily qualitative, analytical and comparative study. It employs comparative case study method to examine the Delhi Legislative Assembly elections of 2013, 2015, and 2020. The analysis is based on Almond and Verba's theoretical model of Civic Culture. The study finds that New Delhi's political culture has change from traditional to issue oriented and identity-based politics. The study concludes that the political culture of New Delhi has evolved toward a more performance and issue focused model which challenged traditional identity politics. Aam Aadmi Party success illustrates a broader trend of urban democratic realignment, where governance outcomes and transparency have become key determinants of voter behavior.

KEYWORDS Political Culture, Voting Behavior, New Delhi, Aam Aadmi Party, Elections

Introduction

Political culture is the values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors of citizens in the context of politics. It is considered an important tool for the success and failure of any political system. To understand the electoral dynamics in a democracy, one must have a thorough understanding of how political culture affects voting behavior. The modern world has widely accepted democracy as the norm. The fundamental tenet of democracy is the public's involvement in political decisions, with the most significant of these decisions being the election. Consequently, political culture has a direct impact on the political system and is directly related to the authoritative allocation of values and distribution of power.

Voting behavior is a psychological study of the human's attitudes and feelings which is based on social -cultural and economic norms of the society. Understanding voting behavior becomes essential in democracies because it dictates how people express their opinions and influence the political system. (Karim, 2014) It reflects the dynamics of political mobilization and participation. It is a critical element in understanding how citizens engage with the democratic process, because it is voting behavior which actually is established through the process of mobilization and participation. The present research paper aims to analyze changing dynamics of political culture and voting behavior in the capital city of India, New Delhi.

India's political system is characterized by constitutional democracy, federalism, parliamentary system, regular free and fair elections at national, state and local level. (Dhote, 2022) India is largest democratic state in the world due to its frequent and highly competitive elections which is based on universal adult franchise. In modern democracies, the right to vote is common factor behind the strengthening of democratic institutions. (Mohammed, 2024) Being the biggest democracy in the world, India demonstrates a dynamic fusion of traditional and modern political principles. Its political culture is rich in millennia of historical legacies, various social structures, and democratic traditions. (Mitra,

2017) The political culture of India is influenced by the nation's colonial history, its constitutional dedication to secularism and federalism and the engaged involvement of its populace in electoral activities. In spite of the rich tapestry of regional, linguistic and religious diversity, the essence of democratic participation has persisted as a fundamental characteristic evidenced by elections that frequently experience significant voter engagement and vigorous public dialogue. Although India's political culture is firmly rooted with democratic norms, yet it face challenges such as caste-based politics, communal tensions, patronage networks and political dynasties which significantly impact voting behaviour and party strategies. (Subramanian & Shairgojri, 2023) The influence of populism, identity politics, and regionalism is evident in shaping public opinion and electoral outcomes. The emergence of new political actors and movements, particularly at the grassroots level, signals an increasing demand for accountability and governance reforms. In this dynamic environment, political culture serves as an essential framework for analysing India's electoral trends, governance challenges, and democratic resilience.

Over the past decade New Delhi, the capital of India has seen a significant change in its political culture. Issue based and anti-corruption politics was reflected in the 2013 with the rise of the Aam Aadmi Party which upended the Indian National Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) long-standing bipolar domination in the capital. (Jain, 2014) This change reflects a shift in the political orientation of Delhi's electorate, especially among the middle and upper-middle classes who supported the development oriented narrative and governance model (Abidi & Jadhav, 2025; Yaseen, Z. et al., 2022).). The present study examines the changing dynamics of political culture and voting behavior in New Delhi, which is not only the seat of governance but also a vibrant case of urban electoral dynamics. This research paper finds out the answers of following research questions: How has political culture and voting behavior in New Delhi evolved between 2013 and 2020 and how did the Aam Aadmi Party rise to prominence in New Delhi's electoral politics.

