

PROMISES THAT MATTER TO INDIAN DEMOCRACY

A STUDY OF ELECTION MANIFESTOS SINCE 1952

SEPTEMBER 2022

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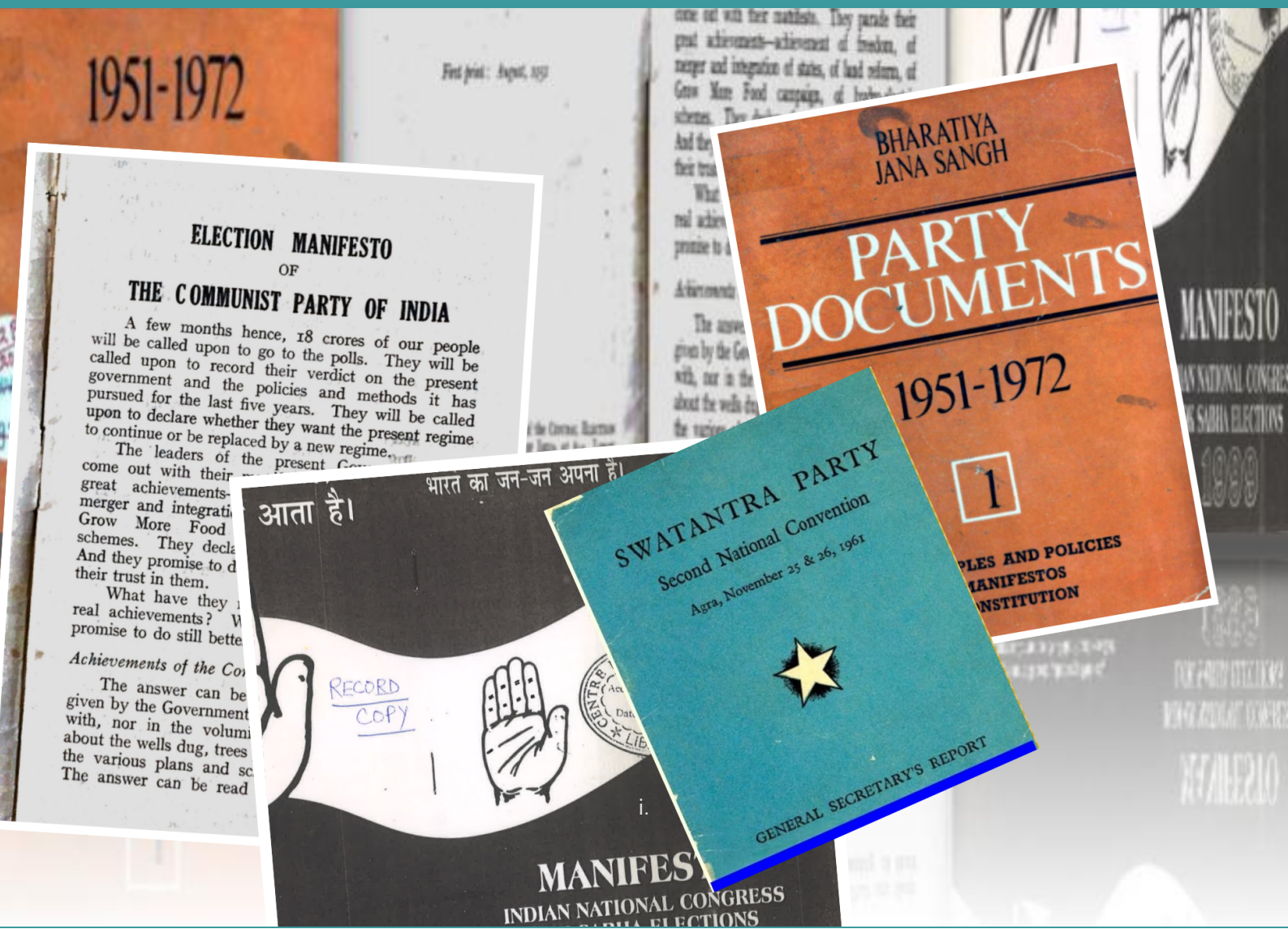
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ABOUT

The Centre for Policy Research (CPR) has been one of India's leading public policy think tanks since 1973. The Centre is a non-profit, non-partisan independent institution dedicated to ethical and high-quality scholarship on all aspects and processes that shape life in India. Through different verticals of research, the Centre engages in questions of economic policy, state capacity and governance, law and state regulation and domestic and international politics.

The Politics Initiative, set up in 2019, focuses its research on the changing competitive political party system, political and legislative institutions, ideological worldview and preferences of political actors, voting behaviour, and incentive structures and choices that shape policy decisions. In engaging with questions, the initiative aims to become a pre-eminent hub of empirically rigorous, theoretically rich, historically-informed political research that shapes the discussions on key policy issues in the country.



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RESEARCH**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Do political parties in India converge or diverge on the issues that matter to our democracy? The importance of this question lies in not only understanding how parties frame core issues but also in the competitive nature of Indian democracy and its future trajectory. This India Manifestos Project analyses Lok Sabha election manifestos from 1952 to 2019 of three ideologically different parties – the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Indian National Congress, and the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

The genesis of the India Manifesto Project lay in discussions with Pradeep Chhibber while working on our book *Ideology and Identity: The Changing Party System of India (2018)* – which maps out the ideological competition in Indian politics over the 20th century. In 2018, I collaborated with Pranav Gupta to collect the manifestos of Indian parties, but we soon realized that our hopes of replicating the Comparative Manifesto Project (<https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/>) database were too ambitious. The Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP), has been mapping manifestos of all major parties in Western Europe since 1945, and the database has been expanding ever since.

Locating pre-1990s manifestos of all parties was an arduous task. So, we limited our efforts to focus on three major political formations on India's ideological spectrum and only collected their Lok Sabha election manifestos. The initial idea was simply to collect all the manifestos since 1952, code them and see how different parties prioritize different issues over time. It was after we collected and perused the manifestos that we came to appreciate the complexity of the project we'd undertaken. Since the manifestos had evolved over time a simple categorization would not have resulted in much.

Our initial efforts were generously supported by the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS, South Asia) in 2020 to enable us to spearhead this project. However, COVID-19 resulted in a long break in our work, as we were unable to visit party offices, archives and libraries to trace these manifestos. Despite that, we managed to collect a handful of manifestos, to begin with, and created a rule book to code these manifestos. This was necessary because the already existing CMP codebook was not suitable for issues that political parties in India have been focusing on. We also managed to pilot-test our codebook on these manifestos and conducted inter-coder reliability tests to ensure that our database is free from particular researchers' interpretations of sentences within these manifestos. I am greatly indebted to intellectual inputs and feedback received from Pranav Gupta, who not only helped us gain clarity but also helped us source difficult-to-get manifestos from early elections.

In 2021, the State Capacity Initiative at CPR generously supported this effort. I'm thankful to Yamini Aiyar and Mekhala Krishnamurthy for extending all their support to the India Manifesto Project. This report would not have been possible without their encouragement and guidance.

I'm also humbled by the efforts put in by researchers at the Politics Initiative at CPR in the last two years to take this project to its logical conclusion. I'd like to extend my sincere gratitude to Ankita Barthwal, Ilika Trivedi, Jatin Rajani, Melvin Kunjumon, Niyati Singh, Vaibhav Parik, Satyam Shukla, Nishant Ranjan, Shamik Vatsa and Talha Rashid. Finally, I'd like to thank the library staff at CPR for their help in providing the necessary help, Anushree Kaushal for carefully editing this report, Sutanu Guru for helping out with the executive summary and Gurman Bhatia for the excellent visuals.

While these individuals may not agree with all the findings and arguments of this report, I'm deeply indebted to each one of them for their help. In the end, the remaining errors are mine alone.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1

Do manifestos of political parties play any meaningful role before, during and after elections? Are they powerful symbols of the ideas, vision and programmes offered by a party to citizens or are they merely symbolic? Since most voters don't bother to read manifestos before casting their ballot, why not relegate manifestos to the dustbins of oblivion? Despite such questions raised every now and then by sceptics and cynics, manifestos remain significant to parties in articulating her future plan, course of action on key issues and ideological vision.

Globally, scholars have treated party manifestos as serious documents that clearly spell out the ideological vision and action plan of a party. The Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) is a collaborative global exercise that converts promises made by rival parties in various countries of the world into statistically measurable and comparable parameters. Unfortunately, Asian and African countries are largely missing from this exercise. Furthermore, the CMP methodology may not work for a diverse country like India, with a proliferation of political parties whose ideological visions are always not very clear. In this context, the Centre for Policy Research (CPR) devised a study protocol that maps out the Lok Sabha election manifestos of the Congress, the BJP and the CPI(M) since 1952. These three parties represent the ideological spectrum of Indian politics, and the study maps the evolution of issues that matter to Indian democracy.

The study involved a large team of independent coders and researchers using "word count"-- the number of words devoted to an issue in the manifesto -- to arrive at statistically measurable parameters. Seven major issues (or domains) were identified for the purpose: national security, political competence, political systems, social fabric, economic planning, welfare and development & infrastructure.

The results of this ambitious exercise are truly fascinating and offer a wealth of data as well as ideas to politicians, scholars, and journalists to dig deeper into specific issues confronting India that have attracted the attention of the major political parties. The study of manifestos from 1952 also offers a ringside view of how deeply and structurally the polity, economy and society have changed since India's first elections. Manifestos may be forgotten, but they have left behind lasting historical footprints.

Those interested can delve deeper into the wealth of data thrown up by this study. For the sake of brevity, here are just a handful of interesting highlights:

- Economic Planning, Welfare, and Development & Infrastructure have received a lot of attention in all manifestos of all three political formations. Together, these three domains account for 55% of the total words written in the manifestos. The context, however, has changed over the decades. The first four decades emphasised socialist models of economic planning with the BJP being the lone advocate of the private sector. The economic liberalisation in 1991 changed the nature of issues in this segment across manifestos.
- Despite the rhetoric proposed by all parties of being committed to rural India, the percentage of words devoted to rural development within the development & infrastructure domain has fallen precipitously from 42% in 1952 to 5.6% in 2019.
- The BJP continues to put a lot of emphasis on physical infrastructure in this century. Similarly, it has been emphasizing national security, start-ups and self-reliance more significantly.
- The Left continues to emphasise anti-imperialistic or "anti-American" themes. It also gives a lot of space to labour rights and agriculture.

- When it comes to foreign policy and national security, internationalism, external influence and foreign special relations dominated the discourse for the first four decades. The Congress's emphasis was on internationalism while the CPI(M) focused on foreign special relations; in support of China/Soviet Union and opposed to the US. The BJP manifestos paid much more attention to the military during this period. Since the 1980s, with terrorism becoming more common, the BJP has dramatically increased its focus on internal security and terrorism. The INC and CPI(M) have not been as consistent in their focus on these two issues.
- Over the decades, the focus of parties shifted, with the changing national and international conditions. As mentioned earlier, terrorism never found a place in manifestos until the 1980s, but it has become an important issue since then. Similarly, while economic planning and state intervention received a lot of attention in the first four decades, any issue related to free markets or economic liberalisation received barely any attention. That has changed dramatically since 1991.
- Changing realities have also led to a new discourse. Environment and sustainability have become important issues since the 1980s. The first few decades did not see much attention paid to “urban” issues as India was overwhelmingly rural. But with increased urbanisation leading to a big chunk of voters living in urban clusters, urban issues now receive a lot more attention.

INTRODUCTION

As intermediaries between the government and the governed, political parties are the representatives of citizens in modern democracies (Satori 1976). Simply put, “when parties fail, linkage fails” (Lawson and Merkl 1988). Parties communicate with citizens through different means, such as face-to-face campaigns or mass media, and in doing so, they educate the electorate on their policies and promises, offer programmatic alternatives to choose from, and engage in coalition building, among other things (Eder et al. 2016; Römmele 2003). One important tool at their disposal in this process is election manifestos.

The Election Commission of India’s Model Code of Conduct (2019) defines a manifesto as “a published document containing a declaration of the ideology, intentions, views, policies and programmes of a political party”. The publication of party manifestos is a statutory requirement in India. They offer an almost unparalleled insight into the party’s ideological and policy positions and, therefore, can be understood as constituting the voice of the party. They serve not only as a compendium of party positions to guide sophisticated voters and give inputs to journalists, but also—and more importantly—as a directive and a handbook for party candidates and mobilisers themselves. It also serves as a contract with the voters that can define the party’s official stance when intra-party factions exist (Eder et al., 2017).

Manifestos have remained largely under-researched in the study of comparative politics in India. By analysing election manifestos offered by different parties since 1950, this first-of-its-kind comprehensive study will enable academics, researchers and policymakers to gain a richer understanding of the trajectories that party ideology and policies take—and could take—in the future, the changing nature of party preferences while being resistant to change, and the impact this may have on the nature of democracy, democratic values and parliamentary competition in the country. In doing so we seek to answer questions such as:

- How are parties matched with issues on a range of pan-national topics and the extent to which their positions differ from one another?
- What are the chief ideological poles that emerge from the contest between parties and how has this ideological spectrum, in turn, impacted party competition?
- What is the relationship between promises and policy decisions and what factors are important in understanding elite responsiveness to mass preferences?

In this report, we undertake a comprehensive overview of the content of manifestos of three political parties—the Indian National Congress (INC), the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP), and the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI (M))—covering the ideological spectrum of Indian politics since 1952, and use content analysis methods, much like those used in the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP). This project has been undertaken to better understand the ideological subtext of these documents. Illustratively, this will help in creating a comprehensive study of the party itself: identifying the issues that parties continue to emphasise (salience), ideas that the party is inherently associated with (ownership) and their commitment to these issues. The goal is to make intra-party comparisons to gauge the ideological gaps or similarities between them and the variations that have taken place in this over the decades. Such an exercise will allow us to place party positions along the ideological continuum.

In India, it is customary for major political parties to release their manifestos in the public domain before an election. Most parties typically constitute separate committees for such a process. While there has been increasing media attention on the contents of the manifestos, the dominant belief is that party manifestos do not matter at all. Given that few voters ever read them, such a disparaging view is understandable.

However, as some scholars have argued, manifestos have many diverse uses. They can provide a crucial sense of clarity regarding a party's positions and help its candidates in conveying their vision to the electorate. They can also act as campaigning guides and allow candidates to streamline their efforts to match that of the broader party line (Eder, et al, 2017). These documents also signal shifts in party positions and allow for greater partisan sorting among supporters (Adams et al., 2014). On occasion, manifestos also further accountability on political parties by providing the public with enough information to compare performance with promises (Ashworth, 2000).

Laver and Garry (2000) define manifestos as “strategic documents written by politically sophisticated party elites with many different objectives in mind.” Therefore, these documents are crucial tools in understanding the official stand of the party on various issues of policy-making, concerns of the public and the general long-term agenda of the party for the development of a nation, if elected to power. Produced with a certain regularity, these documents are among the richest sources of information about a party's leanings, policies and programmes. They adopt a persuasive tone to sway the electorate towards the party in question and away from the alternatives. An analysis of manifestos can illustrate changing national sentiments and the response of political parties towards them. Manifestos are written both for an inward audience (for elected representatives and leaders) and the voter, navigating the needs and attention of both (Harmel et al, 2016; Charlot, 1989). While the promises made within these documents are non-binding, manifestos can act as signalling devices to contextualize the priorities of political parties projecting both an identity and an image (Harmel et al, 2016). They present us with an effective method of studying political parties. They clarify party ideology and party position on issues of national significance, while also giving us a glimpse into relevant contemporary events and issues.

Researchers have also used manifestos to understand campaign strategies—which issues will be emphasized by the party and which will likely be blurred (Rovny, 2012). In an increasingly competitive election climate in India, where professionalized campaign management has become the norm, the nuanced strategies that can be derived from studying manifestos deserve greater inspection.

Other scholars have also used official party platforms to analyze the degree of policy adjustments induced by mimicking the opposition (Adams, et al., 2009). Using data from the CMP, they found that parties tend to shift their policies in the same direction as their opposition in the previous year, and also that the policy adjustments were more apparent in ideologically similar parties. While government responsiveness to public opinion is fundamental to democratic functioning (Lijphart, 1984), the same has not been studied in-depth in India. This is because of the abiding idea that the country's politics is clientelist and non-programmatic/non-ideological. The study of manifestos allows one to estimate party responsiveness to programmatic and ideological preferences, thus creating a new framework with which to assess politics.

The ability to position political parties and politicians along an ideological spectrum—most often the left-right one—is an important element in comparative politics. In contrast to the clear ideological polarization between the United States of America's Republican and Democratic parties, Indian politics has often been considered ‘non-ideological.’ This argument is predicated on exasperation caused by the behaviour of politicians and parties who shy away from taking distinct positions on macroeconomic policy (Nooruddin, 2010; Suri, 2013). This lack of ideology translates into what is known as the ‘persistent centrism’ of India's political landscape (Rudolph & Rudolph 1987). The assertion, however, often belies the complexity of the identity and ideology of political actors in the context of our multi-party, post-colonial polity.

