



**CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE**

**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

Institute of Political Studies

**Master's Thesis**

**Technocratic-Populism in India:**

How Modi & the BJP Maintain Their Vast Winning Coalition

**Author: Sabyasachi Saikia**

**Supervisor: Dr. Petra Guasti, MA, Ph.D.**

**Academic Year: 2021/2022**

## **Declaration of Authorship**

1. The author hereby declares that he compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.
2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.
3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

**Prague, 04/01/2022**

**Signature** 

## **Acknowledgments**

Thank you to Dr. Petra Guasti for her immeasurable help, guidance, and patience.

Thank you to Naba Kumar Saikia, Jayalaxmi Debi, and Chanakya Saikia, for the opportunity and privilege.

## **Abstract**

The politics of both technocracy and populism are viewed as hostile to representative democracy and pluralistic politics. The study of technocratic-populism in politics has proliferated in recent times, with researchers examining how both seemingly contradictory ideas combine to form a distinct political outlook or even a political logic. Furthermore, one has emerging literature examining the adverse impact of technocratic populism across various democracies. Applying Friedman's paradigm of *democratic technocracy*, and Ostiguy and Moffitt's performative-relational approach towards populism, this study explores technocratic-populism in Indian politics. The administration of Narendra Modi and the BJP has been widely studied and critiqued for their authoritarian, Hindu nationalist, and populist politics, with concerns over increasing religious polarization of the public and democratic backsliding. This study employs a demand-supply model to show the importance of technocratic-populist appeal in Modi and the BJP's broader political practice and discourse in impressing the voting public. With the use of survey data on the demand-side of politics, involving the examination of public opinions and attitudes, and the analysis of the political, discursive, and rhetorical practices of Narendra Modi (as the face of the BJP) in particular, this study shows that technocratic-populism plays a major role in the BJP's political discourse, even playing a complementary role to their traditional Hindu nationalist appeal.

## **Keywords**

**Technocratic-populism, political epistemology, naive technocratic worldview, democratic technocracy, overflowing signifier, plebian appeal, social 'other'**

## **Bibliographic note (for citation)**

Saikia, Sabyasachi (2022) *Technocratic-Populism in India: How Modi and the BJP Maintain Their Vast Winning Coalition*. 97 p. Master's thesis. Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Political Studies.

Supervisor Dr. Petra Guasti, MA, Ph.D.

## Master's Thesis Proposal

Institute of Political Studies, IEPS program  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
Charles University in Prague

Date: 23/04/2021



---

Author:	Sabyasachi Saikia	Supervisor:	Dr. Petra Guasti, PhD.
E-mail:	98898503@fsv.cuni.cz	E-mail:	petra.guasti@fsv.cuni.cz
Phone:	+420 778567559	Phone:	...
Specialization:	IEPS	Defense	February 2022
		Planned:	

---

### Proposed Topic:

**Technocratic Populism in India – How the BJP maintain their vast winning coalition**

**Registered in SIS: Yes/No**    **Date of registration: dd.mm.year** (in case of “No” give expected date)

### Topic characteristics / Research Question(s):

Populism has risen across the world in democracies like the USA, Greece, Italy, the Czech Republic, and India. Viewed as a ‘thin ideology’ (Stanley, 2008), populism allows other ideologies to be superimposed on it. Right-wing populism pits the nativist commonfolk ‘we’ against a pluralistic elite. Left-wing populism pits the working class ‘we’ against the exploitative bourgeoisie.

A new form of populism being studied is technocratic populism; technocracy being an approach to governance where technical expertise is prized over democratic representation, with emphasis on an ‘apolitical’ result based approach rather than one based on values. The binary of the left-right political spectrum is absent – populists are assumed to have basic competence in understanding policy problems, adhering to efficiency and results rather than ideology (Friedman, 2019).

Populism is viewed as both an ideology and a political strategy (Bustikova & Guasti, 2018). For the research, we will treat populism as a deliberate political strategy employed by political parties (Jansen, 2011) rather than an external sociopolitical phenomenon or an ideology. The focus will be on how technocratic populism manifests in the political strategy of India’s ruling party – the BJP. Conventional narratives of populism in India view it through the prism of right-wing Hindu nationalism (McDonnell & Cabrera, 2019; Onis & Kutley, 2020). My research will argue for technocratic rhetoric being equally important in maintaining the BJP’s diverse voting coalition, with the rhetoric of national progress, ‘expert’ governance, and efficacy.

Technocracy and populism both emerge from a critique of traditional party-based democracy (Caramani, 2017); their modern-day proliferation has been attributed to brewing discontent over party democracy (Bornschieer, 2017; Pal, 2019). India, however, sees a different manifestation of technocratic populism, with mainstream parties co-opting populist and technocratic stances. Indian politics is characterized by vote-bank politics, where political parties cater to distinct blocs based on community identities (Engineer, 1995; Breeding, 2011). The research will focus on how the BJP employs technocratic populist appeal to unify a diverse base, and leverage different vote-banks

against each other when policies conflict with the interests of a group within the larger coalition.

**Working hypotheses:**

Hypothesis 1: The BJP employs both a technocratic and a right-wing populist approach for a broader appeal – technocratic rhetoric is present in all their political campaigns.

Hypothesis 2: The potency of technocratic and right-wing populist appeal differs across electoral levels – the more localized the political arena, the weaker the appeal.

Hypothesis 3: The BJP criticizes opposing groups for resisting superior technical knowledge, employing a technocratic rebuttal; characterizing the rest of their coalition as the populist ‘we’ – whose wellbeing is compromised by the dissenting groups.

**Methodology:**

There will be a supply side qualitative analysis of speeches, campaigns and social media engagement by BJP leaders, through a technocratic populist lens. A demand side analysis of the votes and support the BJP gets – a quantitative analysis of voting patterns and opinion polls of citizens on major BJP government policies. The third component will focus on how vote-banks react to specific controversial policies. It will have both qualitative and quantitative elements – analyzing speeches, media and social media engagements from BJP politicians defending their policy initiatives whilst discrediting opposition; and also examining whether such controversies lead to any significant changes in their voter bloc composition or voter support. The research will examine three major policies – demonetization of 2016, the Citizenship Amendment Act, and the Indian Agricultural Acts.

Quantitative analysis will involve examining the composition of the BJP’s voting bloc for the 2014 and 2019 national elections, and selected state-assembly elections. I will rely on the database of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), the *India Today*-Axis poll surveys, and other similar databases that breakdown electorate votes composition based on caste, gender, religion, profession and other metrics

**Outline:**

1. Introduction: the global context of populism’s rise, and an overview of Indian politics in the last decade.
2. Populism, technocratic populism, populism in India; defining concepts and summarizing how Indian politics relates to populism and technocracy.
3. Theory – BJP’s strategic use of technocratic populism → hypotheses.
4. Case selection, data, and methods
5. Analysis –
  - i) supply side
  - ii) demand side
  - iii) policy side.
6. Confirming/rejecting hypotheses. Summary and discussion of findings.
7. Conclusions.
8. Bibliography.

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. State-of-the-Art</b>	
<b>1.1 Technocracy</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1.2 Populism</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1.3 Technocratic-Populism</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>1.4 Indian Politics – A Brief Overview</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>2. Theoretical Framework &amp; Methodology</b>	
<b>2.1 Technocracy, Democracy &amp; Populism</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>2.2 Demand, Supply &amp; Methodology</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>3. The Demand-Side Analysis</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>4. The Supply-Side Analysis</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>5. Conclusion &amp; Discussion</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>58</b>

## Introduction

The 2010s witnessed the emergence of populist governments and political movements across the globe. Democracies throughout the world faced a crisis of credibility, with people questioning the efficacy of the political system, frustrated by the apparent paralysis of democratic deliberation. In 2018, *The Atlantic* declared that four of the world's most populous democracies – the US, Brazil, Indonesia, and India – were governed by populist leaders (Mounk & Kyle, 2018). Today three out of the four are still are. In general, one has several other cases of populist movements all coming to the political forefront during the last decade; Brexit, Viktor Orban's populist and Eurosceptic nationalism in Hungary, are just two more examples. The ubiquity of such movements has raised serious concerns about the threat to pluralist representative democracy and fears of democratic backsliding (Roth, 2017; and Fisher, 2018) globally.

In recent times, research on a distinct kind of populism – technocratic-populism – has further accentuated such concerns (Caramani, 2017; Bickerton & Accetti, 2017; Bustikova & Guasti, 2019, 2020; and Bustikova & Babos, 2020). Technocracy is generally understood as a system where policymakers and leaders are chosen based on their technical expertise in a specific area. It presents itself as an apolitical approach to societal problem solving, based on rational and scientific reasoning rather than value-laden decision making. Technocratic populism, then, can be considered an “output-oriented populism that directly links voters to their leaders via expertise” (Bustikova & Guasti, 2020: 468). Despite technocracy favouring elitist specialized governance based on knowledge and expertise, and populism more focused on championing the plebian cause of the ‘people’ typically against an elite or a perceived appeased social group (like minorities), the two do come together to form a cohesive political appeal. The politics of Donald Trump was exemplary in that it possessed populist rhetoric positioning himself as a political outsider championing ordinary Americans, who would “drain the swamp” of entrenched special interests in Washington DC (Arnsdorf, Dawsey & Lippman, 2016), and also claimed competence and efficiency in governance through eschewing of ideological and partisan politics which other politicians were guilty of (Schmitt, 2016). Both technocracy and populism are seen as resulting in democratic backsliding (Bustikova & Guasti, 2020); both find themselves at odds with liberal representative democracy and pluralistic politics (Caramani, 2017; Bickerton & Accetti, 2017). People outside the in-group, whether that be outside the populist's definition of the ‘people’, or being labelled ignorant about policy issues by technocrats, have their democratic participation rights threatened and compromised under such



politics. Bickerton & Accetti (2021) argue that in contemporary democratic politics technopopulism (another term for technocratic-populism) has become the dominant operating logic for politicians and political parties.

Ever since the Bharatiya Janata Party (the BJP) and Narendra Modi came to power, India has seen a rise in populist support, religious polarization, and increased authoritarian tendencies. There appears to be an executive overreach at the expense of institutions like the judiciary and the media, leading to grave concerns about declining institutional autonomy and democratic backsliding (The Wire, 2021; Biswas, 2021). One has a rich body of literature analysing the right-wing Hindu nationalist appeal (or Hindutva) in the BJP's politics, along with the populist appeal of Modi (Varshney, Ayyangar & Swaminathan, 2021; Jaffrelot & Schoch, 2021, Sircar, 2020, McDonnell & Cabrera, 2019). Research has also focused on the strong presence of technocratic appeal evident in Modi's politics (Basu, 2018, Yerramsetti, 2019, Pal, 2019 and Sajjanhar, 2021). Typically, the study of Modi and the BJP's politics entails the juxtaposing of Hindu nationalist appeal with a populist appeal or studying their technocratic-populist discourse, while in terms of studying politics from the Indian public's perspective, the reliance is on electoral voting and survey data. This study will combine the examination of technocratic-populist politics from the perspective of the Indian public, and of Modi and the BJP (the ruling political force) in a demand-supply analytical framework of Indian politics. In doing so, it will chart out the logic of how technocratic-populism operates in the minds of the public, in terms of policymaking and governance, and subsequently how it operates in the political discourse and practices of Narendra Modi is appealing to the public.

Applying the paradigm of *democratic technocracy* (Friedman, 2019a and 2019b)<sup>1</sup>, this study will examine the attitudes, opinions, and the broader political epistemology of the Indian public through the use of survey data, providing insight on the demand-side of politics. Within the larger paradigm applied to the Indian democratic polity as a whole, the study will contextualize the populist political style of Narendra Modi, using the performative-relational approach (Ostiguy & Moffitt, 2021), examining the supply-side of politics in terms of the political practices and discourse of Modi and the BJP, and how they respond to the demand-side. In doing so, the logic of technocratic-populism within Indian politics will be examined. Drawing

---

<sup>1</sup> For the sake of convenience, references to Jeffrey Friedman's *Power Without Knowledge: A Critique of Technocracy* (2019) will be referred to in in-text citation as (2019a), and references to his *Populists as Technocrats* in-text will be referred to as (2019b).

upon the established electoral and political studies on Modi and the BJP and survey data on political attitudes of the Indian public, this study will prove the following hypotheses:

- I. *If the public prefers the technocratic issues over identity-partisan issues, authoritarian decision making, and recognizes Modi as the most capable leader in delivering promises, then it can be argued that they are participating under a democratic technocracy.*
- II. *If Modi's public relations contains a hyper-stylized and performative element, and his political discourse a plebian appeal/grammar, and the creation of a social 'other', then his political style can be classified as decidedly populist.*
- III. *If there is a consistent appeal to his administrative/problem-solving capacities, country's material development, and technological advancement, then there is a consistent technocratic appeal embedded in Modi's political discourse.*

The demand-supply analysis and the three aforementioned hypotheses will substantiate the study's larger thesis statement, that technocratic-populism plays an important and complementing the Hindu-nationalist politics of the BJP (and Narendra Modi) in appealing to the voting public, in face of the demand for technocratic and authoritarian decision-making. The study is organized as follows: the first chapter will examine the state of the art, or the existing literature, on the concepts of populism, technocracy, technocratic populism, and finally on the Indian politics (specifically, the scholarship on populism in India, along with the technocratic-populism of Modi and the BJP). The second chapter will involve elaboration on the theoretical framework, research objectives, and the methodology the study will use to examine technocratic populism in India. The third chapter will involve the analysis of the demand side of politics; here, the attitudes and preferences of the Indian voting public (their political epistemology) will be examined. The fourth chapter will involve the analysis of the supply side of politics; examining how a technocratic-populist appeal is employed by the BJP, specifically Modi as the leader and the face of the party, in meeting the public demands. The fifth chapter will involve the conclusion, and discussion of the limitations and implications of the findings, and the scope for future research.

## **1. State of the Art**

### 1.1 Technocracy

Technocracy is a concept of governance prizing result-oriented policymaking, based on 'scientific rationality, predicated on the idea of technical knowledge and expertise of

policymakers and leaders – leading to efficient, optimal results in solving societal/policy problems. There is a primacy given to solving social problems based on desirable outcomes, but not in fostering democratic consensus and rights of representation to solve problems. Technocratic rhetoric often positions itself as being apolitical, and therefore, capable of accomplishing tasks without any political logjam.

The general idea of rule by qualified leaders or experts has a long history. Plato's conception of the rule by philosopher kings, for example, can be viewed as a precursor to the idea of technocracy. Some early works advocating for governance based out of science and technical education included works of thinkers like Tommaso Campanella and Francis Bacon during the 17<sup>th</sup> century Age of Enlightenment. One of the major precursors to technocratic thought was Max Weber's concept of bureaucracy; for Weber, development of society involved the formation of instrumental rationality, steadily advancing towards a bureaucratic state with a rational-legal administration in policymaking, economics, law, and other areas (Gunnell, 1982: 393-395). Initially, the influence of science and technology in governance was seen as a positive development in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thinkers like John Galbraith and David Bell did not view technocracy as a danger to democracy. However, over time the dominant discourse on technocracy became defined by its threat to democratic participation, with thinkers like those of the Frankfurt School (Max Horkheimer, Jurgen Habermas, and Herbert Marcuse) critiquing instrumental rationality as a means of social control and domination (Centeno, 1993; 308).

For example, David Bell's *The End of Ideology* (1960) posited that the growth of a technocratic ideology superseded all previous grand 'human' ideologies, like Socialism, Liberalism, or Conservatism. Bell believed that rather than technocracy would incorporate existing systems of administration, rather than eclipsing them. On the other hand, in *One Dimensional Man* (1964), Marcuse argued that the prevalence of scientific and technological rationality led to the "logic of domination"; the base of social domination moved from personal dependence – like the relation between a serf and the landlord – to an "objective order of things" – like economic laws (147). The cascading effect of the domination positivist, rational thinking was leading to a one-dimensional society; an established society overseeing and validating all normal communication in line with what they deem socially useful, with values alien to said use being relegated to the realm of fictive communication (251).

In essence, one would have society, where the dominant mode of thought would crowd out all other modes as being invalid. Therefore, meaning-making and social control would be

monopolized by the section of society qualifying as “experts”. The technocratic thesis, then, stated that people have become cogs in the social machinery and objects of technical control (Feenberg, 1993: 94). Over time, technical delegations, by elites/experts, would increase to consolidate and legitimize “an expanding system of hierarchical control” (102). One can imagine increased automation of work and the loss of jobs for workers as such a process. Another explicit area of increased technocratic control is modern healthcare, with the expansion of hospitals with large administrative structures, medical boards for drugs clearance, and health insurance companies, the degree of separation between the patient and the physician, and the administrative obstacles to getting to the actual practice of healthcare have increased.

While there has not been any case of absolute totalitarian social control through technical expertise, academic scholarship has focused on the larger trend of the politicization of knowledge, and the growth of technocratic influence in countries (Nelkin, 1975; Fisher, 1991; and Gailmard & Patty, 2007). The term “technocracy” has attained a multiplicity of meaning, connotations, and implications as the literature and research on the concept grow. In general, neoliberal capitalist philosophy has slowly come to be equated with technocratic thought. The study of Latin American politics demonstrates the subtly changing implication of technocracy and its increased coupling with neoliberal capitalism. For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century most Latin American countries were embroiled in a system of leftist welfare-oriented populism, from the 1970s, and particularly the 1980s, one saw neoliberalism, equated with technocratic (specifically economic) expertise mushroom throughout the region (Conaghan, Malloy & Abugattas, 1990; Phillip, 1998; De La Torre, 2013).

In *Power Without Knowledge: A Critique of Technocracy* (2019a), Friedman develops a new theory regarding the relationship between technocracy and modern democracies. The political epistemology of the citizens being such (*naïve technocratic worldview*) that they assess a political candidate’s capabilities and will to solve societal/policy problems when democratically electing them to office. Friedman gives us a new paradigm providing a logical connection between technocracy and mass democratic politics in what he calls “democratic technocracy” (263-264). The principal claim of the theory is that citizens participating in mass democracies decide both the means and ends of public policy, through voting, thus engaging in the act of technocratic deliberation through democratic participation while choosing political candidates, policy programmes, and so on. This study will employ the paradigm of *democratic technocracy* in analysing the demand-side of politics in India – the political epistemology of citizens regarding public-policy issues, their solutions, and their assessment of the capabilities

of political candidates trying to solve them. The theoretic details of the paradigm of *democratic technocracy* will be elaborated upon in the forthcoming chapter on theory and methodology.

## 1.2 Populism

Populism as a political phenomenon, and its relation to democracy, has been studied extensively in political science, and there is a diverse range of approaches analysing it – each focusing on different aspects and features of the subject. Canovan (2004) discusses the methodological difficulties arising in studying populism, given the wide range of ideological/ideational variance amongst different populist movements and groups in different countries. While there may be a distinct similarity in the style and message – the confrontational politics of championing “ordinary people” against the establishment – generalization of the characteristics of populism remains difficult (242-243). As such one has a range of approaches for studying the phenomenon of populism.

The ideational approach focuses on the Manichaeian distinction between the “pure people” versus the “corrupt elite” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2018: 1670). There is a certain plasticity in the concept of the ‘people’, allowing it to be expanded or contracted to include different groups depending on the political conditions (Stanley, 2008: 107), therefore populism functions as a ‘thin ideology’. The ‘people’ can be the economic underclass, a particular religious or ethnic group, or they could just be whoever complies with the populist leader and the movement. The ideational approach examines how populism, as an ideology based around the Manichaeian distinction of good and evil, combines with other ideologies (say, right-wing nativist, or left-wing socialist, or ‘apolitical’ technocratic).

The political-strategic approach, as Weyland (2001) states, focuses on the “methods and instruments of winning power (12). This is a top-down approach that examines how the leader exercises power, through their principal power capacity, to sustain themselves politically; populism, as per Weyland, has an individual and personalistic leader exercising their power capability of numbers – or direct and un-institutionalized support from a large following – over any kind of special weight, like military backing/caudillismo (2001: 18). Jansen (2011) also similarly approaches populism as a strategic political practice, where populist mobilization is a political means for incumbents and challengers of different backgrounds, a flexible method of animating popular support (77).

