

Haryana Vidhan Sabha Election 2024: Explaining the Verdict

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Abstract

The present paper is a modest attempt to interpret, explain and analyse the electoral verdict and performance of various political parties in 2024 Vidhan Sabha elections of Haryana. The Haryana assembly polls marked an unprecedented moment as the verdict given by the people is contrary to the conceived popular public sentiment, wave in favour of Congress, issue of retaining Jat dominance, Jawan-Kisan-Pahalwan, predictions of political pundits, exit polls. BJP not only overcame anti-incumbency sentiments to secure a third consecutive term and created a history of its own in the state politics through social engineering, organizational skills and electoral manoeuvrings. With 48¹ out of 90 seats, the BJP emerged victorious despite being in powers for 10 years. Content analysis of various published resources before and after election show that even after anti-incumbency against BJP and Jat consolidation in favour of Congress, BJP's focused ground-level strategy combined with agenda of development, targeted campaign focused on delivering a clear narrative, and unified leadership washed the anti-incumbency agenda against it which the state is known. While, shift of dalits support from Congress to BJP, internal bickering and factionalism, vote-splitting due to independent candidates paved the way for the defeat of Congress. This paper also discusses the performance of major political parties in the light of caste calculus and other dynamics such as Jat-non Jat, rural-urban cleavage.

Keywords: Haryana Politics, Vidhan Sabha elections, BJP, Congress, caste Dynamics, Social cleavages Jat Non-Jat

1. Introduction: BJP's attained historic hat-trick in Haryana, the BJP's strategic victory in Haryana emerged from a combination of cohesive leadership, strategic voter outreach, and a clear campaign focus that countered Congress's over-reliance on Jat support and internal discord. By capitalizing on urban loyalty, engineering a counter-polarization among Jat voters, and presenting a unified front under Saini, the BJP overcame a decade's

worth of anti-incumbency sentiment to achieve a historic third term. In a complex and highly competitive election landscape, BJP's formula of development, strategic alliances, and faction-free leadership allowed it to deliver what many considered an impossible hat-trick in Haryana.² BJP has pulled off the biggest surprise in the history of Haryana. The INLD has fared better than JnJP, which has been reduced to zero from 10 seats in 2019.³

Haryana is one of the most developed and industrialised states of India but the state also has a historical context given its proximity to Delhi. Despite the public resentment of urban electorate against the BJP government for poor municipal governance and low-level official corruption, Gurugram, Sohna, Faridabad and Badshahpur sweep by the right-wing party shows loyalty of the urban voters to PM Narendra Modi. While the Haryana results have brought back Congress from where it was before Lok Sabha polls, the BJP on its part has got a huge boost with a larger mandate defying 10 years of incumbency.⁴

Haryana became the third state to join the bandwagon with Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh where the BJP is at the helm of political affairs. The electoral hat-trick of the party in the state, ensured an unprecedented consecutive third term in power. This win of BJP became more pertinent as it has come in the aftermath of introduction, and withdrawal of three farm laws in 2021 by BJP in an agrarian state like Haryana which have center of farmer's agitation. Between the introduction of the legislation and its withdrawal hundreds of farmers died in protests, thus setting off a movement of anger against the BJP in the state. The BJP did suffer in the 2024 general elections as it won only five out of the 10 Lok Sabha seats in the state against all the 10 seats it had won five years ago.⁵

A total of 1,031 candidates were in the fray for the assembly polls with nearly 2 crore voters. A multi-party electoral competition was expected in Haryana's 90-member Assembly as all the political parties namely Aam Aadmi Party, Indian National Congress, BJP, Jannayak Janata Party and Indian National Lok Dal contesting more or less independently. BJP was seeking to hold on to its mandate and return for a third term. Meanwhile, AAP and Congress have contested independently after seat-sharing talks between the two parties failed.⁶ Votes in Haryana were likely to split along community lines. Historically, the Congress had relied more on the Jat community during the elections, while BJP has garnered more votes from non-Jat communities in the state. Of the overall population of Haryana, approximately 25 percent belongs to the Jat community, a dominant agrarian community with particular dominance in central Haryana or popularly known as Jatland. In 2024 elections time around as well, Congress' campaign strategy and candidate selection had leaned into support from Jats. Besides, BJP seemed to be banking on support from non-Jat communities, including OBC, Punjabis and Brahmins. There were certain determining factors that were supposed to determine the outcome of assembly polls namely anti-incumbency against BJP, Jat consolidation in favour of

Congress, dalit support shift from Congress to BJP and the 36 biradari emphasis of BJP. The JnJP had contested the previous polls on a pure anti-incumbency against BJP, succeeding in cutting away Jat votes from the Congress and winning ten seats. However, it became the alliance partner in the BJP government in lieu of deputy CM post along with few cabinet berths, and went on to even criticise the farmers' movement against the agrarian laws, a decision seems unacceptable by the farming community of Haryana.