In 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) achieved the first single-party majority in the Lok Sabha in three decades. With this, the dawn of India's Fourth Party System had begun, informing substantial changes in the form and substance of political competition. In addition, the ideological shifts currently underway caused by the 2014 election results have the potential to transform citizen-state relations and federal dynamics in the coming years. This paradigmatic shift, amidst what was seen as a polarising election (Vaishnav, 2015), prompts the need to study the ideological variations across parties to understand both changing contexts and electorate preferences and biases, and the extent to which this is impacted by the actions of political parties. With the proliferation of numerous parties, particularly based on social cleavages (Chhibber et al, 2014; Heath 2005), the framework provided by Chhibber and Verma (2018) is helpful to understand the ideological positions parties take.

NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

A manifesto is a unique tool for political research since it is the direct voice of a political party. Statements by political leaders, actions taken behind closed doors, promises made to voters in political rallies, and even words said during a legislative discussion in parliament can be altered, subjected to differences in interpretation, backtracked or denied at a later stage. But commitments made in an electoral manifesto convey the legitimate concerns and views of a party. How they aim to address these concerns, what their issues are with other parties and whom the political parties are prioritizing are all stated clearly and explicitly in a manifesto. It would not be an exaggeration to say that manifestos have been understudied in social science research, at least as far as Indian politics is concerned.

Drawing from the Comparative Manifesto Project framework, the India Manifesto Project, 2022, analyses the manifestos of the Bhartiya Janata Party and its predecessor the Bhartiya Jana Sangha, the Indian National Congress, the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) have been chosen for this study since they encompass the three primary ideological leanings—the Right, the Centre and the Left. This project aims to understand how political parties have transitioned over time, and to achieve that, one may study the evolution of their ideology, social groups being targeted, national goals being prioritized, areas of criticism of other parties and various other issues that are all documented and highlighted in a manifesto.

While researching a political party through manifestos, several avenues of research open up. First, the study of a party itself, i.e., how it has changed, the issues that have decreased in priority, and others that remain at the party's ideological core consistently. Second, an inter-party comparison according to election years can provide a fair description of how national parties differ from each other. For example, studies have claimed that parties do not take extremely different positions over mutually important issues but select different areas of priority for themselves and focus on those, without any need for a confrontation. Are such generalizations applicable in India?

Third, the ideologies of Indian political parties have been very dynamic, with parties being extremely hard to place on the traditional left-right political spectrum. A holistic study of manifestos can shine a better light on this gap. Finally, an issue-based analysis can be achieved through the study of manifestos. This data can be used for deeper topic-based research wherein the positional mapping of parties can be done for almost all issues of political concern.

The primary method applied to this study is textual content analysis. All manifestos were read thoroughly by independent coders and the text was broken down into sentences and quasi-sentences according to a set of predefined domains and categories, all of which have different codes signifying a different category. A detailed and extensive code list has been prepared beforehand according to Indian peculiarities.

Specific guidelines have been provided in the standard code book to guide the independent coders about the categorisation of statements and issues mentioned in the manifestos. We have divided manifestos into 7 domains and 41 subcategories. The domain names are:

- Political Competence (100)
- Political Systems (200)
- Development and Infrastructure (300)
- Welfare (400)
- Social Fabric (500)
- Economic Planning (600)
- National Security (700)

We have provided the details of each domain and what they entail in the subsequent pages of this report. For example, the domain Welfare, includes the following categories, with their respective codes in parentheses:

- Labour Rights (401)
- Agriculture (402)
- Food and PDS (403)
- Health and Education (404)
- Welfare State Expansion (405)
- Women (406)
- Underprivileged Minorities (407)

While we are drawing from the idea of the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP), our endeavour remains distinct. The CMP is an international collaborative initiative aimed at collecting and analyzing the manifestos of different political parties existing across various countries. It has a standard code book, but its domains and categories weren't suited to Indian political conditions. Therefore, a codebook dedicated to the Indian political ecosystem was created.

A major difference between the CMP and this project is that the former uses "sentences" as the parameter of measurement, whereas this project will make use of "the word count" as the main parameter of analysis. One complication that may rise when using "word count" as the parameter of analysis is that manifestos can be more verbose about certain issues or topics in comparison to others. If there are 100 words written about the generic importance of Issue A, for instance, and only 10 words are used to make a decisive statement about Issue B, then using the word count method might show that the party prioritizes Issue A over Issue B, which may or may not be factually correct. Therefore, during coding, it is assumed that the entire manifesto of a party has been written by one person or a team of persons representing that political party and that their stance on issues is deliberate and meaningful. Given that manifestos are a dynamic competitive space wherein parties have to choose what they will focus on, and for which they might trade off on other issues of importance, this needs to be analyzed deeply. Therefore, we conducted an in-depth issue-based analysis to understand how the positions of political parties have changed, or remained static, over time, even when they aren't being compared to the positions held by their competition.

To collect all official party manifestos that have existed since Independence, online and offline archives of the concerned political parties were accessed from various university and institutional libraries and online sources. All national election manifestos of the three selected parties, beginning in 1952 until 2019, have been found, read and coded into domains and categories.

Different coders selected manifestos indiscriminately and at random, and coded them independently. All coders were provided with a standardized codebook to ensure the accuracy of the data. Finally, to check the reproducibility of the data, the difference between the results of coding done by independent coders was analyzed. In that analysis, the results achieved by different coders in terms of the percentage of words dedicated to each domain in the chosen manifestos were compared. The maximum difference was 8% between different domains in two different manifestos. The majority of the domains, however, didn't show a major difference, indicating that the standard of categorization and method of coding is effective. On average, we found high inter-coder reliability. The resulting data is, therefore, reliable and reproducible.

Some of the categories that have been created in the codebook are inherently valence issues, such as 'Employment.' This means that all parties will always talk about increasing the level of employment in the country and criticize rising levels of unemployment. But their methods of reaching the same goal may be different or contrasting. Similarly, certain categories are inherently neutral, like the 'Free Market Economy.' This means that both criticism of and praise for this topic will be marked under this category. A party against privatization and another for it will both be placed here. The 'Notes' section in the datasheet kept a track of the varying positions of parties in each category for further issue-based analysis.

SECTION A: THE CHANGING MANIFESTOS SINCE 1952

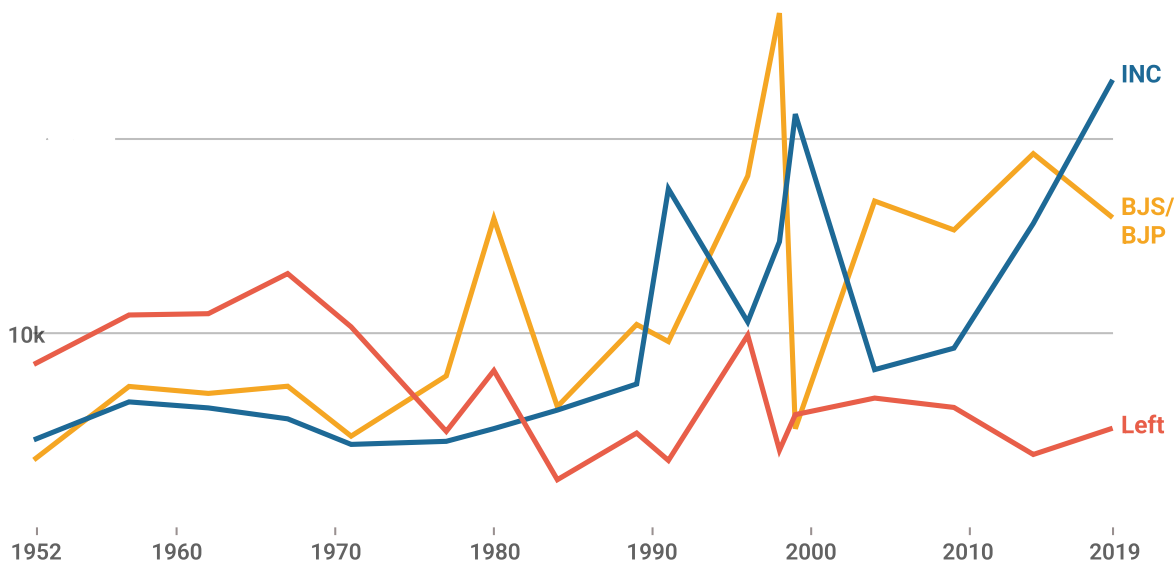
Manifestos are a medium that parties have at their disposal to articulate their programmatic visions as well as intellectual and ideological positions. This section looks at the broader evolution of manifestos, both in terms of their length, as well as in the prioritisation of issues over time (specifically across various party systems).

Figure 1 shows the total number of words in the manifestos of each political party over the years. As can be observed, the manifestos of left parties were extremely lengthy in the 1950s and 1960s, hitting the 10–15,000 word mark at times. Conversely, BJS manifestos were concise until the 1970s, but the lengths peaked in the 1980s and 1990s. With the BJP's formation in 1980, core issues regarding religion and the economy were emphasized, with their manifesto crossing 25,000 words in 1998. The Congress' trajectory is mostly an upward one, interestingly; their manifestos were the shortest when the party came to power in the years post-1999.

FIGURE 1

How long have manifestos been historically?

Word count of manifestos for Lok Sabha elections by party (1952-2019)



Trends in Manifestos

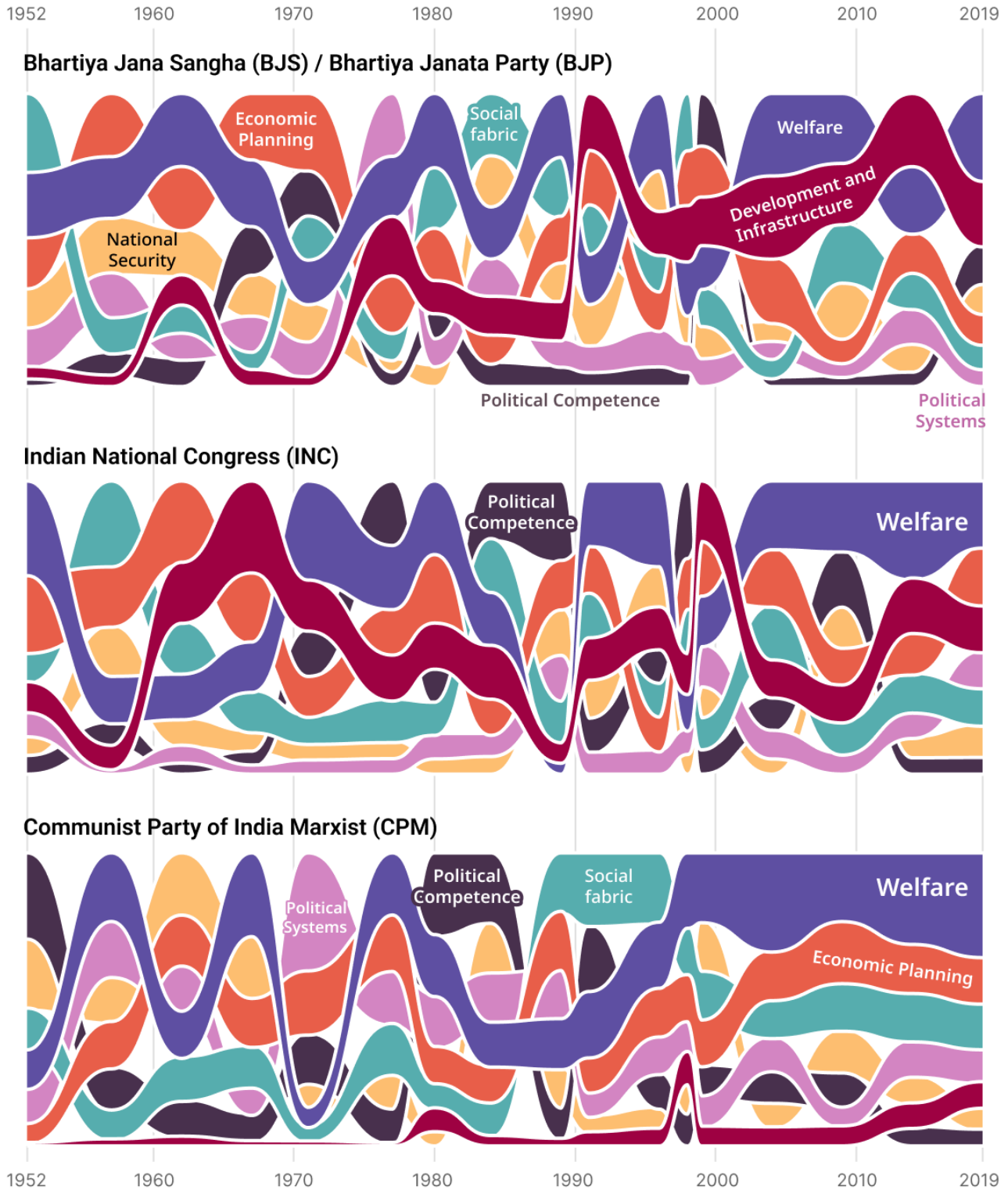
Comparing the importance of the many domains covered by the political parties, it becomes clear that Welfare and Economic Planning hold the lion's share of the word count, with approximately 40% of all words in manifestos dedicated to these domains by all political parties. Those are followed by Development and Infrastructure, which takes up over 15% of all the words.

Political Systems and Political Competence together hold around 20% of the word count, mostly because they generally include criticism of other parties and praises for their own parties and their competence. National Security and Social Fabric get the least number of words overall (see Figure 2). This general trend seems to hold for all parties, but there isn't any discernible pattern apart from this.

FIGURE 2

The shift towards welfare

Which topics appeared how much in party manifestos for the Lok Sabha elections by ranking



Source: India Manifesto Project, 2022

Variations in Manifestos Across Party Systems

Political parties do have their own organisational life, but they are also nested in party systems. They are components, or 'parts,' of the larger system and, therefore, any changes in the system naturally affect the parts.

There is a scholarly consensus that the Indian party system has seen at least four transformations since its inception. During the first party system (1952-67), the Congress was the dominant party winning both at the national level and in most states, overshadowing other parties, giving rise to the name 'Congress system.' The next phase (1967-89) was marked by the emergence of opposition against Congress in several states, resulting in a polarisation of the party systems at the state level. While Congress continued to win nationally, the non-Congress opposition parties started winning more seats and vote shares in the states. The third phase (1989-2014) marked the beginning of the post-Congress polity—a competitive multi-party system in which Congress was no longer the dominant player nationally. The period also witnessed the formation of coalition governments at the national level, since no one party was ever able to win a majority on its own. State-based parties acquired a greater voice both within their states as well as at the national level during this time. The current party system began with the formation of a single-party majority, that of the BJP, in 2014. With a consecutive victory in 2019 and the party's increasing presence, it became clear that India had entered its second dominant party system phase, this time anchored around the BJP. Ideologically, the median seems to have shifted so far towards the right that even the opposition is either mute or coloured in its strategy and tactics.

We use this party system framework to understand how manifestos of Indian parties have evolved over time- how much importance each party has given to certain domains and why. What is discernible is that over time, parties have started giving greater importance to Welfare Development & Infrastructure (see Figure 3). Economic Planning has shown a consistent decrease in importance, except when it comes to left parties. The same applies to Social Fabric, where, again, the left remains the outlier. National Security, too, has plummeted across time and parties.

When it comes to Political Systems, the importance given to the domain by the BJP has shrunk from 14% during the first-party system to 10.5% currently, whereas that given by the Congress has increased from 4.3% to 11.2% respectively. In the domain of Political Competence, the attention given by left parties to the domain has drastically gone down, from 18.1% during the first-party system to 5.1% currently; for INC, it increased during and after Indira and Rajiv Gandhi's respective regimes (14.7% and 15.5%) and fell (4.7%) when the party started losing its legitimacy after their defeat in the 2014 elections. Interestingly, for the BJP, the importance of Political Competence has picked up in the current party system (8%) with the rise of Narendra Modi.

In the first party system (1952-67) (see Figure 4), when the INC, under the leadership of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru was the dominant party, it showed a greater proclivity toward a socialist pattern of organizing its economy and development strategies, which can be observed in the greater importance given to the domains of Economic Planning (25.1%) as well as Development and Infrastructure (12.8%) compared to other parties. BJP—then BJS—gave greater importance to Welfare (22.6%), mostly in terms of expressing their vision of how education and health needed to be structured. Left parties, as the principal opposition, rooted in their ideology, gave greater importance to Political Systems (16.3%) and Political Competence (18.1%).

All parties can be seen giving similar importance to both Economic Planning and Welfare in the second-party system (1967-89). Though INC maintained power, it faced strong opposition and went through multiple organizational crises. This could explain why opposition parties also gave greater priority to Economic Planning and Welfare, just as much as the INC did. When it came to Political Competence and Political Systems, left parties were more vocal in expressing the importance they delegated to these domains. The INC, compared to the previous party system, can be seen dedicating increased words to Political Competence (14.7%), which coincides with the rise of populism under Indira Gandhi.

We see marked departures in the third-party system (see Figure 4). Left parties can be seen giving increased importance to the domains of Social Fabric, Welfare and Economic Planning. Watershed events in Indian politics—like Mandal-Mandir-Market—took place during this time. Left parties giving greater importance to these domains can be read as characteristic of their ideological inclinations. INC can be seen giving greater importance to Political Competence, signalling their acknowledgement of the level of opposition they had faced. BJP gave greater importance to Development and Infrastructure (22.6%) in comparison to other parties.