The discursive approach is another dominant approach, focusing on how the populist leader relates to the public or the ‘people’ through discursive practices of speeches, texts, and

behaviour, all resonating a populist appeal. One of the seminal works of this particular tradition is Ernesto Laclau's *On Populist Reason* (2005); in it Laclau traces out the logic of populism and how it ties into the larger nature of politics and social-identity building, cutting across different political ideologies and circumstances. Populism is believed to be the logic of the political (47). The discursive approach borrows from the Laclauian practise of ascribing meaning to signifiers, while having a basic distinction between two antagonistic camps (like the "people" and the "establishment"), and focusing on the discursive practices (language used or meaning ascribed) that lends meaning to signifiers like "people" or the "establishment" (Anastasiou, 2019: 331-335). The concept of applying significance (meaning-making) to objects and the creation of social identities through the content of discourse is central to these approaches. Ostiguy (2017) devised a sociocultural approach, where the discourse emanating from the socio-cultural and socio-political practices of the populist leader is analysed, whether they practice "high" or "low" political appeal. With "low" political appeal being a plebian manner of relating to the public (77-83).

Literature on populism has also viewed it as a style of politics or highlighted the stylistic aspect of such politics (Knight, 1998; De La Torre, 2013; and Moffitt & Tormey, 2014). A political style can be defined as a repertoire of performances employed to foster political relations, each different style (populist, technocratic, authoritarian, etc.) having its own tropes and motifs. Style and content in this case can be collapsed onto each other at times, with style generating content at times and vice versa (Moffitt & Tormey, 387-388). As per Moffitt and Tormey, populism as a political style is attributed to three major components i) appeal to the 'people' against the other, ii) reference to a crisis, or breakdown or threat, and iii) 'bad manners', or disregard for the 'appropriate' or politically correct way of acting. The latter of the three components can be seen as related to the 'low' of the high-low political axis put forward by Ostiguy (2017).

The complexities of populism also lead to novel and hybridized approaches in studying the phenomenon. One such novel approach, devised by Ostiguy and Moffitt (2021), combs both their approaches – Ostiguy's sociocultural discursive approach to populism and Moffitt's approach to populism as a political style. Populism is treated as a political style comprising of both an exercise in cultivating a relationship with the 'people' and also a performance to the 'people'. In analysing the demand and supply of technocratic-populist politics (in the case study of India) this approach has several advantages. As an approach halfway between pure discursivism and objectivism (47-48), it enables us to observe both the populist discourse

emerging from rhetoric and practices beyond speeches, texts, and semiotics, and also examine behaviour, and the bodily presence of the populist leader. In the heavily mediatized contemporary politics, with the rise of the 24-hour news-cycle and social media, the relational element of politicians' interaction with the public can also be examined under this approach. The theoretical details of what constitutes a populist performance and a populist way of relating will be elaborated upon in the forthcoming chapter on theory and methodology.

### 1.3 Technocratic-Populism

Technocratic-populism, as a distinct form of populism, presents itself as transcending party politics, and left-wing right-wing ideological squabbles, appealing to “ordinary people” with a technocratic vision of politics and relieving them from their civic responsibilities by assuring them that public affairs are in capable hands (Bustikova & Guasti, 2019: 304). It is distinct from technocracy, in that efficiency and governance through technical expertise are nowhere the main concern. Rather, it is the theatrics of technocracy, the ideology of numbers, and expert knowledge to appeal to voters to bolster one's anti-elite and populist rhetoric (305).

Literature on technocratic-populism, theoretically, can be considered as focusing on two broad aspects. Firstly, the dynamics of the seemingly contradictory ideas of technocracy (as a conception of rule by elite experts possessing esoteric knowledge, and that of populism (as a seemingly eclectic idea championing the ‘people’ over an ‘elite’). Research in this field focuses on the common features of both technocratic and populist thought, their shared antipathy towards pluralistic form of representative democracy, and how they combine to make a distinct political outlook (Caramani, 2017; Bustikova & Guasti, 2019; Bickerton & Accetti, 2021). For example, Caramani (2017) states three common factors produce a similar disdain for the pluralistic form of representative democracy that traditional political parties operated under – a) Increased “electoralism”, with political parties neglecting representative and governing obligations, focusing instead on increasing electoral support and re-elections. b) Increasing complexity of “governance”; signalling a process of distancing decision-making from citizens (a populist concern), also signalling the increasing need for experts, not democratic representatives, to effectively execute functions (a technocrat concern). c) Increased “mediatization”, referring to the effects on the style of political communication with the ubiquity of mass media, but more importantly social media – opening up channels of direct and personal communication between politicians and people (58). Bickerton & Accetti (2021) posit that democracies (especially those in the West) have transitioned from ideological-based party

democracy to a new structural logic of democracy, technopopulism, since the 1990s. While the end of the Cold War was a massive step towards the decline of the conventional political axis of left-wing (socialist) and right-wing (capitalist) cleavage, and a period of moderation and aggregation, the Great Recession of 2007-2008, and the subsequent bailout and fallouts led the demands for representation for the people (a populist backlash) and also for a capacity (technocratic competence) in handling public affairs for the good of the people (122-126).

The second aspect examines how technocratic populism impacts the democratic system it comes into (Havlík, 2019; Guasti, 2020; and Bustikova & Babos, 2020). The scholarship illustrates that technocratic populism has an adverse impact on democracy with its rejection of pluralistic and representative democratic processes, and aversion to the mediation of political issues, technocratic populism is viewed as facilitating democratic backsliding and civic apathy. For example, studying the case of technocratic populism in the Czech Republic, Guasti (2020) finds that under the administration of Andrej Babis there was a decline in vertical accountability through the weakening of electoral competition; a weakening in horizontal accountability through the compromise of checks like the judiciary and parliament; and diagonal accountability through the weakening of the independent media and civic participation (476-480). The relation between democratic-backsliding and technocratic-populism once again goes back to the anti-pluralist stance found in both populist and technocratic ideologies.

The paradigm of *democratic technocracy* forwarded by Friedman also has major implications for the relationship between populism, democracy, and technocracy. In fact, as Eliot (2020) states in his critique of *Power Without Knowledge: A Critique of Technocracy* (Friedman, 2019a), one has a “familial relationship” between technocracy, democracy, and populism demonstrated in Friedman’s work. Technocracy rather than a system of governance, here, becomes a political ideology – one where power is legitimated based on the politician’s abilities to solve societal problems (89). Populism becomes a “logical outcome” of the ideology with the public’s political epistemology of *naïve technocratic worldview* (including the naïvely technocratic-realist belief that solutions to societal problems are self-evident) (93). Friedman posits a theory of how populism relates to technocracy in his *Populists as Technocrats* (2019b), arguing (epistemic) populism to be latent in the ambient culture of *democratic technocracy* (322-323), Friedman sketches out a model where democratic procedures and technocratic and populist inclinations appear to have an organic and logical relation, with citizens see solutions to societal/policy problems as self-evident and contrary positions on issues as suspect



hardening their political position and support towards their candidate against others. In using Friedman's paradigm of *democratic technocracy*, along with the Ostiguy and Moffitt's performative-relational approach to populism, this study will seek to see how the demand for technocratic action from the public is met by the supply of Modi and BJP's politics – which this study hypothesizes to be of technocratic-populist in nature.

#### 1.4 Indian Politics – A Brief Overview

One of the first decisive shifts towards populist politics came during her premiership. With the Indian economy in dire straits in the 1970s, the then-prime minister Indira Gandhi embarked on a left-wing populist campaign to retain her popularity. Her *Garibi Hatao* (get rid of poverty) campaign slogan was immensely popular among the masses, with various poverty alleviation programmes, and nationalization of banks and other industries, marking this socialist shift. Simultaneously, she also de-institutionalized her party, the Indian National Congress (INC, henceforth referred to as the Congress), doing away with much of its inner democratic procedures, leading it in a charismatic and personalistic manner (Jaffrelot & Tillin, 2017: 235). While populism in national politics waxes and wanes with the coming of leaders like Indira Gandhi or Narendra Modi, in regional politics it takes a unique form.

Regional populism in India pits the people of one state against the rest of the country; a move which started with Southern Indian states prizing their regional language, culture, and identity over the “alien Sanskritic Hindi-speaking culture of Northern India” (243). The appeal to ethnolinguistic and regional identity forms a crucial component for regional political parties. The late 1970s saw an accelerated growth of regional parties, and the Congress slowly lose its dominance (Pai, 1990: 400-405). Political parties, like the Southern state of Tamil Nadu's Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), incorporated populist welfare policies like reservations for middle and lower caste groups in government jobs and state education, and the introduction of free lunch meals for children in government schools. Such policies, along with their championing of the regional identity and culture, led to the formation of solid voting blocs buoyed by a populist adhesive (Subramanian, 2007: 85-87). Similar regional political parties emerged throughout the country in states like Andhra Pradesh, Assam, and Punjab, amongst others.

The 1980s saw the rise of the Sangh Parivar, an umbrella group of conservative Hindu organizations including the current ruling party – the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), its parent organization. The period also experienced a

rise in communal conflict between Hindus and Muslims, climaxing with a mob of Hindu nationalist supporters demolishing the 400-year-old Babri Masjid (Mosque) in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh. Amidst this increasingly polarized atmosphere, BJP found success in attracting Hindu votes; apart from increased communal tensions of the 1980s-1990s, a culmination of other favourable factors also helped the party achieve national prominence – the proliferation of new media in terms of television and print media, particularly Hindi language newspapers and periodicals, and the discontent of people with Congress Party’s long rule since independence and the various corruption scandals plaguing them (Rajagopal, 2001: 24-25). Since the 1990s BJP has come to be one of the two biggest national-level political parties along with the Congress party, with one or the other having formed a national government.

In 2014, Narendra Modi campaigned on the platform of development, touting a track record of economic growth and development in his home state of Gujarat – a platform that can be categorized as technocratic and populist. The former being appeal to his aforementioned track record (Mitra & Schottli, 2016; Palishkar & Suri, 2014; Pal, 2019; Sajjanhar, 2021) and the latter being both an anti-elitist and right-wing nativist Hindu nationalistic – Hindutva – appeal (Bajaj, 2017; McDonnell & Cabrera, 2019; Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2020; Varshney, Ayyangar & Swaminathan, 2021; and Jaffrelot & Schoch, 2021). Modi and the BJP combined their Hindutva social agenda with anti-elitist attacks against the INC, especially the Nehru-Gandhi family which sent around three leaders to the prime minister’s office – including Indira Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru (India’s first premier). Along with the INC, they also categorize academics, intellectuals, the English-language media, NGOs, and so on as the corrupt elite (McDonnell & Cabrera, 2019: 489-499). Christophe Jaffrelot’s *Modi’s India: Hindu Nationalism & the Rise of Ethnic Democracy* (2021) provides an in-depth illustration of the politics of Modi and the BJP and how their Hindu nationalism fosters “nationalist-populism” amongst the Indian electorate<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> In using a Hindu-nationalist/populist appeal, there is an observed tension between caste-based political parties and the BJP as a party campaigning in the name of all Hindus in general. Caste is a form of social stratification that is based on family lineage, it is distinct from class although both are intrinsically tied together, with people from higher castes disproportionately being represented in the more affluent classes. While it is predominantly a Hindu social system, it also exists amongst other religious groups like Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs. Caste-based political parties dominate regional state elections in many states; for example, the OBC Yadav-community led Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Dalit (SC) led Bahujan Samajwadi Party in the state of Uttar Pradesh court votes from their particular communities. Since Modi’s leadership of BJP, one has observed a consistent increase (and support) in their share of OBC, SC, and ST votes at the national level whereas previously the BJP was viewed as a primarily upper-caste/forward-caste (general category) political party (Verma, 2014; Jaffrelot, 2019).

Modi's victory in the 2014 election was widely attributed to his campaign on the themes of growth and development (Palishkar & Suri, 2014; and Mitra & Schottli, 2016), indicating the demand for effective and skillful governance in the public. However, in the 2019 elections, it was the BJP's welfare schemes for the poor that was highlighted rather than their track rate of economic growth, along with themes of national security and the populist appeal against the 'established elite' (Deshpande, Tillin & Kailash, 2019; and Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2020). Economic liberalization has led to a significant change in social relations and electoral expectations in India. Suri (2019) states that a "two-pronged attack" from the state and the market have led to a significant shift in social relations and electoral expectations; the lower strata of society benefitted from state policies of expansive education, employment, and welfare, while pro-market reforms have led to growing economic opportunities and prosperity (10-11). This has led to a predicament where the public has an appetite for both pro-market economic development policies and pro-welfare policies. As illustrated by the National Election Studies conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Society's (CSDS) Lokniti programme, for the national elections of 2014 and 2019, the most pressing issues for respondents appeared to be regarding themes of unemployment, price rise, economic development, and other such technical issues, over issues of identity politics. This was also the case in between election times as was illustrated by the report, *Politics and Society Between Elections* (2019), published by the joint effort of CSDS and Azim Premji University.

Amidst such a backdrop, one sees a concerted effort on the part of the BJP to redefine ideas of development, progress, and expertise (Kanungo, 2019; Bhatia, 2020 and Sajjanhar, 2021), while also increasing their control over, and dominance in, the media (Rai, 2019 and Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2020), constitutional authorities like the judiciary (Saxena, 2018; and Jaffrelot & Schoch, 2021) and the Election Commission of India (ECI) (Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2020). The literature of Indian politics has noted the encroachment of Hindutva ideology in the public sphere, a 'saffronization' of the public space (Anderson & Longkumer, 2018; Bhatia, 2020; and Jaffrelot & Schoch, 2021). Adopting the slogan of *Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikaas* – together with all, development for all – the BJP positions itself as both populist and a pro-development and growth (technocratic) party. Modi's tech- and media-savvy approach has also introduced a distinct flamboyant style of political campaigning in Indian politics; with a heavy emphasis on media spectacle and performance 'Brand Modi' (Mitra, 2021; Rai, 2019; Sen, 2016 and Kaur, 2015) is an important factor in the BJP's recent electoral and political dominance. Furthermore, Modi's proximity towards the use of technology and digital media has also been

studied with regards to how sets up a narrative of his technocratic credentials (Basu, 2018; Yerramsetti, 2019; Pal, 2019; Sud, 2020).

Another interesting finding is the divergence between populist attitudes and Hindu nationalist attitudes amongst the public. Varshney, Ayyangar & Swaminathan (2021) found no significant correlation between populist and Hindu nationalist attitudes amongst people. While the emergence of right-wing populism at the national level has been observed in the political rhetoric and discourse, it has not translated to the attitudes of the larger public (220). A similar incongruence was observed by Sardesai (2019) when studying voting patterns for the 2019 national election; while BJP did get a majority of the Hindu vote, no significant correlation was found between anti-minority sentiments and voting for BJP, with conservative anti-minority voters also voting for rival parties (12-13). Another major piece of evidence against any ironclad consolidation of the Hindus under the BJP is the divergence of votes between the national and state level. While the BJP under Modi impressively increased their number of parliamentary seats from 2014 to 2019, in state elections their electoral record has been mixed. Major states that were swept in the national elections were either heavily competitive like Maharashtra and Karnataka, or lost like in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. Aiyar & Sircar (2020) observed that despite centralization of power at the national level, electorally BJP performed significantly worse in 9 of the states they swept in the national elections of both 2014 and 2019, suggesting people's support for a split ticket with Modi in the national government and a more competitive regional political scene (214-215). Such findings leave open the scope of research, indicating further complexities in how Modi and the BJP manage to form a winning coalition in India's diverse democratic landscape.

This study seeks to add a few more pieces to the puzzle, by advocating for a technocratic-populist reading of Modi and the BJP's politics. One which may help explain the gaps in public behavior and the discourse set by politicians. Employing a demand and supply model of analysis, where the political epistemology of the public on the demand side is juxtaposed on the political style and discourse presented by politicians on the supply side, the appeal, and efficacy of technocratic populism in the case of study of India under the Modi government will be examined. The forthcoming chapter will discuss the theoretical framework and methodology of the study, including the reiteration and contextualization of the study's hypotheses, and how it builds up to the larger thesis statement.

## 2. Theoretical Framework & Methodology

### 2.1 Tectonics of Technocracy, Democracy & Populism

#### 2.1.1 Democratic Technocracy

Democratic politics can be viewed as an electoral battlefield, where politicians and parties compete to convince the public about the efficacy and merits of their ideas, plans, and policy proposals. Therefore, there is always an underlying technocratic appeal present in public policy and political discourse. The theory of *democratic technocracy* put forward by Friedman provides us with logical relation of technocratic thinking and rhetoric and democratic politics. In a way, this theory does with technocracy and democracy what Laclau's *On Populist Reason* (2005) does with populism as democracy.

Laclau's view of populism as an endeavour in the construction of an in-group as a 'people'; the construction of a 'people' being the *sine qua non* of democratic functioning implies that populism and democracy have a blood relation in politics (2005: 169). Similarly, Friedman's theory of *democratic technocracy* views democratic politics as a system where the voting public chooses both the means and ends of public policies (2019b: 327), choosing political candidates for office, accepting or rejecting legislation through various means of civic engagements. For Friedman, the voting public act like citizen-technocrats, acting as evaluators of technocratic means and ends. When politicians refer to "kitchen-table" issues, like ones about price rises, employment, healthcare, education policies, and so, according to Friedman they are involved in discussing run-off-the-mill technocratic issues (2019b: 328). This "ambient culture of democratic technocracy" fosters a climate where the voters themselves are treated as a kind of a meta-expert arbitrating between competing expertise claims made in policy debates by politicians (329). Assessing the technocratic characteristics and temperaments of politicians and policymakers, then, becomes the *sine qua non* of citizens in democracies.

The political epistemology of the citizens in a *democratic technocracy* is assumed to be premised on naïve technocratic realism – where one's own technocratic opinion on policy debates and social problems are viewed to be self-evidently true, while contrary opinions are viewed as a result of misinterpretation of empirical/technocratic information (Friedman, 2019a: 42). In other words, solutions to societal/policy problems appear self-evident, and opposing positions are either due to misinterpretation, misinformation, or nefarious intentions. This naïve technocratic realism itself leads to the development of the broader *naïve technocratic*

*worldview* of politics, policymaking, and governance in the minds of citizens. A worldview consisting of a) a bias for *technocratic action* – defined as action taken to solve societal problems whose solutions (always) become self-evident upon deliberation and focus on the problems (290); b) *technocratic voluntarism* – a belief that a strong will is necessary for a leader to achieve socioeconomic and political ends (291); and c) a simple ontological understanding of societal/policy problems, such that achievement of solutions is seen as directly relating to the intentions of the policymaker to solve them – the use of *intention-heuristics*<sup>3</sup>. A politician with perceived genuine *technocratic voluntarism*, public belief, and appearance of intent to solve societal/policy problems, is viewed through a *good-intention heuristic*, with the expectation of *technocratic action*. However, if social problems persist, *bad-intention heuristics* are either applied to the political actor for not wanting to or not persevering in solving the problem (292). These three elements comprise the larger *naïve technocratic worldview* (political epistemology) on the part of the voting public, within Friedman’s paradigm of *democratic technocracy*.

The political epistemology of the public embedded in the culture of *democratic technocracies* is argued to be “the ideational source for populist pathologies” (2019b: 322). What Friedman terms as “epistemic populism” emerges from this ambient culture of technocratic assessment and preoccupation of the public in democracies (329). Being intellectually charitable to the populist psyche, Friedman counters the notion of populism and technocracy being fundamentally at odds, and of populists rejecting expert technical knowledge. Rather, epistemic populism entails supporters believing that they can discern truth and falsehood of knowledge claims made by experts through their critical thinking; solutions to complex policy problems are seen as self-evident, and the claims of politicians/policymakers can be scrutinized by voters by exercising their “common sense” (331). A politician thus leverages the public’s bias for *technocratic action* and use of *intention-heuristics* in judging candidate suitability to demonstrate their *technocratic voluntarism* and technocratic credentials, in the hopes that they are viewed through a *good-intention heuristic* and their opponents through the bad.

---

<sup>3</sup> Heuristics in politics by voters are used as short-hand proxies to make up for missing information about a (usually political/policy) topic and are considered “epistemically adequate” for voting (Friedman, 2019a: 272). For a more detailed look at how heuristics are used in general by citizens in making political decisions like who to vote for, see Jeffery Friedman’s *Knowledge Without Power: A Critique of Technocracy* (2019), chapter 6 “Public Ignorance & Democratic Technocracy” (pp. 263-316).