Though Congress seemed to be aware that anti-incumbency and Jat consolidation was not enough to ensure the victory of Congress. In order to curb the divisive tendencies, the party made sure that Bhupinder Hooda and Kumari Selja, the eminent SC leader of the party share the platform. Bhupinder Singh Hooda and his son Deepender Singh Hooda, were given free reign when it came to ticket distribution, which infuriated rivals Kumari Selja and Randeep Surjewala, general secretary of AICC. Selja declined to campaign until very recently, while late stayed preoccupied with his son's Campaign. Interestingly, Selja didn't participate in any rallies until Rahul Gandhi joined the Haryana campaign. She continued to express in public her desire to become chief minister. The BJP utilised circumstances and continued to accuse Hooda for being a casteist and

refusing to give a due place to Dalit leader in the party. Infact, BJP state leaders even offered Kumari Selja to join BJP. She began her regular campaign very late. The symbolic joining of hands on the stage by Selja and Bhupinder Hooda at the behest of Gandhi did assail the fears about disunity in the Congress to a great extent. Another significant factor which was noticeable from speeches of Bhupinder Hooda and other Congress leaders is the regular invoking of 36 biradari or all castes, to allay the fears of anti-Jat consolidation.⁷ The ruling BJP and the opposition Congress, AAP, INLD-BSP alliance and JJP- Azad Samaj Party (ASP) alliance were in the fray though, the election was largely believed to be a contest between the BJP and the Congress.⁸

Key Issues of Haryana Assembly Polls:

Farmer distress, the Agniveer scheme and the protests of wrestlers against BJP leader and ex-Wrestling Federation of India chief were among the key assembly poll issues.⁹ The famous narrative was the 'kisan-jawan-samvidhan' (farmers-army-constitution) narrative, which later turned to be Jawan-Kisan Phalwan specific for Haryana election after Vinesh Phogat joined the congress party and given ticket encompassing the farmers' unrest over the BJP's handling of the farmers' movement, youth anger and fears among SCs about ending reservation and altering the

constitution. Besides, pan-state issue of the family ID, launched as Parivar Pehchanatra scheme a flagship scheme in 2020 to ease distribution of services, became the reason of difficulties to common people to the extent that the Congress has announced to scrap it if voted to power. Besides, inflation, unemployment and poor state of infrastructure were also among the major issues. Though, Haryana can boast of a large network of quality highways but internal roads are broken and the rampant problem of water logging across the state, even in metro cities like Gurgaon or Faridabad. According to a survey by Hyderabad-based agency People's Pulse, more than one-third of sitting MLAs had a negative approval rating from their voters for failing to do development work in their constituencies. Infact, few of them even faced resentment and opposition when they visited for campaign in their constituencies.

Government employees in the state, from permanent to contractual workers were dissatisfied with the BJP's decade-long rule and are demanding a change. Since the last two years, the sarpanches of the state are on a war-path against the government for changing rules and bringing in e-tendering process that allegedly curtails the powers of panchayat representatives. In March 2023, a

permanent protest call was given by sarpanches on Chandigarh-Panchkula border, which was also lathi charged by police on government orders. Clearly, these issues were creating significant problems for the incumbent government, and if the unrest was genuine, the BJP government's chances of a third term seemed increasingly unlikely, however things turned differently at the ground level.