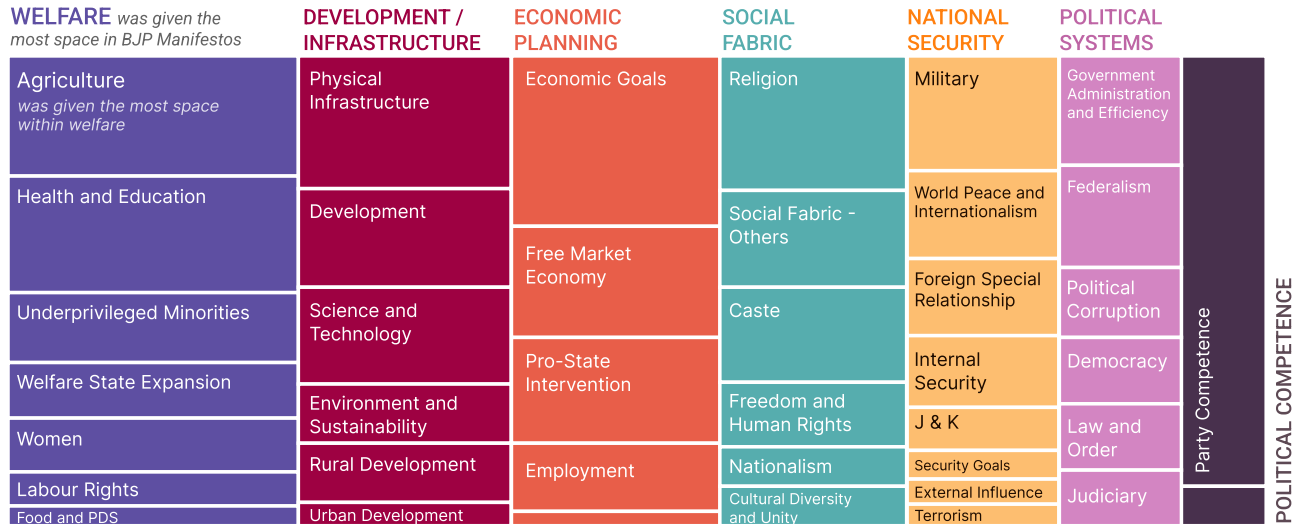
In the current, fourth-party system, what can be seen is the greater importance BJP gives to National Security (10.4%), Political Competence (8%), and Development and Infrastructure (23.6%). The rise of Narendra Modi as a strongman and the proponent of the Gujarat Model of development can be gleaned from the importance the party gives to these domains. The INC and the Left, on the other hand, can be prioritizing Economic Planning and Political Systems. The Left continues to give greater importance to Social Fabric (16.1%) as they consider themselves to be the principal ideological opposition to the Hindu majoritarian ideology the BJP espouses.

FIGURE 3

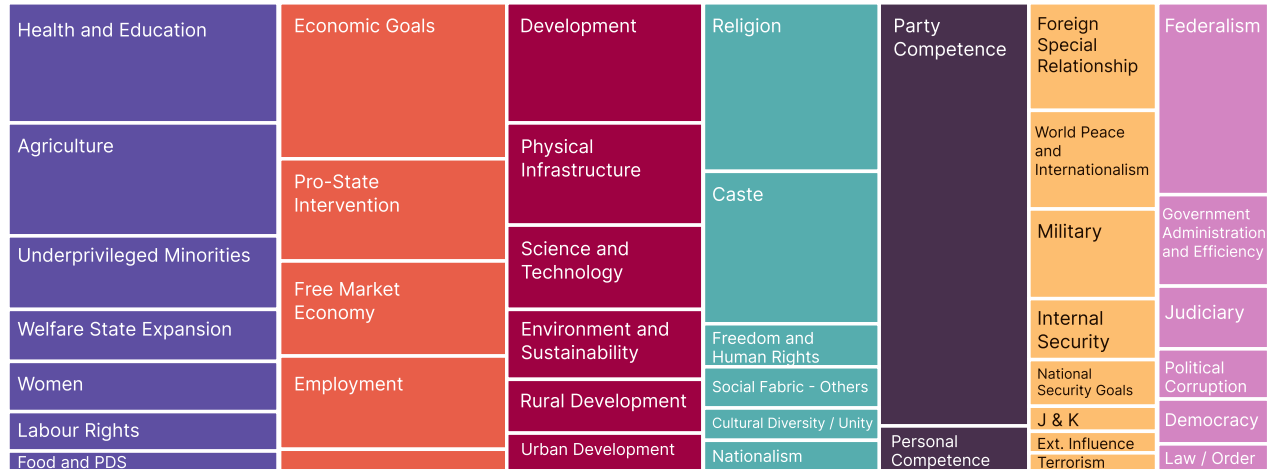
Welfare is the most popular across parties

Proportion of words used under each topic by different parties between 1952-2019 in manifestos for Lok Sabha elections

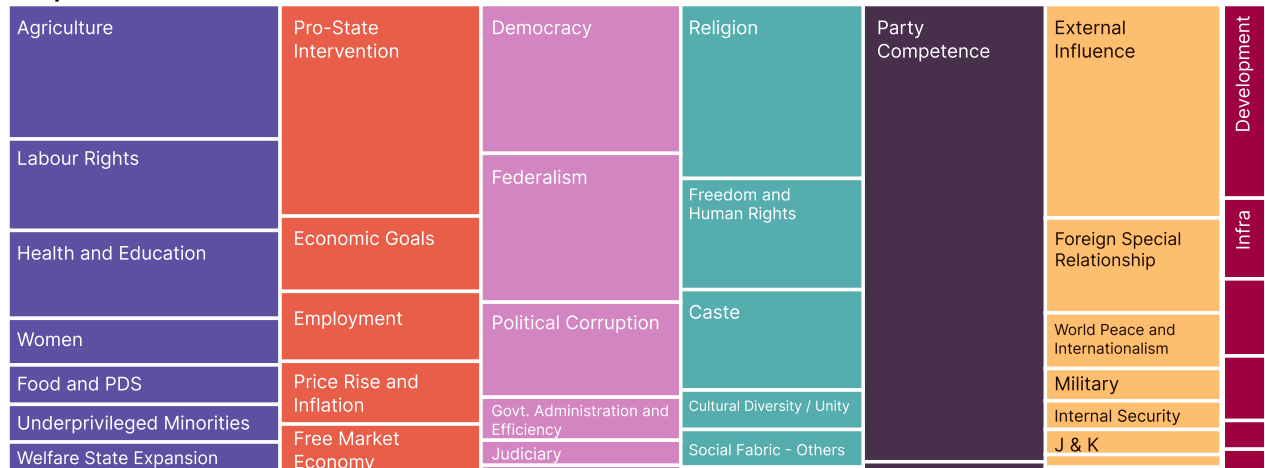
BJS/BJP



INC



CPI/CPM



Source: India Manifesto Project, 2022

FIGURE 4

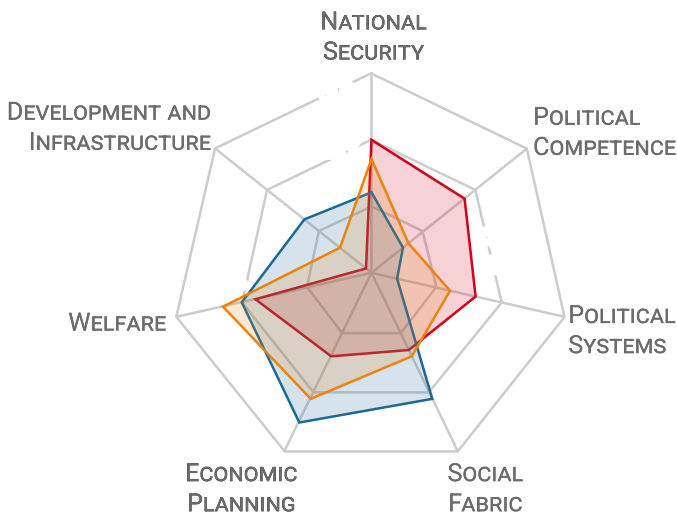
The shape of manifestos across time

Percentage of words used by different parties by subject during different party systems in Lok Sabha manifestos

First Party System

1952 – 1967

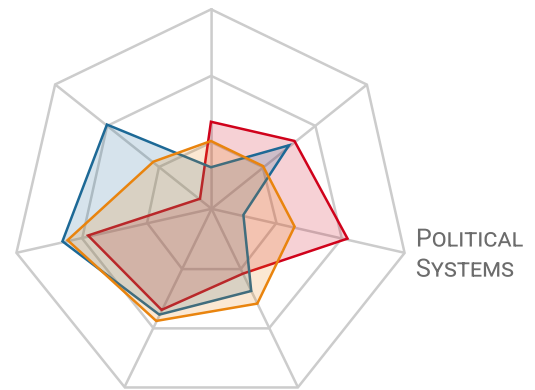
Newly sovereign, the relevance of national security and economic planning is higher than it'll be in the future.



Second Party System

1967 – 1989

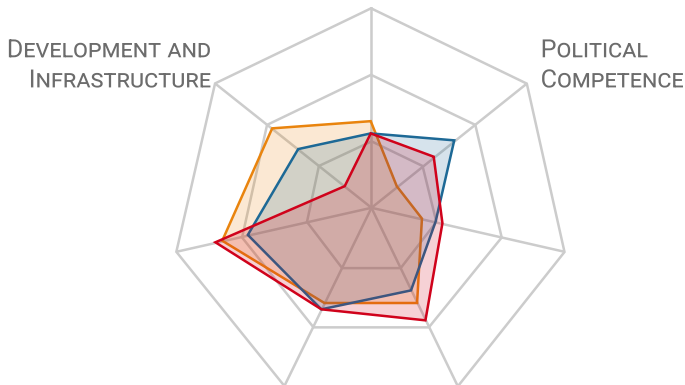
Congress focuses on development and infrastructure, **CPM** on the political systems.



Third Party System

1989 – 2014

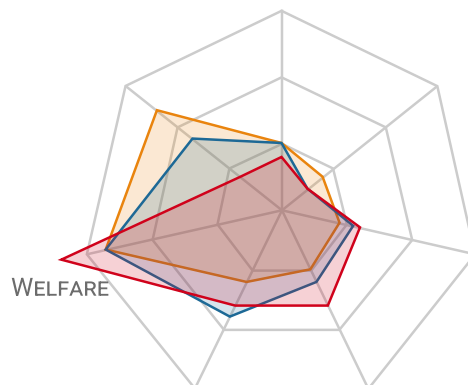
BJP plays on development, **INC** on political competence.



Fourth Party System

2014 – Present

Welfare takes greater precedence, **BJP** emphasises further on development.



Source: India Manifesto Project, 2022

SECTION B: POLITICAL COMPETENCE AND POLITICAL SYSTEM

Manifestos are mainly a means for political parties to propagate their stances and critique the positions taken by other competing parties. These aspects are captured most strongly by the domains of Political Systems and Political Competence. Most of these categories provide space for parties to counter each other. The categories under Political Competence are Personal Competence and Party Competence. In this section, we first discuss political competence and then political systems.

Political Competence

Party Competence and Personal Competence respectively capture the emphasis given to the credibility of the party and its leadership. Party Competence holds a substantial share of the space given in a political party's manifesto (see Figures 5A and 5B). In the years post-Independence, with Congress being in power, Jana Sangh's manifestos highlighted the lack of Congress policies, issues with planning, their socialist-leaning, external aggression faced by India and excess governmental control. In the decades that followed, criticism of Indira Gandhi's totalitarian and undemocratic policies and the consequent emergence of the Janata Party are all issues that fall under this category. The statements of political parties about the political climate and leadership of that time can be found in detail within these categories. These categories also include popular issues in an election year or all generic self-appreciation.

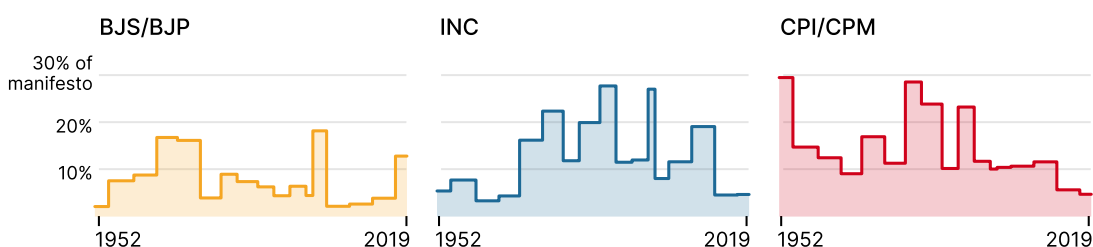
The analysis reveals that Congress has predominantly focused on its own achievements and prominent decisions taken by the party leadership. The contributions of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi have all been highlighted. In the years when they were in the opposition, Congress' criticism of other parties was based on situational issues as well as a lack of stability and secularism.

For the Left, the opposition is more principled and directed against the policies followed by Congress and the BJP, which would include corruption, crony capitalism and foreign policy stances, particularly those with respect to the United States. However, there are other ideological drivers as well, which include communalism, misuse of preventive detention laws and protection of minority rights. In terms of highlighting their own competence, the left parties lay emphasis on praising the success of the state governments run by them.

FIGURE 5A / POLITICAL COMPETENCE

Parties now spend less of the manifesto talking of political competence

Percentage of Lok Sabha election manifestos dedicated to political competence (1952-2019)

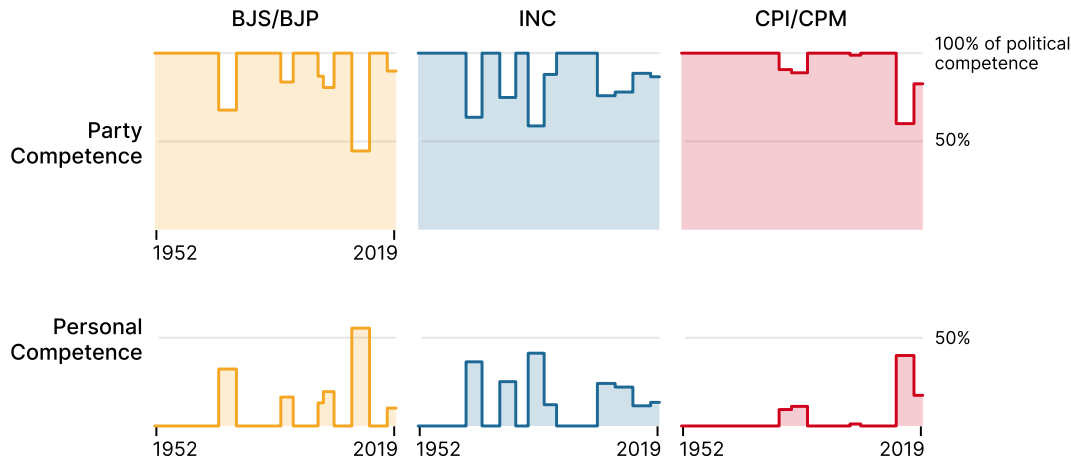


Source: India Manifesto Project, 2022

FIGURE 5B / POLITICAL COMPETENCE

Incumbent elections see a spike in the mention of party competence

Percentage of content on political competence in Lok Sabha election manifestos used for different topics (1952-2019)



Source: India Manifesto Project, 2022

Political System

The categories under Political Systems are Governmental and Administrative Efficiency, Political Corruption, Judiciary, Federalism, Law and Order, and Democracy. Figure 6A provides space given by political parties to this domain in their manifestos over time. We discuss each of these categories in detail below.

Governmental and Administrative Efficiency and Political Corruption

Under the domain of Political Systems is the category of Governmental and Administrative Efficiency which discusses topics like good governance, the economy in administration, adoption of new technologies, digitization, e-governance, better accountability, transparency and reform of civil services and the legislative system. The category of Political Corruption captures discourses on corruption as well as allegations and instances of corruption that are meted out against political rivals. For the BJP, it is the importance attributed to Governmental and Administrative Efficiency and Corruption that is worth underscoring. Even though the word share is not constant, it remains significant enough to be discussed in every manifesto. BJP has adopted the guiding principle of “minimum government and maximum governance” in recent years and has also suggested lateral entry into government positions as well as Constitutional reforms, further proving that these issues are important to them.

When it comes to the other parties, things look slightly different. For Congress, efficiency has occupied at least 20% of the words in its domain across time, while the word share for corruption keeps changing—it was not mentioned in 2009, was 27% in 2014 and merely 2% in 2019 (see Figure 6B). On the other hand, Efficiency is not a major focus for the Left but it was emphasised in 2014 and 2019. Corruption, however, is the second most important category for the Left, with over 25% of the domain’s word share dedicated to it since 1996 (see Figure 6B). Issues like the Right to Information, implementation of Lokpal, whistle-blower protection, black money, vigilance, anti-corruption mechanisms, criminalization of politics and corrupt electoral practices are discussed in this category, along with mentions of any scams that have been brought to light in the past, like the 2G scam.

Law and Order

Law and Order discuss police and domestic criminal activity and how it can be tackled better through reform and procedural improvement. All opinions about methods of getting justice and dealing with specific crimes, like drugs, are discussed here. As far as the emphasis on it goes, it is the BJP which consistently highlights things within this category, while the Congress and the Left do not focus on it as much.