The political epistemology of citizens and their worldview is of crucial importance in Friedman's theory of *democratic technocracy*; how they view the complexities of societal/policy problems, and their expectations from elected representatives. Once more, referring to Elliot's critique on Friedman's work, the political epistemology of citizens formulated in the theory of *democratic technocracy* provides a "connective tissue" to explain the familial relation between technocracy, democracy, and populism (2020: 88). Technocratic-populism can be defined as the strategical use of technocratic appeal and weaponization of numbers, combining ideology of expertise (and ability) with a populist appeal (Bustikova & Guasti, 2019: 304). Approaching the case study of Indian politics through the paradigm of *democratic technocracy* allows for consideration of how politicians deliberately signal their ideological commitment to technocratic progress, and how the public engages with such claims. In addition, given the "familial relation" between democracy, technocracy, and populism, the technocratic-populist appeal of Modi and the BJP can be examined in the context of how they convince the public of their technocratic credentials and how their populist rhetoric helps form a 'people' they obtain their electoral mandate from. Therefore, the paradigm of *democratic technocracy* allows us to consider how modern democratic politics are contested, in terms of campaign rhetoric, policy proposals, and even policies all signalling to voters the technocratic capabilities of policymakers, as a matter of supply for the demand of technocratically capable governance as per the citizens' political epistemology.

### 2.1.2 The Performative-Relational Approach

How Modi and BJP present themselves and their politics to the public, and the kinds of political appeal they employ will be examined in the supply side section. This study aims to examine the technocratic-populist appeal in the supply of their political practices, discourse, and policies. Given that the last two national elections were contested with Narendra Modi under the limelight, there will be a specific focus on the technocratic-populist appeal in his political style, rhetoric, and practice, but also how it feeds into the larger political discourse of the BJP.

To analyse the supply side politics, this study will employ the performative-relational approach as put forward by Ostiguy and Moffitt (2021); an approach stated to be existing halfway between pure discursivism and objectivism (47-48). Here, populism is examined at the level of discursive practices (rhetoric and speech), plus the embodied dimension of style and

presentation to the crowd. Ostiguy's conception of populism as "flaunting of the low"<sup>4</sup> and Moffitt's populism as a political style<sup>5</sup> hybridize to focus not on the forms of representation but the mechanics of it, emphasizing the performers (politicians) the audiences, the stages, and the mise-en-scène. In practice, it constitutes of examining mediated enactments, televised performances, rallies, speeches, dress-sense, and the use of vocabulary and vernacular. This performative spin on populism conceptualizes political communication (the relational aspect) as a two-way street, where populist leaders make claims on behalf of the 'people', and the 'people' either accept, reject or modify said claims (51-52). Political style, here, is not a "faddish" or superficial sheen put on ones' political performance, but rather a deliberate method of communication emblematic of a certain sociocultural identity and societal cleavages (63).

The performative-relational approach bridges the gap with more discourse-oriented works, borrows the concept. Ostiguy and Moffitt flip the concept of Laclau's "empty signifier"<sup>6</sup> on its head presenting us with the "overflowing signifier". While Laclau maintained that the populist leader, as an "empty signifier" functioned as a blank slate onto which the 'people' invest their meanings and desires, Ostiguy and Moffitt view the concrete particularities of the leader – their mediated identity, performances, and bodily presence – as linked to the diverse interpretations the 'people' can have of them (53-54). For example, Modi can stand for a "Hindutva icon", "a technocratic go-getter", or "a man of the people with humble roots" as both an empty and overflowing signifies; however, it is only under the latter Modi's words and actions are ascribed intention. The populist leader as an 'overflowing signifier', then enacts a populist performance in relating to the public through their populist style of presentation by appealing to the 'people', using 'plebian appeal/grammar', or vocabulary of the masses, and antagonism against a social 'other' (63-64). In other words, the performative-relational approach, examining the populist leader's style of political performance and public relation, focuses on the *plebian appeal* and the creation of an antagonistic *social other* constituting of said style.

---

<sup>4</sup> Ostiguy developed the discursive sociocultural analytical approach on populism, with a "high-low" political axis, referring to a high-brow or low-brow manner of socio-culturally relating to people, and in the political culture of policymaking; Ostiguy states populism to involve a low-brow manner in both, or what he calls the "flaunting of the low" (Ostiguy, 2017: 73-102).

<sup>5</sup> Moffitt conceived of populism as a distinct political style involving three key elements – i) an appeal to the 'people', ii) reference to a crisis or a threat, iii) "bad" manners, similar to Ostiguy's "flaunting of the low" (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014: 390-392).

<sup>6</sup> Laclau bases his approach on three categories – discourse (how it shapes social identities), the empty-signifier and hegemony (a hegemonic identity built through projections of the people on a blank screen), and rhetoric (how it is used for the political construction of the 'people') (2001: 68-72).



What makes the ‘people’ identify with that particular political leader? How is it that Modi bested others in the field to take on the role of the populist leader? Applying the performative-relational lens allows us to examine these questions. Furthermore, Ostiguy and Moffitt give two compelling reasons as to why this lens is of particular relevance in contemporary politics. The first is a critical shift in the landscape of the media with the growth of the 24-hour news cycle, mediatization, and increased partisanship and polarization in both the media and the audience, leading to the intensifying of “overflowing” “abundant” nature of meanings of the leader; the second being the relational aspect of populism being accentuated by the internet and social media, allowing leaders to have more direct contact with the public (65-66). The media, including the internet and social media, is the primary vehicle of political information and politics in general in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and it has a tangible and significant impact on how populists present themselves.

This approach to populism complements the paradigm of *democratic technocracy* well, as technocracy is treated as an ideology, in the sense that the voting public expects technocratically competent policymakers, and political candidates have to articulate, perform and convince voters of their credentials and competence. In this sense, on the supply-side analysis, while examining the particular populist style, practice, and discourse of Narendra Modi (the political candidate, in contrast to his rivals), the study can also examine the technocratic appeal embedded in it. Circling back to the paradigm of *democratic technocracy* employed in the demand-side analysis, technocratic-populism and the fostering of technocratic nationalism are both viewed by Friedman as part and parcel of politics in mass democracies. Technocratic-populism involves politicians appealing to the public by positioning themselves as strong authoritative leaders willing to go above and beyond, bend and break the rules, to serve the public interest, and solve societal problems (2019b: 350). Technocratic nationalism involves the use of nationalism, or rhetoric/discourse surrounding the national interest, as a heuristic to appeal to the public (357-366). One finds a certain consistency in how populism is treated in the paradigm of *democratic technocracy* and the performative-relational approach, with both treating populism as a deliberate political practice, one used to build a coalition of people to come to power.

## 2.2 Demand, Supply, and Methodology

### 2.2.1 Demand Side

To examine whether the case of Indian politics fits in the paradigm of *democratic technocracy*, one will have to gauge whether the public's political epistemology consists of a naïve technocratic worldview, with a bias for *technocratic action* and *technocratic voluntarism*, and use of *intention-heuristics* (Friedman, 2019a: 289-295). To understand the importance of technocratic appeal within the larger populist (and ethnonationalist) politics of Modi and the BJP, first, this study will examine the public's attitudes and preferences over the kind of public policy issues they are concerned and think require prioritizing, on whether a strong authority-based or more democratic based policymaking is preferred, and which politicians/leaders are viewed as most capable.

In highlighting the importance of technocratic-populist appeal, on the demand side (side of the voting public), this study will use survey data that best approximates to illustrate a *naïve technocratic worldview* on the part of the public. Due to the lack of a survey designed around Friedman's theory with regards to the Indian context, this study will rely upon existing survey data – the National Election Studies (NES) for 2014 and 2019, conducted by the Lokniti programme under the Centre for the Study of Developing Studies (CSDS), surveys gathering data from all 28 states and 8 union territories in India. The results will also be further compared with additional literature on attitudes and preferences of the Indian voting public. In doing so, when checking for the public attitude – a) prioritizing of technocratic-issues over political-partisanship/identity issues will be an approximation to check for a bias for *technocratic action* in the public; b) the preference for strong (authoritarian) rule over democratic decision-making as an approximation for their affinity towards a leader with *technocratic voluntarism*; and c) which leader/politician is perceived as the most technocratically capable – comparing Modi's popularity with other prominent politicians, to approximate to their use of *intention-heuristics* in assessing candidates. In doing so, one will be examining the kind of political epistemology the Indian public may have, and whether it tends towards a *naïve technocratic worldview*.

The concept of technocracy, as discussed in the previous chapter, has evolved with time, and has a multiplicity of implications<sup>7</sup>. To empirically verify what constitutes technocratic-issues, on the demand-side of politics when citizens are assessing politicians' capabilities, one will have to adhere to how technocracy is treated in Friedman's work. Specifically, the neoliberal-capitalist and technological implications (and characteristics) of technocracy are expunged to make way for a focus on the solving of societal/policy problems and how it relates to

---

<sup>7</sup> Refer back to chapter I, on the "State of the Art" section of technocracy, pp. 4-6.

governance from the perspective of the voting public. Therefore, in the demand-side analysis technocracy is treated as an ideology of solving societal/policy problems while considering society as an apolitical homogenous unit. Technocratic-issues are defined as the *societal/policy problems framed as neutral to the socio-cultural/socio-political stratification of society, rather problems characterised as affecting the society/country as a homogenous whole*. They are distinct from identity-based and political-partisan-based issues (henceforth, identity-partisan issues), ones concerning themselves with *the politics of power and resource distribution based on socio-cultural or socio-political differentiation of groups (within a democratic framework)*.

To examine the political epistemology of the public, comparing their concerns regarding technocratic-issues versus partisan-identity issues, one will have to operationalize which societal/policy issues in CSDS's NES 2014 and 2019 surveys will qualify as technocratic or partisan-identity. Therefore, what qualifies as technocratic issues and what as partisan-identity will have to be operationally defined as per the standard (NES survey) question "What will be the most important issue for you while voting in the coming Lok Sabha (national) elections?" (Q. 12| NES, 2019: 17). Answer options regarding governance, economics, infrastructure, and welfare will be categorized as "technocratic-issues" and answer options regarding caste/religious (or any) identity, communalism, voting incumbent/opposition party, or candidate will be categorized as "partisan-identity" issues. Furthermore, options regarding terrorism will also be put under the latter category due to their highly politicized nature.

Based on the aforementioned questions, responses will fall under the following categories:

Technocratic-issues: "economy", "jobs", "skill training", "industrialization", "price rise", "economic inequality", "wages" and "pensions", "poverty", "hunger", "GST", "demonetization", "development", "delivery of services", "conditions of roads/highways", "transport services, "electricity-related problems", "government performance", "agricultural issues", "corruption", "welfare and subsidies", "women's rights and safety", and "environmental issues".

Identity-partisan issues: "vote for Modi/BJP", "vote for Rahul Gandhi/Congress leader", "vote against Modi/BJP", "vote against Rahul Gandhi/Congress", "vote in favour-of/against any other party/leader", "vote for/ against a coalition government", "vote for a particular candidate", "religious identity/protection of my religion", "caste identity/protection of my caste", "regional/state/linguistic identity", "Hindutva", "cow protection/slaughter issues", "casteism", "communalism", "appeasement of Muslims", "neglect of Muslims", "Ayodhya issue/Ram Mandir-Babri Masjid", "SC-ST Act issue", "Pakistan related issues", "terrorism", "Naxalism/Maoism (left-wing terrorism)", "reservation", and "Article 370/Kashmir issue".

Should the quantitative analysis, a simple statistical comparison, demonstrate that citizens do prefer technocratic-issues over identity-partisan issues – approximating for a bias for *technocratic action*; demonstrate a preference for strong (authoritarian) decision-making over democratic forms – approximating for *technocratic voluntarism*; and consistently choose Modi as the leader best fit for governing – approximating for the use of *good-intention heuristic*, one will have demonstrated the presence of a *naïve technocratic* worldview in the political epistemology of citizens implying the Indian politics can be viewed as operating under the paradigm of *democratic technocracy*. In doing so, this study will test its first hypothesis –

- I. *If the public prefers the technocratic issues over identity-partisan issues, authoritarian decision making, and recognizes Modi as the most capable leader in delivering promises, then it can be argued that they are participating under a democratic technocracy.*

Approaching the Indian democratic system using the paradigm of *democratic technocracy* then allows us to contextualize the technocratic-populist appeal of Modi and the BJP from the supply of politics. The principal aim of the supply-side strategy being that of meeting the demand for technocratic action and leadership based on the public’s political epistemology.

### 2.2.2: Supply Side

To examine the technocratic-populist politics of Narendra Modi and the BJP, this study will analyse the political discourse emerging from both their political practices – like policies, public outreach/relations strategies, and electoral campaigning – and their political rhetoric – specifically Modi’s, given his leadership status within the party and the country. In studying this “supply” of politics, we will apply the performative-relational approach formulated by Ostiguy and Moffitt (2021). The supply side analysis will examine how Modi and the BJP compete in a democratic system within Friedman’s *democratic technocracy* paradigm, and how they convince the public of their technocratic credentials and employ a populist style of politics while doing so. The primary goal is to verify whether they are meeting the public demand for technocratic governance – solving societal problems – in their public outreach, through the technocratic-populist appeal hypothesized to be emanating from their political discourse.

Political style can be defined as the aesthetic, discursive, and performative practice of political outreach to people. A populist political style can be defined as the aesthetics and performance of *plebian appeal* and the creation of a *social other*. The term *plebian appeal* is defined as the general use of language, rhetoric, tropes, and behavior deemed as ‘low-brow’ – colorful and

colloquial language, personal attacks against rivals. The principal defining feature of the appeal is that it relates to the masses, distinguishing them from the ruling socioeconomic/socio-political elite. While the formation of the identity of the ‘people’ contains this non-elitist element; the antagonistic *social other* does not necessarily have to be an elite, it can also be targeted towards ethnic, religious, or sexual/gender minorities, or immigrants, and so on (Ostiguy & Moffitt, 2021: 64). Applying these definitions for the *plebian appeal* and creation of the (antagonistic) *social other*, how Modi relates to the public will be examined through the mise-en-scene and deliberate political performance of his public outreach, to verify his populist political style. The supply-side analysis will seek to prove two specific hypotheses, the first being:

- II. *If Modi’s public relations contains a hyper-stylized and performative element, and his political discourse a plebian appeal and the creation of a social ‘Other’, then his political style can be classified as decidedly populist.*

Examining political discourse through the performance of his politics and the manner of his relating to the public, we will first verify the basic fact that Modi’s politics is indeed populist in style. To do so, we test whether his politics and rhetoric fulfil the criteria of populist politics as per Ostiguy and Moffitt’s performative-relational lens – the use of *plebian appeal* and the creation of the *social other*. After which, we will seek to locate and verify the technocratic appeal embedded in his political discourse assuring the public that their demands of capable technocratic leadership.

There is a general affinity between neoliberalism/market capitalism and technocracy (Centeno, 1993: 311). Technocracy has an innate relationship with modernity, ‘scientific’/rational thinking, and technological progress was briefly discussed in the previous chapter. Gunnell (1982) described the relationship between technology and politics as having three distinct, but related dimensions. First, in situations where political decisions rely on specialized knowledge, political power, and technical decision-making power gravitates towards the technological elite. Second, as technology becomes more autonomous, politics becomes a function of systemic structural determinants, over which it has little control. Lastly, technology and science can become a new legitimating ideology, insidiously propping up certain forms of social domination (397). One witnesses the consistent coupling of technocracy with neoliberalism in the case of Latin American studies (Conaghan, Malloy & Abugattas, 1990; Phillip, 1998; De La Torre, 2013; and Barrenechea and Dargent, 2020). Furthermore, such a coupling is also

evident when technocracy is discussed in Indian politics concerning Modi's politics (Basu, 2018; Yerramsetti, 2019; Pal, 2019). Therefore, the meaning and implications of technocracy broaden again to not only incorporate the ideology of solving societal/policy problems considering society as an apolitical homogenous unit but also consider its special affinity for neoliberal and technological action.

The final hypothesis follows –

- III. *If there is a consistent appeal to his administrative/problem-solving capacities, country's economic development, and technological advancement, then there is a consistent technocratic appeal embedded in Modi's political discourse.*

In locating technocratic appeal within Modi's larger populist political style and discourse, this study will verify that the demand for a technocratically capable leader by the public is being answered by Narendra Modi's politics both practically and performatively, within the larger paradigm of a democratic technocracy. This section of the study will examine the 'Gujarat Model' of development touted by Modi, the control over the media, and media narratives by Modi, the prolific use of social media, and the rhetoric and practice of digitizing and information-technology (IT) development in the BJP's politics. Concrete political practices like these, help control the narrative around Modi and the BJP, and also help them signal their intent as a political force that prizes both the interest of the 'people' and the technocratic development/progress of the country – in other words, helps them signal a technocratic-populist intent, for the public to use as an intention-heuristic.

Treating Modi as a political leader who functions as an "overflowing signifier" allows us to understand the multidimensionality of his political discourse, one that involves a range of different appeals to the public, be it populist, technocratic, nationalist, or religious/communal. Applying the Laclauian perspective of populism being the logic of (democratic) politics in the creation of popular identities, something that the relational, performative approach borrows from (Ostiguy & Moffitt, 2021: 53-57), any politician competing electorally will be endeavouring to present themselves as an overflowing signifier for the people, ideally in a positive way. Their electoral success can be attributed in part to how much 'significance' they assume for how big a coalition of people. Given Modi's popularity, one can safely assume that he does carry significance across the country. Treating him as an overflowing-signifier then allows us to treat his politics beyond the lens of a singular appeal (like nationalism or populism), opening up his politics for a more multifaceted analysis. In addition, it also allows us to test for the show of technocratic volunteerism and intent for the public to use as intention-

heuristic, the latter two elements of the naïve technocratic worldview (Friedman, 2019a: 289-295), from the supply side of politics. The first element, a bias for technocratic action, cannot be tested from the supply side, as that appears to be an exclusively demand-side temperament of the public to which politicians and parties have to respond.

### Thesis Statement – Technocratic Appeal’s Complementarity to Ethnonationalism & Populism

The broader aim of this study is to demonstrate the importance of technocratic appeal in Modi and the BJP’s political discourse, one that also includes a populist, and the oft-discussed ethnonationalist (Hindu nationalist) appeal. Employing Friedman’s paradigm of *democratic technocracy*, this study situates politics in a demand-supply dynamic to explain how the politics being preached and practiced caters to the attitudes and preferences of the voting public.

This study will analyse the supply-side by examining the discourse emerging from the electoral campaigns of Modi and the BJP, and the non-electoral campaigns, to demonstrate that technocratic-populist appeal exists all across their larger political appeal. On the examination of their electoral politics, the relational, performative lens will be applied to check how Modi as an ‘overflowing signifier’ conveys technocratic-populist rhetoric along with the rhetoric of welfare-populism, ethnonationalism, and so on. In proving that there is a demand for technocratic politics from the Indian public, and Narendra Modi and the BJP consistently employ technocratic populism in performing politics and relating to the public, this study aims to prove the broader thesis statement – a technocratic-populist appeal is an important part of Modi and the BJP’s populist politics and complements their Hindu nationalist ideology in appealing to the voting public, in the face of public demand for technocratic governance.

### **3. The Demand-Side Analysis**

On the demand-side of democratic politics, the attitudes and preferences of the public regarding socioeconomic, socio-political, and public policy issues are of primary concern, for it will provide us with an understanding of how the public, on aggregate, approaches democratic political participation and their expectations from their elected representatives. Examining survey data from the pre-election (pre-poll) and post-election (post-poll) surveys conducted around the national elections of 2014 and 2019 by The Centre for Studies of Developing Societies (CSDS) as part of their National Election Studies (NES) under the Lokniti programme; this section will examine if the Indian public’s overall concern for technocratic-issues outweighs identity-partisan issues – checking whether there is a bias for *technocratic-action*. Examine whether a large segment of the public also prefers authoritarian decision-

making over democratic decision-making – illustrating a bias for *technocratic-voluntarism*<sup>8</sup>. And the third key point of examination, the public’s opinion regarding Modi’s capability for technocratic action compared to his rivals – illustrating the *good-intention-heuristic* cultivated by Modi and the BJP with their supporters<sup>9</sup>.

3.1.1: Bias for *technocratic-action*; comparing public attitude over which type of policy issues are most pressing:

For this section, we examined responses to the standard question: “Which is the most important issue for you while voting?” (Post-election poll survey, 2019: 11-14|Q. 7f). Categorizing the issues into technocratic and identity-partisan issues as per the definitions of the previous chapter.