2. Explanation of Verdict: The BJP's victory in Haryana was a big surprise. Haryana's mandate is humbling for the BJP's critics, the media who had almost unanimously predicted defeat for the party, and the Congress who were all set to celebrate victory. The BJP has been thrice re-elected in a state where nurturing 'anti-incumbency' is the Haryanvi people's electoral norm.¹⁰ Bhajan Lal had won 51 seats in the 1991 assembly election. Five years later, in 1996, he could only win 9 seats. In an earlier election, Jat stalwart Devi Lal and the BJP alliance won 76 out of 90 seats; they won 18 seats at the next election. Bhupinder Singh Hooda made a mark with 67 seats in 2005; nine years later the Jat leader and his party won 15 seats. A third term for the BJP is a political stunner difficult to decipher for the political pundits. The BJP, which won four seats in 2009 and had then a 9% vote share, has seized firm control of Haryana in just 15 years.¹¹

Table: 01

Legislative Assembly Election 2024: Results

Political Parties	Seats contested	Seats Won	Vote share (%)
BJP	90	48	39.94
Congress +CPI(M)	89+1	37	39.09
INLD-BSP	90	2	4.14
JnJP-ASP	90	00	0.09%
AAP	90	00	1.79
Others	103	00	
Independents	585	3	11.64

Source: www.eci.gov.in

In 2024 BJP won 48 seats out of 90 it contested; on the other hand, shocked Congress bagged 37 seats. Three independents and two candidates of the INLD also registered wins.¹² Exit polls in Haryana proved incorrect due to Haryana's complex caste calculus. Jats traditionally support Congress, especially after leading protests against the BJP, while the BJP aimed to consolidate non-Jat votes.¹³ Historically, Haryana has been a challenging territory for parties aiming for a third consecutive term. The BJP, however, seems poised to defy this trend, positioning itself to cement its dominance in a state where no party has achieved this feat since its formation in 1966. The ruling party's ability to navigate a tricky electoral environment while maintaining its voter base has been commendable, and its performance is reflective of a deeper connection with the electorate. On the other hand, Congress remained far away

from the majority mark (i.e. 45) necessary to govern independently. However, with a vote share of 39.09%, the Congress has made significant strides compared to its previous election performance, where it only achieved 28.08%. Though, the realities on the ground illustrate the unpredictability of electoral outcomes and the challenges of relying on polls as a measure of voter intent. The neck-and-neck in certain Jat dominant constituencies defies the earlier narrative of an impending Congress sweep. With BJP winning the election has underscored a pivotal shift in the political dynamics of the state.¹⁴

Social engineering, dominant OBC consolidation and regional equations hold special importance and have played catalytic role in the electoral verdict of assembly polls. Considering the fact that in Haryana the dominant caste were generally agricultural castes due to their numerical strength and land ownership. Despite erosions, the caste

arithmetic of the BJP was still holding on to ensure the win of BJP as it focussed on the historically ignored casts in the state and this social engineering begins right before 2014 elections. Four numerically biggest OBC communities of Haryana, Saini, Ror/Marathas, Kashyaps and Yadavs were decisively in favour of the BJP. While the elevation of Nayab Singh Saini as the chief minister is one of the reasons behind it, the other definitely is anti-Jat sentiment among other dominant OBCs. It is for this reason that almost all the senior BJP leaders, including Shah and Modi, keep invoking the Jat versus OBC narrative in their speeches. Non-Jats did not want Jat CM especially Hooda as they were apprehensive of being ignored again and were also fearful of lopsided development of Rohtak region only at the expense of other regions.¹⁵

Historically, Haryana has witnessed tight elections and 2024 was not different. In the 2019 election, 25 out of 90 seats were decided by a margin of fewer than 5,000 votes, with similar patterns in 2014 and 2009. This year, despite the Congress securing approximately 40 % of the total votes a 12 % rise from 2019 the split in anti-BJP votes among independents and smaller coalitions blunted its strike rate, preventing the party from converting its vote share into seats.¹⁶ While the Congress was marginally ahead of the BJP in the vote-share,

however it was not been able in converting this to seats. Though in several seats, the margin was very low, indicating that regional parties and Independents ate into the anti-incumbency votes in Haryana, benefiting the BJP.¹⁷

