

The Youth Vote in Lok Sabha Elections 2019¹

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ABSTRACT

The scale of the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) victory in India's 2019 parliamentary elections took most observers by surprise. The magnitude of the party's victory indicates that it not only consolidated gains made in 2014, but also further expanded its support beyond its traditional base. Similar to the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, these elections saw a lot of buzz around young voters (18- to 25-year-olds) and the parties left no stone unturned in order to attract this section. BJP's share among young voters was 41 percent, which was not only 7 percentage points higher than that in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, but also about 4 percentage points higher than the party's overall vote share. So clearly, the young vote played a significant role in the performance of the BJP and the party not only managed to retain the youth vote, but also expanded its support among them. Analyzing data from the National Elections Study (NES) 2019, this paper looks into the factors that influenced the youth vote in its favor. Satisfaction with the overall performance and the decisions of the central government in the last five years with a weak opposition and a weaker poll strategy helped the BJP emerge even stronger among young voters. However, it was the Modi's popularity that triumphed over all other factors and had the most impact among the young.

Keywords: youth, BJP, vote, turnout, electoral participation, issues, Lok Sabha elections

El voto juvenil en las elecciones de Lok Sabha 2019

RESUMEN

La escala de la victoria del Partido Bharatiya Janata (BJP) en las elecciones parlamentarias de la India en 2019 tomó por sorpresa a

la mayoría de los observadores. La magnitud de la victoria del partido indica que no solo consolidó las ganancias logradas en 2014, sino que también amplió aún más su apoyo más allá de su base tradicional. Al igual que en las elecciones de Lok Sabha de 2014, estas elecciones también vieron mucho revuelo entre los votantes jóvenes (18-25 años) y los partidos no dejaron piedra sin mover para atraer a esta sección. La participación del BJP entre los votantes jóvenes fue del 41 por ciento, lo que no solo fue siete puntos porcentuales más alto que en las elecciones de Lok Sabha de 2014, sino también alrededor de 4 puntos porcentuales más que la participación general en el voto del partido. Claramente, el voto de los jóvenes jugó un papel importante en el desempeño del BJP y el partido no solo logró retener el voto de los jóvenes, sino que también amplió su apoyo entre ellos. Analizando los datos de los Estudios Nacionales de Elecciones (NES) 2019, este documento analiza los factores que influyeron en el voto de los jóvenes a su favor. La satisfacción con el desempeño general, así como con las decisiones del gobierno central en los últimos cinco años con una oposición débil y una estrategia de votación más débil, ayudó al BJP a emerger aún más fuerte entre los jóvenes. Sin embargo, fue la popularidad de Modi la que triunfó sobre todos los demás factores y tuvo el mayor impacto entre los jóvenes.

Palabras clave: Juventud, BJP, votación, participación electoral, participación electoral, asuntos, elecciones de Lok Sabha

2019年人民院选举中的青年投票

摘要

2019年印度议会选举中印度人民党（BJP）取得胜利的规模让大多数观察者感到意外。该党获胜规模表明，BJP不仅巩固了其在2014年获得的成就，还进一步扩大了超过其传统阵地的支持。与2014年人民院选举相似的是，这些选举也在年青选民（18岁至25岁）中引起大量讨论，并且各党都不遗余力地吸引这一群体。41%年青选民投给了BJP，这一数字不仅比该党在2014年人民院选举中所获青年投票高出7个百分点，还比该党总得票率高出4个百分点。显然，青年投票在BJP的表现中发挥了显著作用，并且该党不仅成功保留了青年投票，还扩大了其在青年群体中所获的支持。通过分析2019年国家选举研究（NES），本文研究了影响青年为BJP投票的各因素。对过去五年间中央政府的整体表现及决策表示满意、反

对党势力的虚弱及其选举策略不足，这些都帮助BJP在青年群体中的体现更为强烈。然而，莫迪的受欢迎度胜过了所有其他因素，并在青年人群中发挥了最重要的影响。

关键词：青年，印度人民党，投票，投票率，选举参与，议题，人民院选举

1. Introduction

India is a young nation, having two thirds of its population below the age of 35 years.² In such a scenario, the youth vote proved to be a game changer in the 2019 general election. To start with, it is very complex to define youth, as there is no general consensus on its definition. However, for this study, we define youth as those individuals who are in the bracket of 18 to 25 years.

Youth are seen as the agents of social and political change and play an important role in electoral politics. Nonetheless, most of the previous studies done on voting behavior and political participation hint toward the lower participation of youth in electoral politics and India is no exception. However, the youth have been seriously engaged in various social and political movements in India. Due to their significant number, no political party can afford to ignore the interest of the young. As in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, these elections saw a lot of buzz around young voters and the parties left no stone unturned in order to attract this group.³

The magnitude of BJP's victory in India's 2019 parliamentary elections

indicates that the young voters played a significant role and was one of the key factors in the spectacular victory of the BJP. The party's vote share among young voters was 41 percent, which is not only 7 percentage points higher than that in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, but also about 4 percentage points higher than the party's overall vote share. In this context, the central question this paper seeks to answer is *What factors influenced the youth vote in favor of the BJP?* While answering this question, we also try to study how young voters are different from voters from other age groups in assessing the government's performance and the major decisions made by the government. Before investigating the central question by using a logit regression model, we present the emerging trends of voting behavior of Indian youth by juxtaposing them with that of other voters (non-youth, as per our definition). The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 delves into the voting behavior of Indian youth. In this section, we discuss young voter turnout, electoral participation, and party preferences, comparing them horizontally (within the youth segment) and vertically (to voters from other age groups).