Preference of Technocratic-Issues vs. Identity-Partisan Issues (Post-electoral Poll)

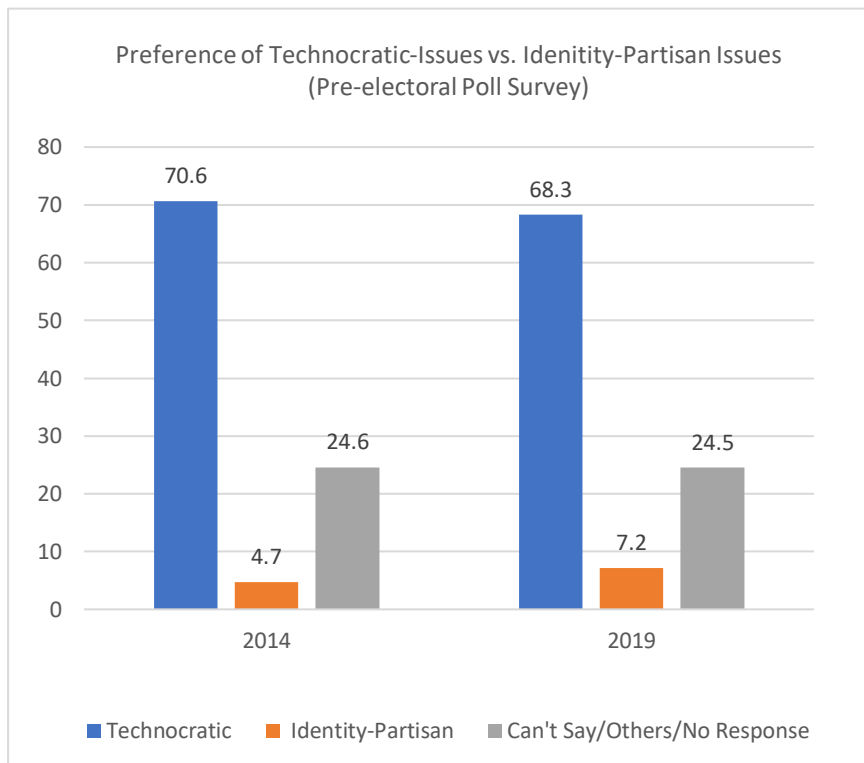


Figure 3.1 (Source: CSDS, Lokniti, National Election Studies, Pre-election survey 2014: 8-10| n = 20951)

(Source: CSDS, Lokniti, National Election Studies, Pre-election survey 2019: 17-21| n = 10010)

<sup>8</sup> The assumption that a strong-will is necessary for achieving sociotropic change. This mind-set is one of the elements that make up the *naïve technocratic worldview* in the public minds (Friedman, 2019: 291).

<sup>9</sup> Another element of the *naïve technocratic worldview*; in a competitive political arena the politician as a point of leverage to fix problems – they portray their intentions as good and their rivals’ as bad (Friedman, 2019a: 292).



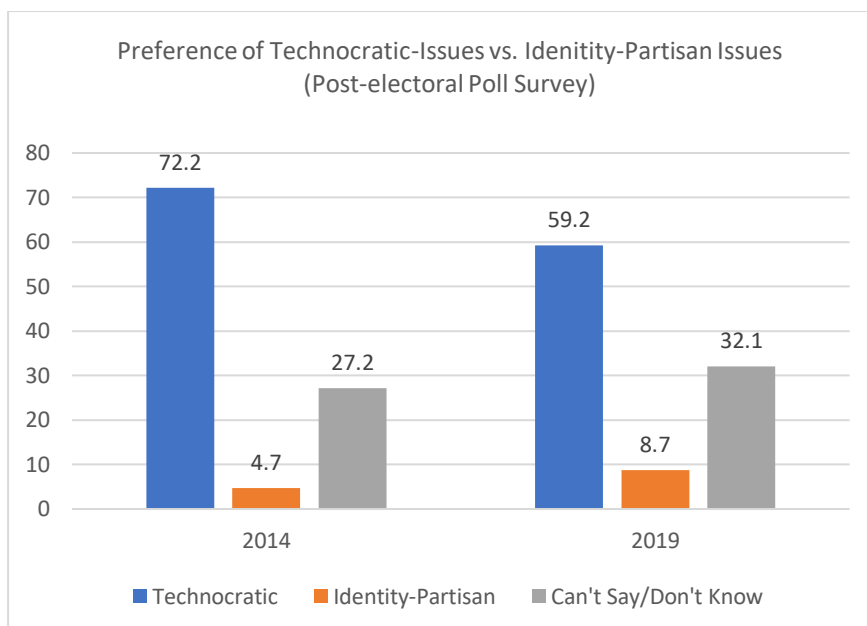


Figure 3.2 (Source: CSDS, Lokniti, National Election Studies, Post-election survey 2014: 5-6| n = 22299)

(Source: CSDS, Lokniti, National Election Studies, Post-election survey 2019: 11-14| n = 22381)

Both the pre-election and post-election surveys, for 2014 and 2019, show issues categorized as technocratic dominate as the primary motivation for respondents when it comes to basing their voting choices. Figure 3.1 (pre-electoral surveys) shows 70.6% of respondents expressing technocratic-issues to be their primary concern while voting in 2014, and 68.3% in 2019. Figure 3.2 (post-electoral surveys) shows it to be 72.2% in 2014 and 59.2% in 2019. To take a closer look at the survey responses, one can examine the trend on individual answer options in the survey over the years. For an example of people's preferences in the survey, if one looks at the option of 'development' as an issue of concern in the poll surveys, one will see that at 10.9% in the 2014 post-election survey (2014: 5) and 16.6% in the 2019 survey (2019: 12), it has remained in the top tier of issues. On the other hand, a combination of the issues identified as identity-partisan – Maoism (left-wing terrorism), terrorism, secularism/communalism, and reservation (positive discrimination for disadvantaged socioeconomic groups) – cumulatively accounted for only 0.9% in the 2014 post-election survey (2014: 6) and 0.6% in the 2019 post-election survey (2019: 13-14).

The Azim Premji University-CSDS' *Politics & Society Between Elections* report, demonstrates a similar pattern of people prizing technocratic concerns especially in matters of politics, administration, and governance. Across all 12 states surveyed, researchers found that issues of unemployment, price rise, development, growth and poverty, law, governance, and corruption, amongst others. Social issues, social infrastructure, and agricultural issues were found to be the

least pressing issues in their respective order (2019: 153-154). It should be noted that the issues that were found to be most pressing were the same ones as the survey data for both 2014 and 2019 showed. One can also observe the temporal and factorial sensitivity of public opinion; the report contrasted with the 2014 post-electoral survey showed that the previously rated issue of price rise dropped from 19% to 11% in 2019 before election season, while unemployment rose 7.5% to 19%. Corruption as an issue declined as a concern, while other choices like development, growth and poverty, physical infrastructure, social issues, and infrastructure were rated higher off-election season in 2019 (156).

3.1.2: Bias for *technocratic-voluntarism*; comparing public attitudes on type of decision making, authoritarian versus democratic:

Examining public opinion on democracy and policymaking through four multiple-choice questions in the 2019 post-election survey

We check for the following opinions in figure 3.3:

- a) “The country should be governed by a strong leader who does not have to worry about winning elections”.
- b) “In a democracy, the will of the majority community should prevail”.

(Post-election poll survey, 2019: 48-49|Q. A4)

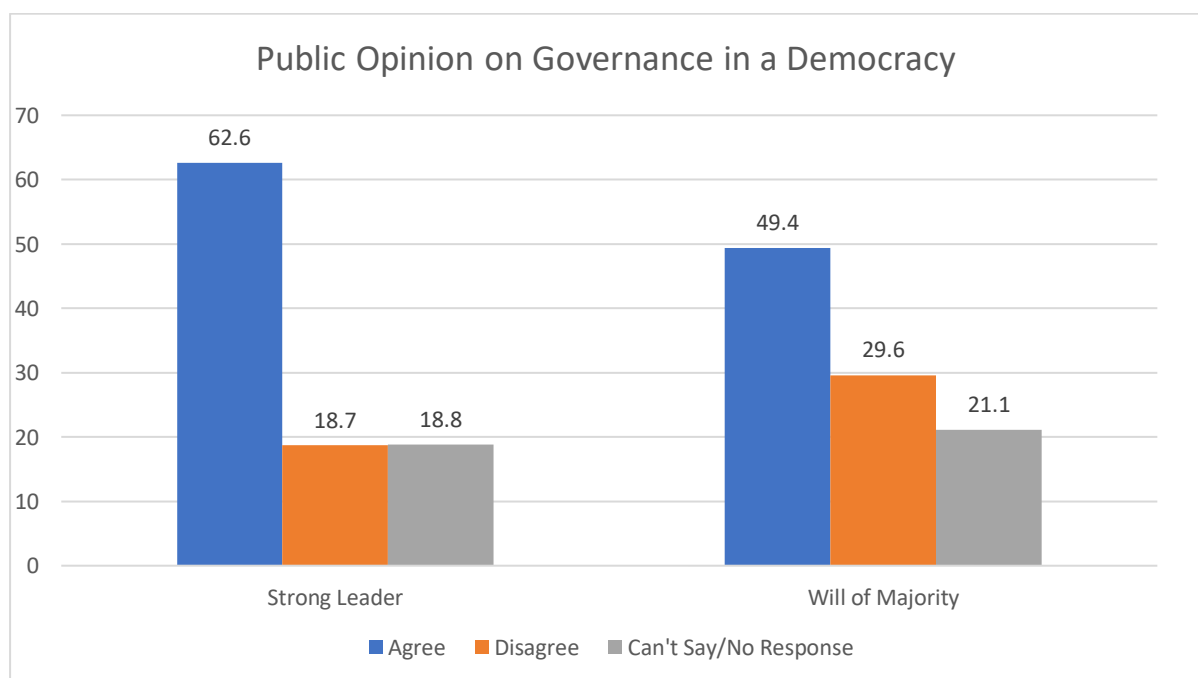


Figure 3.3 (Source: CSDS, Lokniti, National Election Studies, Pre-election survey 2019: 48-49| n = 12194)

Figure 3.3 demonstrates a large portion (62.6%) of respondents preferring a strong authoritative executive leader, one who does not get hindered by parliamentary procedures and democratic consensus-building but rather can take decisive action by themselves. With similar results provided by the Pew survey (2021), there appears to be a consistency in the popularity that authoritative rule from an (elected) executive enjoys amongst the public. This can be viewed as a demand for technocratic voluntarism – or the idea that a strong will, in a leader, is crucial to precipitate sociotropic change.

In general, a trend for increasing support for authoritarian administration has been observed in India. The World Value Survey of 2015 illustrated that between the period of 2010-2014, just as Modi came to power, the percentage of Indian respondents preferring rule by a strong leader jumped to 56% from 45% in 2009; India, in general, placed itself higher other democracies like the USA or Spain in this regard, two countries that also saw a significant rise in said preference (Sircar, 2020: 183-183). The Pew Research Centre found that while 46% of respondents favoured reliance on democratic forms of government to solve the country's problem, around 48% favoured a strong leader solving them instead (2021: 135).

The public's attitude on majoritarianism (the will of the majority) provides an interesting insight into how they relate democratic representation. In a way, this translates to support for the will of the people, or *volante generale*, which can be viewed as an important element of populist sentiment. However, studies explicitly done on the preference of the public are a little less clear when it comes to populism. In *Politics & Society Between Elections* (APU-Lokniti, 2019), the researchers found that on the demand side for populist attitudes almost two-thirds of respondents responded negatively to questions on populism. Although, around 20-30% of the respondents were categorized as strongly populist in their response (151). Varshney, Ayyangar & Swaminathan (2021) analysed data gathered from *Politics & Society Between Elections* (APU-Lokniti, 2019) to find that on the demand side of politics, there is a significant gap between Hindu nationalism and populist attitudes for the public. As per their findings, non-Hindu groups tended to exhibit more populist attitudes on average (214). In addition, there was no statistically significant relationship found between Hindu nationalism and populism at the level of popular attitudes, which itself is distinct from the supply side level of discourse provided by political leadership (217).

3.1.3: (Good) Intention-heuristics; to examine the public's confidence in Narendra Modi (compared to other politicians) in solving country's social problems (or technocratic abilities):

Evidence of the public perception of Narendra Modi's technocratic capabilities was evident even in 2014 in the post-election survey of the NES:

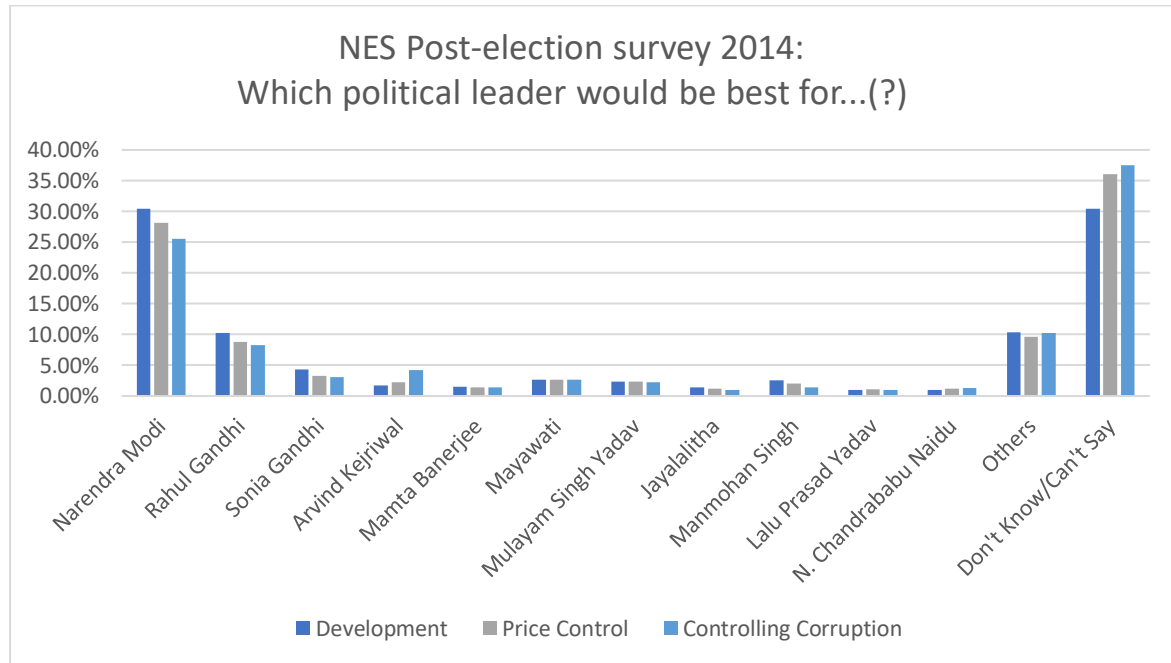


Figure 3.4 (Source: CSDS, Lokniti, National Election Studies, Post-election survey 2014: 42-47| n = 22299)

Given Modi's track record as the chief minister of Gujarat, and the Gujarat model of economic development being his central campaign platform (Verma, 2014; Chibber & Verma, 2014; and Jaffrelot & Schoch, 2021), one can state that he presented the public the credentials for his *technocratic-voluntarism* and his technocratic intentions (to be used as a heuristic for voters), feeding into the general demand and bias for *technocratic-action*. Figure 3.4 illustrates the public perception of Modi, appearing to be the candidate that most trust will be the best for issues like development, price control, and corruption control – issues codified as technocratic in this study<sup>10</sup>.

The popularity of Narendra Modi, both in terms of the NES surveys and also electoral results, increased significantly after his first tenure, indicating a certain demand for his politics and policies amongst the public. From winning 282 out 543 parliamentary seats in 2014 with a voter turnout of 66% to winning 303 seats in 2019 with a voter turnout of 67%, it is indicative of the level of public engagement in national politics with Modi in the limelight (Sircar, 2020:

<sup>10</sup> India follows the first-past-the-post electoral system, where the candidate/political party with the highest number of votes is the winner, even if they do not obtain an outright majority or plurality of votes. In other words, whoever gets the highest number of votes, regardless of the margin, wins the election. Therefore, any candidate (including Modi) has only to ensure that they get most votes compared to their rivals.

186-188). Both elections experienced a record voter turnout, with the last record, of 64%, being that of the 1984 election in the aftermath of then prime minister Indira Gandhi's assassination.

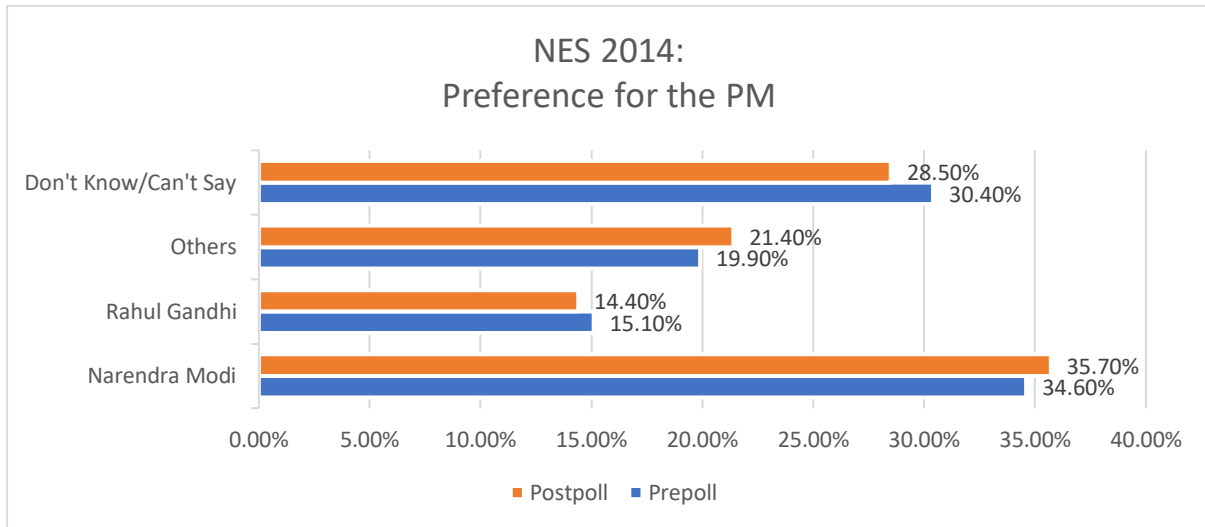


Figure 3.4 (Source: CSDS, Lokniti, National Election Studies, Pre-election survey 2014: 5-7| n = 20951)

(Source: CSDS, Lokniti, National Election Studies, Post-election survey 2014: 4| n = 22299)

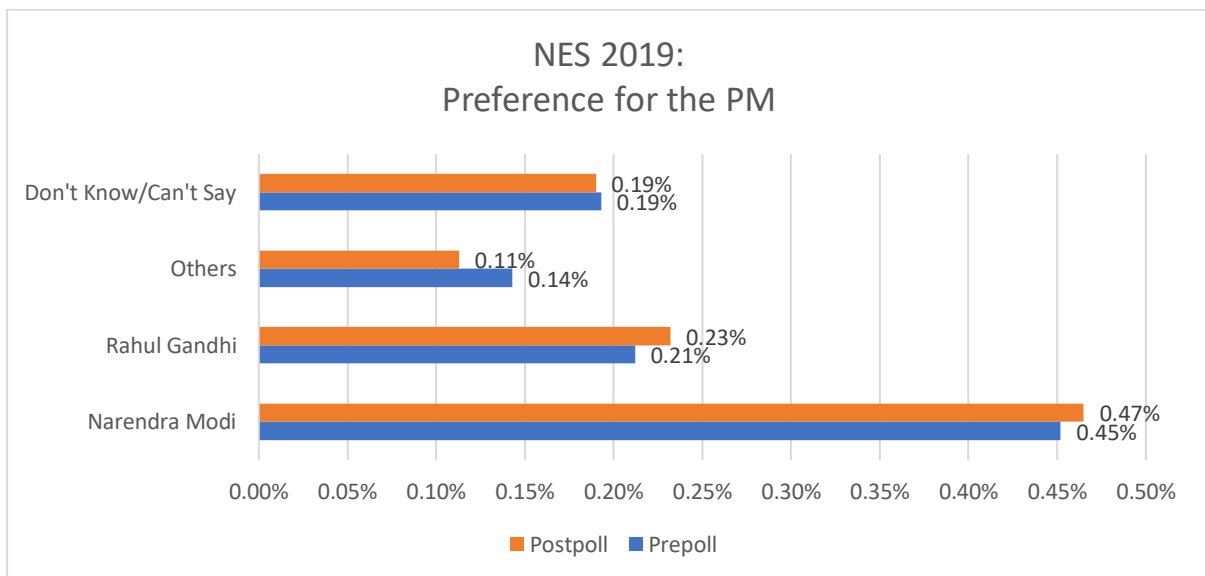


Figure 3.5 (Source: CSDS, Lokniti, National Election Studies, Pre-election survey 2019: 12-14| n = 10010)

(Source: CSDS, Lokniti, National Election Studies, Post-election survey 2019: 19-21| n = 24235)

Figures 3.4 and 3.5 show us that the Indian public's demand for Narendra Modi as the chief executive of the country (the prime minister) is significantly high compared to other political

candidates. His popularity for the post of prime minister saw an increase after his first term in office.