As political experts say that the state politics veers around the national politics. This time as well the voters of state voted on national issues instead of state issues of Jawan, Kisan and Pahalwan. The BJP swept to power for an unprecedented third time in Haryana seems to be. The Assembly election results have larger ramifications on national polity. The electoral results in Haryana showed that PM Modi retains his charisma with the electorate, especially women, and has the capacity to swing votes in favour of the BJP on his own. Even though the 2024 Lok Sabha election results took some sheen off the Brand Modi, the Haryana election results have shown that PM is the tallest political leader in India with mass appeal across religion, caste and region. The flipside of the results was that the narrative built by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi that BJP was on an electoral decline and its leader Narendra Modi was tired was buried by Haryana electorate.¹⁸ The revitalisation of the BJP means that way to power for Congress got tough with its alliance partners condemning it as being arrogant and complacent. The Assembly elections result also shows that both the BJP and its ideological parent, the RSS,

have been able to get their chemistry back after the temporary estrangement of 2024 Lok Sabha elections and get the public to vote for the BJP while using the whisper campaign against Jats to good effect. While the BJP and Congress divided the Jat-dominated and the Dalit

constituencies virtually equally among themselves, it is the OBC constituencies in which the BJP scored. The BJP won 20 out of 25 OBC-dominated seats with significant non-Jat populations.

Table:02

Region-wise Performance of Political Parties

ELECTORAL REGION	REGION-WISE SEATS	BJP (SEATS WON)	CONGRESS (SEATS WON)	INLD	INDEPENDENT S
AHIRWAL-SOUTH HARYANABELT	23	17	6		
BANGAR BELT	19	6	10	2	1
DESHWALI BELT	21	10	9		2
GT ROAD BELT	27	15	12		
	90	48	37	2	

Source: www.eci.gov.in

BJP won majority of the seats i.e. 17 out of 23 total seats falling in Ahirwal region and the remaining 07 were won by Congress. The majority of Yadavs resides in Ahirwal, a region that encompasses Rewari, Mahendragarh, and Gurgaon districts, named after the Ahirs or Yadavs who are the dominant communities in the region. Moreover, the Valmiki among SCs also favour the BJP over the Congress, even this time. And the support for the BJP among general castes, be it Baniyas, Brahmins and Rajputs, along with Punjabis, is also considerably more than the Congress. The

Ahirwal Belt have shown the enduring loyalty towards BJP. The Ahirwal region, has been a BJP stronghold since 2014. Led by influential Ahirwal leader and Union Minister Rao Inderjit Singh, the BJP's presence in these constituencies remained solid, with most Ahirwal seats leaning toward BJP in both assembly and Lok Sabha elections.¹⁹ In Bangar belt Congress won 10 seats while BJP scored 06 seats and remaining 02 were secured by INLD. In GT Road belt 15 out of 27 seats were won by BJP and 12 by Congress. In this belt districts of Panipat and Karnal, the situation of the BJP was quite comfortable due to the

high number of Ror/Maratha, Punjabi and general caste voters and significant number of urban seats The Gurjars in the Faridabad area support the BJP over the Congress. The Congress party made significant headways in Mewat and Jatland.

Performance of Regional parties: smaller parties like the AAP, JJP and INLD seemed ineffective, a large number of rebel candidates are spoiled the equations for both the major parties, turning it into a seat-by-seat election in a number of regions. Although Congress seemed to have an edge over BJP in Haryana.²⁰ Most of the experts on Haryana politics were unanimous that the JnJP was going to perform very badly, including Dushyant Chautala, and the reason is the sense of unfaithfulness towards the farmers. Similarly, INLD was also not doing well, and was expected to win one or two Vidhan Sabha seats only. This meant that about one fourth population of Haryana comprising of Jats was consolidated in favour of the Congress party, The INLD, once a dominant force, infact, an

alternate partner to rule the state was struggling to regain its footing, won only 2 seats, while the JJP, which allied with the BJP in the previous elections, failed to open its account. Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), was hoping to make a mark in the elections but drew a blank.²¹ Infact regional parties and Independents collectively spoiled the fortunes of congress party.