Literature Review

The transformation of political culture and voting behavior in New Delhi from 2013 to 2020 has sparked increased scholarly interest as a result of the Aam Aadmi Party's remarkable growth and shifting voter preferences. (Kumar S. , 2013) Provide an insight that Delhi's electorate has gradually shifted away from traditional identity-based voting, such as caste and religion, and towards a more performance- and issue-based assessment of political parties. This trend was most noticeable in the 2013 and 2015 Delhi Assembly elections, when voters prioritised governance outcomes, anti-corruption initiatives, and service delivery over traditional political loyalty. (Verma A. , 2015) investigates the complex connection between electoral results and urban government in the quickly changing metropolitan setting of Delhi. She contends that the 2020 Delhi Assembly elections represented a paradigm change in which voter preferences were significantly shaped by urban development plans, notably in areas like public transport, sanitation, health, and education. Verma highlights that by emphasizing localized, citizen-centric governance models like mohalla clinics, school reforms, and free utilities, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) was able to successfully redefine the politics of urban development and have a direct impact on the everyday lives of middle-class and urban poor people.

Ahmed (2014) discussed the role of middle class in the rise of the Aam Aadmi Party symbolizes the growing political assertiveness of India's urban middle class, particularly its younger, more educated, and inspirational parts. This modern middle class, disillusioned with conventional parties such as the Congress and the BJP, saw in the Aam Aadmi Party a vehicle to convey its desire for openness, accountability, and performance-based governance. According to the study, the middle class played an active role in establishing the Aam Aadmi Party identity through volunteerism and internet mobilization, rather than being a passive recipient. The author emphasises that the Aam Aadmi Party narrative of anti-corruption, civic participation, and administrative efficiency aligned with the middle class's

aspirations of a clean, technocratic, and service-oriented state. (Hazarika, 2015) examines the interactions between variables that influence voting decisions in the democratic context of India. According to Hazarika, caste, religion, gender, class, regional identity, leadership appeal and political party performance are only a few of the many socioeconomic, cultural, and political factors that affect Indian voters' decisions. Nonetheless, he observes a slow but notable shift away from identity-based voting and towards issue-based and governance-oriented decision-making, particularly in urban areas. This change is especially noticeable among young people and the urban middle class, who place a higher value on policy delivery, transparency, and developmental concerns than they did on old allegiances. In the context of New Delhi, where the rise of the Aam Aadmi Party is an example of this changing trend, Hazarika's study is especially pertinent. The study emphasizes that urbanization, media exposure, and voter education are important factors influencing this shift in behavior, showing a mature electorate that is more concerned with civic issues and accountability than with symbolic politics.

In short, the current literature offers a strong basis for comprehending how voting patterns and political culture have changed in New Delhi. By closely examining the rise of Aam Aadmi Party' the relationship between populist tactics, governance performance, and shifting voter expectations in Delhi's political trajectory, this study seeks to close that gap.

Material and Methods

This is primarily qualitative, analytical and comparative study. It employs comparative case study design to examine the Delhi Legislative Assembly elections of 2013, 2015, and 2020 to analyze Aam Aadmi Party politics and change of political culture and voting behavior in New Delhi politics. This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the socio-political shifts associated with the rise of the Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi's electoral landscape. The study analysis three electoral results of Legislative Assembly elections of New Delhi 2013, 2015 and 2020 saw a significant shift in voter's behavior. Data is collected from the secondary sources such as articles, books, newspaper, official archives and Election Commission of India.

Theoretical Framework

The Civic Culture Theory by Almond and Verba (Almond, 1996) serves as the theoretical foundation for this study basis for comprehending Delhi's electorate's growing political participation which aims to explain how New Delhi's political culture and voting patterns changed between 2013 and 2020. Democratic societies thrive when individuals actively engage in political life according to their theory, which distinguishes three forms of political culture: parochial, subject, and participant which will be discussed later. This is seen in the example of New Delhi, where the Aam Aadmi Party was born in 2013 as a result of strong civic participation particularly from the urban middle class who demanded accountability and transparency. As an indication of a change towards a more participatory political culture, citizens started taking part in issue-based political action, advocacy, and protests in addition to passive voting.