Section 3 underlines the factors that might drive young voters to choose the BJP over other parties. Factors such as satisfaction with the incumbent government, leadership, support for major decisions of the government, electoral issues, and the campaigns led by the incumbent government and the opposition party are discussed in detail in this section. Section 4 presents an analytical explanation of the central question using a logit regression model. Section 5 sums up the argument and discusses the overall findings.

2. Emerging Trends in Voting Behavior of Indian Youth

a. Voter Turnout Among Young Indians

The first step toward participating in politics is voting. In order to encourage young Indians to participate in elections, the Election Commission of India used an aggressive campaign to

encourage voters to enroll and vote. Voting is the most active form of political participation, but unfortunately, not all who are eligible to vote do so. This section taps into the turnout among young voters vs. other age groups. The analysis of the Lok Sabha elections of 2019 shows that the turnout among youth saw a marginal decline from 2014 and stood at 67 percent (Figure 1). The turnout figures for youth and the other age groups portray a somewhat complicated trend. Barring 1998 and up to 2009 Lok Sabha elections, there was a substantive gap in the turnout between the two groups. There was less enthusiasm among younger voters to vote. However, since the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the gap between the turnout among young and other voters has almost diminished.

Socio-demographics factors like education, income, caste, locality, age, and region are also associated with turnout. When we look at the voter turnout of youth from different socio-

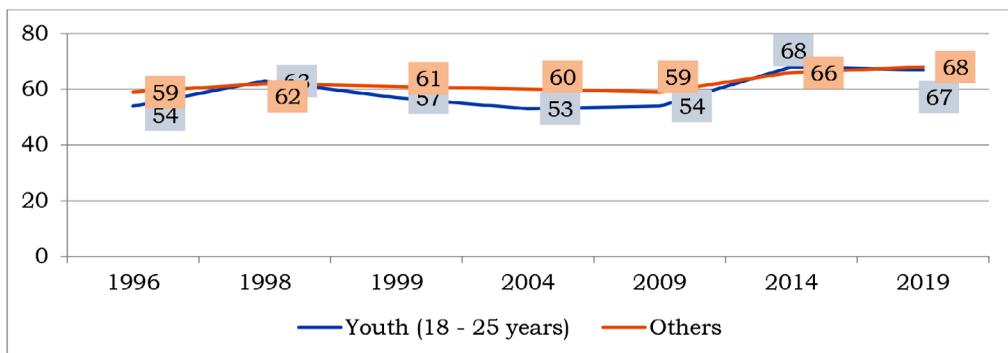


Figure 1. Voter Turnout among Youth and Others over the Years

Source: The data is weighted as per the actual voter turnout. Turnout for youth and others has been calculated by the data from CSDS Surveys.

Note: All figures are in percentages

Table 1: Turnout among Youth Belonging to Various Social Demographics

	Turnout 2019 (%)		Turnout 2014 (%)	
	Youth	Other	Youth	Other
Caste and communities				
Upper Caste	66	69	73	67
Other Backward Classes	69	71	69	69
Scheduled Caste	72	69	68	68
Scheduled Tribe	73	75	81	70
Muslim	58	61	60	58
Other religious minorities	56	61	58	60
Level of education				
Non-literate	63	65	70	65
Up to primary education	64	71	75	71
Up to matric education	69	69	63	67
College and above education	67	69	69	64
Locality				
Rural	67	70	71	69
Urban	66	64	62	62
Gender				
Women	66	66	65	64
Men	68	70	71	68
Economic class				
Poor	68	67	61	60
Lower	66	67	71	67
Middle	67	71	67	69
Upper	68	69	72	67

Source: The data is weighted as per the actual voter turnout. Turnout for various social demographic categories has been calculated by the data from CSDS Surveys.

Note: All figures are in percentages

economic backgrounds and compare it to the last Lok Sabha election held in 2014, voter turnout dropped among all the categories of youth, with the exception of youth belonging to scheduled castes and poor classes, youth having matric education, urban youth, and

marginally among young women. On the other hand, voter turnout increased for all categories of the non-youth voters. Here, not a single group saw a decline in turnout from 2014. The highest increase in voter turnout was registered among young poor voters from 61 per-

cent turnout in 2014 to 68 percent in 2019 Lok Sabha election. This pattern is indicative of a broader trend, as this was the case with other voters as well, where poor voters saw a 7 percentage points increase in the voter turnout from 2014. When we look at turnout among youth belonging to various castes, youth from scheduled castes increased their voter turnout. During 2014, 68 percent of youth from scheduled castes voted in the election, which increased by 4 percentage points in the 2019 Lok Sabha election. A similar proportion of increase can be observed among urban young voters as well. In the 2014 Lok Sabha election, four out of five young voters from scheduled tribe communities voted in the election, but the proportion dropped to a little less than three out of four during the 2019 Lok Sabha election. This trend was specific to youth only, as among non-youth scheduled tribes, there was an increase of 5 percentage points in its turnout (Table 1).