Performance in Reserved Constituencies: The Dalit vote got Fragmented between different political parties. The Congress's expectation of sweeping the Dalit votes that comprise over 20 per cent of the electorate did not materialize. The rise of two Dalit-centred coalitions one of INLD with the BSP, the other of JnJP with Chandrasekhar Azad's Azad Samaj Party fractured the anti-BJP Dalit vote. Moreover, the sidelining of Kumari Shailja in the Congress brought further disillusionment. The focus on the caste census, seen as benefiting the OBCs, also created uncertainty among Dalit voters, compounding Congress's challenges.²²

Table No:3

Electoral Performance in Reserved Constituencies (2024)

NAME OF AC	WINNING PARTY	RUNNER UP PARTY
Sadhaura(SC)	INC	BJP
Mullana(SC)	INC	BJP
Israna(SC)	BJP	INC
Nilokheri(SC)	BJP	INC

Kharkhauda(SC)	BJP	INC
Guhla(SC)	INC	BJP
Kalanaur(SC)	INC	BJP
Jhajjar(SC)	INC	BJP
Shahabad(SC)	INC	BJP
Uklana (SC)	INC	BJP
Narwana(SC)	BJP	INC
Pataudi(SC)	BJP	INC
Bawani Khera(SC)	BJP	INC
Ratia(SC)	INC	BJP
Kalanwali(SC)	INC	BJP
Hodal(SC)	BJP	INC
Bawal(SC)	BJP	Congress

Source: <http://www.elections.in/haryana/assembly-constituencies/2014-election-results.html>

All major parties were eying on Dalit votes in the state, which has a sizeable number of Assembly seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes i.e. 17. In the 2019 assembly elections as well as 2024 Lok Sabha polls, there was reduced support to BJP from the Dalit community, while Congress has seen gains. In 2014, BJP had won nine of the 17 seats reserved for the SC community, but in the 2019 assembly polls, this dropped to five. The Congress on the other hand, secured four and seven seats respectively in 2014 and 2019. Further, the Congress improved on its vote share among SC-reserved seats during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, with a post-poll analysis

by CSDS-Lok Niti noting that a majority of Dalits in Haryana shifted from BJP-led National Democratic Alliance to the INDIA bloc. Seeking to capitalise on this sentiment, Kumari Selja had been fielded from Sirsa during the elections. Observers however, had suggested that it would have been more advantageous to the party if she had been fielded for the assembly elections.²³

Deprived Scheduled Casts have had a long-winded antipathy to the Congress. Scheduled Caste communities form 22.5 percent of Haryana's population— of which 8 percent belong to Chamar-related castes, and 14.5

percent belong to DSCs. The government jobs in Haryana are distributed among dominant (Chamar and related) and deprived (non-Chamar) castes. While dominant castes significantly outnumber DSCs in Group A and Group B jobs, the proportion of DSCs is higher in Group D jobs. DSC are facing discrimination in terms of government jobs. Of the 17 reserved Assembly seats in Haryana, 11 MLAs, elected this time, belong to the dominant Chamar caste, which is approximately 47% of scheduled caste population while six belong to the remaining DSCs. Even the two reserved Lok Sabha seats have MPs from the Chamar caste. According to a post-poll survey conducted by Lokniti-CSDS, at least 45 percent of DSCs voted for the BJP in 2024 Haryana Vidhan Sabha election. Meanwhile, the Chamar castes largely supported the Congress. Congress' defeat in the Assembly elections was an unexpected one,

particularly because of its impressive performance of winning half of the parliamentary seats in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, where it won five of the total ten seats from the BJP. These included the two seats reserved for SCs. Dalit voters switched from voting for the Congress in Lok Sabha elections to the BJP during Vidhan Sabha elections in at least four of the 17 reserved seats.²⁴

The Performance of Women candidates in Vidhan Sabha Elections 2024 : Politics is still a male arena in Haryana state, wherein all the women candidates have a political background or celebrity. Majority of females so far have been fielded in active politics by major parties in Haryana most of them either having the backing of a politics. Since its formation in 1966, Haryana has never had a woman chief minister.²⁵

Table: 04

The Performance of Women candidates in Vidhan Sabha Elections 2024:

Political party	Contestants	winners
BJP	10	5
Congress	12	7
AAP	11	00
JnJp	07	00
Independents and others	60	1
Total	100	13

Source: www.eci.gov.in

Total 13 women MLAs have entered the current Haryana assembly and the tally of women legislators became 100. Till date during last 14 assembly elections, just 87 women have become legislators in the state and this time 13 women secured victory taking their tally in the state assembly to 100.²⁶ Seven women candidates have secured victory on the Congress' ticket. Five women, tasted victory on BJP's ticket.²⁷ India's richest woman, Savitri Jindal, secured victory as an independent candidate from the Hisar assembly constituency. Former education minister Geeta Bhukkal has created a record by winning five consecutive assembly polls and she is the first woman from the state to achieve this feat followed by Shakuntla Khatak has won four consecutive elections from Kalanaur seat in Rohtak.²⁸