Results and Discussion

In the seminal work "The Civic Culture" (1963) Almond and Verba classified political orientations into three aspects: evaluative (perception of political legitimacy or performance), emotive (perception of political symbols or leaders), and cognitive (knowledge and comprehension of politics). All three perspectives are balanced in a healthy political culture. They also categorized the political culture into three types: parochial, subject, and participant. In a parochial political culture, citizens have little understanding or interest in politics; such cultures are common in traditional or tribal civilizations where political institutions play a minor part in daily life and people have cognitive orientation. In

contrast, subject political culture refers to countries in which people are aware of the political system but do not actively participate. Citizens in such societies possess effective orientations and often docile and accept the choices of those in power without inquiry, as seen in authoritarian or bureaucratic governments.

A more democratic and active form is the participant political culture, where citizens are well-informed, emotionally invested and actively engaged in political processes. These individuals exhibit evaluative orientations and not only vote in elections but also actively take part in political discussions, protests, and civic activities, aiming to influence policymaking. Almond and Verba also introduced the concept of civic culture, a balanced combination of all three types. Civic culture is considered ideal for democratic stability as it encourages active political participation while maintaining trust in institutions and tolerance for differing views. The growth of the Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi interpreted as a change towards a civic and participatory culture, where educated urban middle class's cognitive understanding, affective engagement and critical evaluation demands accountability and clean governance.

Results and Discussion

Elections 2013, 2015 and 2020: An Analysis

Over the past decade, the political culture of New Delhi has seen a remarkable transformation from patronage clientalism to increasing public participation in politics, performance based voting and the erosion of traditional party loyalties. The rise of the Aam Aadmi Party was a turning point that emerged against corruption scandals under the Congress and promised clean governance, decentralization, and grassroots democracy. This transformation was seen by increased voter participation and the electoral victories of Aam Aadmi Party in 2013, 2015, and 2020. The governing approach of Aam Aadmi Party centered on fundamental public services including education, healthcare, electricity, and water that appealed to urban voters who prioritized quality of life. Consequently, Delhi's political culture transitioned from passive observation to an active, issue oriented and rational mode of interaction and notion of participant political culture.

In 2013 Legislative Assembly elections of New Delhi results revealed widespread public frustration with the Congress and BJP, as Aam Aadmi Party secured 28 seats and 29.5% of the vote share in its debut, BJP won 31 seats and a vote share of 33.1%, while the Congress was relegated to third place, with eight seats and 24.6 % of the vote. While voter turnout surged to 65.63%, a clear indicator of heightened political participation. (Chakrabarti, 2025) The electoral results of New Delhi have changed dramatically between 2013 and 2025, moving from passive political observance to active citizen involvement. A sign of this shift was the higher voter participation of 65.63% in the 2013 Delhi Assembly elections, which showed that people were becoming more and more eager to engage in the political process. (Verma, 2015) The rise of the Aam Aadmi Party became a hope pillar to those individuals who were fed up with the Bharatiya Janata Party's traditional top down political tactics and disillusioned by the ongoing corruption scandals during the Congress administration. Aam Aadmi party's emphasis on grassroots government through mohalla sabhas and its anti-corruption rhetoric, represented by the Jan Lokpal movement, gave a drastically different political vision based on openness, decentralisation, and participatory governance. (Engineer, 2014). The middle and upper middle classes in Delhi, who had previously been politically inactive but were suddenly spurred into action by a combination of civic annoyance and online activism, found great appeal in this new political discourse. (Chakrabarti P. , 2016) Aam Aadmi Party oppose to VIP culture, seeming austerity measures and focuses on real issues appealed to voters who were looking for honest leaders and meaningful change. These voters actively participated in democratic reform instead of merely selecting the traditional leadership. Their actions fit the definition of participant political culture put forward by Almond and Verba, in which people participate in, question,

and work to change the political system rather than just casting ballots. Between 2013 and 2020, Aam Aadmi Party governed by focusing on service delivery and welfare-based governance. The sweeping victory in the 2015 elections, winning 67 out of 70 seats with a 54.3% vote share was evidence of a strong mandate for its governance model, which prioritized free electricity, water subsidies, improvements in government schools, and the establishment of mohalla clinics. Turnout peaked at 67.47%, reflecting deepened civic engagement. The party continued its dominance in the 2020 elections, securing 62 seats and 53.57% of votes, although turnout slightly declined to 62.55%. These years entrenched a new kind of political culture in Delhi one driven more by performance on everyday governance than by ideology or caste affiliations (Verma, 2015).