Drawing from the NES 2019 post-electoral survey results, Shastri (2019) found that amongst the BJP voters, 32% of them stated they would change their voting preference were Modi not the candidate for prime minister; similarly, for voters who voted for political parties allied to the BJP under the NDA coalition, around 25% of them stated similar sentiments (214). Furthermore, logistic regression results demonstrated the odds of people voting BJP due to Modi was 1.602 times higher than those who voted for the party but stated that the prime minister candidate made no difference to them (216). While it is an extrapolative and correlational exercise, given that the surveys of 2019 did not repeat the questions of a political candidate's capabilities for different policy problems like that in 2014 (figure 3.5), Modi's increased popularity for PM as demonstrated in figure 3.4, and the record electoral turnout for 2019 demonstrate that attitudes may not have changed much.

### 3.2.1 Indian Politics within the Democratic Technocracy Paradigm

To approach a democratic polity as a *democratic technocracy*, certain conditions on part of the citizens/public must be fulfilled. The public's political epistemology should be that of a naïve technocratic worldview as a result of their adherence to naïve technocratic realism, or their belief that solutions to complex policy problems are self-evident and contingent upon selecting the candidate with the right intent and will. A bias for *technocratic action*, and for *technocratic voluntarism*, plus a simple ontological understanding of societal problems, such that solutions are seen as possible directly relating to the will of a political actor to solve them – resulting in the use of *intention heuristics* – being the elements that comprise of the larger naïve technocratic worldview (Friedman, 2019a: 291).

Figures 3.1 and 3.2 show that a significant majority (of respondents do indeed hold technocratic-issues more pressing than issues of identity, political partisanship, or ideology. This study treats technocracy as an ideology itself, one that legitimates power based on a politician's problem-solving abilities. However, where technocracy differs from other ideologies and issues of identity, is that when discussing technocratic issues – like unemployment or economic development – it is framed as an issue for the entire country/nation as a homogenous whole, rather than a specific economic policy aimed at a particular social-group of society to better their conditions. Both the pre-election and post-election surveys for 2014 and 2019, and *Politics & Society Between Elections* (2019) report, provide substantial

evidence to support the claim that a major segment of the Indian voting public has a bias for *technocratic action*.

Figure 3.3 illustrates a significant section of the public preferring a strong authoritarian government over democratic consensus-building done when competing for a mandate in elections. In addition, surveys like the Pew Research Centre's and the World Value Survey's further confirm such a trend. Such attitudes do imply a certain expectation of decisive action and policymaking in part of the executive branch, especially compared to the more debate and democratic-oriented legislative branch or the parliament. There is thus a significant public demand for a leader with *technocratic voluntarism*; for as per the hypothesized naïve technocratic worldview in the public mind, a strong-willed leader can take decisive action to achieve the desired ends of public policy.

Finally, given the political appeal and outreach of Narendra Modi (analysed in the forthcoming chapter), Figure 3.4 illustrates significant support and faith in Modi as the political candidate best suited for the role of the chief executive in solving societal problems. Having campaigned on his track record of economic development and business-friendly administration during his days as the Gujarat chief minister, and on the theme of “good governance”, in 2014 (Palishkar & Suri, 2014; Mitra & Schottli, 2016), the public perception of Modi's intention (and will) reflected confidence in his ability over all other major political candidates. Similarly, figures 3.5 and 3.6 not only show Modi leading as the choice for prime minister but between 2014 (3.5) and 2019 (3.6) demonstrate an increase of 10.8% in approval in pre-electoral surveys and 10.6% in the post-electoral surveys. Therefore, there is an undeniable public perception, amongst a large group, that Narendra Modi is the best candidate for prime minister; the public does view him through a *good-intention heuristic*, with strong *technocratic voluntarism*, in the role of the chief executive policymaker in the country. What Sircar (2020) terms the “politics of *vishwas*” (politics of faith) when it comes to sections of the Indian public relating to Modi, once again echoes similarity to the idea of the public using intention-heuristics to distinguish politicians posited by Friedman (2019).

In terms of political epistemology, the existence of the three components of the naïve technocratic worldview can be confirmed within a significant portion of the Indian public. Thus, we can state that the *democratic technocracy* paradigm can be applied to how a significant section of the Indian public approaches politics.

### 3.2.2 Demand for Authoritarianism versus Demand for Populism

Figure 3.3 shows support for the will of the majority demonstrates that a large segment of the public supports a type of populism – in the sense of *volante generale*, or will of the people. However, the divergence observed between the Hindu nationalist and populist sentiments amongst people by Varshney, Ayyangar & Swaminathan (2021) suggest that populist attitudes, Hindu nationalist attitudes, anti-minority sentiments, and majoritarianism while ideationally related do not have a simple linear relation.

For Friedman, while considerations for technocratic issues and solutions drive engagement for citizen-technocrats (the voting public), the appeal of populist leaders' transgressive political style signalling their willingness to bend or break the rules for their – and in turn 'the people's' – interests, is what leads to authoritarianism's close link to technocratic populism (2019: 351-352). In the model of *democratic technocracy*, populism is treated as a political practice rather than a metaphysical phenomenon (353). This allows consideration of the dynamic nature of populism as it manifests in different democracies, political systems, or countries. Populism does not entail static homogenous groups of 'the people' or the 'elite', with the populist exerting the "will of the people"; rather, Friedman views the leader's will only as important to their constituents as it is strong enough to sustain the people's fight against special interests. These special interests do not have to be economic or political elites, they can also be minorities, immigrants, LGBTQ, and so on perceived as a social other. The metaphysical unity of 'the people' while desired by populists is threatened by pluralism in general (354).

Ostiguy and Moffitt's (2021) performative-relational approach adopt a similar approach to the creation of social 'other' in populist politics – where it does not necessarily have to specify an established elite, but can also denote other identities heterogenous to the constructed identity of the 'people' (64). To examine how the public demand for *technocratic action* and leadership imbued with *technocratic* voluntarism is met by the BJP, and how populism is utilized as a political style to set up a narrative of technocratic nationalism under the leadership of Narendra Modi, such that the public view him through a *good-intention heuristic*, the forthcoming chapter will examine the supply side of politics.

#### **4. The Supply-Side Analysis**

Despite an observed consolidation of the Hindu vote for the BJP in 2014 (Palishkar & Suri, 2014; Chibber & Verma, 2014) and 2019 (Sardesai, 2019; Heath, 2020), there is no consolidation of the vote for BJP at the state level, where regional parties still dominate electorally. Furthermore, Varshney, Ayyangar & Swaminathan (2021) demonstrated a



divergence between people with populist sentiments and those with Hindu nationalist sentiments. Therefore, voter consolidation with Hindu nationalism as the single binding force is also highly unlikely. As observed in the demand side analysis, a significant majority of the public view matters of economics, law, and order, and administration (categorized as technocratic-issues) as a priority over matters of communalism, or interests of any particular religious group, affirmative action for backward groups (categorized as identity-partisan). This suggests that the politics of Modi has other sources of appeal that may play a complementary role in helping coalesce voters at the national level under his leadership. Given the observed technocratically-affiliated political epistemology, the tendency to favour authoritarian leadership, support majoritarianism, and support for Modi on the demand-side analysis, the political practice and discourse of Modi and the BJP may explain how this public demand is met at the national level.

#### 4.1 Mise-en-Scene for the Overflowing-Signifier

##### 4.1.1 Political Strategy and Campaigning

In general, BJP and other Sangh Parivar organizations<sup>11</sup>, have a very strong door-to-door canvassing culture. The BJP relies on an extensive network of party workers mobilizing during election times, having election booth-monitoring teams. Chibber and Ostermann (2014) concluded that vote mobilizers<sup>12</sup> played an important role in the BJP's victory in 2014, with a significantly positive relationship between their share of vote mobilizers and their vote share. Similarly, in 2019, the state of Maharashtra alone saw around 92,000 booth monitoring teams set up teams. The BJP's campaign was bolstered at the ground level by their *Panna Pramukhs* – page chiefs – or party workers who were responsible for voters listed in a single (or at times multiple) pages in the published voter list, their job being to mobilize and urge people to go vote. The party's IT cells created constituency profiles at the booth level, classifying voters by class, caste, and religion, using the Sangh Parivar's traditional network of around 45,000 to 50,000 *shakhas* (branches), as well as recruits, to collect the relevant information, like phone numbers, at the grassroots level. Much like the vote mobilizing *Panna Pramukhs*, BJP party president Amit Shah (current home minister) announced the creation of 'cell phone pramukhs' in 2018, to disseminate information at the booth level (Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2020: 161-162).

---

<sup>11</sup> An umbrella of Hindu right-wing organizations, including the BJP, RSS, and VHP.

<sup>12</sup> Vote mobilizers are individuals proactive in campaigns beyond voting, including engaging in door-to-door canvassing, campaign donations, and putting up flyers, leaflets, and so on.

In terms of campaign organization and mobilization, the BJP is significantly ahead of its rivals<sup>13</sup>.

The BJP's political campaign is significantly more media and tech-savvy than competitors; for the 2014 election, they employed a more novel, western, approach of electoral campaigning with the help of the campaign strategist group Citizens for Accountable Governance (CAG) – non-profit non-governmental organization. CAG was made up of around 200-400 full-time paid employees, 800 paid interns, and around 1,00,000 volunteers, from prestigious institutes like the Indian Institute Technology (IITs), Indian Institute of Management (IIMs), Brown University, Columbia University, London School of Economics, and also from firms like JP Morgan and Goldman Sachs. The organization worked on an in-depth analysis of the 450-odd Lok Sabha (parliamentary) constituencies, micro-managing the strategy and rhetoric accordingly (Verma, 2014: 91). On the other hand, in the 2019 elections, an apparent asymmetry and bias towards Narendra Modi compared to the rival politicians in media coverage has been observed (Rai, 2019 and Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2020). Being the incumbent, the BJP was able to utilize the larger media apparatus to benefit their campaign, something that will be examined in more detail in the section studying their media use.

Modi's public relations strategy and tactics have even more novel and spectacular manners of outreach. In the 2014 election, while being the challenger, Modi employed a number of novel PR and campaigning tactics. One of the most prominent was his use of 3D hologram technology to address public rallies; these 'Bharat Vijay' rallies involved the use of 400 video vans in thousands of villages across the country, with Modi physically speaking in three to four villages while being simultaneously broadcasted via holograms in 100 different locations (Verma, 2014: 91). Another unique PR strategy was the *Chai Pe Charcha* programme. This initiative connected around 1000 chai shops (tea shops) across 300 parliamentary constituencies using a combination of satellite, direct-to-home (DTH), and internet connections to broadcast a video conference, where Modi would address the concerns of the voters. The tactic played on Modi's humble roots of working with his father as a child and selling tea in

---

<sup>13</sup> They are also the richest party in Indian politics, and a recent controversial electoral bond system allowing for anonymous donation and removal of limits on corporate donation has furthered the distance; the Association for Democratic Reform (ADR) estimated the BJP getting around INR 210 crore out INR 222 crore, 95%, in electoral bond financing between 2017-2018 (Sircar, 2020: 186). The 2019 elections were the most expensive in any democracy around the world, with the total expenditure being estimated to be around \$7.2 billion, and the BJP estimated to have spent around 45%-55% of the total, with their second place rival the Congress spending around 15%-20% (Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2020: 166).

railway stations, while also using digital technology to reach voters across the country in a novel manner, in an attempt to emotionally sway them through awe or empathy (Rai, 2019: 333).

Voter and worker mobilization is also done in an effort to exacerbate communal polarization. In studying the history of BJP's political mobilization in the state of Uttar Pradesh (the state sending the highest number of MPs to parliament, 80 of the 543 Lok Sabha seats), Pai and Kumar (2018) point out to a strategy of perpetual polarization in the BJP's mobilization efforts, where low-key communal tensions are kept simmering in the rural areas, especially between Hindu and Muslim communities. Since the early 2000s, a new approach of "institutionalization of everyday communalism" has been adopted by the BJP, where workers and politicians instigate low-intensity incidents, working at the grass-roots level to propagate constant communal tensions that over time climax in a big and violent riot (277).

This new communal praxis involves policies of communal surveillance, and the politicization of everyday lives along sectarian lines, with culture, food, gender relations, and social interactions amongst communities (Hindus and Muslims). This strategy put into practice after the 2004 national election defeat of the BJP, further accelerated when a BJP led government returned under Modi in 2014; campaigns like anti-Love Jihad, cow vigilantism, policing of food habits and the beef ban became explicit and entered the mainstream political discourse (279). Another aspect of this new strategy, in contrast to that of the early 1990s Ram Temple movement, is what Pai and Kumar call the "subalternization of Hindutva" (2018: 281), and Jaffrelot calls the "plebianization of Hindu nationalism" (2021: 83). The post-2004 BJP put a significant focus on their outreach towards Hindus from disadvantaged castes, like the Dalits (Scheduled Caste/SC), the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and Scheduled Tribes (STs), under their brand of Hindu nationalism.

The support of the lower and middle castes and classes has been a major factor in the BJP's success in the last two elections. Caste-based political parties dominate regional state elections in many states; for example, the OBC Yadav-community led Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Dalit (SC) led Bahujan Samajwadi Party in the state of Uttar Pradesh court votes from their particular communities. Since Modi's leadership of BJP, one has observed an increase in their share of OBC, SC, and ST votes at the national level whereas previously the BJP was viewed as a primarily upper-caste/forward-caste (general category) political party (Verma, 2014; Palishkar & Suri, 2014; Suri, 2019; and Jaffrelot, 2019). In 2014 they got an estimated 40 %

of the Other-Backwards-Class (OBC) votes, and an estimated 24% of the Scheduled Caste (SC/Dalit) votes, and the 28 % of the Scheduled Tribe (ST) votes (Palishkar & Suri, 2014: 40). Electorally in 2019, the dividends were even better; as per the Lokniti NES (2019), 36% of both the poor and the lower class, 38% of the middle-class, and 44% of the upper-class vote, whereas, in 2013 the BJP received 24% of the vote (Jaffrelot, 2019: 3). Another significant indicator was the BJP's performance caste-wise, especially with Dalit votes – 33.4% - and the ST votes – 44% (7).

#### 4.1.2 Mediation of the Discourse (Traditional & Digital Media)

The 2014 elections were the first national elections in India to involve the extensive use of social media, especially Twitter. Modi had already cultivated a significant online presence relatively early compared to other Indian politicians. He had a website – narendramodi.in – running since 2007, one where citizens could message him, set up appointments, and access archives of his speeches, and by 2009 he had an active Facebook and Twitter account (Pal, 2019: 166). He is the most followed Indian leader on Twitter, with a following of around 73 million in 2021<sup>14</sup>. Rai (2019) suggests that Modi's use of technology and media marks a structural shift in the nature of political campaigning in India, integrating a more modernized public relations and branding system enabling his “celebritized, affective political aura” (324).

Twitter played a central role in the BJP's online campaign in the 2014 elections, in the framing of election issues and narratives (Bajaj, 2017: 252). Specifically, it was used to set the election agenda on that of ‘good governance’ and leadership and shift the narrative away from Hindutva and communal polarization. Bajaj's (2017) analysis showed, of Modi's tweets during the 2014 election season, approximately half (50.6%) of them referring to ideas of good governance and development, with only 3.6 % having any explicit reference towards Hindutva or a sociocultural agenda, and the rest being categorized as other-information control tweets (261). The 2019 national elections saw WhatsApp take primacy over Facebook and Twitter. This was for three particular reasons – its popularity across the country, with an estimated 300 million active users in April of 2019; that it enabled categorizing of the electorate to most efficient of manner, through voter sections and sub-sections as classified by the BJP; and that one could hide their affiliation in WhatsApp groups, like in Facebook, while spreading propaganda. BJP's

---

<sup>14</sup> Analytics obtained from the website <https://socialblade.com/twitter/top/50/most-followers>

estimated WhatsApp groups in 2019 stood around 200,000 -300,000, their rivals Congress had around 80,000-100,000 for comparison (Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2020: 163).

Narendra Modi and the BJP are adept at controlling the discourse and content in social media through the online mobilization of their supporters. As per Rai (2019), a brand of authoritarian populism is displayed in social media with an army of hired trolls and “internet warriors”, who orchestrate a cyberbullying campaign proxy Modi and the BJP (335). Udupa (2018) conducted an ethnographic case study on two self-confessed techno-volunteers of Hindutva; her subjects represented an important group of BJP social-media volunteers – English educated and techno-savvy (465). The growing affiliation of English (or Western) educated middle-class Indians, especially from technical backgrounds like engineering or information-technology (IT) with BJP and Modi’s conservative politics has been linked to the technocratic attitudes of people, valuing technological and material progress with disregards to issues of social justice and identity-politics (Krishnan, 2017: 372). Electoral studies have demonstrated the popularity of Narendra Modi amongst the middle-class for both the 2014 election (Sridharan, 2014) and the 2019 election (Jaffrelot, 2019).

As the incumbent in the 2019 elections, the Modi administration also possessed more of an oversight and control over the country’s institutions, including the conventional and digital media. As per Jaffrelot and Verniers (2020), the government systematically targeted several other media houses critical of them; for example, a news anchor from the channel *ABP*, and editors of newspaper *Hindustan Times* and the magazine *Outlook* were pressured into resigning by government harassment, while news-channels providing more favourable coverage like *Republic TV*, received favourable treatment. Aside from intimidation and restrictions experienced by critical media-houses, there also appeared to be a significantly lop-sided coverage of the BJP compared to other political parties. The BJP had 100% times more press coverage in the state-run channel *Doordarshan* compared to the Congress, in the 2019 election. The imbalance was particularly pronounced in Hindi-language news channels; a study by the Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) found that the BJP duo of Narendra Modi and Amit Shah got more than 850 hours of airtime compared to 335 hours for the Congress’ Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi. Furthermore, Modi even had his own TV channel – NaMo TV – launched around this time, which disappeared after the elections (165).

In terms of using traditional media, like the television and radio, the terms are dictated by Modi, rather than journalists approaching the prime minister with inquisitive and directed questions.

This is evident in the fact that he never addresses a press conference, where the field is open for unmediated questions, be it during election times or off-election season (Chaturvedi, 2018; Tewari & Kaushika, 2019; and Raghavan, 2021). Instead, most of his public outreach is done either by Twitter, broadcasted speeches, and his monthly radio programme *Mann Ki Baat* (Thoughts of the Mind), creating a one-way communication channel (Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2020: 164). *Mann Ki Baat* is a particularly interesting avenue of direct communication, between Modi and the public, in the manner in which a populist leader will relate directly to the ‘people’; people can call in and ask questions to the prime minister, and a select few calls are broadcasted every month, and the programme is positioned as an unmediated way Modi can interact with the people.

#### 4.1.3 ‘Brand Modi’

The BJP declared Narendra Modi as their prime minister candidate six months before the national election, in September of 2013. Modi and the BJP turned the election into a presidential-style campaign (Chibber & Verma, 2014: 52); one where the candidate for national office was decided before the election results, something never officially done, hitherto. Parliamentary elections typically have candidates fight locally, on the merit of their own persuasions and policies. However, recently parliamentary elections are bearing increasing resemblance to presidential-style campaigns, or what some have termed “prime ministerialization” of parliamentary elections (Chibber & Osterman, 2014; Shastri, 2019). The centrality of Modi’s name in the BJP’s electoral efforts was further confirmed when in 2019, all BJP Lok Sabha (lower parliamentary house) candidates sought votes in the name of Modi, rather than their own individual merit in the localized context. In fact, even the 108 candidates from BJP’s National Democratic Alliance (NDA), allied parties, campaigned in Modi’s name (Shastri, 2019: 209). The broader campaign strategy was to revolve the election around a persona rather than campaign issues, positioning Modi to employ a charismatic populist appeal through the adept use of political rhetoric and the media. This importance of Modi’s leadership and PM candidature was observed in the previous chapter, with around 32% of BJP voters and 25% of NDA (the larger party coalition under the BJP) voters stating they would have voted differently had he not been the candidate (Shastri, 2019).