3. Discussion:

3.1 Jat versus non-Jat cleavage: In 2024 assembly elections, there were 14 Assembly seats where both the BJP and Congress had fielded Jat candidates- Kalayat, Panipat Rural, Narnaund, Garhi-Sanpla-Kiloi, Loharu, Bhadra, Dadri, Tosham, Meham, Rai, Baroda, Tohana, Nalwa and Beri. Out of these 14, BJP won six seats, and lost one seat, Loharu, by a margin of only 792 votes. Other than this, there were 15 seats where a Jat was fielded against the non-Jat, between the BJP and Congress. Here, the

Congress, in alliance with CPI(M) won seven seats, while BJP bagged six seats. And as experts point out the BJP this time has won 22 new seats. Seven of these lies in Jat-dominated Bagar/Bagad and Deshwal belt. So, the argument that Jat vs non-Jat was a dominant factor in elections doesn't hold ground when one looks at the caste arithmetic of Haryana poll verdict, infact, we can say the process of Hinduisation of safforization of Jats have taken a deep root.²⁹

The Congress banked heavily on consolidating the Jat vote, alongside support from farmers and Dalits and backing from the wrestling community that voiced grievances under BJP rule. However, this singular focus on Hooda and the wrestlers who became the face of the Congress campaign backfired. The party was perceived as catering to Jats, prompting the BJP to solidify the non-Jat votes, especially among the OBCs, who had not strongly supported the BJP in the Lok Sabha elections. The BJP's policy to raise the creamy layer income limit blunted Rahul Gandhi's caste census demand, further consolidating the OBC vote in the BJP's favour, particularly in south Haryana.³⁰ The overconfidence in Jat votes have proven a big issue of concern for defeat of congress. With Hooda's leadership and traditional Jat support, Congress appeared overconfident, assuming the Jat votes were secure hoping to secure political power. This led to an over-reliance on

a singular voter base, and ignorance to non-Jat votes which provided an opportunity to BJP and the same was well utilized by the ruling party. BJP's targeted focus on to its voters with its united front having clear leadership unlike Congress proven beneficial for it. The BJP's leadership strategy was clear and cohesive. Months ahead of the election, BJP replaced its former chief minister, Manohar Lal Khattar, with Nayab Singh Saini, projecting him as the fresh face of the party in Haryana. This clear line of leadership and lack of factionalism within the BJP allowed for a more focused campaign.³¹

3.2 Rural-Urban Cleavage: In terms of rural-urban cleavage, urban voter not only have proven loyal to BJP in key urban constituencies in Haryana but also ensured BJP's success to an extent, particularly in the southern Ahirwal belt, which has consistently supported the party since 2014. Constituencies like Gurugram, a commercial hub, demonstrated a clear loyalty to the BJP, reflecting the party's appeal among urban and semi-urban voters. Urban educated voters, conscious about economic growth and infrastructural development, seemed to be resonated with BJP's narrative on development and supported the party. Cities such as Gurugram, and areas along with GT Road which have a substantial working-class population, reaffirmed their support for BJP, marking a decisive contribution to the party's

win.³² BJP's developmental agenda, particularly in sectors like technology and business, pushed urban voters to urban voters in Haryana. The loyalty of the urban base helped the BJP maintain a strong presence in districts where Congress hoped to capitalize on anti-incumbency.³³

Focused development campaign of BJP further helped the voters to make their choice. BJP's emphasis on development across urban and semi-urban centers appealed to voters interested in infrastructure and economic growth. Its commitment to projects in major cities resonated with the working and middle classes. Voter engagement through local leadership proved to be one of the most important strategies of BJP. Depending on local leaders like Rao Inderjit Singh in Ahirwal and emphasizing its commitment to the region's development helped BJP secure and expand its base. This grassroots approach contrasted with Congress's broad reliance on Jat support, which proved insufficient.³⁴

3.3 Religious Polarization: The religious polarization in Haryana post riots in Muslim-dominated Nuh further strengthened the Hindu vote in favour of the BJP as well as the illegal infiltration of Rohingyas from Bangladesh. Religion never been an important aspect of Haryana politics. The Haryana and the Jammu and Kashmir election also showed consolidation of the Hindu vote as it came at a

time when the Hindu minorities were being targeted by Islamists in Bangladesh. To make matters worse, the Haryana electorate saw through Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's strategy of consolidating the Muslim vote while trying to divide the Hindu vote on caste basis.