The Election Commission of India and different political parties ran a campaign to improve voter turnout. They especially targeted first-time young voters and urged them to register as voters. Even Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi in his radio program *Mann ki Baat*⁴ in January 2019 urged young people to register as voters. These programs or campaigns were available on news and social media platforms. The data suggest that more than social media, the news media was more impactful in motivating young voters to vote. The data further indicates that voter turnout among the youth increas-

es with an increase in the level of news media exposure among young voters. However, this systematic increase is not visible when we look at the impact of social media on turnout among the youth (data is available on request from authors).

b. Youth Electoral Participation

Political participation beyond voting can be explained through the participation in various electoral activities such as door-to-door canvassing for the candidate or party, distributing pamphlets, collecting or donating funds, or joining a procession. Most previous studies found a lower political participation of youth as compared to people from other age groups.⁵ Milbrath and Goel studied the relationship between age and participation and found that participation was lowest for young adults, peaks in middle age, and then falls among the oldest.⁶ The lower engagement in politics and political activities of youth has attracted the attention of researchers on civic culture and theorists who study the association between age and political engagement to try and understand the reason for lower participation among the youth as compared to adults. Youth do not engage themselves in the polity and decision-making process and their absenteeism in the political system leads to less attention toward issues concerning youth. Therefore, Suchowerska emphasizes youth engagement in politics and states that in order to break the image of apathy and make their presence in the decision-making process and political system, youth should involve themselves in politics and express their

political opinions freely.⁷ They should engage in civic life and associations, as this civic engagement would motivate youth to participate in politics.⁸

In order to measure the engagement of youth in electoral activities (barring voting), an index of “participation in electoral activities”⁹ was created. A similar measurement was used for previous National Election Study (NES) data to see youth’s participation in electoral activities in comparison to the participation of voters from other

age groups. In the 2019 Lok Sabha election, around 30 percent of Indian youth participated in electoral activities other than voting. This number has been on a continuous rise (Figure 2). In the previous 2014 Lok Sabha election, the figure was 22 percent. A significant finding that emerges out of the data is that participation of youth in electoral activities has always been higher than voters from older age groups. However, this has been an opposite case when we look at turnout, where the youth have mostly turned out in lower numbers (Figure 2).

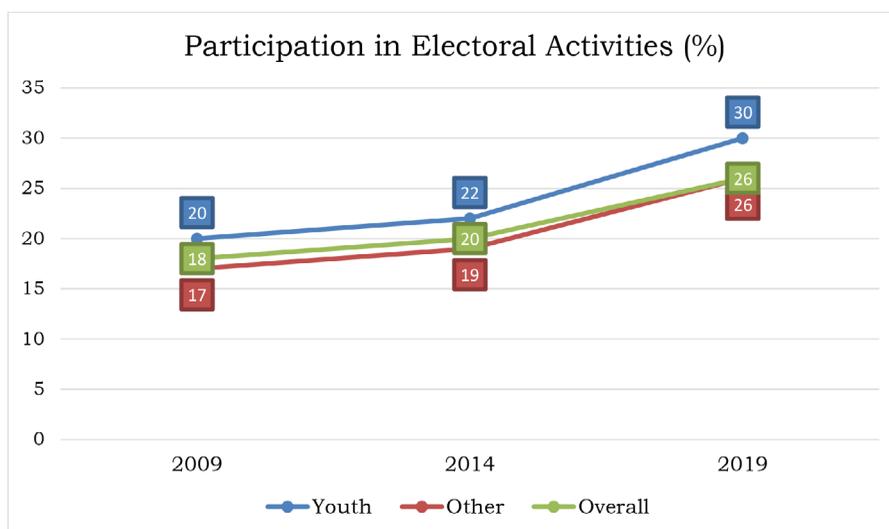


Figure 2: Participation in Electoral Activities

Source: CSDS data unit

Note: All figures are in percentages

The data suggests that young women’s participation in electoral activities is comparatively less than their male counterparts and this pattern reflects the overall pattern in Indian politics. Nineteen percent of young women in NES 2019 were found to participate in electoral activities as compared to

38 percent of young men. The participation in electoral activities was highest among the youth belonging to other religious minority groups. The only difference one observes between the young and the non-young is in the case of caste and communities where among the young, the youth from other reli-

gious minorities were the most active, but among the others, the upper castes and those belonging to the other backward classes were the most active. Level of education and economic status has a positive relationship with electoral participation for both groups (Table 2). However, such an association between

the two is not visible when it comes to voting and the better placed or those of higher economic status vote less often than their counterparts.

c. Party Preference

The scale of the Bharatiya Janata Party’s (BJP) victory in India’s 2019 election

Table 2: Participation in Electoral Activities by Socioeconomic Status

	Participation in electoral activities (%)	
	Youth	Others
Caste and communities		
Upper Caste	33	27
OBC	30	27
Scheduled Caste	26	25
Scheduled Tribe	27	23
Muslim	28	25
Other religious minorities	36	25
Level of education		
Non Literate	14	18
Up to primary education	25	25
Up to matric education	27	30
College and above education	33	32
Locality		
Rural	29	25
Urban	31	28
Economic class		
Poor	22	20
Lower	27	26
Middle	37	31
Rich	38	31
Gender		
Women	19	18
Men	38	33