‘Brand Modi’ is an extensive case of political performance. There are multiple facets to the types of symbolism associated with the image of Modi. One has the Hindutva front, where Modi associates himself with Hindu symbolism, like abbreviating his name into “NaMo” (a

Hindu chant while praying), or referencing Hindu mythology and tradition in his rhetoric, observably and significantly more than references to any other religion (Rai, 2019; Jaffrelot & Schoch, 2021). His political imagery also aims to embody a type of signaling of bravado and machismo, as is evident in seen speeches referring to his “56-inches wide chest” (Rai, 2019: 327), his hyper-nationalist election campaign of 2019, positioning himself as the *Chowkidar* (sentinel) of the nation in the election campaign against foreign (especially Pakistani/Pakistani terrorist) aggression (Sircar, 2020; and Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2020). Furthermore, his sartorial choices also received significant attention from the domestic and international media. One of his biographies has a dedicated chapter on the ‘Modi Kurta’, with him having a sartorial item associated/named after him, similar to political icons like Nehru with his ‘Nehru Jacket’ and Gandhi with his khadi. Modi’s fashion sense was also commented upon by international journalists, like that of the *New York Times* (Sen, 2016: 104).

The ‘Brand Modi’ style also includes appearing in a whole episode of the popular reality TV show *Man vs. Wild* in India, with the host Bear Grylls; and photo-shoots of him praying and bathing the holy river of Ganga and “climbing” a mountain in the Himalayas to meditate in a cave around the time of 2019 elections, to project a “saintly” mystic persona (Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2020: 158-160). Modi’s association with Bollywood celebrities is another such element of mediatized persona building. He participated in a Google Hangout session with the popular actor Ajay Devgan that was broadcasted on YouTube, while campaigning in 2012 for the Gujarat state assembly election. The most recent one being his ‘non-political’ interview with Akshay Kumar in April of 2019, in the middle of election season and voting (Mitra, 2021: 287). The run-up to the 2019 election saw Modi in a highly opportune photo opp. with a group of popular actors and directors; personalized tweets, tagging major movie stars like Amitabh Bachchan, Shah Rukh Khan, and Akshay Kumar – asking them to encourage their followers to vote (291-292). This performance of having a close personal relationship with popular Indian celebrities is of a populist appeal, in that it is what Ostiguy would term as a ‘low’ form of socio-cultural engagement – relying on the culturally popular (Ostiguy & Moffitt, 2021: 62).

The close association of the Hindi film industry with Modi has been observed, at times, to extend beyond photo opportunities, interviews, and endorsement. In the months preceding the 2019 national elections, two movies (*Uri: The Surgical Strike* and *The Accidental Prime Minister*) with discernible political implications were released. The former was a dramatization of a retaliatory Indian military attack across the Pakistan border in 2016, fittingly released before the election campaign where the issues of national security and cross-border terrorism

would play a major role. The latter, based on the writings of the UPA-II's press secretary, the movie depicted Modi's predecessor, Dr. Manmohan Singh, as a weak-minded prime minister who was manipulated by the Congress' Nehru-Gandhis (Rahul Gandhi and his mother Sonia Gandhi). There was also a biopic on Modi - *PM Narendra Modi* – that was slated to be released, and while the Election Commission of India did bar the movie's release until after the elections, the promotion, teaser, and trailer of the movie were allowed to circulate at the height of the election campaigning season (The Wire, 2019).

While one cannot state that the BJP, as a political party, or the Modi government as the administrative power actively made executive decisions for people in the film industry, the observed imbalance of Bollywood's association with the ruling party has been observed by researchers (Rai, 2019; Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2020; and Mitra, 2021). Intentions and internal machinations of the politics between the media and the ruling establishment/political parties notwithstanding, in the mediatized political landscape of India Narendra Modi does enjoy a degree of popularity and limelight that is absent for any other individual politician in India.

The particularities of Modi's public relation activities, plus the BJP's larger political strategy, inscribe the persona of Narendra Modi with an abundance of different meanings and significance, such that he can be treated as an overflowing-signifier; with his bodily presence, performance, and particularities having different interpretations for different people (Ostiguy & Moffitt, 2021: 53). The BJP's campaign strategy, mobilization practices, and their (especially Narendra Modi's) engagement with the media, both traditional and digital, shape the mise-en-scene for the populist political performance of Modi. From the strategy of naming him the prime ministerial candidate before the elections to the emphatic use of social media, and other mediatized modes of public outreach, the political campaign of the BJP centres the narrative around the persona of one politician – Narendra Modi. The behaviour and rhetoric of Modi come to signify a message appealing to a large section of the public, with different aspects appealing to different parts of the crowd. For public outreach and persuasion, images, films, speeches, interviews, narratives, and spectacle are all presented providing a political persona with an abundance of simultaneously co-existing meanings – Modi as the *Vikaas Purush* in 2014 (man of development), or as the *Chowkidar* (sentinel of the nation) in 2019, as the political outsider from a humble tea-selling background, or the Hindutva icon with a 56-inch chest restoring the nation's masculine pride.



The discourse disseminated by the BJP in association with ‘Brand Modi’ is one where the political figure of Narendra Modi comes to be the leader around which various social groups and communities coalesce together under the banner of the ‘people’. Leading the BJP, by default, Modi becomes the champion of Hindu nationalist and conservative sections of the public; but Modi also actively pushed a technocratic rhetoric in his public outreach, signifying his credentials and intentions for massive development projects, administrative and market reforms, and “good governance”. These messages particularly targeted the hopes and aspirations of the “neo-middle class”, referring to the large sections of people from disadvantaged communities who experienced upwards socioeconomic mobility post-1991 economic liberalization. Furthermore, Modi’s “Other-Backward Class” (OBC) background, and his modest origins as a political outsider, are also played up to appeal to the OBCs, SCs, and STs (historically marginalized communities within Hindu society). Therefore, we see an appeal to the ‘people’ that is also rooted in caste and class division, beyond that of the religious cleavage used by the BJP in general.

#### 4.2 Populist Style with Technocratic Appeal

##### 4.2.2 Plebian Appeal and the Social Other

The populist discourse of Modi’s politics is well-evident in his speeches and addresses; while in political practice, one witnesses the ‘othering’ of the Muslim community, as described previously. In terms of Modi’s political rhetoric, a number of ‘other(s)’ can take up the mantle as antagonistic to the people (McDonnell & Cabrera, 2019: 494-495); from the judiciary to the English-language media, to academics, to people coalescing around caste-identities over the Hindu-identity, and the political elite as exemplified by Rahul Gandhi, the Nehru-Gandhi Dynasty and the Congress party. Examining his rhetoric regarding the opposition demonstrates how Modi applies the Manichaeian distinction against rivals, to pit himself as a champion of the ‘people’ against the established political elites. His online Twitter campaigns involve creative attacks against the opposition, as evidenced by tweets like:

*Shahzada (Rahul Gandhi of the Nehru-Gandhi family) has not got over his childhood days, which is why he can’t see beyond balloons & toffees. Development is a non-issue for him.*<sup>15</sup>

(Modi, 2014)

---

<sup>15</sup> For easier access – Modi, N. (2014). [Twitter] 15<sup>th</sup> April. Available from <https://twitter.com/narendramodi/status/456025085782925312> [Accessed 03/01/2022]

*Manner in which Congress, SP & BSP [other parties that are competitive in the state] are mocking my poor background shows their mindset. Yes, I am proud I sold tea... I never sold the nation.*<sup>16</sup>

(Modi, 2014).

With the Congress' more than 54 years of rule in India's 74 years of independence, there is ample ammunition for their rivals to attack them for India's general sluggish development and the numerous corruption scandals that have occurred under their rule. Despite being the incumbent in 2019, Modi continued attacking the Congress for its past track record. However, there was also a subtle shift in the rhetoric from more policy-based barbs in 2014 to more personal attacks on becoming more personal towards Rahul Gandhi and his family – symbolizing the elitist nature of the party as a whole (Shastri, 2019: 208). While the main campaign issues flipped from development and growth to national security between the two elections, the populist appeal pitting the 'people' against the 'elite' has remained consistent. With the juxtaposition of his humble tea-selling roots against the privilege of Rahul Gandhi, and admonishing Congress and other parties for their misgovernance, one sees the use of *plebian appeal* and the creation of an antagonistic *social other* – in this instant the corrupt and entrenched political establishment.

Modi's rhetoric also contains a creative vocabulary and aggressive assertions, in a display of his plebian grammar. Nicknaming Rahul Gandhi as *Shahzada* (prince) is one such instance. At times attacks can be particularly vitriolic<sup>17</sup>; for instance, in the 2019 election campaign, Modi attacked Rahul Gandhi's father, and former prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, stating that while his courtiers dubbed him 'Mr. Clean', he had died as 'Bhrashtachari No.1' (corrupt-man no. 1) (Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2020: 156). Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated in 1991. His interview to *India Today*, further highlight Modi's creative rhetoric:

*Modi's image has not been created by the Khan Market gang, or Lutyens Delhi, but 45 years of his toil... good or bad.*

(Modi, Indian Express, May 13, 2019)

---

<sup>16</sup> For easier access – Modi, N. (2014). [Twitter] 21<sup>st</sup> April. Available from <https://twitter.com/narendramodi/status/458226382766497792> [Accessed 03/01/2022]

<sup>17</sup> It must be noted that such kinds of personal attacks are used by other politicians as well, including Rahul Gandhi and the Congress. He coined the slogan *Chowkidar Chor Hai* (watchman is a thief), targeting Modi as a corrupt leader (India Today, 2018). Available from <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/hindustan-ka-chowkidar-chor-hai-rahul-gandhi-calls-pm-modi-a-thief-in-rajasthan-1344775-2018-09-20>

“Khan Market gang” here, along with Lutyens Delhi, refers to the affluent, English-speaking liberal elites living in the posh localities of New Delhi. Once again, we see a juxtaposition of Modi’s good intent against the corrupt elite, and also references to the diligence of his character. But in this instance, it is the more nebulous diffused sociocultural/economic “elite”, as opposed to when the attack points towards political rivals. In the context of religious othering, Modi is relatively subtle, and never overtly disparaging. As pointed out by Mitra & Schottli (2016) and Sen (2016), Modi has carefully controlled his image to soften the Hindu nationalist elements in favour of a more technocratic image. However, there are observed instances where his anti-minority sentiments emerge.

For instance, during the nationwide protests of the blatantly anti-Muslim Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC)<sup>18</sup> forwarded by the BJP led parliament, the prime minister remarked that the one’s protesting and rioting could be identified by “their clothes”, which some identified as a dog whistle, designed to cloak the targeting of the Muslim community (Kiro, 2019). This also came at the heed of instances of police brutality in two Muslim universities, Jamia Milia Islamia and Aligarh Muslim University, where students were protesting the CAA-NRC policies. Critiques maintained such rhetoric as being polarizing, and a thinly veiled attempt at targeting the Muslim community, who have a distinct style of clothing. No explicit mention of any community in his statement does allow for plausible denial of any incendiary communalizing. In this Modi’s rhetoric work as a cue for his critiques but also as one for his supporters, moderate or extremist, in interpreting his words. However, the context of his speeches (especially in cases like the CAA-NRC protests), and the absence of any conciliatory remarks towards the victims of the police brutality can be viewed as an indication of where his sympathy lies.

The other principal appeal in Modi’s political rhetoric is that of his governance capabilities and efforts. His recent speech in the city of Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, is an example:

*Brothers and sisters,*

---

<sup>18</sup> In 2019, the Modi government and BJP-led parliament passed the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) that provided citizenship status to Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, Sikh and Christian refugees from other South Asian countries, the omission of Muslims was widely criticized. The National Register of Citizens (NRC) was another drive to determine the ‘actual’ citizens of India. There was widespread concerns and fears of the exclusion of the Muslim community from this very process, given cases of exclusion and rejection were predominantly faced by Muslims, and the aggressive language of BJP politicians like Amit Shah (Jaffrelot & Schoch, 2021: 371-392; and Connah, 2021).

*For those who were in the government for long before us, healthcare had been a means of earning money and scams... Today there is a government ... which understands the pain of the poor, downtrodden, oppressed, backward, middle class, everybody... Earlier, public money used to go into scams, and to the chests of such people, today money is being spent in mega projects. Therefore, today the country is also dealing with the biggest pandemic in history and is also building infrastructure worth lakhs of crores of rupees for a self-reliant India.*

(Modi, Varanasi; October 25, 2021)

The contents of this speech excerpt demonstrate how the Manichaeian distinction of Modi-good and opposition-bad is coupled with Modi's rhetoric of development and governance, topics this study considers technocratic. Disparaging the previous government's record as riddled with scams, and healthcare initiatives as ineffective, Modi also contextualizes his policies as being for all sections of the masses. The reference to "projects" and "infrastructure" signals the Modi government's technocratic predisposition, in so far as healthcare is a problem to be solved for the whole of society, and also a development goal that is being energetically pursued. We, thus, witness not only a *plebian-appeal* in terms of claims of development for the poor, and the 'othering' of previous governments as corrupt and antagonistic to the people, but also an integration of Modi's technocratic appeal, one which emanates from his rhetoric of development and governance.

#### 4.2.3 Technocratic Nationalism

Technocratic appeal has a central place in Modi's political discourse and practice, often intertwined with a populist, and at times even Hindu-nationalist, appeal. Modi came to power through a campaign on the theme of development and good-governance that entailed criticism of the Congress led-UPA II government's social welfare policies, which was viewed as an "apologetic" appeasement tactic, complementing the UPA-II's crony capitalism and misgovernance (Palishkar & Suri, 2014: 44-45). However, 2019 saw Modi campaign for social welfare policies; the BJP's campaign brandished their NDA-II government's flagship schemes like the *Ujjwala Yojana*, *Swachh Bharat*, *Jan Dhan Yojana*, and *Ayushman Bharat Yojana*<sup>19</sup>, along with crediting themselves on improving the delivery of existing welfare systems (Deshpande, Tillin & Kailash, 2019: 2). As Jaffrelot and Verniers (2020) point out, this secondary plank fit well with the primary rhetoric of national security that had developed due

---

<sup>19</sup> Respectively: a cooking gas connection scheme, a clean India drive, a financial inclusion scheme, and a universal health insurance scheme for low-income groups.

to increased tensions with Pakistan during the election season<sup>20</sup>, with Modi being presented as the caretaker and protector of the poor along with the nation (157-158). The digitization and expansion of government services have a significant part in Modi's discourse:

*The technology, which is being made the core for good governance and improving governance in India, is empowering the common man and it is unprecedented. Digital India campaign has empowered the country manifold by connecting the common man of India with digital technology ... there are 130 crore Aadhaar numbers, 118 crore mobile subscribers, about 80 crore internet users and about 43 crore Jan Dhan bank accounts. There is no such vast connected infrastructure anywhere in the world. This digital infrastructure is delivering to the common Indian from ration to administration in a rapid and transparent manner.*

(Modi, New Delhi: September 27, 2021)

The digitization of government services for citizens was an initiative started under the Congress-led UPA administration in 2006. However, Modi and the BJP have made technological progress, especially the use of IT and digital media, an integral plank of their political platform. E-governance has been a major policy initiative of Modi's; this has led to the development of a technocratic governance paradigm under the NDA-II administration (Yerramsetti, 2019: 6-7). The digital Direct-Transfer-Benefits scheme is exemplary in having delivery of provisions to the poor being transferred into an electronic system; in addition, the push to create a Unique Identity Authority of Initiative (UIDAI) collecting digitized biometric data of Indian citizens also saw a massive push under the Modi government. Many of the aforementioned welfare services like the *Jan Dhan Yojana* (Bank accounts and financial credit for the poor), or the *Ujjwala Yojana* (provision of cooking gas) were provided with digital enrolment. Bringing a managerial sensibility in the administration of welfare policies has led to a technocratization of administration with the professionalization of bureaucracies being delinked from public service (12).

*How a nation uses technology is linked to its values and vision. India's democratic traditions are old; its modern institutions are strong. And, we have always believed in the world as one*

---

<sup>20</sup> In 2019, national security took centre-stage after a terrorist attack on a military convoy in Pulwama, Kashmir, and subsequent retaliatory air-strikes in Balakot, Pakistan. National security being the main campaign theme of the issue worked in BJP's favour, being viewed as "owning" the issue of national security in politics, a topic that fits well into their hypernationalist ideology (Chibber & Verma, 2019: 134). The election also saw the politicization of the traditionally neutral military; taking advantage of the heightened nationalist sentiments, Modi asked for votes in the name of the "courageous martyrs of Pulwama", and "courageous *jawans* (soldiers)" who retaliated in Balakot (135). This time the ethnonationalist appeal took the forefront, with the Pakistan as the Muslim enemy of Hindu India.

*family. India's IT talent helped to create the global digital economy. It helped cope with the Y2K problem. It has contributed to the evolution of technologies and services we use in our daily lives.*

(Modi, Sydney: November 18, 2021)

Modi's political discourse contains what (Basu, 2019) states as a technocratic nationalist appeal. The Smart City Mission (SCM) is one of the grand initiatives reflecting such a disposition. The concept of "rurbanization", developing modern townships in rural areas, has been a major policy initiative. SCM is one policy area where the affable dynamics of the technocratic and the populist is observable; technology-based solutions to the socioeconomic problem of infrastructure in the country are co-opted in the rhetoric of nationalist pride using tropes of global status, modernity, and religiosity (81). In practice, the SCM has been less idealistic and utopian. Actual infrastructure projects have primarily been started only in satellite townships next to well-established metropolitans like Delhi, Mumbai, or Bangalore; with a heavy reliance on the IT industry for setting up cheap and efficient administrative networks in new townships, there has been a decline in the power of democratic local civic bodies and further retraction of public services from urban administration – with the burden fall on empowered "self-management" (84). This has had the effect of further marginalization, and also displacement, of the urban poor, who get left out of the new digital modes of administration, and also suffer from the reduction of bureaucrat-led public services (84).

Modi's politics regarding economic/industrial development (technocratic) agenda is also intertwined with populist and Hindu nationalist references and motifs. Even during his chief-ministership in Gujarat in the 2000s, the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in the Kutch saw the building of a temple to the Hindu-God Hanuman near the border with Pakistan. Interviews with the zone development officials demonstrated a Hindu-nationalist ethos being mixed with the more technocratic development-oriented discourse. The building of the SEZ in the region saw the displacement of the predominantly Muslim fishing community; dissent from the displaced community, social and environmental activists led to vilification from BJP workers and government officials (Sud, 2020: 15-16). This mix of technocratic and religious appeal has a significant place in Modi's own political discourse, bridging the gap between the purely populist, technocratic, and Hindu nationalist appeal for the BJP's larger political discourse:

*That is, Shiva and Shakti reside in Kashi [Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh]. Kashi, the powerhouse of knowledge, relieves us from both pain and suffering. Then what better place than Kashi to start such a mega plan related to health ... two big events are taking place from this platform. First, an Indian*

*government scheme worth more than Rs. 64,000 crores for the entire country is being launched today from the holy land of Kashi. And secondly, projects worth thousands of crores of rupees for the development of Kashi and Purvanchal are being inaugurated... Mahadev's blessings are also there in these schemes being launched from Kashi. And where there is the blessing of Mahadev, then well-being and success is assured. And when Mahadev's blessings are there, then freedom from suffering is also inevitable.* (Modi, Varanasi: October 25, 2021)

The framing of Kashi (Varanasi) as the holy land, and the reference to Mahadev (the Hindu God, Shiva) along with the announcement of development projects, signifies Modi's intentions and initiative, while also signifying his affiliation with the Hindu religion. As a politician, one may use such rhetorical tactics to demonstrate their affinity to their constituents, but the conspicuous absence of such references to Muslim or Christian (or other minorities') religious tropes and motifs in discussing development projects or government initiatives do point towards the asymmetry of their association and intentions.

Sajjanhar (2021) views the technocratic and populist appeals of the BJP as working in tandem to redefine and conflate notions of technocratic progress and the Hindu nationalist agenda. Such efforts take place at the level of policy-level and academic discourse, as Sajjanhar points out, through the growing number of BJP-allied right-wing public policy think tanks seeking to counter the dominance of the old-elite of English-speaking left-liberal intellectuals by promoting the expertise of Hindu-nationalist intellectuals retired military officers, bureaucrats and technical professionals like engineers and business managers (10-12).