3.4 Performance of BJP and Congress in the light of Caste Dynamics of Haryana

BJP has been able to break the stereotypes of Jat domination in the politics of the state and also the winning number is with the Jat community during these elections. Infact, it also breaks its image of being brahmin baniya and non-Jat party. The BJP campaigned heavily to appeal to broader castes, diluting the notion of "Jat-only" politics. This strategic shift allowed BJP to lead in 19 out of the 36 Jat-majority seats, gaining ground where the Congress expected a stronghold.³⁵ Besides, it was also successful to pull apart JnJP's Influence. Previously, the JJP, led by Dushyant Chautala, held sway over a section of Jat voters. However, BJP managed to not only to shift a portion of these voters to their side, but also undermined Congress's hold in Jat regions.³⁶

The main reason is the overconfidence of the Congress party leaders of Haryana. They thought the BJP ran the state for 10 years and there was anti-incumbency vote against them, ensuring their victory. In 2014, the BJP got 47 seats and in 2019 they dropped to 40 seats and

had to take outside help to form the government. So, the Congress was sure of the BJP's defeat.³⁷ Hooda was being accused of not accommodating other people and parties to ensure the Congress victory in Haryana. As per the critics he did not want anyone else to take credit for the victory in Haryana so he kept side-lining his party leaders and also ignore independent candidates who turned to be vote divisors and caused party defeat.³⁸

The Jat vote split was one of the most important reason responsible for the defeat of Congress. BJP's counter-polarization strategy, the Jat community, representing a significant voter bloc in Haryana, was seen as the core base for Congress under Jat leader Bhupinder Singh Hooda. Historically, Congress relied on the Jat vote for dominance in Haryana's politics, particularly with the Congress winning in 27 out of the approximately 36 Jat-dominated Lok Sabha constituencies. However, the BJP's strategy effectively countered this expectation.³⁹

Although the Congress aimed to consolidate Jat votes, the BJP capitalized on a counter-polarization effect. As the Congress leaned into Jat support, the BJP appealed to non-Jat communities and sections within the Jat community who felt disillusioned with Congress's promises.⁴⁰

Congress's Internal Struggles and Strategic Missteps while the BJP projected a unified front under newly appointed Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, the Congress camp was struggling with internal divisions. Key leaders with strong ambitions vied for influence, fragmenting the party's focus and weakening its strategic position.⁴¹ Congress's leadership conflicts discord was quite open, with Bhupinder Singh Hooda emerging as a prominent face but challenged by other leaders like Kumari Selja and Randeep Surjewala. This contest for influence often led to conflicting strategies and diluted the party's message.⁴² It's been pointed out that loyalty over winnability mattered in the candidate selection of Congress party. Hooda, aiming to strengthen his claim on the Chief Minister's position, allegedly gave tickets to his loyal candidates. This approach, while consolidating Hooda's faction within Congress, often prioritized personal loyalty over candidate strength, leaving Congress with weaker candidates in some constituencies.

Saini, positioned as BJP's CM candidate, provided stability and a clear choice for voters. As a recent appointee with fresh energy, he symbolized a shift that was appealing amidst the anti-incumbency sentiment. By smoothly transitioning Khattar to a union ministerial role, BJP strategically sidestepped anti-incumbency criticisms associated with his tenure. This move allowed the BJP to introduce a fresh face in

Saini while retaining Khattar's administrative experience. Saini in a short span of time represented as a man of masses which was lacking in Khattar.⁴³ Without any competing factions unlike Congress, the BJP presented a united front that emphasized continuity and stable governance. This cohesion contrasted sharply with Congress's divided leadership, appealing to voters looking for consistency. BJP's Ground-level strategy and development focus BJP's targeted campaign focused on delivering a clear narrative that resonated with key voter groups, especially around themes of development, stability, and unified leadership.⁴⁴

By scoring a hat-trick in Haryana BJP and PM Modi has signalled that he is still the political force to reckon with. The Haryana election results also caused a setback to the continued farmers agitation over the now repealed three farm laws. With the farmers making life and business inconvenient by permanently blocking key roads and highways, the largely agrarian state of Haryana gave a thumbs down to these agitators, who were at times proxies of Opposition parties with funding from Punjab and abroad. Fact is that the majority of cities on the GT Karnal Road from Ambala to Sonipat voted for the BJP candidates as Congress chief ministerial candidate B S Hooda had offered to open the now-closed Shambu and Jind borders for agitators to camp on the borders of Delhi.