Source: CSDS data unit

Note: All figures are in percentages

Table 3: Voters and their Votes

	Congress	Congress Allies	BJP	BJP Allies	BSP+	Left	Others
Young voters	19	5	41	7	7	2	20
Others	20	7	37	7	6	2	21
Total Vote Share	19.5	7	37.4	7.1	6.4	2.1	20.6

Source: CSDS data unit

Note: All figures are in percent-

Table 4: Preferences for the Parties by Age Group

	Congress	Congress Allies	BJP	BJP Allies	Other parties
18–22 years	20 (+3)	5 (+3)	41 (+4)	7 (0)	28 (-7)
23–27 years	18 (-2)	6 (+3)	40 (+8)	7 (0)	29 (-8)
28–35 years	19 (0)	7 (+4)	39 (+6)	7 (0)	28 (-8)
36–45 years	20 (2)	7 (+4)	37 (+7)	7 (0)	29 (-11)
46–55 years	20 (0)	8 (+5)	36 (+6)	7 (-1)	29 (-10)
56 years and above	19 (-1)	8 (+3)	35 (+7)	7 (0)	29 (-9)

Source: CSDS data unit

Note: Figures in parentheses are vote shift from 2014.

Figures have been rounded off and are in percent.

Table 5: Preferences for the BJP and Congress across Elections

Parties	1999		2004		2009		2014		2019	
	Youth	Others								
Congress	27	29	27	26	28	29	19	20	19	20
BJP	26	23	23	22	20	18	34	30	41	37

Source: CSDS data unit

Note: All figures are in percentages

was historic. From 31.1 percent, the party successfully managed to increase its vote share to 37.4 percent. In 2014, there was an immense focus on young voters and the parties did everything possible in order to woo this section. The results of 2014 elections show that young voters voted decisively in favor of one political party, the BJP. The vote share of the BJP among young voters (18–25 years) was 34 percent, 3 per-

centage points higher than its average vote share of 31.1 percent.¹⁰ Comparatively, these elections witnessed BJP increasing its vote share further among this group. BJP secured a vote share of 41 percent among young voters, a rise of a whopping 7 percentage points (Table 3). The data collected by Lokniti-CSDS further shows that the BJP emerged as the most preferred party among the first-time voters (18–22 years of age).

Two out of five first-time voters voted for the BJP. The party also saw a rise of 4 percentage points in its vote share among first-time voters (Table 4). What is interesting is that both the parties saw an increase in its vote share among the first-time voters, but Congress was unable to garner votes from second time voters who are in the age group of 23 to 27 years. On the other hand, the BJP's vote share among this group was 8 percentage points higher than what it was in 2014. It is possible that having voted for the BJP for two or three elections, these young voters may continue voting for the party in future elections, thus giving the BJP a long-term advantage.¹¹ Time series data on young voters show that BJP has always had an advantage among the young voters, but the gap between young and other voters' support for the party was marginal. However, this gap has widened when one looks at the last two elections of 2014 and 2019 (Table 5).

Segregating the data by various socio-demographics factors, one finds that the BJP saw an increase in its support among both young men and women, but the advantage among young men has narrowed down in these elections. Both men (41 percent) and women (40 percent) voted for the BJP, more than they did for Congress, but the increase in support for the party was higher among young women (Table 6). On the other hand, Congress's vote share among young women remained stable at 20 percent and the party saw a marginal increase in its support among young men. A larger proportion of youth belonging to rich economic classes vot-

ed for the BJP compared to their counterparts. This finding is identical to the existing national picture, which shows that elites are the most loyal supporters of the BJP. However, the maximum gain in terms of votes for the BJP came from poor youth, where the party saw a gain of whopping 12 percentage points from 2014 elections. Conversely, maximum gain for Congress came from upper class youth. When disaggregating the data in terms of residential locality, one notices that the BJP received unprecedented support from youth residing in rural and urban areas of the country. The BJP saw an advantage across all caste groups, but the maximum gains came from Lower OBC youth. The party saw an increase of 14 percentage points among this group from 2014, followed by Upper OBC and Tribals. It is important to note these trends are similar to the adults as well, but in general, more young voters preferred the BJP than the adults did.

3. Explaining Factors That Influenced the Youth Vote in Favor of the BJP

The BJP has been successful in consolidating a significant section of young voters in its favor. But what are young voters really attracted to in the party? Is it the performance of the party in its first tenure? Do young voters feel that the party delivered what it promised in 2014? Is it Modi and his leadership? Is it the impact of all the decisions like demonization or India's air strike in the terrorist training camps in Pakistan? Or is it simply not having a