Democracy

As far as the idea of Democracy is concerned, all parties seem to place a significant emphasis on it in their manifestos. The BJP, for instance, have consistently spent at least 20% of its domain's word share in this category, that number peaked in 1977, with around 61% spent on the category (see Figure 6B). Since then, however, that number has consistently decreased and become practically non-existent in recent years. BJP's proposed reforms include simultaneous elections, electronic voting, company funding, increased voter participation like postal ballots for citizens living abroad, elimination of criminals from politics and a single voter list. The 1984 manifesto discussed four evils that were threatening to subvert the freedom and fairness of elections—money power, ministerial power, media power and muscle power. Democracy, for BJP, has been synonymous with equal importance to rights and duties.

Under the umbrella of democracy, Congress has continuously proposed a comprehensive electoral reforms bill with a strong anti-defection law. Their manifestos in 2014 and 2019 dedicated 2.3% and 22% word share respectively to democracy (see Figure 6B), within which the proposed electoral reforms included the scrapping of the Electoral Bond Scheme, setting up a National Election Fund and ensuring that EVMs and VVPATs are tamper-proof. For the left parties, the share has been very consistent. CPM has proposed electoral reforms like scrapping electoral bonds, placing a ceiling on election expenditure, state funding of elections, prohibition of corporate funding, reform of the Election Commission, reducing criminalization and introducing proportional representation. Statements about increasing authoritarianism and independence of institutions are also tackled under this category.

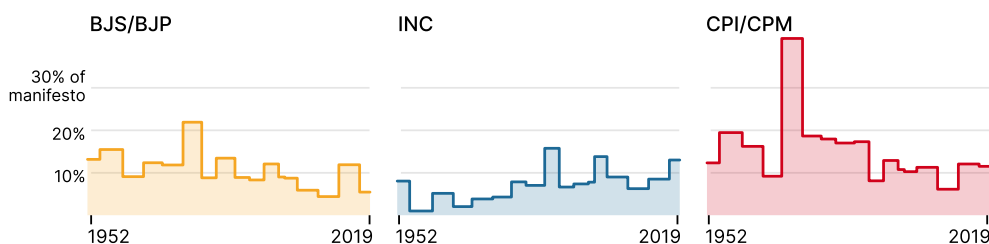
Judiciary

Judiciary as a category captures judicial reforms—especially concerning the appointment of judges through the National Judicial Appointments Commission—fast-tracking cases, establishing special courts, accessible and speedy justice, rectifying judicial delays, legal aid, better judicial infrastructure, reform of the criminal justice system, alternate dispute redressal mechanisms, separation from the executive and overall independence of the justice system. The BJP has discussed this with the highest overall word share. While BJP's focus on the Judiciary has declined in recent years, with 7% words about it in its 2019 manifesto, Congress has increased its emphasis on the subject in the last four elections. Left parties have constantly given it about 5-8% of the word share since 1998 (see Figure 6B).

FIGURE 6A / POLITICAL SYSTEMS

Political systems are not a significant part of the manifesto

Percentage of Lok Sabha election manifestos dedicated to political systems (1952-2019)



Source: India Manifesto Project, 2022

Federalism

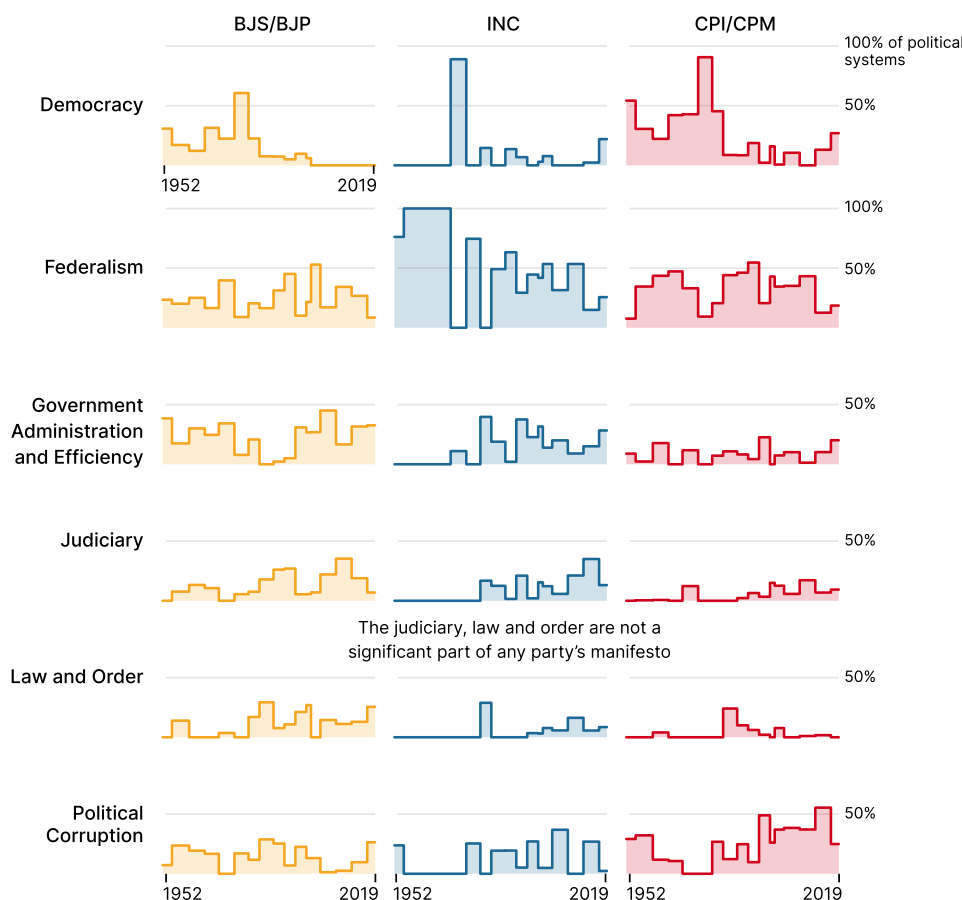
Federalism as a category encompasses topics of centre-state relations, rural-local government and inter-state relations. Centre-state relations include support for federalism through the devolution of political and/or economic power from the centre to the states. Improved centre-state relations, increased autonomy for any sub-national level in policymaking and greater fiscal devolution to the states are important themes here. State-specific concerns and issues are also coded under this category. Historically, the BJP has changed its stance drastically over the years—from the Jana Sangh supporting a unitary form of government in the years post-Independence to the BJP's current stance of ensuring strong state governments. Implementing the recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission, such as appointing state governors in consultation with state governments, stopping the misuse of Article 356 and creating newer states, has been highlighted by the BJP. Meanwhile, Congress and the CPI have clearly supported the creation of states on the basis of language. CPM has stated its intention to keep the federal nature of the Indian constitution intact and has detailed steps in its manifestos to ensure the same (Figure 6B).

Jana Sangh has discussed the evolution of elected Panchayats since 1952 and ensuring their self-reliance has been a priority for the BJP. In fact, the BJP has often cited the Vedic times as the root of the Panchayat system. Though the INC has dedicated the maximum number of words to this category, it began primarily in 1989. The granting of constitutional status to Panchayati Raj institutions has been discussed by them in extreme detail over the years to show Congress' commitment and contribution to strengthening the local self-government system in India. The role of Rajiv Gandhi and PV Narsimha Rao has been highlighted numerous times in this regard. Both parties have also discussed strengthening the institution of Gram Sabha for people's participation. The Left, on the other hand, has kept its focus on granting autonomy to tribal areas and attaining "genuine" decentralisation, which has not been fulfilled so far.

FIGURE 6B / POLITICAL SYSTEMS

Manifestos in the world's biggest democracy, hardly talk about democracy

Percentage of content on political systems in Lok Sabha election manifestos used for different topics (1952-2019)



Source: India Manifesto Project, 2022

SECTION C: DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

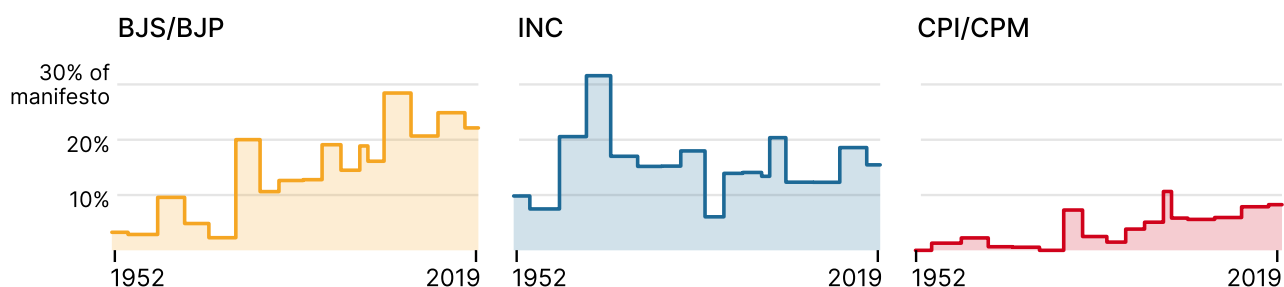
Development is unarguably the most important domain when analysing the manifestos of Indian political parties, occupying significant space across the board. It includes the positive interventions that political parties promise to undertake for the betterment of the country and to raise the standard of living of its people. Development is a comprehensive domain which comprises a number of varied categories, all tackling issues of importance concerning the day-to-day lives of common people as well as infrastructural aspects of the country that would enhance it as a whole.

Figure 7A below shows the overall space allocated to development and infrastructure in a party's manifesto. As evident, the BJP and Congress allocated up to 30% of their space to this domain at their respective peaks. For most of the timeline, both parties allocated a significant space to development and infrastructure unlike the Left parties, whose allocation never crosses the 10% mark. The categories subsequently mentioned in this section from the part of this domain, and the accompanying visualisations reflect the proportion of space taken by the categories in the domain of development.

FIGURE 7A / DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Development and infrastructure gain more space

Percentage of Lok Sabha election manifestos dedicated to development and infrastructure (1952-2019)



Source: India Manifesto Project, 2022

Development

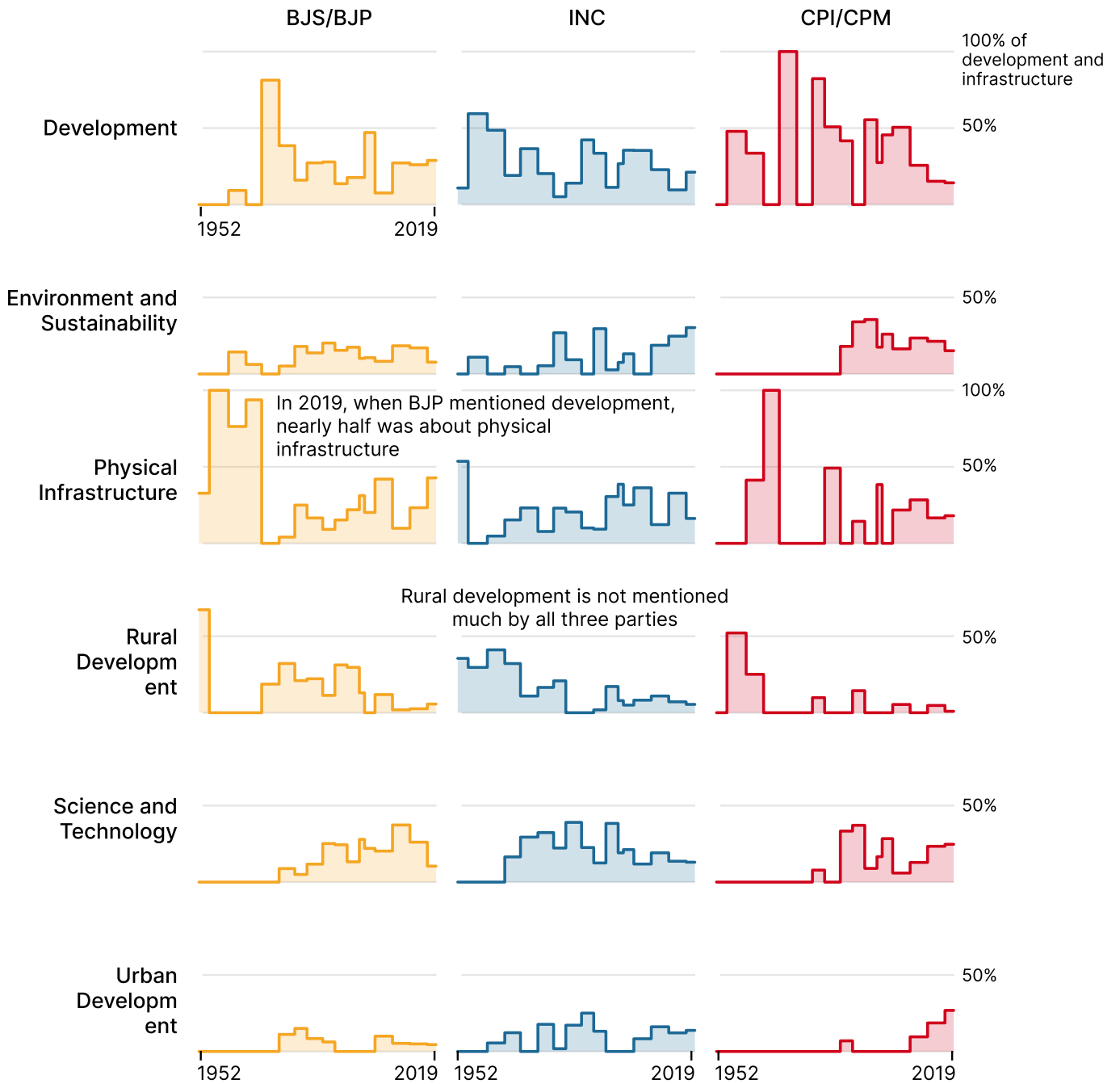
This category acts as a catch-all term in which any generic mention of development is included. Political parties often talk about broad development ideas without any sector-specific goals or policies, all of which are included in this category. Aims to reduce poverty and inequality, for instance, or the management of the country's population are common topics of concern in this category.

The BJP has consistently emphasised its aim of reducing inequality and destitution and the need to provide people with the basic necessities of life like food, shelter and clothing. Distributive justice is a major theme here. Since the late 1970s, family planning and welfare through non-coercive methods have been discussed in the context of population control and stabilisation towards the larger aim of sustainable development. On average, 23% of the word share of this domain is usually allotted to this category by the BJP (see Figure 7B).

FIGURE 7B / DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

BJP sells on physical infrastructure, INC on sustainability

Percentage of development and infrastructure content in Lok Sabha election manifestos used for different topics (1952-2019)



Source: India Manifesto Project, 2022

Congress talks about economic equality and social justice. The establishment of a 'Socialist Cooperative Commonwealth' was their goal in the initial decades post-Independence. The INC considered socialism as the best route to achieve its developmental goals, both in the economic and social context. The Congress also discussed the importance of Non-Governmental Organisations to support the welfare initiatives of the government in implementation. Poverty alleviation has been a major pillar of the Congress' development agenda while stabilising the population is considered to be equally important, according to its (1999 manifesto).

The word share for this category has steadily declined for the CPM and the Congress since 1996 and 1999 respectively. This can possibly be explained by the fact that instead of talking about development in general terms, these parties have now identified specific sectors and policies that they focus on. Reduction of poverty and inequality remains their overall focus.

When political parties concentrate on expanding developmental work in a particular sub-national region or state, that work falls under this category. It is a minor category going by the word share, but there are specific regions that are continuously emphasised for developmental work. Improving the infrastructure, connectivity and security in north-east India, for instance, is highlighted and discussed in all manifestos post-1990s.

The BJP has mentioned the development of island groups, hills and desert regions, as well as its union territories in its manifestos since 2004. The Congress discussed the upliftment of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in 1999 and 2004. However, the development of northeast India remains common across all parties.

Rural and Urban Development

Rural Development is a comprehensive category which includes social and economic modernization of villages, improving infrastructure (including the agriculture sector) and provision of essential goods and services. The development of cooperatives and small village-based industries is also included here. The BJP has consistently mentioned the need for rural development, with 16% of the word share given to this category on average; however, since 2009, the number of words dedicated by the BJP to this category has been minimal (see Figure 7B). Despite this, the BJP discussed the goal of achieving Gram Swaraj in 2019. Neither the INC nor the Left prioritise rural development much. Congress also brings up better governance at the local level, while CPM mentions small industries.

Urban Development is usually discussed in the context of urbanisation, slum redevelopment, city amenities like public transport and better municipal governance. While not as important before 2004, political parties have since started discussing it. The BJP also discusses the development of global and smart cities through the adoption of the latest technologies. The development of urban areas to minimise migration has also been highlighted by them. The CPM mentions the protection of vulnerable groups like street vendors and migrant labour.

Physical Infrastructure

This category includes improving the physical infrastructure of the country—transportation, irrigation, the energy sector, water management and large public works projects. This is a dominant category in this domain for the BJP, especially since the late 1990s. Congress also focuses on this category, but its share of it is significantly lesser than the BJP's. Left parties have dedicated around 19% of their words in this domain to this category on average (see Figure 7B), whereas the BJP and the INC have dedicated 33% and 21% respectively.