Interviews with BJP affiliated policy think-tanks demonstrate the conscious and deliberate effort in wedding ideology to policy. For instance, Anirban Ganguly the head of the BJP-affiliated Shyama Prasad Mookerji Foundation stated having programmes that seek to "make ideological political points...through the route of policy"; Ram Madhav, a general secretary of the BJP and the head of the policy think-tank India Foundation stated that their work involved getting the policy and intellectual elites "closer to BJP thinking" (Sajjanhar, 2021: 12-13). A thin veneer of apolitical objectivity in describing technocratic objectives like economic growth or technological progress in policy discussions in this new climate, heavily cloaked with Hindu-nationalist rhetoric. Hindu nationalism finding itself embedded in the discourse of technocratic action and policy, with development and progress being linked to reclaiming India's lost civilizational prestige (18); with religious events like the Kumbh Mela (annual Hindu pilgrimage) being repackaged as an infrastructure achievement of managing thousands

of pilgrims, or the recognition of International Yoga Day being treated as a civilizational achievement (21).

### 4.3 The Supply of Technocracy, Nationalism & Populism

Pal (2019) states that Modi's proficient use of the media, and digital media, in particular, is another form of flexing his technocratic credentials. The use of the discourse of technology in his political rhetoric, like policy proposals for e-governance and the technology industry, and the practice of using technology for campaigning, like holograms and social media, all present the persona of a leader who is modern and technologically oriented (170). One can find a prominent position that technocratic appeal holds in Modi's political rhetoric along with ethnonationalist and populist appeals. In addition, the use of sophisticated and in-depth constituency-level demographic analysis using consultancy groups like the CAG in 2014, or the "cell phone pramukhs" in 2019, show the BJP's affinity towards new technological methods, with regards to gathering information, broadcasting messages, and public outreach in the practice of politics.

In framing campaign issues, Modi compared his home-state, Gujarat's, performance with that of the national government. Throughout the campaign, Modi contrasted Gujarat's high economic performance with the lackluster ones of other states and the national economy. Thus, Modi framed himself as the man who could get things done, in a game where most people would procrastinate and obfuscate (Mitra & Schottli, 2016: 616). The business-friendly and pro-development technocratic rhetoric took the limelight in the 2014 elections, due to the widespread dissatisfaction with the incumbent UPA-II's governance. Compared to the explicitly Hindutva agenda of their 2009 election manifesto, there was a significant shift in 2014's agenda of development and good governance (617-618).

Nonetheless, in his political discourse, not only does one see a highly mediatized and stylized form of presentation in practice, but also multiple practices and appeal. For example, the populist appeal, in terms of *plebian appeal* and the *antagonistic (social) other* is evident both in political mobilization, and what Pai & Kumar (2018) term "everyday communalism", fostering tensions especially between Hindu and Muslim communities. But one also witnesses a larger Hindu nationalist discourse, through anti-Pakistan national election campaigns, the establishment of Hindu-expertise think-tanks, and references to Hindu civilization, and Hindu religious symbolism in policy initiatives. One has other options in galvanizing the 'people'



against the ‘other’, with political rivals, the establishment (as exemplified by the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty and the Congress party), the Westernized, English-speaking elite, and left-liberal intellectuals all eligible for the criterion.

The presence of technocratic appeal in Modi’s politics is also clearly evident. One also sees how it is combined with populist and religious symbols to blur the line against technocratic progress and Hindu nationalist symbolism. Whether it be his speech in Varanasi referencing religious themes (something he does not do for any other religious community), or the establishment of a temple in the industrial Special Economic Zone, or the establishment of allied intellectual/policy think tanks to marry technocratic expertise with Hindu expertise, technocracy is not only a major political appeal used by Modi but also one that is actively being conflated with the populist-(ethno)nationalist appeal in the broader political discourse.

## **5. Conclusion & Discussion**

### 5.1 Summary & Synthesis

The supply-side analysis demonstrated the importance of technocratic-populist (and Hindu nationalist) appeal in Modi and the BJP’s political discourse and practice. While this study aimed to show the importance of technocratic-populist appeal in Indian politics through a demand-supply analysis, it by no means claims to weigh the importance of one appeal over the other, say, for example, technocratic appeal over Hindu nationalist. Rather, it aimed to demonstrate the complementarity between technocratic, populist, and Hindu nationalist appeals, and how the lines between them get blurred and intertwined. The thesis statement of this study – that Modi and the BJP’s politics constitutes of technocratic-populism as an important appeal, complementing their Hindu nationalist politics in the face of a demand for technocratic and authoritarian-decision making by significant sections of the public – is substantiated by the findings in the study and the verification of its hypotheses.

The first hypothesis maintained that the Indian public’s political epistemology was such that it could be classified as a *naïve technocratic worldview*<sup>21</sup>, and therefore, Indian politics could be viewed as operating under the paradigm of *democratic technocracy*. The results of the demand-side analysis verified this proposition. A significant portion (a majority) of respondents showed their concern for technocratic-issues over identity-partisan issues, their preference for strong authoritarian (executive) leadership over parliamentary (electoral) consensus-building, and

---

<sup>21</sup> Refer to chapter II pp. 14-15 for the definition of the *naïve technocratic worldview* and its constituent elements – a bias for *technocratic action*, *technocratic voluntarism*, and the use of *intention-heuristics*.

their support for Narendra Modi as the best political candidate for governing India. While there are fluctuations in responses between the 2014 and the 2019 surveys, by and large, the trends remain consistent. In addition, supplementary survey data (APU-Lokniti, 2019; and Pew Research Centre, 2021) also illustrated similar trends.

Political discourse in India does not necessarily occur along sectarian lines, however, it has been the BJP's *modus operandi* since its inception. The Hindu nationalism espoused by the BJP to unite the majority Hindu community has always been a battle of uniting under religion and overcoming caste division amongst the ocean of different clans and communities who are considered as Hindus. Jaffrelot and Schoch (2021) state such a feat as never having been effectively realized until 2014 and the rise of Modi; nonetheless, the populist logic of uniting the majority under Hindu nationalism has a tense relation with what Jaffrelot calls "Bahujanism" – (especially lower) caste-based political parties and organizations fighting for their social rights, as opposed to coalescing with upper-caste Hindus (103-104). There is a certain fluctuation, dynamism, and fragility to the language of populist discourses, which Laclau attributes to the performative operation of the populist logic in a social reality marked by heterogeneity (2005: 118). Hindu nationalism, thus, cannot always satiate the demands of all groups that make up the winning coalition of the electorate. Nonetheless, what Laclau termed as the performance of the populist discourse has been employed by Modi and the BJP, to an unprecedented degree of success in the last two national elections.

On the supply-side analysis, Ostiguy & Moffitt's performative-relational approach is based on the Laclauian interpretation of the discursive study of populism, juxtaposing it against performative political practices (2021: 52-53). Politics itself is seen as an exercise in public relations done in distinct styles – with the populist style entailing the use of *plebian appeal* and the creation of an *antagonistic other*. Examining the supply-side of politics, the practices and discourse of Modi and the BJP, demonstrated that indeed in both practice and discourse such a style is employed by Modi. By treating Modi as an "overflowing signifier" under the approach, one could contextualize the different appeals within the political performance to relate to as many different heterogeneous groups as possible.

While a baseline populist discourse appears to be directed as a broad overarching appeal for all to coalesce under, other appeals like the Hindu nationalist, the social-welfarism, or technocratic appeal, append the larger discourse to attract people from diverse backgrounds. The second hypothesis – verifying the populist style of Modi's public outreach – finds substantiation in the

supply-side analysis; in political practices, one has the massive mobilization of party workers and those from allied organizations, polarizing tactics to fan communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims (and other minority groups), and the use of Hindu symbols and imageries in politics and policymaking; in discourse Modi's appeals to his humble outsider beginnings to politics and his OBC background to connect to the masses of lower- and middle-caste Hindus and the poor in general, and the vilification of various *antagonistic others* – political rivals as the corrupt elite, Muslims (and other religious minorities) as the social 'other', left-liberal intellectuals as 'anti-nationals' and so on. Coupled with the highly stylized and persona-driven political campaigns of Narendra Modi, one has a political leader that extensively uses a populist political style.

The importance of technocratic appeal in the supply side, when juxtaposed against the demand-side preferences for *technocratic action*, and *technocratic voluntarism* (a strong will in a leader), becomes evident. If the fluctuations and dynamism of the populist discourse arise due to the heterogeneity of society, technocratic rhetoric frames societal/policy problems in an identity-partisan neutral manner, under the ostensible guise of solutions for the "good of all" – the homogenous nation. While the populist logic, as illustrated by Laclau, referred to political leaders operating in democratic politics and trying to create a coalition of the 'people' to represent, the *naïve technocratic worldview* (political epistemology) of citizens works as a technocratic-logic of assessing politicians, policymakers and leaders based on their problem-solving capacity in the paradigm of a *democratic technocracy*. For Friedman, the political epistemology of the citizens (*naïve technocratic worldview*) leads to the development of epistemic populism<sup>22</sup> in a *democratic technocracy* (2019b: 329-331). Technocratic-populism arises when a politician/leader's style is transgressive in claims of looking out for the 'people's' interests is legitimized by public acceptance; the populist leader, then, is viewed to use authoritarianism as a justified means to the end of solving societal/policy problems, over partisan legislative debating (350-353).

The supply-side analysis also verified the third hypothesis – that a consistent technocratic appeal is embedded in the larger political discourse of Modi and the BJP. In general, there is a visible authoritarian style of governance demonstrated by Modi, whether it be the decline in the freedom of the press (Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2020), or independence of the judiciary (Saxena,

---

<sup>22</sup> Epistemic populism is the development of populist mentality amongst the public based on their claims of knowing the correct knowledge claims of what policies, or politician may be good for the country, and anyone with a contradictory stance is the enemy of the 'people'. For a more detailed explanation refer back to chapter II, p. 15.

2018; and Jaffrelot & Schoch, 2021), or authoritarian (technocratic) developmental projects like the Smart-City Missions, or development of Special Economic Zones, with the large-scale displacement of the poor (Basu, 2018; Yerramsetti, 2019; Sud, 2020; and Jaffrelot & Schoch, 2021). The executive responsibilities of the prime minister of solving societal/policy problems as a decisive, strong-willed leader find valency on the supply-side – in the minds of Modi and the BJP – and on the demand-side – with the expectations of the public. Other constitutional institutions like the judiciary and legislature find their roles significantly reduced. The analysis also demonstrates the clear technocratic rhetoric and appeal embedded in Modi’s political discourse, existing in complementarity with the authoritarian populist and Hindu nationalist appeal. Furthermore, there is an amalgamation of the different kinds of appeals, as evidenced by the rhetoric in the speeches of Modi’s, the mixing of Hindu symbols and motifs with development projects (Sud, 2020), or the endeavour to establish an alternative intellectual and policy discourse through policy think tanks (Sajjanhar, 2021), or changing the education policies for more bias towards Hindu culture and thinking over others, in terms of history and social sciences (Jaffrelot & Schoch, 2021: 169).

The study showed how the public demand for *technocratic action*, and *technocratic voluntarism* in a leader (a strong will for necessary social change), is met by the political practices and discourse of Narendra Modi. It is populist in style, leveraging a narrative of Modi as the champion of the ‘people’ against a range of social *antagonistic others* – the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty and the Congress party (as political elites), the English-speaking Westernized elites, intellectuals, or minorities. One has the *plebian appeal* of a confrontational and jesting tone of speech towards his rival in Modi’s rhetoric, a hyper-stylized, mediatized, and celebratized public relations style, while simultaneously also referencing his austere saintly dedication to public service and his humble origins as a political outsider who worked selling tea with his father in railway stations as a boy. In addition, Modi’s political style (‘Brand Modi’) has a heavy emphasis on technology and modernity, be it for his model of governance based on heavy industrialization and privatization, or his proselytization and practice of technology-based public administration, or his general rhetoric of economic development, ‘good’ governance, and technological innovation. The larger Hindu nationalist discourse of the BJP, and other affiliated organizations, lead to the supply of ethnonationalism populism. Therefore, a technocratic-populist appeal also emerges along with the Hindu nationalist-populist appeal in Modi and the BJP’s political discourse. The rising authoritarianism in India

can be seen as a product of the Hindu nationalist, technocratic and populist politics being practiced and preached by the party in power.

## 5.2 Discussion of Limitations & Implications

### 5.2.1 Limitations

A few methodological challenges do arise in this study; particularly, with regards to the application of the paradigm of *democratic technocracy* to the case of India, how we treat the concepts of both “technocracy” and “populism”, and the general methodological issues encountered in using survey data. The nature of these political phenomena being studied is complex and multidimensional, as is the application of such concepts in any real-world context. Populism itself is approached in different methods to study – ideationally, as a political strategy, as a political style, and as a political discourse. Similarly, technocracy has could be the traditionally defined notion of the *technocratic* as an esoteric, elite form of knowledge expertise used by a qualified few for “objectively” neutral policymaking for the “good of all”, and also be defined as an ideology of solving societal/policy problems of society, or the polity, as a homogenous whole from the voting public’s perspective<sup>23</sup>.

The choices of the theories applied in the study – Friedman’s *democratic technocracy* paradigm and Ostiguy & Moffitt’s performative-relation approach – have both their advantages and disadvantages, something discussed briefly in the theory and methodology chapter<sup>24</sup>. One major drawback of the *democratic technocracy* paradigm is how it treats the concept of “technocracy”; in treating it as an ideology from the demand-side (citizen’s perspective), the emphasis falls primarily on effective governance and public policymaking, and not necessarily on the technological and economic implication of having a technocratic mindset. Similarly, in focusing on the performance of the populist style, and how public relations are cultivated, the focus on the ideational implications, or the more concrete strategic implication of top-down decision-making emblematic of populist leaders receives relatively less attention.

However, the theoretical framework applied allows the study to pursue its intended objective, that of conducting a demand-supply analysis to demonstrate the importance of technocratic-populism as a political logic. On the demand side, Friedman’s paradigm allows us to examine

---

<sup>23</sup> Refer back to chapter I, Introduction, on the state-of-the-art literary review of studies on technocracy and populism.

<sup>24</sup> Refer back to chapter II, Theoretical Framework & Methodology, to check how technocracy and populism (as a political style) are defined.

the political epistemology of the public with regards to their notions on policymaking and technocratic competence. On the supply-side, the performative-relational approach allows us to examine how Modi's political practice and discourse constitute elements of technocratic-populism within it. The selective operationalization of terminology in the methodology allows for a more coherent and consistent demonstration of the study's intended thesis – that technocratic-populism plays an important role in the larger political discourse of Modi and the BJP, especially in the face of the demand for technocratic and authoritarian policy-making.

With regards to the use of survey data, two particular challenges arise in the study. First is the general challenge of applying survey data. One of the primary concerns is that of respondents' answering questions with social-desirability as a confounding influence – for instance, while neutral and obvious policy actions like economic development may be marked as the most important issue by a respondent, they might be hiding their true policy concern that could be motivated by bigotry towards another social group. Despite having a representative sample from all the states of India, one cannot easily generalize the findings of survey data. The large and varying sample sizes, with  $n = 20951$  and  $22299$  for the 2014 pre-and post-electoral surveys respectively; and  $n = 10010$  and  $22381$  for the 2019 pre-and post-electoral surveys respectively, pose a challenge for a direct comparison. While generalization using survey data itself is challenging, longitudinal comparison of political opinions of voters with differing sample sizes makes it even more so. Nevertheless, the data coupled with the literature on Indian politics demonstrate the categorical existence of a technocratic-populist logic.

The second challenge is the approximation of the CSDS NES survey-data results as a stand-in for the requisite conditions of the *naïve technocratic worldview* in the Indian public's political epistemology – which in turn verifies the first hypothesis of Indian democracy functioning like a *democratic technocracy*. The survey questions and responses chosen provide a good approximation for testing the requisite conditions. However, a survey specifically designed to test the public's political epistemology, in line with the framework designed by Friedman (primary research) would have given more reliable and robust results regarding the public's political epistemology. In fact, newer surveys examining such attitudes of the voting public, a meta-analysis of existing surveys, and more studies on the Indian public's political epistemology, will undoubtedly provide a more precise understanding of the subject. As such, this study provides us with evidence of the presence of conditions that appear to fulfil the *democratic technocracy* paradigm. The degree to which these conditions are embedded in the

public psyche, the nitty-gritty nuances of these conditions still merit further research and discussion.

### 5.2.2 Implications

In applying an explicit technocratic-populist reading of Modi and the BJP's politics, this study contributes to the emerging scholarship on technocratic-populism in India that considers the cumulative-combined effect of both the appeals, rather than treat them as mutually exclusive. Furthermore, regarding contemporary Indian politics, it provides us with another avenue of understanding distinct from the ethnonationalist (Hindu-nationalist) populist developments that have been extensively studied since the ascent of Modi and the BJP to national office. Not as an alternative proposition, but rather as a complementary development – where technocratic, populist, and ethnonationalist politics all intertwine in their effect on both the demand and the supply side of democratic politics. A technocratic-populist explanation of the success of Modi and the BJP also alleviates the reductive narrative of Indian politics primarily being dominated by identity-politics, religious polarization, and ethnonationalist discourse. The aforementioned tendencies do play a gargantuan role in shaping Indian politics. However, as the study illustrates other (so-called technocratic-issues and preoccupations) also do play an important factor in both the public and the politician's minds.

Bickerton & Accetti (2021) posit technopopulism to be the new logic of contemporary democracy, shifting away from the programmatic ideological logic of the left-wing-right-wing binary. In arguing their case, they primarily rely on case studies of European democracies, particularly in the case of Britain, Italy, France, and Spain (41-87). However, such developments and changes are being felt across the world over, with each case demonstrating the way in which technocratic-populism operates in general, but also in a unique manner, given the context and circumstances of each particular case. In studying the proliferation of technocratic and populist positions in Italy's party-political spectrum, post-Berlusconi, Castaldo & Verzichelli (2020) attributed such developments to the history of populist political mentality and recurring demands for effective and technically skilful governance in the country (492). Such patterns have also been observed in Latin American where Conaghan, Malloy, and Abugattas (1990), for instance, found the "behaviour and economic performance of previous administrations" to be a central issue influencing a neoliberal shift from the authoritarian-populist governments in countries like Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru (10). Since the 1990s, Latin American politics have developed a pattern of cohabitation and coexistence among

technocratic and populist forces depending upon the economic and security circumstances, as illustrated by Barrenechea and Dargent (2020).

The case study of India provides another example for technocratic-populist politics in the context of a country with a similar history of social welfare practices, populist politicians, and also demand for effective governance and economic development. In describing the voting public's mentality after the 2019 national elections, Suri (2019) states that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Indian citizens have experienced social change from two avenues; firstly, the state in terms of socioeconomic rights and empowerment through the right to equality and education provided for the lower strata of society, and through policies of land-reform and welfare-schemes; and secondly, the market, as post-1991, neoliberal capitalist policies have increased urbanization, facilitated occupational mobility, and raised material wealth of many of the hitherto, poor (10-11). In such a socio-political climate the technocratic-populist politics of Modi and the BJP is way to navigate both the expectations and demands of the Indian public.

Finally, as an analysis on the dynamics of technocratic-populism and how it functions as ideology and discourse from the demand and supply of Indian politics. Researchers like Caramani (2017) and Bickerton & Accetti (2017) have noted that the complementarity between technocracy and populism arises due to the mutual disdain for pluralist (representative) party democracy. Friedman's paradigm of *democratic technocracy*, however, establishes what Elliot (2020) calls a "familial relationship" between technocracy, democracy, and populism. The demand-supply analysis tests this relationship by checking for the political epistemology of the public, through the examination of the populist political style and the technocratic appeal embedded in the politician's (Modi) political discourse. In doing so, the study demonstrates an affinity between technocracy and populism that goes beyond their shared antipathy towards representative democracy, and towards a shared political logic for the public and politician within a democratic framework – or within a *democratic technocracy*.



## Bibliography

Azim Premji University-Lokniti. (2019). *Politics and Society Between Elections*. [Online] Available from [https://www.lokniti.org/media/upload\\_files/politics-and-society-between-elections-2019-report.pdf](https://www.lokniti.org/media/upload_files/politics-and-society-between-elections-2019-report.pdf)

Arnsdorf, I., Dawsey, J. & Lippman, D. (2016). 'Will 'drain the swamp' be Trump's first broken promise?' *Politico*. [Online] 22<sup>nd</sup> December. Available from <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/12/trump-drain-swamp-promise-232938> [Accessed 03/01/2022].