Table 6: Social Basis of the Youth Vote

	Voted for Congress (%)		Voted for BJP (%)	
	Young	Others	Young	Others
Rural	20 (-3)	19 (-1)	40 (6)	36 (7)
Urban	19 (-2)	21 (2)	42 (7)	39 (7)
Women	20 (0)	20 (1)	40 (8)	36 (7)
Men	19 (2)	19 (-1)	41 (5)	38 (6)
Non-Literate	20 (1)	20 (1)	36 (10)	34 (10)
Up to primary	21 (0)	20 (-2)	38 (13)	35 (7)
Up to matric	22 (2)	20 (1)	38 (3)	37 (4)
College and above	18 (1)	17 (0)	42 (4)	42 (3)
Poor	17 (-6)	17 (-2)	37 (12)	36(12)
Lower	18 (0)	21(2)	41 (7)	35 (3)
Middle	23 (4)	21 (1)	36 (1)	38 (6)
Rich	20 (7)	20 (2)	52 (8)	42 (5)
Upper Caste	13 (3)	12 (0)	56 (3)	52 (-1)
Upper OBC	14 (0)	15 (0)	45 (9)	41 (12)
Lower OBC	14 (-2)	15 (-1)	58 (14)	47 (6)
Scheduled caste	18 (1)	20 (1)	35 (28)	33 (10)
Scheduled tribe	33 (5)	31 (3)	46 (37)	43 (5)
Muslim Youth	32 (-4)	33 (-5)	7 (-1)	9 (0)

Source: CSDS data unit

Note: All figures are in percentages. (Figures in parenthesis show gap from 2014)

Table 7: Voter's Satisfaction with BJP-Led NDA Government

Satisfaction with performance of	Youth	Others
Fully satisfied	29	25
Somewhat satisfied	39	39
Somewhat dissatisfied	12	12
Fully dissatisfied	17	19
<i>Net Satisfaction (fully satisfied minus fully dissatisfied)</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>6</i>

Source: CSDS data unit

Note: All figures are in percentages

Table 8: Preference for Modi as the next PM

	Rahul Gandhi		Narendra Modi	
	2019	2014	2019	2014
<i>Overall</i>	23	14	47	36
Youth	23	16	51	41
Others	23	14	46	35

Source: CSDS data unit

Note: All figures are in percentages

Table 9: PM Candidate Swayed Young BJP voters

	Party	Candidate	PM Candidate
Young BJP Voters	36	28	33
BJP voters from other age groups	40	27	29
<i>All voters</i>	44	32	17

Source: CSDS data unit

Note: All figures are in percentages

better alternative that worked? This section looks into the factors that made it possible for the BJP to further enhance its vote share among young voters.

a. Satisfaction with the Performance of the BJP-Led NDA Government

In elections, it is assumed that one of the most important and evident operational principles is that good performance is rewarded by voters. Three out of every four young voters expressed satisfaction with the performance of the BJP-led NDA government in the Centre (Table 7). Looking at the net extremes (those fully satisfied minus those fully dissatisfied), the net satisfaction with BJP central government among young voters was double compared to adult or other voters (12 vs. 6). Young voters seem to be satisfied with how the

BJP government had performed in the previous five years and this satisfaction also showed in their vote preference.

b. Leadership

For the BJP, the elections revolved around Narendra Modi and the party canvassed for votes in his name. There was strong support for Narendra Modi, where half of the young voters wanted to see him as the prime minister (51 percent). This figure decreased to 46 percent among the other respondents. This number was not only 10 percentage points higher than in 2014 but also 28 percentage points higher than the support for Rahul Gandhi, the second most preferred person after Modi (Table 8). Despite this gap, support for Rahul Gandhi also increased from 2014. Thus, the support for other potential

PMs saw a decline. In some states, Modi was more popular among young voters, such as Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Karnataka. In these states, preference for Modi as PM was much higher among young voters as compared to the state average. Interestingly, in two Southern states, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, with strong regional parties, Narendra Modi was the preferred PM among young voters.

Data further shows that young voters who voted for BJP were almost four times more likely to state the prime ministerial candidate as the most important consideration while voting compared to young Congress voters (33 percent vs. 8 percent). For BJP voters from other age groups, the figure was 29 percent and for them, party was a much more important consideration, where two-fifths considered the party to be important while voting. Among young voters, the difference between party and PM candidate as voting consideration

was only 3 percentage points, with the former leading over the latter (Table 9). Modi's candidature as PM was another strong factor that attracted voters to the BJP. Overall, a quarter of the voters asserted that in his absence, they would have voted for parties other than the BJP. This Modi factor was equally important for both young and other voters, as one in every three voters would have voted for some other party had Modi not been the PM candidate.

c. Support for Major Decisions Taken by Central Government

Additionally, young voters, in comparison to the other age groups, also seem satisfied by various decisions of the Modi government (Table 10). Two in five young voters supported demonetization, whereas among the other voters, a little over one-third supported this step. The air strike on a terrorist camp inside Pakistan in the aftermath of the terrorist attack on CRPF in Pulwama gave a push to BJP's campaign. The par-

Table 10: Support for Various Decisions of the Modi Government

	Youth		Others	
	Overall	Voted for BJP	Overall	Voted for BJP
Demonetization decision by the government was a necessary decision that benefitted people	39	61	36	58
Heard about India's air strike on terrorist training camps in Pakistan	85	42	75	40
Support Central government decision to 10% reservation for economically weaker sections	68	43	65	43