Transportation is a major aspect here, with discussions around developing better roadways, connectivity through railways and necessary structures like bridges and ports. The development of heavy industries and concerns about the public sector are topics the Left focused on in this category.

Science and technology

Compared to earlier categories, Science and Technology is much more sector-specific. While its word share would indicate little emphasis historically, certain issues within this category, like networks, internet facilities and telecom, are becoming increasingly important with each passing day and technological invention. This category has occupied 10-13% of all words in its domain for both the BJP and Congress in recent years. Improving communication and connectivity is the ultimate aim of any telecom policy. Strengthening its regulatory authority, improving public sector enterprises and creating better-operating conditions for private sector companies have been discussed by both parties.

The Janata Party discussed adopting “appropriate technology” in 1977 in order to promote self-reliance and local development of technology. Making India a software superpower through the IT industry and building a knowledge economy was discussed in detail by the BJP in 2004. E-governance is a major area of focus since the last three national elections for both parties while making every household digitally literate is on the BJP's agenda. Left parties, however, have not focused on this category in manifestos, but internet governance has been mentioned by them in recent years.

Developing a proper national technology policy and inculcating a scientific attitude in people, investing in upcoming sectors and research, preventing brain drain and having a good Intellectual Property Rights framework are the major themes. The Congress has discussed better research & development, scientific education and the use of technology in industries like pharmaceuticals, atomic energy and biotechnology. Concentrating on indigenous technology, the autonomy of educational institutions and developing knowledge commons are important for the Left.

Environmental Protection and Sustainability

This category includes policies for greenhouse gas emissions, adoption of methods of growth that align with environmental protection and better techniques of sustainable development. Green policies like the preservation of natural resources and the protection of forests are a part of this category. Topics like ecological degradation, desertification, protection of wildlife, pollution and deforestation are discussed. Protection of tribal rights and the creation of a formal national environment policy are also emphasised. This topic is usually nominally mentioned by all political parties.

On average, the BJP dedicates about 11% of the word share to this category (see Figure 7B). Though not important to it historically, Congress has given more attention to this category over the past three elections and has discussed specific steps for environmental protection, like green budgeting and the creation of an independent authority to work on it. Left parties mention this category nominally, with some priority to water conservation, and, on average they have allocated around 12% of words in the domain to this category.

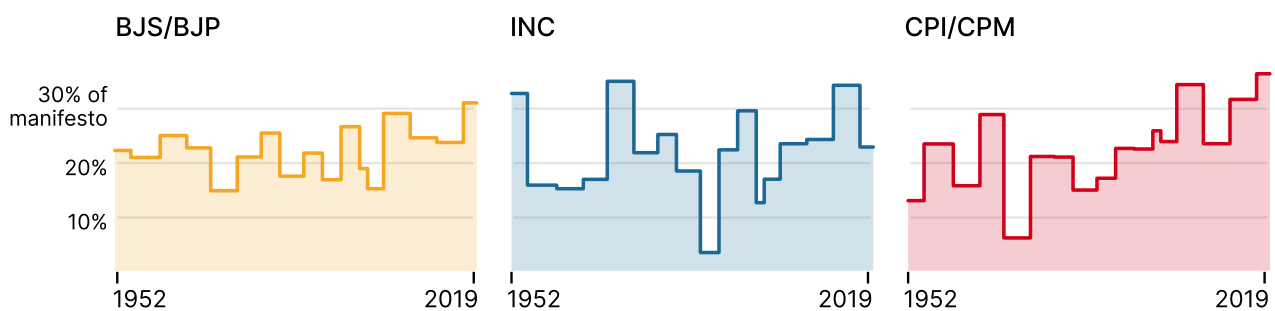
SECTION D: WELFARE

A large section of society continues to be either socially or economically backwards, or both. The provision of welfare, therefore, forms a key component in manifestos. Since the state is responsible for helping these sections, political parties have dedicated a sizeable portion of their manifestos to ideas and visions for the upliftment of the marginalised and the mitigation of social inequalities. Figure 8 shows that the space given to issues related to welfare has been consistently substantial across parties. The domain on welfare not only includes parties' positions on the welfare state at large but also on sectors such as agriculture, health and education, as well as what they would aim to do for various social groups, including women, wage labourers and minorities groups.

FIGURE 8A / WELFARE

The share of welfare in manifestos has been consistently increasing across parties

Percentage of Lok Sabha election manifestos dedicated to welfare (1952-2019)



Source: India Manifesto Project, 2022

Welfare state expansion

This category includes favourable mentions of social security and the role of the government as a welfare state. All sectors that have not been categorised separately are included in this section as well. All parties dedicate 5-10% of the word share to this category on average, prioritizing different aspects variably across years. Among them, the major issues are the public provision of essential items (housing, for example), access to drinking water, sanitation and providing pensions to senior citizens and persons with disabilities (see Figure 8B).

Jana Sangh, the predecessor to the BJP, initially proposed placing limits on the private incomes of individuals to ensure redistribution and equality. The Gandhian concept of Antyodaya and the BJP's now fundamental philosophy of Integral Humanism was discussed by the Janata Party as a way to assist the poorest of the poor. Topics like consumer protection, justice for the poor and improving social security through national identity cards were mentioned. The 1971 Congress manifesto discusses the importance of implementing certain directive principles of state policy for the welfare of the people and socioeconomic development. Welfare policies related to social assistance, like NREGA, are highlighted here. Direct Benefit Transfer and Aadhar were discussed by Congress in 2014 and Minimum Basic Income in 2019. For the Left, the provision of electricity and establishing a system of subsidies are also important.

Agriculture

Agriculture represents a dominant category in the Welfare domain, with detailed descriptions of the policies and schemes to improve the agricultural sector. This can include irrigation, infrastructure, crop insurance, technology and education, and incentives to farmers like loan waivers and agricultural modernisation.

All political parties prioritise this category. The number of words given to it fluctuates when it comes to the INC and the BJP; in the 2019 BJP manifesto, it saw a major jump, with almost 30% of the words of this domain belonging to this category, which is three times more than it was in 2014. The Left, on the other hand, has shown a consistent increase in the word share dedicated to this topic over the years.

This category also includes topics like land reforms, tenancy reforms and land ownership for a more equitable distribution of land resources. Predictably, left parties consistently talk about this aspect in every manifesto, while the BJP and Congress do not discuss them with the same emphasis (see Figure 8B). There are many years in which the latter do not even mention land issues in their manifestos.

Food and PDS

Despite political parties often mentioning necessities like food, shelter and housing, food and the public distribution systems (PDS) have not been emphasised as much by any of them when we look at the data.

Neither BJP nor Congress has ever dedicated more than 5% of words from the Welfare domain to this category on average. Tackling the shortage of food grains was a major issue of concern in 1967 when both the BJP and the Left discussed food distribution. Ending hunger and malnourishment and having a corruption-free PDS are highlighted in this category as well. Congress has mentioned the National Food Security Act consistently since 2009. On the other hand, left-wing parties have dedicated 5-10% of the words to this category since 1996.

Labour rights

This category includes topics like working conditions, changing demands and labour laws, facilities for workers (especially for women and children) and changing industrial conditions.

This category is a major focus point for Left manifestos, with 15-20% of the word share of the Welfare domain given to this category for the last five national elections. This is in contrast to the BJP, which has had a very nominal focus on this topic for the last two decades. The Congress can be said to have held a middle ground, with labour rights being mentioned in some detail in some specific years.

Health and Education

As an important category in the Welfare domain, health and education are referred to as public goods, considered essential for human resource development and whose supply is supposed to be the responsibility of the government. Political parties consistently dedicate a significant word share of the Development domain to health and education. The major priorities within these categories are similar for all political players.

The focus for all parties has been on universal primary education, scientific institutions of higher education, adult education, ending illiteracy, vocational training, better working conditions and training of teachers. Education in regional languages was to be prioritised. Reducing gender inequality in access to education has also been an important issue for all political parties.

In its initial days, the BJS, the predecessor of the BJP, advocated bringing Bharatiya culture into the educational system. This was later carried forward by the BJP in their manifestos promising to include Indian culture, heritage and ethical values in the syllabi. The implementation of the Right to Education Act has been discussed by Congress. They want a total overhaul of the education system and vocation-oriented schooling, using the mother tongue as the medium of instruction and removal of colonial and elitist legacies. They are against Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in higher education.

Under healthcare, major themes include accessibility, better infrastructure, immunisation, nutrition, hygiene and sanitation. Integrating indigenous systems of medicine (AYUSH) is discussed by the BJP. The Left want not just increased public expenditure but production from the government as well, like public sector pharmaceutical units.

Women

When it comes to women's issues, the BJP has consistently dedicated a significant share of words to it, ranging from 10-20% in recent years (see Figure 8B). The BJS highlighted equal opportunities for women, including equal property rights, education and training. Better provisions for working women are prioritised with encouragement for employment and entrepreneurship. The goal to root out the practice of dowry has been consistently specified since 1977. The aim is to strengthen women as decision-makers, breadwinners and homemakers. The promise for reservation in elected bodies was stated in 1996 for the first time and has been repeated in every manifesto since then. The Uniform Civil Code to ensure equal rights for women of all religions has also been a priority for the BJP since 1996. Post-1996, detailed steps have been listed to reduce violent crimes against women. Women-led development and providing healthcare for women for a dignified life were major themes in the 2019 manifesto.

Congress has focused on removing social disabilities for women to ensure their full participation in the country. Equality in all spheres—education, training and welfare—is a priority as well. The reform of Hindu Law for women's rights was mentioned in 1957. Fighting social evils like dowry has consistently been on Congress' agenda. Schemes like Indira Mahila Yojana, rural development projects and reservation in elected bodies are emphasised, along with the economic empowerment of women. The 2014 manifesto detailed measures to ensure the safety of women.

Left parties also champion gender equality in their manifestos. Though most aspects of their plans are the same as the other parties, they remain focused on equal rights and provisions for working women. The issue of crimes against women is also important to them while aiming for social equality comes up in Left manifestos since the 1980s. The Left focuses a lot on labour rights, and the rights of women labourers are discussed simultaneously in detail. The 2019 CPM manifesto also mentions issues such as criminalizing marital rape, enacting a stand-alone law against honour crimes and increasing allocations under gender budgeting.

Underprivileged minority groups

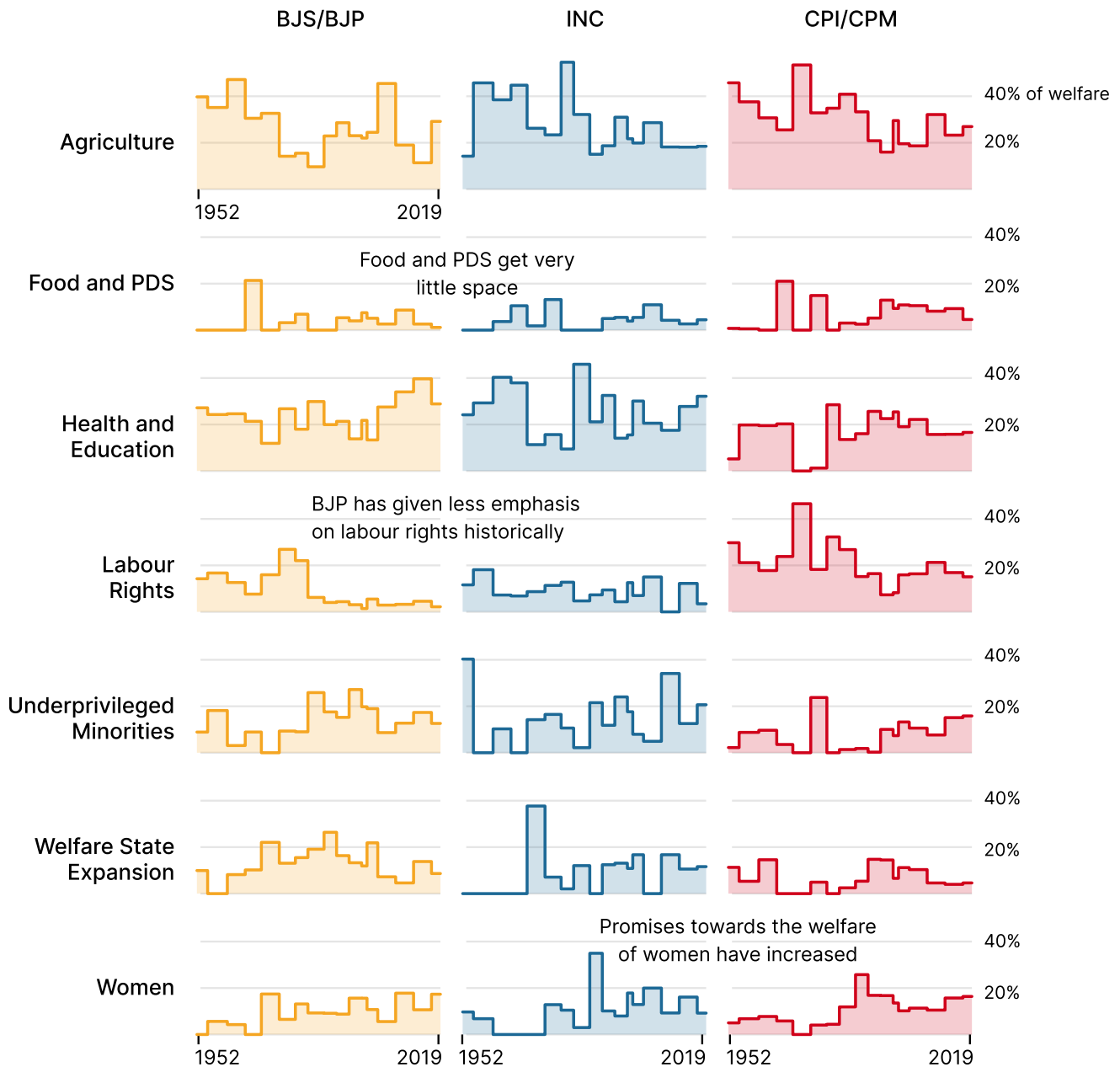
This is a broad category that comprises various topics such as children, youth, persons with disabilities, gender, sexual minorities and other underprivileged minority groups who don't fall under any other categories. The share of words each party has dedicated to this category does not hold any conspicuous pattern and has varied over time, with the inclusion of topics such as gender and sexual minorities (like the transgender community) in recent times.

In the initial years after Independence, the BJS made it a point to talk about displaced persons as a result of the partition of India, giving top priority to their rehabilitation and defining measures to help them financially. Supporting Hindus migrating from Pakistan to India was a major feature of Jana Sangh's manifestos until 1967. It specifically stated that the party believes in equal rights for all and does not recognize minorities based on religion. It simultaneously emphasizes its stance against discrimination and the policy of supporting backward classes through economic and educational opportunities. The establishment of a Minorities Commission was discussed by the Janata Party in their manifesto.

FIGURE 8B / WELFARE

Agriculture, health and education are popular across parties

Percentage of welfare content in Lok Sabha election manifestos used for different topics (1952-2019)



Source: India Manifesto Project, 2022

The BJP specifically mentions the Sindhi community in 1989 and 1991 and assures the protection of their identity and representation. In their 1996 manifesto, the BJP talks about the steps needed to be taken for the protection of Kashmiri Pandits, Chakma refugees, Sri Lankan Tamil refugees as well as Non-Resident Indians in Hong Kong.

The Congress's 1952 manifesto also talks extensively about the rehabilitation of displaced persons from Pakistan. The 1996 manifesto clearly states that Congress recognizes the special disadvantages faced by minorities and prioritizes their welfare through increased funds and better policies. The 2009 manifesto mentions Congress's pioneering reservation for minorities in specific states.

Linguistic minority groups are often discussed by the INC and educational instruction in the mother tongue is a major promise for these communities, according to the 2019 manifest; so is the welfare of fisherfolk. Left parties discuss refugee rehabilitation and their gainful employment as well as provisions for linguistic minorities in the years post-Independence. Usually, the Left takes the generic stance of non-discrimination and upliftment of backward communities through welfare measures and reservations. The CPI has specifically mentioned rehabilitating people displaced because of developmental projects in 1999. The CPM has discussed issues faced by fisherfolk in every manifesto since 1999.

Issues concerning youth include involving them in the process of development and governance, increasing their opportunities for education, employment and skill development, and higher involvement in sports. The BJP mentions a National Youth Policy and talks about the youth's societal contribution, instilling in them a sense of pride in India's culture and tradition as well as voluntary community service. The 2019 manifesto of the BJP discusses entrepreneurship and start-ups and the participation of youth in governance. Congress has also maintained regularity on this issue but with a more fluctuating word share, especially because the 2019 manifesto did not consider this category at all. The Congress has discussed involving the youth in social reform, reducing drug abuse, lowering the voting age and utilising the natural demographic dividend possessed by India. Congress manifestos also call being youthful and dynamic the hallmark of the party, with promises to induct more youth into the party. Left-wing parties, on the other hand, have not focused much on youth apart from the topics of student politics and employment. Similar to the BJP, the CPM has consistently mentioned the goal to develop a National Youth Policy.

Common topics for all parties include child labour, primary education, universal healthcare with immunization and nutrition, protection of children and a better juvenile justice system. Special provisions for the girl child and other vulnerable children are also discussed. Children have been a category of focus for the Left since 2004, before which this group was not emphasised much.