With business establishments on G T Road taking a huge hit during the 2020-2021 farmers agitation, the voters ensured that Bhartiya Kisan Union leader lost his deposit and ensured that BJP government was repeated again. Another reason was that non-Jat voter did not want the Jats to flex muscles and dominate politics as has happened before the BJP came to power in 2014. In simply words, business out-voted muscle power and politics.

3.5 Party Politics: The implications of electoral verdict of Haryana Assembly 2024 are profound. The BJP's apparent success may signal a consolidation of power and a continuing trend of majoritarian politics. Conversely, the Congress's ability to capture a significant portion of the vote share suggests that the party remains a formidable challenger, despite its current struggles. In terms of vote shares both parties must reassess their strategies moving forward. The BJP must ensure that it delivers on its promises to retain its voter base, while the Congress must capitalize on its increased vote share to regroup and strategize for future contests.⁴⁵ If we talked about the implication on party politics of the state these elections again reaffirmed bi-party system in the state. The difference is that earlier the contender used to be one national party and one regional party with rural support base. The regional parties, however, failed to make a mark in this election. Though The INLD and

the BSP won two seats each and three seats were won by Independents.⁴⁶

4. Conclusion: The 2024 Haryana Assembly elections left the political landscape with intrigue, showcasing the ever-changing voter sentiment. This election has not only reaffirmed the resilience of the BJP but also highlighted the shifting allegiances and expectations among the electorate. The BJP's Comeback for third consecutive time was nothing short of remarkable. Despite predictions suggesting a Congress resurgence, BJP secured 48 seats, capturing a significant 39.10% of the vote share. This marks a notable increase from their 2019 election, when it secured 36.49%. Its strategic campaigning and ground-level mobilization appear to have paid off, effectively countering the Congress's earlier momentum.⁴⁷ This change in vote share reflects a broader sentiment among the electorate. It indicates a possible weariness with the Congress's governance at both the state and national levels, combined with a calculated embrace of the BJP's policies that resonate with the aspirations of the middle class and rural voters.⁴⁸ A combination of strategic missteps, internal rifts, vote-splitting and more, derailed the party from the path to victory. Though, it was a unique opportunity for the Congress to reclaim power after a decade of BJP rule. Yet, it failed to secure a majority, notwithstanding with a significant rise in vote shares. There

were certain instrumental reasons responsible for the defeat of the Congress, firstly, after the unanticipated success in the Lok Sabha election, where Congress won half of the 10 seats, after drawing a blank in the previous two national polls the party's confidence swelled, leading to complacency. With a palpable anti-incumbency sentiment against the BJP's 10-year rule, Congress assumed it would emerge victorious, especially with the diminishing influence of INLD and JnJP. This overconfidence caused the leadership, particularly under former CM Bhupinder Singh Hooda, to make arbitrary decisions on ticket distribution, sparking internal rebellions that weakened the party's chances in several key constituencies.⁴⁹ Thirdly, Congress's internal divisions Infighting and rifts significantly

hampered not only its campaign but also its electoral fortune in assembly polls. Hooda's dominance over decision-making specifically related to alienated other factions. Some insiders even speculated that Hooda encouraged independent candidates to prevent the Congress from winning a comfortable majority, keeping intact his influence over any decision the party could take about who would be the chief minister. This strategy backfired, pushing the Congress below the majority threshold, and leaving the party fractured and vulnerable.⁵⁰ The electoral ramifications of Haryana assembly polls are reflective specifically on party politics in terms of signaling the consolidation of power and a continuing trend of majoritarian politics while reaffirming bi-party system in the state.

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Received: 19 April, 2025; Accepted: 27 April, 2025. Available online: 30 April, 2025

Published by SAFE. (Society for Academic Facilitation and Extension)

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5. Endnotes and References

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