Source: CSDS data unit

Note: All figures are in percentages

ty used it to attract voters. During one of his rallies, Narendra Modi appealed to first-time voters to cast their vote and dedicate it to the army who carried out the air strike in Pakistan and the brave martyrs of the Pulwama terror attack.¹² The awareness level regarding the air strike on terrorist training camps in Pakistan was much higher among young voters than the rest of the voters (with a gap of 10 percentage points). Forty-two percent of youth who had heard of the strikes voted for BJP and 40 percent of other voters did as well. Although awareness about the air strike was comparatively low among adult voters, there was not much difference among young and adult voters in voting for the BJP. Thirdly, the incumbent NDA government had announced a policy of 10 percent reservation for economically weaker sections; there was also a little more support among young voters for this compared to voters from the other age cohorts. However, when it came to vote for the BJP, there was no difference among young and other voters.

d. Campaign Strategies Used by the Parties

Other than these political episodes, the campaign strategies launched by the parties affected the voting behavior of young voters. There is no doubt that the BJP ran an aggressive youth-specific campaign to woo these voters. For instance, the party initiated a digital campaign, Youth with Modi program to connect youth with the party through various social media platforms.¹³ These platforms were used as the medium to discuss various issues and the BJP-led

NDA government also advertised their own popular policies. The party not only used digital campaigning, it also used traditional campaigning methods where it interacted with voters in face-to-face conversations in their respective constituencies. The youth wing of the BJP, Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha, launched a somewhat similar campaign called Modi Yuva Shakti to get in touch with college students through direct conversation in order to popularize BJP's central schemes and campaign for the party.¹⁴ Additionally, the BJP's IT cell introduced the Millennium Vote Campaign app to assist first-time voters in registering for the electoral rolls.¹⁵ It targeted roughly 150 million first-time voters with a special reach out campaign before the elections with a pledge *Pehla Vote Modi Ko* (first vote to Modi). The party's youth leaders also assisted these first-time voters in obtaining their voter ID cards. In addition, the party also launched social media campaign #ModiOnceMore, which it claimed garnered "massive support" among people of all age groups.¹⁶ This explains the BJP's popularity among first-time voters.

It was not only the incumbent party BJP, but Congress too focussed on young voters in its campaign. Rahul Gandhi, after becoming Congress president, started a dialogue with youth via *Apni baat Rahul ke saath*.¹⁷ The youth Congress also organized the *Yuva kranti yatra* and visited close to twenty-five Indian states.¹⁸ During this march, the party highlighted pertinent issues related to young voters, like unemployment, inflation, crime against minorities and scheduled castes, and the failure of

the NDA government to fulfill many of its promises. Many regional parties also launched youth-centric campaign programs. These youth-specific events suggest the importance of young voters for political parties. Congress also highlighted the Rafale fighter aircraft deal and alleged wrongdoing by the incumbent government on the national security front. On the economic front, it promised a Minimum Income Guarantee (Nyunatam Aay Yojana) for poor households. The controversy surrounding the Rafale aircraft deal did not work in favor of the party. Despite the fact that a huge proportion of young Indians compared to others had heard of the controversy, a similar proportion

believed that there was some wrongdoing by the government. Although young voters felt that there has been wrongdoing, close to quarter of them still voted for the BJP (26 percent); this proportion among others was one in every five. However, a much higher proportion of youth had heard of the NYAY scheme (66 percent vs. 57 percent), but a deficit of trust in the execution of the proposed NYAY scheme prevented the party from receiving benefits in term of votes. The data suggest that among those who had heard, young voters were less likely to believe that that Congress would fulfill this promise if elected to power (Table 11).

Table 11: Congress’s Weak Campaign Strategy

	Youth	Others
Heard of Congress’s promise of a Minimum Income Guarantee (Nyunatam Aay Yojana) for poor households	66	57
(If heard) Congress will fulfill this promise if elected to power	32	35
Heard of controversy surrounding the Rafale aircraft deal	64	48
(If Heard) There has been some wrongdoing by the government in the Rafale aircraft deal	38	38
Those who feel that there was wrongdoing, but still voted for the BJP	26	20

Source: CSDS data unit

Note: All figures are in percentages

Based on the Rafale controversy, Congress launched a campaign *Chowkidar Chor hai* that failed miserably. The BJP took to this by counterattacking Congress by using *Main bhi Chowkidar* and prefixing the twitter handle of ministers by *Chowkidar*. Thousands of BJP supporters joined in as well. Although Congress supporters tried using *berozgaar* (unemployed) as a prefix to

their twitter account but it did not work in its favor.¹⁹ Two in every five youth who had heard the slogan *Chowkidar Chor hai* voted for the BJP (43 percent). Congress further failed to highlight issues like unemployment, demonetization, GST, economy, and farmer-distress in order to mobilize the voters in their favor.²⁰

Table 12: Majority of Late Deciders Voted for BJP

	Youth			Others		
	All	Vote for Congress	Vote for BJP	All	Vote for Congress	Vote for BJP
Last-minute deciders (30)	31	19	39	29	18	39
Earlier, during the campaign (18)	18	19	40	18	17	33
Even before the campaign started (36)	34	21	44	36	21	41
After candidates were declared (12)	13	18	40	11	23	33

Note: Figures in the parentheses refer to the total proportion of youth in that category. Last-minute deciders are those who either decided who to vote on the day of election or a day or two before elections.