Left-wing parties have dedicated the maximum number of words to this category overall among all parties. The BJP has not prioritised children over the years but the 1998 manifesto goes into detail about the basic rights that must be ensured for children. Congress does discuss children in some detail and mentions the establishment of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights in 2006. But all-in-all, this category cannot be said to be a priority for any of these parties.

All parties have started discussing persons with disabilities and the LGBT community in recent years, especially post-2009, but their word share is minimal. A rising focus on these groups shows that the parties have increased social awareness and are working towards more welfare initiatives for newer social groups that might've been ignored in the past.

Empowerment and development of persons with disabilities, better accessibility through infrastructure and providing them with equal opportunities is the goal for all parties. Congress and the Left have mentioned their duty to protect the rights of the LGBT+ community, gender sensitivity training as well as correct the issues with the Transgender Bill 2014. The CPM has mentioned its support for the legal recognition of same-sex couples and a comprehensive anti-discriminatory bill to protect the community. The BJP has specifically mentioned giving opportunities to transgenders only through their socio-economic empowerment.

SECTION E: SOCIAL FABRIC

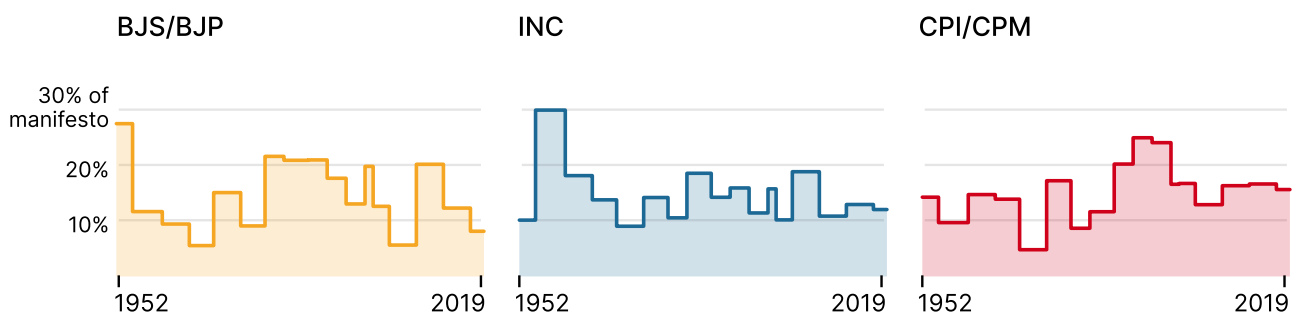
When it comes to the social fabric of society, there is a greater distinction between the positions parties take compared to other domains. Issues of freedom, democracy and culture often make for strong signalling devices and capture a party's social and political ideology. Caste and social justice, religion and secularism, nationalism, cultural diversity and unity, freedom, human rights and other Social Fabric issues are the important categories in this domain.

With major socio-cultural shifts over the course of independent India's history, this has become an important domain for analysing a political party's stance on significant events. India is a combination of innumerable social groups which makes this domain important to understand the views of various parties on maintaining diversity. Post-Independence, around 20% of the words were dedicated to discussing the nation's social fabric in the manifestos of all parties. But over time, the share of this domain has declined, falling to 8-10% in recent years (see Figure 9A). Moreover, while parties across the ideological spectrum maintain their dedication to the secular principles of the Indian constitution, their mechanisms for ensuring the same vary drastically.

FIGURE 9A / SOCIAL FABRIC

The space given to the social fabric has stayed mostly consistent

Percentage of Lok Sabha election manifestos dedicated to the social fabric (1952-2019)



Source: India Manifesto Project, 2022

Cultural diversity and unity

This category deals with favourable mentions of cultural diversity and plurality within the society and the preservation of the autonomy of religious and linguistic heritages, including special educational provisions. This is a significant category for all parties, even though its importance has declined over the years in terms of word share. The theme of unity in diversity and non-discrimination is strong for all political parties.

Languages are the major concern in this domain. Protection of languages like Urdu, Sindhi, Manipuri and Nepali, retaining the three-language formula and medium of instruction in regional languages are often the key points of focus. The Left, for instance, consistently emphasises developing regional languages and opposes the forcible imposition of Hindi. On the other hand, Congress has more or less regularly discussed the issues in this category since the 1990s, while Jana Sangh was more focused on this issue before the 1990s.

However, the BJP and Congress did dedicate 22% and 14% of words in the domain respectively to this category in 2014 (see Figure 9B). The promotion of Hindi and Sanskrit is important for the BJP while being united despite all differences is important for the Congress.

Nationalism

Nationalism was a key point in the manifestos of the Congress and the Jana Sangh in the earlier elections of Indian democracy, with parties highlighting their idea of a country as well as their achievements during the struggle for independence.

Cultural nationalism remains an important feature of right-leaning parties, exemplified by the BJS deriving their nationalism from Indian history and mythology, aimed at restoring lost glory. They have often depicted India as Bharat Mata in multiple manifestos. By 1962, there was a reduction in the number of words for this category, given the relative crystallisation of ideas about the nation compared to previous elections. The recent resurgence in this category has been seen primarily in 2009 and 2014 when the BJP traced the historical achievements of Indian civilization in their manifestos. Interestingly, nationalism and patriotism were not explicitly penned down in the 2019 BJP manifesto, although their campaign focused on similar issues.

The Congress, on the other hand, draws heavily on the party's contribution to the freedom movement and nation-building post-Independence and Partition. It has often highlighted the legitimacy of the party in the context of its legacy. Though this category is not a major point of focus, it is mentioned with respect to the role the INC played in the freedom movement and how Congress leadership has sacrificed their lives for India for decades, citing Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. The Left, however barely mentions nationalism.

Freedom and human rights

The category of freedom and human rights includes upholding civil liberties, freedom from any form of repression and the idea of individualism. The Jana Sangh has discussed values like the rule of law, equality and preservation of civil liberties, and has criticised repression through laws related to preventive detention. Criticism of the violations of human rights during the Emergency era forms a major part of this category for the Janata Party—for instance, when the right to protest, and other fundamental rights, were denied to the public. Freedom and human rights have not been very important categories for the BJP in recent years. They were mentioned until the late 1990s but have not been discussed since then.

Freedom of the press and the creation of a statutory national-level human rights authority are issues of importance for all political parties. For Congress, 74% of this domain in the 1971 manifesto was about this category, which mainly discussed the right to property (see Figure 9B). The topic is not discussed with much consistency in Congress manifestos, although 26% of the word share in 2019 tackled topics like sedition, defamation, reform of preventive detention laws, prisons and privacy concerns related to internet rights.

Left parties had given a dominant portion of the domain's words to this category until 1980; its importance declined subsequently until 2004 when it picked up again. The key topics were mentioned police brutality and strict enforcement of fundamental rights, including the rights of workers. The CPM has discussed the negative consequences of the Emergency in extreme detail. Repealing draconian laws, like those of preventive detention, (AFSPA, for example) has been a major concern throughout the years for the CPI and the CPM. Apart from these issues, concerns about Aadhar and the death penalty were also highlighted in 2019.

Religion

Any mention of the protection of religious minorities and strengthening their rights with welfare schemes, special provisions and budgetary allocations are included in this category. Independent minority educational institutions, religious freedom, the establishment of a statutory authority to deal with minority issues and the promotion of Urdu are some important issues in this category. The rights of Muslims are the most crucial here.

Initial Jana Sangh manifestos state that the party does not recognize minorities on the basis of religion, but the party also mentioned the protection of Hindu refugees from Pakistan. The BJP clearly stated its policy of 'justice for all, appeasement of none' in its 1996 manifesto and promised action to support Kashmiri Pandits in 1998. Their 2019 manifesto stated their intention to extend the National Registration of Citizens to more states after Assam. The Congress has regularly highlighted the importance of India's secular character, freezing the status of places of worship, a separate Ministry of Minority Affairs and creating a law against hate crimes and affirmative action.

This is the most important category in this domain, especially when it comes to political parties and their ideological differences. Though all parties firmly state their belief in equality among people of all religions in India, religious differences and opinions are frequently brought up along. Criticisms of other parties being communal are raised in manifestos, especially against the BJP by Congress and the Left. As a result, this category dominates this domain for the latter two, while the BJP has not dedicated a lot of space to this topic, especially since the 1990s. The Left has dedicated 40-50% of the word share of this domain to this category since 1984, both with respect to Congress and the BJP.

For Jana Sangh, the concept of *Dharma Rajya* is explained as a rule of law and not as a theocracy. They are clearly opposed to the politics of Muslim appeasement, or "pseudo-secularism," and aim to establish a completely secular nation based on Bhartiya nationalism with equality for all. The Indian ideals of *Sarvadharmā Sambhava* and *Sarva Panth Samadara* are important for them to ensure India's heritage of respecting the diversity of all forms. Establishing a Uniform Civil Code is an important aspect in this regard and has been mentioned in almost all manifestos since the 1990s. Their 2009 manifesto discussed the establishment of an inter-faith consultative mechanism for harmony and the issue of religious conversions.

Whenever the INC discusses the secular character of the country, it is accompanied by their support of the duty of the state to protect religious minorities. The issue of Sikh communalism and the strong steps taken by Congress to maintain India's integrity were discussed in detail during the 1980s. Secularism is one of the pillars of the modern Indian nation according to the INC, and the efforts of Congress to preserve the same have been highlighted. The politicization of the Babri Masjid/Ram Janmabhoomi issue by other parties is discussed, and the Congress' stance is touted to be the best for the nation. The INC is opposed to the Uniform Civil Code unless the demand comes organically from communities themselves. Establishing an Inter-Faith Council was stated in the INC 2019 manifesto as well.

Left parties have consistently stated their opposition to communal forces like the RSS, and they have repeatedly called out the weaknesses in Congress' actions to tackle such divisive forces and Congress' alliances with these actors at different points in time. The regressive communal menace of the BJP and its Hindutva agenda has been discussed the most by the Left in this category. The Babri Masjid issue and instances of communal violence have been condemned in detail by the CPI and the CPM, and both left parties and Congress clearly support a judicial decision in the case of Ram Janmabhoomi. The CPM has also openly criticized the role of Congress in the anti-Sikh riots of 1984.

Hindutva or Hinduism is especially important for the BJP. Congress and Left parties have not discussed this issue in much detail, except to criticize the BJP's policies. The Jana Sangh's emphasis on Bhartiya culture, nationalizing non-Hindu cultures, protection of cows through the prohibition of cow slaughter, promotion of Hindi and Sanskrit, resettling Hindu minorities from neighbouring countries, repealing anti-Hindu laws, protection of Ram Setu and Ganga, the autonomy of temples and their clear intention to build the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya are all issues that are repeated often in this category. The Congress and the, on the other hand, have rarely focused on this category, except for a few instances of declaring their support for a peaceful judicial decision or a negotiated settlement in the Ram Mandir issue. The 1998 Congress manifesto criticized the exclusionary politics of the RSS and the BJP in extreme detail. The CPM has criticized the Congress' opportunism as well and has always stated its clear intent to defeat communal forces in India.

Caste

Caste is one of the most dominant categories in the domain of Social Fabric. Economic and social empowerment through welfare, special provisions and stricter laws are the priority under this category. The rights of tribals are discussed in detail as well, especially in the context of land and forest rights. Parties across the spectrum believe in social justice for the marginalised sections of Indian society, even though their mechanisms for tackling this issue are different. Parties have consistently dedicated a sizable share of words to talk about these topics.

The 1980s saw the subject of Other Backward Classes (OBCs), the Mandal Commission and reservations being supported by all parties. Left parties focus on this category most consistently, with over 30% of words rising since 2009, and a continuous focus on the welfare of this group prior to that as well. The CPI supported the idea of extending reservation to the private sector in their 1996 manifesto and reservation for Dalits of other religions in 1999. Regional autonomy for tribal areas and recognition of tribal languages has also been highlighted. The share was usually greater than this in the years prior to that.

The BJP has highlighted equality for all and the end of casteism and untouchability in the context of unity within Hindu society as well. The BJP has also supported reservations based on economic backwardness since 1991. The party has highlighted its commitment to the two principles of social justice and social harmony in recent years. The BJS believed that individuals deserve equality of opportunity and liberty on the basis of Bhartiya "Sanskriti" and "Maryada." Untouchability has also been discussed in most BJP manifestos and the party has adopted a firm stance against the practice. The BJP's philosophy of Integral Humanism aims to form a casteless socioeconomic order in India. However, in comparison to the Congress and the Left parties, the BJP has dedicated the least number of words to this category.

The Congress and the Left have adopted a similar stance on social justice, with the majority of their words dedicated to the sub-domain focusing on preventing atrocities against Dalits and other marginalised sections. Social justice features in the majority of the manifestos of the Left and Congress; however, the number of words dedicated to it has reduced over the years. In the 1971 INC manifesto, ending privy purses to princely states was considered a firm stance in ensuring social justice. In 2014 and 2019, the party vouched to ensure social justice by strengthening the Anti-Manual Scavenging Act of 1993 and protecting street vendors. Left-wing parties believe that eradicating casteism is imperative for maintaining working-class solidarity, as mentioned in the 1967 CPI manifesto.

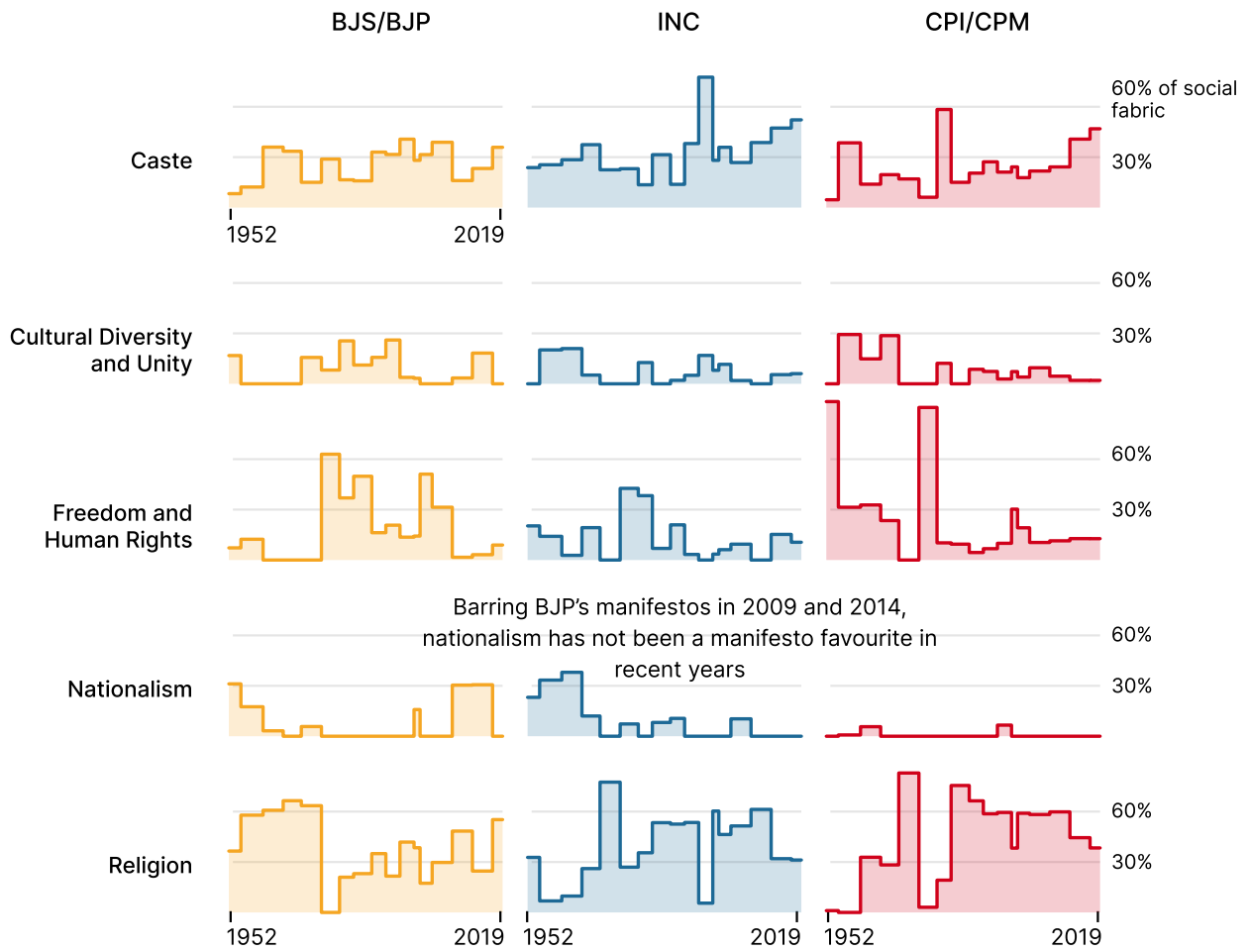
Culture and Morality

Other themes from the Social Fabric domain comprise traditional morality, civic-mindedness, and topics such as media, arts, sports and cinema. Traditional morality here specifically refers to prohibition and traditional family values, with the former being a stated nationwide aim of the Jana Sangh in 1957. The BJP in their 1996 manifesto discussed Bhartiya culture and how it must be preserved through the monitoring of media and cinema and the promotion of Indian traditions. The importance of family in Indian society was also discussed in 1998.