In Legislative Assembly elections 2020 the political supremacy of Aam Aadmi Party in the capital city remains superior. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) secured only eight seats, the Indian National Congress unable to secure a single seat in assembly elections, and the Aam Aadmi Party won 62 out of 70 seats, securing a landslide victory. With a vote percentage of 53.57%, the Aam Aadmi Party demonstrated sustained support from a broad spectrum of Delhi voters, particularly those in the middle and lower middle classes. This election result demonstrated a change in political culture towards performance-based voting, as religious or ideological appeals were subordinated to concerns about healthcare, education, power, and water services. (Verma, 2021; Yaseen, et. al., 2016). The 2020 assembly election showed that voters demonstrated a preference for government that produced noticeable changes in day to day living rather than strictly following party or identity lines. Urban voters responded favorably to the Aam Aadmi Party technocratic and welfare focused style, especially in a metropolis where worries about quality of life are paramount. The political culture of Delhi is evolving towards Almond and Verba's participant political culture where citizens are informed, involved, and driven by the results of government rather than by ingrained allegiances. This is reflected in the move towards more rational and participatory voting. (Barthwal & Ali, 2021).

Table 1
New Delhi Legislative Assembly Election 2013

Political Party	Seats Won (out of 70)	Vote Share (%)	Nature of Political Culture	Voting Behavior Characteristics
Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)	28	29.5%	Rise of participatory and issue-based politics	Citizens disillusioned with traditional parties; demand for accountability and anti-corruption reforms
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	31	33.1%	Traditional representative culture with nationalist leanings	Support from traditional urban voters; anti-incumbency against Congress
Indian National Congress (INC)	08	24.6%	Decline of dominant party culture	Loss of credibility due to corruption scandals and governance fatigue

Source: Indian Election Commission, compiled by researcher

Table 2
New Delhi Legislative Assembly Election 2015

Political Party	Seats Won (out of 70)	Vote Share (%)	Nature of Political Culture	Voting Behavior Characteristics
Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)	67	45.3%	Strengthened civic political culture	Emphasis on public services (education, health); rejection of communal politics

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	03	32.2%	Weak ideological appeal in urban middle class	Focused on national image but failed to address local issues
Indian National Congress (INC)	0	9.7%	Collapse of legacy party	Voters abandoned INC due to lack of leadership

Source: Indian Election Commission, compiled by researcher

Table 3
New Delhi Legislative Assembly Election 2020

Political Party	Seats Won (out of 70)	Vote Share (%)	Nature of Political Culture	Voting Behavior Characteristics
Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)	62	53.77%	Mature, rational, performance-based political culture	Voters prioritized governance delivery; continuity over change
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	08	38.52%	Resurgence in national narrative influence	Gained vote share but not enough local credibility
Indian National Congress (INC)	0	4.26%	Further erosion of political relevance	Completely sidelined; lost support across all demographics

Source: Indian Election Commission, compiled by researcher

Rise of Aam Aadmi Party: A Shift in Political Norms and Voter Behavior

The electoral results of the New Delhi Legislative Assembly elections in 2013, 2015 and 2020, identifies a significant transformation in the political culture from passive orientation to a more participatory and engaged civic culture. The inception of the Aam Aadmi Party signified a pivotal moment in Delhi's political arena. Aam Aadmi Party emerged from the anti-corruption movement led by Anna Hazare (Our History). The newly born political party presented a distinct political narrative emphasizing transparency, grassroots governance, and direct public service provision. The strategy was based on participatory democracy featuring candidates who were ordinary citizens rather than seasoned politicians.