The campaign strategy that a party adopts is very beneficial for the voters in order to help them decide whom to vote for, especially if they are last-minute deciders. What is also interesting is that one in every three young voters was late minute decider during this election (31 percent) and among other voters, the figure was 29 percent. In 2014, close to half of the young respondents said that they had made up their mind of whom to vote for even before the campaign started, but in this election, this figure dropped by 13 percentage points; this is where campaign strategy can help a party. For both 2014 and 2019 elections, the figures were more or less similar for young and other voters as well. The BJP was more successful in attracting young voters to the party using campaign strategies. This can be ascertained from the fact that of those who said that they made up their mind whom to vote for during the campaign, a higher proportion of young voters were found to have voted for the BJP than voters from other age group,

with a difference of 7 percentage points. Candidates of the parties also impacted young voters, as data indicate that of those who made up their mind after the parties declared their candidate, young voters voted more for the BJP than adult voters did (Table 12).

e. Concerning Issues While Voting

For the youth, the single most important voting issue in 2019 Lok Sabha elections was unemployment. One in every five young voters considered this to be an election issue, whereas among adult voters, only one in every ten considered unemployment to be an electoral issue. For adult voters, development was the biggest issue; nonetheless, the same proportion of young voters stated that development was the most important election issue. In a separate question, 63 percent of young voters stated that the problem of joblessness was very serious (Tables 13 and 14). However, the job crisis issue did not prevent young voters from voting for the BJP and among the 19 percent who stated unemployment

was an election issue, 45 percent voted for the BJP, 10 percent for the BJP allies, 20 percent for Congress, and 6 percent for Congress allies. Additionally, young voters who considered joblessness to be a very serious issue also voted for the BJP. Although the Pulwama inci-

dent was not stated in the open-ended question, it did have an indirect impact in favor of the BJP because awareness of the air strike further strengthened voters' preference for BJP, even among those for whom joblessness was a serious issue.

Table 13: Biggest Election Issue for Voters

Biggest Election Issue	Youth	Others
Development	14	14
Lack of jobs, unemployment	19	10
Price rise, high fuel prices	3	4
Corruption	3	3
Economy, economic growth	3	3
Poverty, neglect of poor	2	3
Lack of development	2	2
Water-related problem	2	2
Others	36	39
No opinion	17	19

Source: CSDS data unit

Note: All figures are in percentages

Table 14: The Issue of Joblessness for the Youth

Problem of joblessness	Youth	Others
Very serious	63	59
Somewhat serious	25	25
Less serious	4	5
Not at all serious	3	2
No response	6	9

Source: CSDS data unit

Note: All figures are in percentages

4. Logit Regression

In order to further understand what actually shaped young voters' inclination towards the BJP in the 2019

Lok Sabha election, a regression analysis was used. The dependent variable was young voters' vote for the BJP in parliamentary constituencies (PCs), where BJP candidates were in competi-

tion with candidates from other parties. To create the dependent variable at first, we recoded PCs into two categories: 1 as constituencies where BJP candidates ran against other candidates and 0 as constituencies where candidates from BJP allies or independent candidates supported by the BJP ran against other candidates. Then we selected a sample of young voters and constituencies

where BJP candidates ran and used the vote choice variable as the dependent variable, where a vote for the BJP was labeled as 1 and a vote for other parties was labeled as 0. It was a binary variable having two categories; therefore, a logit regression model was used. The total sample used in the regression analysis was 2641 (refer to Table 15 for logic of the sample selection).

Table 15: Sample Selection for Regression Model

	Sample size
NES 2019 total sample	24235
PCs BJP candidates running against other candidates	19866
Young voter sample in our survey	3188
Young voter sample in selected PCs where BJP candidates ran against other candidates	2641

The independent variables included in the model were assessment of the incumbent government’s performance, closeness to a party, leadership choice, election issues such as unemployment, price increases, opinion on demonetization, and awareness of the Pulwama attack. These factors were also controlled by socioeconomic factors such as caste-communities, level of educational attainment, locality, economic class, and exposure to both social and news media.

The model was statistically significant as the goodness of fit test was significant (the Hosmer and Lemeshow Test sig value was .510). Socioeconomic factors, such as economic class, locality, level of educational attainment, level of social and news media exposure, and caste-communities that young voters

belong to, did not have an impact on youth’s voting for the BJP, as these factors were not found to be statistically significant. On the other hand, attitudinal variables, such as satisfaction with the incumbent government’s performance, closeness to a party, leadership choice (where respondents were asked to name a person they wanted to see as the next PM of India in an open-ended structure), and support for demonetization, were found to be statistically significant. Other election issues, such as unemployment, price increases, and the Pulwama attack, were not significant in the presence of other factors. It was Modi’s leadership as PM of the country that emerged as the most significant factor with a sig value .000; however, partisanship (those who like the BJP as a party over other parties) was also significant (p value was .016), but not to the extent

of Modi’s leadership variable. Perhaps Modi’s image as a strong and decisive leader attracted young voters, and this can be determined from the fact that young voters who believed that demonetization was a necessary step supported the BJP. Demonetization was one of the critical and bold decisions taken by Narendra Modi and had received mixed responses, but those who supported this decision overwhelmingly supported the BJP. Nonetheless, satisfaction with the work done by the incumbent NDA government at the Centre also attracted

young voters to the BJP. So, the major takeaway from the regression analysis was that Modi’s leadership was the main factor that attracted young voters to the BJP.