Aiyar, Y. & Sircar, N. (2020) Understanding the Decline of Regional Party Power in the 2019 National Election and Beyond, *Contemporary South Asia*, 28(2), pp. 209-222, DOI: 10.1080/09584935.2020.1765989

Anastasiou, M. (2019) Of Nation and People: The Discursive Logic of Nationalist Populism, *Javnost - The Public*, 26(3), pp. 330-345, DOI: 10.1080/13183222.2019.1606562

Anderson, E. & Longkumer, A. (2018). 'Neo-Hindutva': evolving forms, spaces, and expressions of Hindu nationalism, *Contemporary South Asia*, 26(4), pp. 371-377, DOI: 10.1080/09584935.2018.1548576

Bajaj, S. G. (2017). The Use of Twitter during the 2014 Indian General Elections: Framing, Agenda-Setting, and the Personalization of Politics. *Asian Survey*, 57(2), pp. 249–270. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26367749>

Basu, I. (2019). Elite discourse coalitions and the governance of 'smart spaces': Politics, power and Privilege in India's Smart Cities Mission. *Political Geography*, Vol. 68, pp. 77–85. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2018.11.002>

Barrenechea R. & Dargent E. (2020), Populists and Technocrats in Latin America: Conflict, Cohabitation, and Cooperation. *Politics and Governance*, 8(4), pp. 485-495.

Bell, D. (1960). *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties*. New York, Free Press.

Bhatia, A. (2020). The 'Saffronisation' of India and Contemporary Political Ideology, *World Englishes*, 39(4), pp. 568-580. <https://doi.org/10.1111/weng.12494>

Bickerton, C. & Accetti, C. I. (2017) Populism and technocracy: opposites or complements, *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 20(2), pp. 186-206, DOI: 10.1080/13698230.2014.995504

Bickerton, C., & Accetti, C. I. (2021). *Technopopulism: The New Logic of Democratic politics*. Oxford University Press.

Biswas, S. (2021). 'Electoral autocracy': The downgrading of India's democracy', *BBC*. [Online] 16<sup>th</sup> March. Available from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-56393944> [Accessed 03/01/2022].

Bustikova, L. & Babos, P. (2020). Best in Covid: Populists in the Time of Pandemic. *Politics and Governance*, 8(4), 496-508. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v8i4.3424>

Bustikova, L. & Guasti, P. (2018). The State as a Firm: Understanding the Autocratic Roots of Technocratic Populism. *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, 33(2), pp. 302-330.

Bustikova, L. & Guasti, P. (2020). A Marriage of Convenience: Responsive Populists and Responsible Experts. *Politics and Governance*, 8(4), pp. 468-472. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v8i4.3876>

Canovan, M. (2004) Populism for political theorists, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 9(3), pp. 241-252, DOI: 10.1080/1356931042000263500

Caramani, D. (2017). Will vs. Reason: The Populist and Technocratic Forms of Political Representation and Their Critique to Party Government. *American Political Science Review*, 111(1), pp. 54-67.

Castaldo, A. & Verzichelli, L. (2020). Technocratic Populism in Italy after Berlusconi: The Trendsetter and his Disciples. *Politics and Governance*, 8(4), pp. 485-495. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v8i4.3348>

Centeno, M. (1993). The New Leviathan: The Dynamics and Limits of Technocracy. *Theory and Society*, 22(3), pp. 307-335. Retrieved August 5, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/657736>

Chaturvedi, S. (2018). 'Mute Modi: Why Is the PM Terrified of Holding Even a Single Press Conference?', *The Wire*. [Online] 4th January. Available from <https://thewire.in/politics/narendra-modi-press-conference> [Accessed 03/01/2022].

Chhibber, P. K. and Ostermann, S. L. (2014) 'The BJP's Fragile Mandate: Modi and Vote Mobilizers in the 2014 General Elections', *Studies in Indian Politics*, 2(2), pp. 137–151. Doi: 10.1177/2321023014551870.

Chhibber, P., & Verma, R. (2014). The BJP's 2014 "Modi Wave": An Ideological Consolidation of the Right. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 49(39), pp. 50–56. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24480734>

Conaghan, C. M., Malloy, J. M., & Abugattas, L. A. (1990). Business and the "Boys": The Politics of Neoliberalism in the Central Andes. *Latin American Research Review*, 25(2), pp. 3–30. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2503778>

Connah, L. (2021) The Indian Northeast: India's Shift from Colonised to Coloniser, *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 33(2), pp. 201-209, DOI:10.1080/14781158.2021.1847062

De La Torre, C. (2013). Technocratic Populism in Ecuador. *Journal of Democracy*, 24(3), pp. 33-46. DOI: 10.1353/jod.2013.0047

Deshpande, R., Tillin, L. and Kailash, K. K. (2019) 'The BJP's Welfare Schemes: Did They Make a Difference in the 2019 Elections?', *Studies in Indian Politics*, 7(2), pp. 219–233. Doi: [10.1177/2321023019874911](https://doi.org/10.1177/2321023019874911).

Elliott, K. J. (2020). A Family Affair: Populism, Technocracy, and Political Epistemology, *Critical Review*, 32(1-3), pp. 85-102, DOI: 10.1080/08913811.2020.1851480

Feenberg, A. (1994) The Technocracy Thesis Revisited: On "The Critique of Power", *Inquiry*, 37(1), pp. 85-102, DOI: [10.1080/00201749408602341](https://doi.org/10.1080/00201749408602341)

Fischer, F. (1991). American Think Tanks: Policy Elites and the Politicization of Expertise. *Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration*, 4(3), pp. 332-353.

Fisher, M. (2018). 'The Weaknesses in Liberal Democracy That May Be Pulling It Apart', *The New York Times*. [Online] 1<sup>st</sup> November. Available from

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/01/world/americas/democracy-brazil-populism.html> [Accessed 03/01/2022].

Friedman, J. (2020). *Power Without Knowledge: A Critique of Technocracy*. Oxford University Press.

Friedman, J. (2019). Populists as Technocrats, *Critical Review*, 31:3-4, 315-376

Gailmard, S., & Patty, J. S. (2007). Slackers and Zealots: Civil Service, Policy Discretion, and Bureaucratic Expertise. *American Journal of Political Science*, 51(4), pp. 873–889. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4620105>.

Guasti, P. (2020). Populism in Power and Democracy: Democratic Decay and Resilience in the Czech Republic (2013–2020). *Politics and Governance*, 8(4), 473-484. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v8i4.3420>

Gunnell, J. (1982). The Technocratic Image and the Theory of Technocracy. *Technology and Culture*, 23(3), 392-416. doi:10.2307/3104485

Havlík, V. (2019) Technocratic Populism and Political Illiberalism in Central Europe, *Problems of Post-Communism*, 66(6), pp. 369-384, DOI:10.1080/10758216.2019.1580590

Heath, O. (2020) Communal realignment and support for the BJP, 2009–2019, *Contemporary South Asia*, 28(2), pp. 195-208, DOI: 10.1080/09584935.2020.1765986

Jaffrelot, C. & Tillin, L. (2017). Populism in India. In C. R. Kaltwasser, P. Taggart, P. O. Espejo, & P. Ostiguy (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* (1st ed., Vol. 1, pp. 179–194). chapter, Oxford University Press.

Jaffrelot, C. (2019) ‘Class and Caste in the 2019 Indian Election—Why Have So Many Poor Started Voting for Modi?’, *Studies in Indian Politics*, 7(2), pp. 149–160. Doi: 10.1177/2321023019874890.

Jaffrelot, C. & Verniers, G. (2020) The BJP’s 2019 Election Campaign: Not Business as Usual, *Contemporary South Asia*, 28(2), 155-177, DOI:10.1080/09584935.2020.1765985

Jaffrelot, C., & Schoch, C. (2021). *Modi’s India Hindu nationalism and the rise of ethnic democracy*. Princeton University Press.

Jansen, R. (2011). Populist Mobilization: A New Theoretical Approach to Populism. *Sociological Theory*, 29(2), pp. 75-96.

Kanungo, P. (2019). Sangh and Sarkar. In A. P. Chatterji, T. B. Hansen, & C. Jaffrelot (Eds.), *Majoritarian State: How Hindu Nationalism is Changing India*, pp. 133–149. chapter, Oxford University Press.

Kaur, R. (2015) ‘Good Times, Brought to You by Brand Modi’, *Television & New Media*, 16(4), pp. 323–330. Doi: 10.1177/1527476415575492.

Kiro, S. K. (2019) ‘Look at Their Clothes’: Modi Plays Communal Card on CAA, Targets Muslim Protestors’, *The Wire*. [Online] 16<sup>th</sup> December. Available from <https://thewire.in/communalism/narendra-modi-citizenship-amendment-act-protests-clothes> [Accessed 03/01/2022]

Knight, A. (1998). Populism and Neo-Populism in Latin America, Especially Mexico. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 30(2), pp. 223–248. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/158525>

Krishnan, S. (2017) The engineering of India’s middle-class politics, *Contemporary South Asia*, 25(4), pp. 364-379, DOI: 10.1080/09584935.2017.1395809

Laclau, E. (2005). *On Populist Reason*. London, Verso.

Larsson, O. L. (2020) Technocracy, Governmentality, and Post-Structuralism, *Critical Review*, 32(1-3), pp. 103-123, DOI: 10.1080/08913811.2020.1842004

Lokniti (2014), *National Election Studies* Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. Pre-Poll Survey. Available from <https://www.lokniti.org/national-election-studies>

Lokniti (2014), *National Election Studies* Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. Post Poll Survey. Available from <https://www.lokniti.org/national-election-studies>

Lokniti (2019), *National Election Studies*. Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. Pre-Poll Survey Available from <https://www.lokniti.org/national-election-studies>

Lokniti (2019), *National Election Studies* Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. Post Poll Survey. Available from <https://www.lokniti.org/national-election-studies>

Marcuse, H. (1964). *One Dimensional Man*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

McDonnell, D. & Cabrera, L. (2019) The right-wing populism of India's Bharatiya Janata Party (and why comparativists should care), *Democratization*, 26(3), pp. 484-501, DOI:10.1080/13510347.2018.1551885

Mitra, S. (2021) #ModiWithAkshay: 'Brand Modi', social media and Bollywood star power, *Celebrity Studies*, 12(2), pp. 282-298, DOI: 10.1080/19392397.2021.1912256

Mitra, S. K., & Schottli, J. (2016). India's 2014 General Elections: A Critical Realignment in Indian Politics? *Asian Survey*, 56(4), pp. 605–628. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26364378>

Modi, N. (2019). 'Prime Minister Narendra Modi Interview to Indian Express: 'Khan Market gang hasn't created my image, 45 years of tapasya has... you cannot dismantle it'', Interviewed by Ravish Tiwari and Raj Kama Jha. *India Today*. [Online] 13<sup>th</sup> May. Available from <https://indianexpress.com/elections/pm-narendra-modi-interview-to-indian-express-live-lok-sabha-elections-2019-bjp-5723186/?pfrom=HP> [Accessed 03/01/2022].

Modi, N. (2014). [Twitter] 15<sup>th</sup> April. Available from <https://twitter.com/narendramodi/status/456025085782925312> [Accessed 03/01/2022]

Modi, N. (2014). [Twitter] 21<sup>st</sup> April. Available from <https://twitter.com/narendramodi/status/458226382766497792> [Accessed 03/01/2022]

Modi, N. (2021). *Digital infrastructure is taking everything from 'Ration to Prashasan' to the common Indian in a fast and transparent manner*. Speech [Online] 27<sup>th</sup> September, New Delhi, India. Available from <https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modi-s-address-at-the-launch-of-ayushman-bharat-digital-mission-557563> [Accessed 03/01/2022]

Modi, N. (2021). *Double Engine Government of Uttar Pradesh is the result of decades of hard work of many Karma Yogis*. Speech [Online] 25<sup>th</sup> October, Varanasi, India. Available from <https://www.narendramodi.in/prime-minister-narendra-modi-s-speech-at-launch-of-pm-ayushman-bharat-health-infrastructure-mission-in-varanasi-558078> [Accessed 03/01/2022]

Modi, N. (2021). *India's digital revolution is rooted in our democracy, our demography, and the scale of our economy*. Speech [Online] 18<sup>th</sup> November, Sydney, Australia. Available from <https://www.narendramodi.in/prime-minister-narendra-modi-keynote-address-at-the-sydney-dialogue-558564> [Accessed 03/01/2022]

Moffitt, B., & Tormey, S. (2014). Rethinking Populism: Politics, Mediatisation and Political Style. *Political Studies*, 62(2), pp. 381–397. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.12032>

Mouk, Y. & Kyle, J. (2018). What Populists Do to Democracies, *The Atlantic*. [Online] 26<sup>th</sup> December. Available from <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/12/hard-data-populism-bolsonaro-trump/578878/> [Accessed 03/01/2022]

Mudde, C. & Kaltwasser, C. R. (2018). ‘Studying Populism in Comparative Perspective: Reflections on the Contemporary and Future Research Agenda’, *Comparative Political Studies*. 51(13), pp.1667-1693. doi:[10.1177/0010414018789490](https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414018789490)

Nelkin, D. (1975). The Political Impact of Technical Expertise. *Social Studies of Science*, 5(1), pp. 35–54. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/284554>

Ostiguy, P. (2017). Populism: A Socio-Cultural Approach. In C. R. Kaltwasser, P. Taggart, P. O. Espejo, & P. Ostiguy (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* (1st ed., Vol. 1, pp. 73–100). chapter, Oxford University Press.

Ostiguy, P., & Moffitt, B. (2021). Who Would Identify with an “Empty Signifier”? - The Relational, Performative Approach to Populism. In P. Ostiguy, F. Panizza, & B. Moffitt (Eds.), *Populism in Global Perspective: A Performative Discursive Approach* (pp. 47–72). chapter, Routledge.

Pai, S. (1990). Regional Parties & the Emerging Pattern of Politics in India, *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 51(3), 393-415. Retrieved June 10, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41855505>

Pai, S., & Kumar, S. (2018). *Everyday communalism: Riots in contemporary Uttar Pradesh*. Oxford University Press.

Palishkar, S., & Suri, K. C. (2014). India’s 2014 Lok Sabha Elections: Critical Shifts in the Long Term, Caution in the Short Term. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 49(39), pp. 39–49. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24480733>

Pal, J. (2019). The Making of a Technocrat: Social-Media and Narendra Modi. In Punathambekar, A. & Mohan, S. (Eds.), *Global Digital Cultures: Perspectives from South Asia* (pp. 163-183). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Pew Research Centre (2021). *Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation*. 29<sup>th</sup> June [Online] Available from [https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2021/06/PF\\_06.29.21\\_India.full\\_report.pdf](https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2021/06/PF_06.29.21_India.full_report.pdf)

Philip, G. (1998). The New Populism, Presidentialism and Market-Orientated Reform in Spanish South America. *Government and Opposition*, 33(1), pp. 81–97. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44484078>

Raghavan, S. (2021). ‘PM Modi Has Held Just One Press Conference in Six Years. What Does This Mean for India?’, *Statecraft*. 2<sup>nd</sup> January [Online] Available from <https://www.statecraft.co.in/article/pm-modi-has-held-just-one-press-conference-in-six-years-what-does-this-mean-for-india> [Accessed 03/01/2022]

Rai, S. (2019) “May the Force Be with You”: Narendra Modi and the Celebrityization of Indian Politics, *Communication, Culture and Critique*, 12(3) September 2019, pp. 323–339, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ccc/tcz013>

Rajagopal, A. (2005). *Politics after television: religious nationalism and the reshaping of the Indian public*. Cambridge University Press.

Roth, K. (2017). ‘World Report 2017’, *Human Rights Watch*, pp. 1-14 [Online] Available from [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/world\\_report\\_download/wr2017-web.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/world_report_download/wr2017-web.pdf) [Accessed 03/01/2022]

Sajjanhar, A. (2021). The new experts: Populism, technocracy and politics of expertise in contemporary India. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, pp. 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2021.1934889>

Sardesai, S. (2019) ‘The Religious Divide in Voting Preferences and Attitudes in the 2019 Election’, *Studies in Indian Politics*, 7(2), pp. 161–175. Doi: 10.1177/2321023019874892.

Saxena, S. (2018) ‘Court’ing Hindu Nationalism: Law and the Rise of Modern Hindutva, *Contemporary South Asia*, 26(4), pp. 378-399, DOI:10.1080/09584935.2018.1546672

Sen, R. (2016) Narendra Modi’s Makeover and the Politics of Symbolism, *Journal of Asian Public Policy*, 9(2), pp. 98-111, DOI: 10.1080/17516234.2016.1165248

Shastri, S. (2019) ‘The Modi Factor in the 2019 Lok Sabha Election: How Critical Was It to the BJP Victory?’, *Studies in Indian Politics*, 7(2), pp. 206–218. Doi: 10.1177/2321023019874910.



Schmitt, M. (2016). 'Donald Trump is not an ideologue – he's a (bad) technocrat'. *Vox*. [Online] 27<sup>th</sup> January. Available from <https://www.vox.com/polyarchy/2016/1/29/10872912/donald-trump-technocrat> [Accessed 03/01/2022].

Stanley, B. (2008) The thin ideology of populism. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 13(1), 95-110. DOI: 10.1080/13569310701822289

Sridharan, E. (2014). Class Voting in the 2014 Lok Sabha Elections: The Growing Size and Importance of the Middle Classes. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 49(39), pp. 72–76. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24480737>

Subramanian, N. (2007). Populism in India. *The SAIS Review of International Affairs*, 27(1), pp. 81-91. Retrieved June 9, 2021, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26999347>

Sud, N. (2020): The Actual Gujarat Model: Authoritarianism, Capitalism, Hindu Nationalism and Populism in the Time of Modi, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, DOI: 10.1080/00472336.2020.1846205

Sircar, N. (2020) The Politics of Vishwas: Political Mobilization in the 2019 National Election, *Contemporary South Asia*, 28(2), 178-194, DOI: 10.1080/09584935.2020.1765988

Suri, K. C. (2019) 'Social Change and the Changing Indian Voter: Consolidation of the BJP in India's 2019 Lok Sabha Election', *Studies in Indian Politics*, 7(2), pp. 234–246. Doi: [10.1177/2321023019874913](https://doi.org/10.1177/2321023019874913).

Tewari, R. & Kaushika, P. (2019). 'Narendra Modi addresses first press conference as PM, restricts it to his 'mann ki baat'', *The Print*. [Online] 17<sup>th</sup> May. Available from <https://theprint.in/politics/narendra-modi-addresses-first-press-conference-as-pm-restricts-it-to-his-mann-ki-baat/236839/> [Accessed 03/01/2022].

Udupa, S. (2018) Enterprise Hindutva and social media in urban India, *Contemporary South Asia*, 26(4), pp. 453-467, DOI:10.1080/09584935.2018.1545007

Varshney, A., Ayyangar, S., & Swaminathan, S. (2021). Populism and Hindu Nationalism in India, *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 56, 197-222. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-021-09335-8>

Verma, A. K. (2014). Development and Governance Trump Caste Identities in Uttar Pradesh. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 49(39), pp. 89–94. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24480740>

Wadhawan, D. A. & Deka, K. (2018) 'Hindustan ka chowkidar chor hai: Rahul Gandhi calls PM Modi a thief in Rajasthan', *India Today* [Online] 20<sup>th</sup> September. Available from <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/hindustan-ka-chowkidar-chor-hai-rahul-gandhi-calls-pm-modi-a-thief-in-rajasthan-1344775-2018-09-20> [Accessed 03/01/2022].

Weyland, K. (2001). Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics. *Comparative Politics*, 34(1), pp. 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.2307/422412>

The Wire (2019). 'Election Commission Stalls Release of Modi Biopic', *The Wire*. [Online] 10<sup>th</sup> April. Available from <https://thewire.in/politics/pm-narendra-modi-biopic-election-commission> [Accessed 03/01/2022].

The Wire (2021). 'India Is No Longer a Democracy but an 'Electoral Autocracy': Swedish Institute', *The Wire*. [Online] 11<sup>th</sup> March. Available from <https://thewire.in/rights/india-no-longer-democracy-electoral-autocracy-v-dem-institute-report-bjp-narendra-modi> [Accessed 03/01/2022].

Yerramsetti, S. (2021) 'Not decided in the kitchen! Technocracy and the regulatory-welfare politics of India's Direct Benefits Transfer reform', *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 87(4), pp. 908–924. DOI: [10.1177/0020852319873708](https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852319873708).

2022. [online] Available at: <https://socialblade.com/twitter/top/50/most-followers> [Accessed 03/01/2022].