A significant transformation has seen in Delhi's voting behavior, shifting from symbolic and identity based voting to an increasing focus on governance and performance. Aam Aadmi Party's strategy focused on providing access to the essential services like, water, electricity, education, and healthcare facilities to public, became the main reason of public support. This represented a notable difference from previous elections, where allegiance to political parties was frequently influenced by caste affinities or party ideology. The Aam Aadmi Party government launched several signature initiatives including complimentary energy for up to 200 units, subsidized water, the mohalla clinic healthcare model, and substantial investments in government school infrastructure, which garnered widespread acclaim across socio-economic strata. (Hall, 2021) This governance oriented paradigm garnered support not only from the urban community who directly benefited from welfare programs but also from the middle class who appreciated the government's focus on transparency and efficiency.

The transition to issue based voting is apparent but it is crucial to recognize the persistent significance of identity politics in influencing electoral results among specific groups of Delhi's population. The city's demographic composition consists of a diverse array of migrants, Dalits, Muslims, and lower-middle-class groups, many of whom persist in voting according to caste or community affiliations. The Aam Aadmi Party electoral approach involved intentional efforts to attract Dalit and Muslim votes via targeted humanitarian initiatives, symbolic representation and inclusive language. (ROY, 2014)

However communal polarization especially during the 2020 elections, conducted in the wake of the anti- Citizen Amendment Act (CAA) protests and the North-East Delhi riots demonstrated that identity continues to exert a significant influence on political mobilization. (Sridhar, 2024) The BJP aimed to unify Hindu voters by invoking nationalism and law-and-order themes, although this approach achieved only little success given the capital's comparatively cosmopolitan environment. Nonetheless, the convergence of class and caste proved pivotal. The Aam Aadmi Party success stemmed from its ability to transcend these divisions, establishing itself as a party focused on governance and inclusivity, rather than one rooted in caste-based patronage systems.

Over the past decade election campaigns in India has undergone digitalization, with Delhi leading this transition. The Aam Aadmi Party has adeptly leveraged social media platforms to engage younger, technologically proficient voters, circumventing conventional media gatekeepers. The party's digital initiatives highlighted openness, interactive voter engagement, and real-time information distribution strategies that notably appealed to first-time voters and urban professionals. Furthermore, urban women particularly from lower-income demographics—exhibited increased electoral participation and political engagement, which can be ascribed to the direct influence of welfare measures on their everyday existence. Digital mobilization not only enabled wider participation but also influenced political discourse. Hashtag campaigns, live-streamed town halls, and viral films have enhanced Aam Aadmi Party reputation as a responsive and contemporary party, simultaneously prompting other parties such as the BJP and Congress to broaden their digital engagement. (Kumar, 2012)

Conclusion

The shift from passive to participatory political culture and voting behavior in New Delhi between 2013 and 2020 represents a significant departure from traditional electoral trends in urban India. The emergence of the Aam Aadmi Party marked a unique political development wherein governance performance, issue-based politics, and civic participation have increasingly replaced identity-driven affiliations. Furthermore, the party's success underscores the growing importance of localized governance models and citizen-centric development in shaping electoral outcomes in metropolitan contexts.

These developments indicate the emergence of a hybrid political culture in New Delhi. On one hand, the electorate is increasingly rational, informed and engaged demanding accountability, efficient governance and performance-based legitimacy. But the enduring relevance of caste, community, and ideological identity cannot be ignored. This hybrid culture is characterized by a fusion of traditional allegiances and modern participatory norms. Voters may still identify with their community or religious group, but their political choices are increasingly shaped by their lived experiences of governance. This duality explains the volatility of Delhi's electorate quick to reward success but equally willing to punish underperformance. The rise of the Aam Aadmi Party thus represents more than just a political realignment—it reflects a broader transformation in the way urban Indian voters perceive their role in the democratic process. As Delhi continues to grow and diversify, its political culture will likely continue to evolve in complex and unpredictable ways, blending the old and the new, the emotional and the rational, the symbolic and the practical.

Though the ascent of the Aam Aadmi Party shows a move towards performance-driven and pragmatic politics the analysis also raises concerns about the party's ability to handle complex structural issues and the long-term viability of its populist approach. This study advances the knowledge of how urban political culture changes in response to changing voter expectations and the efficacy of governance. In the end, the New Delhi case provides insightful information on how democratic participation is evolving and how political accountability is being redefined in India in the twenty-first century.

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