5. Conclusion

A few trends emerge from the discussion above: first and foremost, although young voters’ participation in electoral activities is always higher than other voters, the same cannot be said about voting. However,

Table 16: Logit Regression Model for Young Voters’ Party Preference

	Vote for BJP		
	B	S.E.	Wald
Satisfaction with NDA government (scale from dissatisfied to satisfied)	.416**	.161	6.670
Narendra Modi as PM (labeled 1) over Rahul Gandhi (labeled 0)	3.382***	.429	62.129
Feel close to BJP (labeled 1) over others (labeled 0)	.755*	.313	5.827
Joblessness as an issue (very serious to not at all serious issue)	.221	.205	1.162
Price rise as an issue (very serious to not at all serious issue)	.015	.189	.006
Demonetization a necessary step (labeled 1) unnecessary (labeled 0)	.828**	.260	10.124
Heard about air strike on Pakistan: heard (labeled 1) not heard (labeled 0)	-.214	.415	.268
Caste/communities			10.401
Upper caste	1.507	1.018	2.190
Other backward classes (OBC)	1.650	1.010	2.668
Scheduled caste	1.226	1.033	1.410
Scheduled tribe	1.650	1.064	2.403
Muslims	.225	1.113	.041
Social Media exposure (No to high)	.046	.145	.100
News Media exposure (No to High)	.079	.167	.222
Level of education (Non-literate to college educated and above)	-.137	.186	.544
Economic class (poor to upper)	.001	.129	.000
Urban	.404	.312	1.677
Constant	-9.254	1.637	31.972
-2 Log likelihood			480.238 ^a
Cox & Snell R Square			.462
Nagelkerke R Square			.621
Hosmer and Lemeshow Test: Chi square (sig value)			7.246 (.510)

Note: *** .000; ** >.000 but < .01; * >.01 but <.05. n=2566.

young people are gradually catching up with other ages as far as voting is concerned. Secondly, while there was more or less an equal increase in the BJP's vote share among young voters and others from 2014, the youth vote for the party was about 4 percentage points higher than the party's overall vote share and hence they undoubtedly played a significant role in the spectacular performance of the party. The work done by the BJP-led NDA government at the Center, but more importantly the trust and the leadership quality of Narendra Modi, attracted young voters to the BJP. Additionally, due to a strong and aggressive campaign in comparison to the

weak campaign strategies of the other parties, the BJP was able to attract late deciders in their favor. The opposition party failed miserably at highlighting issues like unemployment, demonetization, GST, and the economy, as well as at mobilizing voters in their favor. Despite unemployment being the biggest poll issue for young voters, it did not prevent them from voting for the BJP. The Pulwama attack had an indirect impact on vote choice in favor of the BJP. However, the one factor that surpassed the others in attracting young voters to the BJP was Narendra Modi and his being the undisputed leader in the prime ministerial race.

Notes

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- 3 Arun Kumar, "Parties Vie for Youth Vote in Bihar," *Hindustan Times*, March 26, 2019, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/lok-sabha-elections/lok-sabha-elections-2019-parties-vie-for-youth-vote-in-bihar/story-YmUn3IaaPPK78ksAn40PI.html>; Saumya Tiwari, "45 Million New, Young Voters could Play a Key Role in 2019 Elections," *Scroll*, February 20, 2019, <https://scroll.in/article/913411/data-check-45-million-new-young-voters-could-play-a-key-role-in-2019-elections>.
- 4 Mann Ki Baat (literally "Heart's Voice") is an Indian program hosted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in which he addresses the people of the nation on All India Radio, DD National, and DD News.
- 5 Lester W. Milbrath and M.L. Goel, *Political Participation: How and Why do People get Involved in Politics?* (Rand McNally College Publishing Company, 1977); Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie, *Participation in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).
- 6 Milbrath and Goel, *Political Participation*, 14.
- 7 Roksolana Suchowerska, "A Generational Model of Youth's Engagement in Politics," *International Review of Modern Sociology* 39 (2013): 89–109.

- 8 R.D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).
- 9 The index was constructed by taking into account four questions asked during the survey: a. campaigned in elections; b. distributed pamphlets; c. took part in protest/demonstration; and d. donated or collected money. In each question, the response options offered to the respondent were “Yes” and “No.” The scores of all questions were summed up. The summed scores of all questions ranged from 0 to 4. These scores were then distributed across two newly created categories that indicate the degree of political participation. A score of 0 was categorized as “no participation” and a score of 1 to 4 was categorized as “participation.”
- 10 Suhas Palshikar, Sanjay Kumar, and Sanjay Lodha, eds., *Electoral Politics in India: The Resurgence of the Bharatiya Janata Party* (Taylor & Francis, 2017).
- 11 Jyoti Mishra and Amrit Negi, “BJP, the Most Preferred Party of Young India,” *The Hindu*, May 29, 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/elections/lok-sabha-2019/the-most-preferred-party-of-young-india/article27277454.ece>.
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