FIGURE 9B / SOCIAL FABRIC

When parties talk of the social fabric in manifestos now, they mostly talk about caste and religion

Percentage of social fabric content in Lok Sabha election manifestos used for different topics (1952-2019)



Source: India Manifesto Project, 2022

Other parties have had mixed opinions on prohibition. Congress discussed the importance of moral values and the goal of prohibition only in 1957. The CPI, on the other hand, discusses the scrapping of prohibition laws in 1979 and the desire to bring about temperance through persuasion. It simultaneously wanted to resist ideological and cultural invasion which threatened India's traditional values. The CPM discussed steps to counter decadent culture and stated its goal to encourage progressive literature and art in 1980 to reduce increasing criminalization and degenerating moral values, like the glorification of violence and the commodification of women.

Among other things, Congress discussed the need for meaningful citizen engagement and civil society participation in 2019. Apart from this, their manifestos do not have any specific appeals for unity for social change that are independent of other contexts. Congress proposed setting up a statutory National Commission for Heritage Sites in 2009. Art, culture, sports and media were a focus for them in 2019, with concerns like developing a code of conduct for reporting and curbing monopolies in media. For the BJP, this category has been a major point of focus for almost throughout 1971. The promotion of the film industry with respect to its role in entertainment as well as national integration, implementation of the Prasar Bharti Act, reviewing the Official Secrets Act, exemption of certain quality performances from entertainment tax, free press with no governmental interference and promotion of traditional folk and tribal arts are some major concerns for the BJP.

When it comes to sports, developing a National Sports Policy, promoting sports at all levels and putting India on the Olympic map are some of the main points. Sports have been highlighted specifically by the BJP in recent manifestos. Their 2004 manifesto mentioned the goal of developing a National Policy for India's Entertainment Industry and a National Media Policy. Left parties emphasize the free expression of India's cultural traditions, the promotion of progressive art and strong autonomous organizations for free media.

SECTION F: ECONOMIC PLANNING

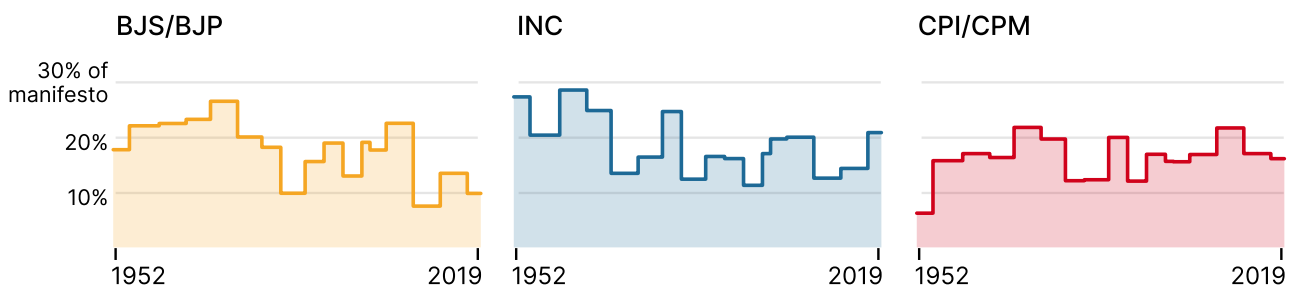
One of the clearest shifts in party positions across time is seen in the domain of Economic Planning. It is one of the most important domains based on manifestos as it has consistently been the one with the maximum number of words for all parties (see Figure 10A). This domain includes the following categories: economic goals, pro-state intervention (in the economy); free market economy; price rise and inflation, and employment.

While analysing the numerous categories mentioned above, we focus on the free market economy, pro-state intervention and economic goals, to understand the distinct positions of political parties and their contrasting viewpoints on important economic issues. The remaining categories often comprise similar positions for all parties, such as the need to reduce inflation and increase employment.

FIGURE 10A / ECONOMIC PLANNING

BJP's emphasis on the economy is decreasing

Percentage of Lok Sabha election manifestos dedicated to economic planning (1952-2019)



Source: India Manifesto Project, 2022

Economic goals

The category of Economic goals captures broad and generic economic goals as well as the need for raising the nation's overall economic growth vis-à-vis government measures that do not fall under any specific policy positions. Since 1984, the BJP has mostly focused on this category within the Economy domain. Almost 40% of words were dedicated to economic goals in the post-Emergency years. The Janata Party talked about the stagnation of the economy and reformulating planning based on the Gandhian values of Antyodaya, austerity and imbining social justice within economic policy. The goals of reduction of wealth and income inequality through simplified taxation and limits on income were important. Countering inflation, increasing employment and reducing poverty have been standard goals for the BJP throughout. The BJP has called for autonomous monetary institutions and improving the balance of trade by regulating foreign trade to counter the fiscal deficit.

There has been a distinct shift in their last four manifestos, with the BJP aiming to transform India into a global superpower. They have consistently emphasised tax reforms, with promises for VAT and GST in recent years. Specific steps have been discussed to turn India into a manufacturing hub and improve industries like coal, steel, textiles, tourism and the knowledge economy. Topics like fiscal discipline, corruption, Special Economic Zones and Self-Help Groups have been discussed. The 2014 and 2019 manifestos prioritize start-ups, ease of doing business, MSMEs, check on Non-Performing Assets, increasing Foreign Direct Investment and overall macroeconomic stability with policies like Direct Benefits Transfers, tax reform through GST, Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code and Make in India. The goal is to turn India into a USD five trillion economies by 2025 and a USD 10 trillion Economy by 2032.

The goals of the Congress party have evolved significantly across elections and seem to respond to the socio-economic demands of its time. Economic goals hold clear importance for Congress in this domain, with over 34% of the world's share dedicated to this (see Figure 10B). Immediately after Independence, the party focused on the development of agriculture. Soon after, in the 1960s, it started looking toward industrialization and the growth of the public sector. This set of goals remained largely unchanged until the early 1990s, wherein their socialism started giving way to liberalization. Regardless, the guiding principle that motivates most of their economic goals is economic development combined with social justice.

The Congress's manifestos relied heavily on planning in the initial years post-Independence. During the 1980s and until 1991, it provided vague goals and criticisms of other parties with few policy specifics but slowly started providing detailed policies to enact its goals, which have been consistent from 1996 to 2019. Topics like tax reform (VAT, GST, Direct Tax Code), self-reliance, financial and banking sector reforms, foreign trade and investment, fiscal discipline, capital markets and even specific industries like power, telecom, coal, etc. have been addressed in this category.

For the Left, the word share given to economic goals has always been overshadowed by another category in the domain. Somewhat similar to the Congress, they combine economic development with social justice, and their goals broadly focus on the upliftment of depressed economic groups, like the working class, farmers and labourers. The main gripe with Left manifestos is that they provide vague and broad goals without delving into specific policies that may help achieve those goals. Moreover, their economic goals remained more or less unchanged between 1991 and 2019, going back and forth between increasing public investment, establishing minimum wages, regulating the inflow of foreign capital and managing foreign debt and taxation structure. In other words, the CPI(M) has continued to offer general solutions that do not take into consideration or respond to the actual economic realities of the time.

Pro-state intervention

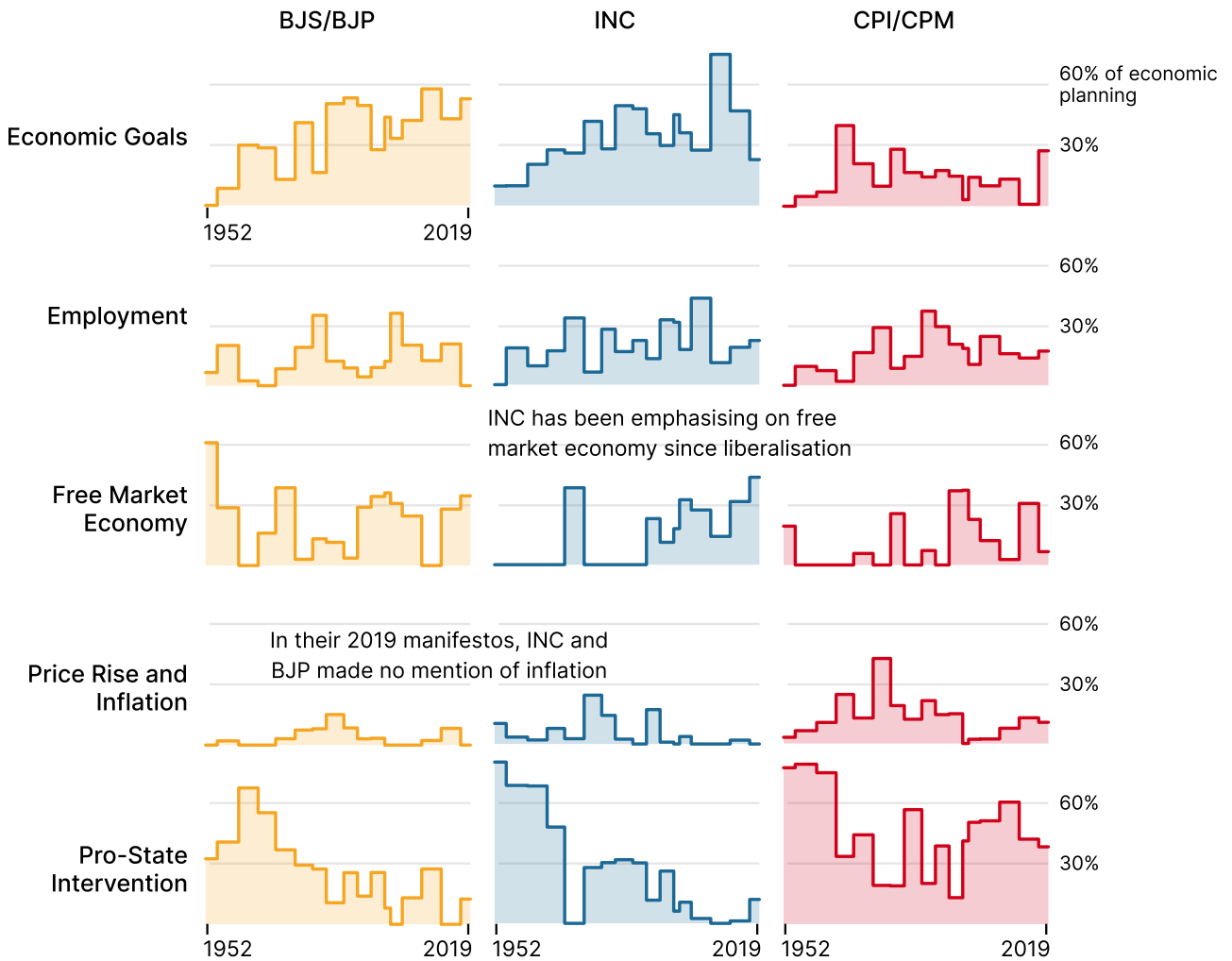
As the name suggests, the category takes into account the importance parties have given to the aspects and modes of direct intervention the state should make to enable a free and competitive market that is free of monopolies as well as state-driven economic development.

The BJP maintained a balanced position with almost an equal word share for pro-state intervention and a free market economy until the early 1980s. The Jana Sangh prioritized the fulfilment of basic needs like food, clothing and shelter and self-sufficiency for the country. Swadeshi was a strong policy position and regulated trade; specifically, minimal imports of consumer goods were crucial. Jana Sangh spoke about the Indianization of foreign-owned industries, the nationalization of foreign banks and minimal foreign aid. Better planning for industrial growth, micro-planning for the public sector to make it more profitable and efficient and macro-planning for the economy as a whole were discussed. The use of labour-intensive and Swadeshi technology was also encouraged. The word share for this category has declined since the 1980s; it has been less than 15% in recent BJP manifestos, with a high of 28% in 2009 (see Figure 10B). Economic reforms and incentives to increase industrial production, improve public sector enterprises and better the unincorporated sector have been the major focus of this category in recent manifestos. Despite this declining word share, the protection of small-scale and cottage industries and providing incentives for their growth has been a mainstay.

FIGURE 10B / ECONOMIC PLANNING

Parties often talk about economic goals in manifestos, seldom talk about inflation

Percentage of economic planning content in Lok Sabha election manifestos used for different topics (1952-2019)



Source: India Manifesto Project, 2022

Congress had been a staunch supporter of state intervention from the very first election, citing in its 1952 manifesto that the Planning Commission was intended to plan all aspects of national life. The party's aim to structure the economic and social organization of India as a Socialist Cooperative Commonwealth has been clearly stated. Congress had historically focused on nationalization, the public sector and the protection of small industries. A clear change can be seen post-1996, with words dedicated to pro-state intervention declining to below 12% and being almost non-existent for three consecutive years. The aggressive pro-state intervention bent vanished by the 2000s when it became evident that "both the public sector and private sector are essential for India's continued high growth success story," in the words of the party itself.

This category is the main priority for the Left, with almost 45% of the word share dedicated to it on average across time. There is a disproportionate emphasis on the importance of land reforms and the plight of the working class. The party also pushed for exclusively left-leaning economic policies, such as nationalisation, socialism, checks on monopolies, increase in wealth, corporate and income taxes for the affluent classes and reduction of foreign aid and foreign capital. The party has also called for an increase in public investment in agriculture and infrastructure.

Free market economy

A free market economy, as a neutral category, is devised to take note of policy positions parties have with respect to free market capitalism as an economic model. This category captures both criticisms that are meted out against capitalism as well as favourable positions.

In the initial decades of independent India, the Jana Sangh clearly stated their intention of following a mixed economy system in which a balance between private and state enterprises was the goal. Jana Sangh's manifestos indicate their plan to encourage private enterprise, maintain competitive markets, reduce controls like complicated taxation and regulations and welcome foreign capital, as long as there aren't any political strings. Another important aspect was no state ownership of industries except defence and essential items.

On average, the BJP has spent 23% of its words on a free market economy in the domain of Economic Planning. The word share for this category decreased in the 1980s when the new BJP emphasized economic goals to address the issue of economic crisis. Post-1991, the BJP has dedicated 30% of the words of the Economy domain to this category on average. While 2009 didn't have much focus on this category, in recent years, the BJP has prioritized Foreign Direct Investment, international trade and commerce, globalization and economic and financial reforms to improve the ease of doing business for entrepreneurship and developing the competitive industry, manufacturing and services sectors.

Similar to the BJP, Congress has changed its position over time, from pro-state intervention to a free market economy. Words dedicated to a free market economy have consistently increased post-1991, with 43% in their 2019 manifesto. In 1957, Congress stated that the private sector will remain subservient to the demands of the Five-Year Plans. It further stated that laissez-faire is "peculiarly unsuited" to India and it is incompatible with planning.

A shift emerged around 1991 when Congress advised opening the domestic market to foreign competitors. By the election of 1998, after seeing how the free-market policies had played out in India, the Congress came out in full support of liberalization and called for a lowering of duties and regulation of tariffs, disinvestment and fair competition. They also called for complete delicensing of all but certain strategic industries. Now, Congress appears keen on dipping its toes in both free-market and pro-state pools, without committing to either. But the tilt towards the free market is evident, even though it is supplemented with some interventionist measures.

The Left has the least amount of word share for a free market economy, especially before 1991. On average, merely 12% of the word share was dedicated to this category, and that was mainly criticism. Even as Congress began to court free-market economic policies post-economic reforms, the Left remained staunchly opposed to it. Liberalization was seen as the reason behind India's financial turmoil and left parties argued against rampant privatization, the dismantling of the public sector and the entry of foreign investment. It was wary of global competition and cautioned against subjecting Indian agriculture to the "vagaries of the international market." It criticized the BJP primarily for favouring big businesses and foreign companies. The sole favourable mention of free market policy from the Left was when it demanded foreign capital in areas with pre-defined priorities. The private sector is considered important by them only in new product areas, research and development (R&D) and service sector domains such as tourism.

Inflation and Employment

Price rise and inflation have often been major political agendas during elections. They may not be a crucial category that is addressed in detail, but they do garner enough importance to receive a special mention. In fact, all political parties ensure that they include their intention to maintain price stability and question the ruling party's failure to control price rises. While there is no pattern in the BJP and the INC manifestos in this category and the words dedicated to inflation are also fewer, the Left manifestos are much more consistent in mentioning this category, with 7-12% of the Economic Planning word share being dedicated to this category in the last three manifestos.

Employment is a major category of focus for all political parties. Congress mentions measures to ensure employment regularly. At least 10% of the words in this domain are related to employment, a share that has increased up to 21% as well. The BJP and the Left also emphasize decreasing unemployment and associated methods to generate employment with regularity.

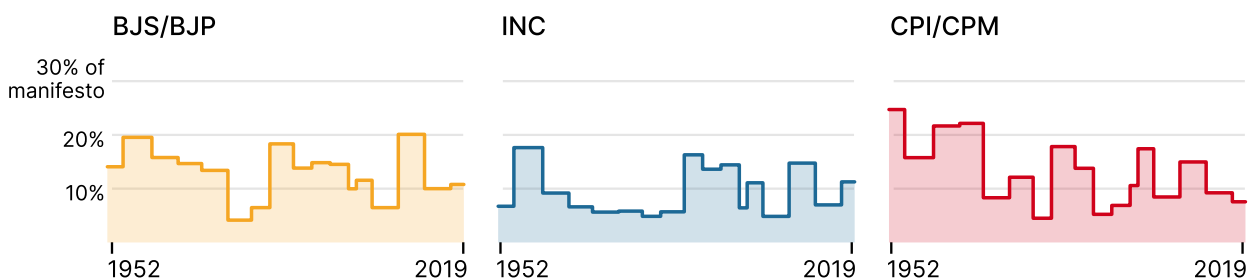
SECTION G: NATIONAL SECURITY

Given India's tumultuous colonial past and its nuanced relationships with neighbouring countries and global superpowers, National Security has remained an important domain in the parties' manifestos. While the share of this domain in manifestos has slightly declined in the last few decades still the domain occupies at least a tenth of space across party manifestos (see Figure 11A). The parties have given considerable attention to discussing foreign policy and relations with external entities—which include international governmental organizations and other countries—and matters of internal security. The other categories in this domain also include more specific military and security goals, as well as terrorism on one hand, but also see parties articulate larger ideological positions on world peace, internationalism and other global issues on the other hand.

FIGURE 11A / NATIONAL SECURITY

In the last two elections, a tenth of all three manifestos were about national security

Percentage of Lok Sabha election manifestos dedicated to national security (1952-2019)



Source: India Manifesto Project, 2022

Foreign special relationships

Foreign special relations, another neutral category, captures any mentions—favourable or unfavourable—of particular countries with whom India has a special relationship. For the purposes of this analysis, the status of “special relationship” has been restricted to Pakistan, China, Russia (or the USSR/Soviet Union) and the United States. Favourable expressions, i.e., the need for cooperation with, sending aid to, or restoring/strengthening diplomatic ties with these countries, are recorded under this category. Equally, unfavourable mentions, i.e., aggressive action, blaming them for terrorist acts, or border violations, are recorded too.

Of the three parties, the CPI(M) has spent the highest proportion of words on this subcategory, having accorded it 52% of its total domain word share in 1980. The emphasis placed by the INC has reduced over time. The same applies to the BJP, leaving the Left parties to be the only ones to be invested in the Foreign Special Relationships the nation has, owing to their strong anti-imperialist stands.

The CPI(M) has continually called for the maintenance and strengthening of India's relationship with China, Russia and other socialist countries since its Independence. In fact, it often reserves specific sections exclusively for India-China or India-Russia relations. The language with which the CPI(M) discusses these countries—for example, describing China and its model of development as 'glorious,' or lauding the development of class consciousness in Russia—is overtly positive.

It has even spearheaded the case for enhancing China's position in the United Nations and giving the country more say by awarding it a permanent seat on the Security Council. Additionally, the CPI(M) has aggressively and consistently scrutinized India's relationship with the United States, predating even the onset of India's liberalization and globalization policies in the 1990s. It frequently condemns the ruling parties' decision to ally with the Western nations and criticizes the Western nations' influence on the economic and foreign policy-related decisions undertaken by the governments of the ruling parties.

In fact, the greatest number of words spent by the Left on external relations was in 1967, and a majority of this word-share was dominated by aggressively pro-China, pro-socialism and anti-Western imperialism messaging. The spike in word count corresponds directly with the turbulent events that influenced communist politics that had directly preceded it, such as the 1962 Sino-Indian War and the CPI split in 1964 (see Figure 11B). The Congress, on the other hand, has expressed support for developing India's relationships with the socialist world but is also quick to decry China for its border and territorial violations. This pro-Soviet, pro-China bent is largely absent from the BJP's manifestos.

All parties refer to matters pertaining to Pakistan generally in non-controversial terms. Harsh turns of phrase and military measures are encouraged in case of fricative, politically-charged events, such as the Bangladesh War in 1971 and the Kargil attack in 1999. Even so, the parties do emphasise the importance of restoring friendly relations between the two countries, often through peaceful rather than forceful measures.

External influence

Another pertinent subcategory within the domain is external influence. This refers to negative mentions of imperial or colonial behaviour, forceful occupation and one state exerting a strong or undue influence (political, military or commercial) over other states. Statements against international financial organizations or states using monetary means to assert strong influence over the manifesto or other states are also included. These refer to the influence of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on India's domestic economic activities, as well as statements against foreign debt and circumscribing state actions. It also includes favourable references to greater self-government within a state (i.e., decolonization and freedom movements in other countries). International alignments (i.e., North, South and non-aligned countries) and mentions of world orders (i.e., the 'third world') developed during the Cold War have also been noted under this category.

The CPI(M) emerges as the most vocal and outspoken critic in this subcategory as well. Its staunchly anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist perspective is very evident across its texts. It is extremely critical of the Western—admittedly, often American—bent of international organisations such as the World Bank and the IMF. It has repeatedly expressed interest in divorcing India's economic activities and interests from those of these entities.

Both the INC and the BJP are not regular in articulating their stances on external influence. In the manifestos from the 1990s, the BJP had criticised the Congress government's handling of the WTO, arguing that a Swadeshi, 'India First' approach would be better suited for the national economy. The Congress, by virtue of being the party that had decided to enter into relations with the United States, has hardly vocalised their discontent with the way international monetary platforms bend towards the West.

There are a considerable number of inter-party similarities in this category. In the 1950s and '60s, the initial manifestos of all three parties would frequently deride British rule and its debilitating influences on the Indian economy and society, as well as the role it played in the Partition.

This gradually declined as their focus shifted to building friendly relations with other countries. One also sees strong support for the principle of non-alignment from these parties—more so from the CPI(M) and Congress than the BJP. Words spent on non-alignment peaked in the election manifestos from 1977, 1984 and 1989. However, this petered out by the 90s; this is unsurprising, as one may speculate that the cause, in due course, became obsolete, owing to the termination of the Cold War. All parties have also expressed support, to varying degrees, for other countries and colonies' right to self-government, such as the liberation of French Indochina and decolonization in other African and Asian countries.

National security goals

The category of national security goals is related to any generic mention of improving border security, methods of improving security architecture and institutional effectiveness at the national levels. National security goals are noticeably absent in manifestos from the INC and the Left, although this category suddenly appears in 2019. For the BJP, national security goals are a usual presence, even if it is a small mention.

Jammu and Kashmir

Jammu and Kashmir is a separate category because political parties discuss the issues of this state specifically and their stances are focused on the relevant circumstances of the time. For the BJP, issues related to J&K are discussed in most years, but the word share has been hovering around 8% in the three recent manifestos, down from 15% in 2004. Congress has discussed J&K sparingly, but around 15% of the words in 2019 were used for this category. Left parties have mentioned J&K with more regularity since 1998. However, 2019 was an outlier, with 25% of the word share dedicated to it (see Figure 11B).

The BJP's stance towards the abrogation of Article 370 and Article 35A, granting autonomy to Jammu and Ladakh and the return of Kashmiri Pandits has been consistent and clear. While the BJP supports giving more power to security forces to control internal security threats, the Left supports a total withdrawal of AFSPA and Congress wants to review the same to achieve a balance. Congress and the Left want to involve all stakeholders in the peace process. They fully support Article 370 and regional autonomy for Jammu and Ladakh simultaneously. Development of the region, free and fair elections and regional autonomy are priorities shared by all political parties.

Internal Security

Internal security includes statements related to tackling left-wing extremism or Naxalism and insurgency in India, especially in the northeast. Earlier manifestos include references to Punjab's insurgency problem. Issues of illegal immigration from neighbouring nations and armed struggle and instability in specific regions of India are mentioned here. Internal security is consistently mentioned by all parties.

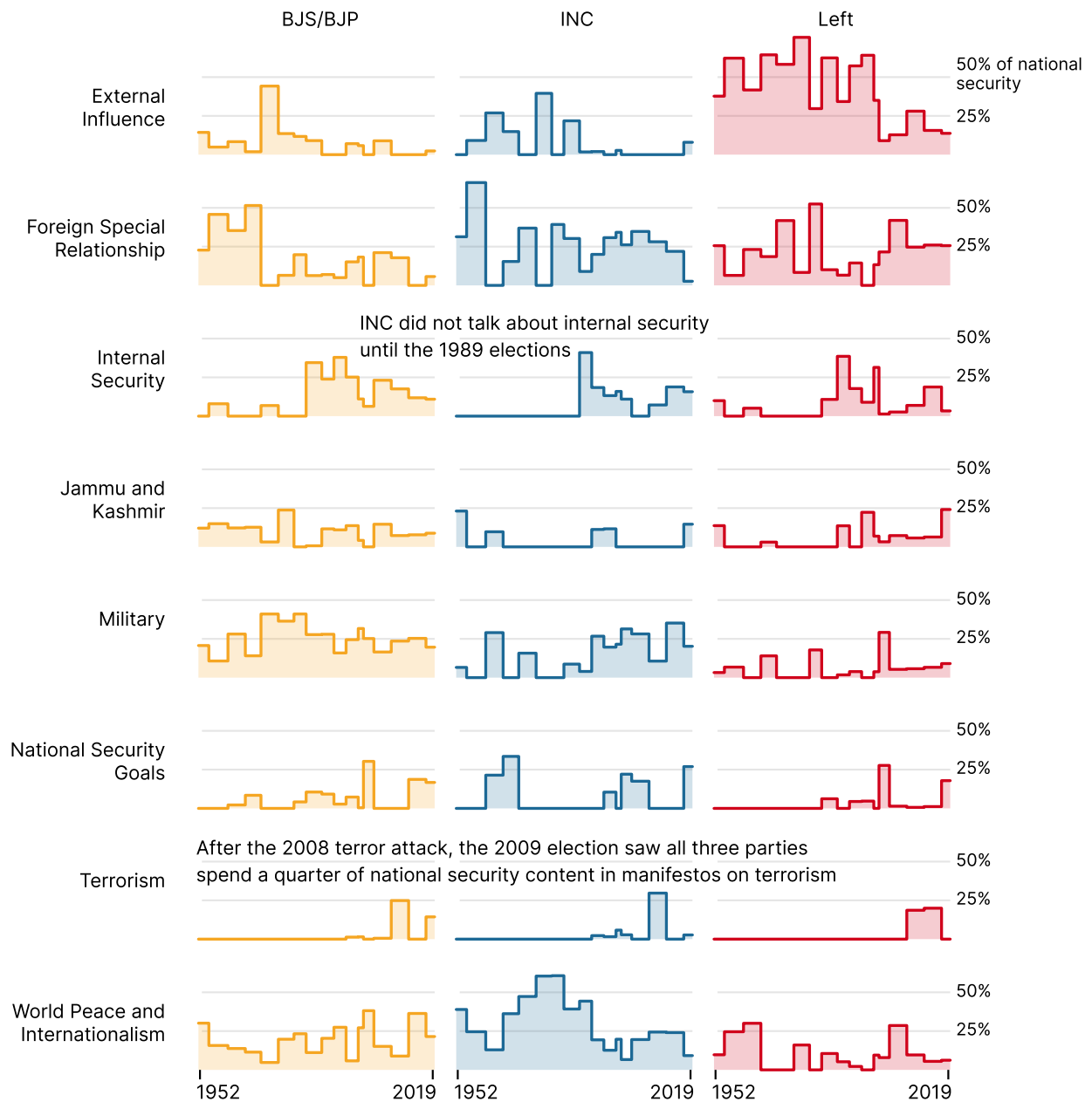
Terrorism

With respect to terrorism, parties usually discuss the prevention of attacks, better security and justice for victims and punishment for terrorists. There is no consistent trend for the category of terrorism, but it was mentioned in 2009 by all parties, possibly due to the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, and was again mentioned in 2019 by the BJP, but not as much by the Left and Congress.

FIGURE 11B / NATIONAL SECURITY

When making promises on national security, BJP and INC talk of goals and the military

Percentage of content on national security in Lok Sabha election manifestos used for different topics (1952-2019)



Source: India Manifesto Project, 2022

Military

This subcategory includes the importance of expanding the military and defence capabilities of the country. It contains references to the maintenance of, or increase in, military expenditure, improvement of military strength, securing adequate manpower and modernization of the armed forces. It also includes references to nuclear weapons, disarmament and nuclear testing treaties such as the NPT and the CTBT. On the whole, mentions of the military were absent in the initial elections. Upon the completion of the first nuclear test conducted by India in 1974, mentions of India's right to develop and possess nuclear weapons, but also simultaneously resistance to using weapons of mass destruction for the purposes of war, started becoming more common. All three parties unanimously agree on the idea that nuclear war ought to be avoided, the process of disarmament globally ought to be enforced and the nuclear treaties signed by India ought to be renegotiated in India's favour.

Of the three parties, the BJP has spent the highest proportion of words discussing the military, while the Left has spent the lowest. While Congress and the CPI(M) have discussed this subject to the extent of maintaining existing levels of militarization, the BJP has spent a significant proportion of these sections discussing the need for increased militarization and an increase in military expenditure. There was a significant spike in the late '90s in terms of the word share given to the military by the BJP as well. While a direct cause cannot be discerned for this spike, it should be noted that this occurred two years after the launch of the ballistic missile Prithvi in 1994. The BJP spent the greatest number of words on external relations in 1998, the year they won the election. Again, while causation cannot be established, it may be important to note that this is the same year as when the Pokhran tests took place and a year before the Kargil attack, i.e., when tensions with Pakistan were still brewing. Congress has historically spent a large portion of this section discussing the improvement of the quality of life of jawans. This includes discussing reforms in terms of pension, living facilities for current and retired servicemen and remunerations to, and the general welfare of, families of deceased servicemen.

World Peace and Internationalism

The final subcategory concerns support for diplomacy, negotiation, dialogue and other peaceful means of resolving international conflicts. This would include domestic peace and world peace as general goals. It also includes favourable and unfavourable references to the need for international and multilateral cooperation via the platform of intergovernmental organizations. Expressions of the need for global planning of resources and global governance are included. Any mentions of the Indian diaspora are included in it as well. Congress has spent a significant portion of its manifestos on the need for peace and internationalism, dedicating nearly 60% of its domain word share to this subcategory. The Congress's lengthiest domain portions came in 1991, which corresponds with the introduction of their liberalization and globalization policies, and their goals for internationalism were emphasized in the same document as well. The Left has been far less regular in articulating matters under this category, preceded by the BJP.

The parties have also used their manifestos to express support for other countries or to decry imperialist and undemocratic systems in others. For instance, the CPI(M) has continually shown support for the liberation of the people of Palestine. All three parties have expressed their disapproval of the apartheid regime in South Africa. Moreover, a broad trend for the parties had been to aspire to strengthen relationships with immediate neighbours such as Pakistan and Nepal, and then big superpowers such as the United States and Russia/the USSR.

As the ideas of the first, second and third worlds deepened during the Cold War, the parties began looking toward other countries in South East Asia and East Asia. The parties have emphasized the importance of maintaining friendly relations with such countries through platforms such as SAARC since 1985, and with other developing countries through BRICS since 2006.

FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

The importance of studying manifestos to understand the changing nature of Indian politics has been highlighted in this report conclusively. With domains and categories covering the entire gamut of issues, the data collected under the aegis of the India Manifesto Project, 2022, could help us answer many important questions related to Indian democracy.

Do voters allocate importance to manifestos or not, are manifestos just a rhetorical tool with no functional meaning or do they shape a party's direction and motivation to act? Such questions need an exhaustive analysis and that remains an agenda of our future research. This can include research on some selected issues of importance and how they have been handled in the past by political parties in terms of their stance and tone of action. Further research can also be undertaken to analyze whether there is a difference in the way political parties write and release manifestos when they are in opposition and when they are in power. Do parties in opposition have more critical manifestos? Are their statements more detail-oriented? Do they give practical solutions and answer the 'how' more than the ruling parties? Is there a distinct type of method of manifesto being followed by specific parties? Similarly, the role and importance of state-level political parties can also be studied as the kind of positions they've held vis-à-vis their national-level competitors.

We hope that the Indian Manifesto Project succeeds in creating interest to fill among the many under-researched themes in Indian politics.

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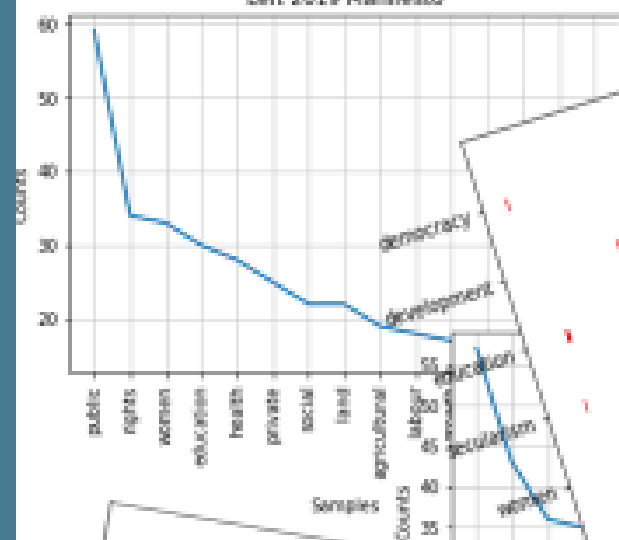
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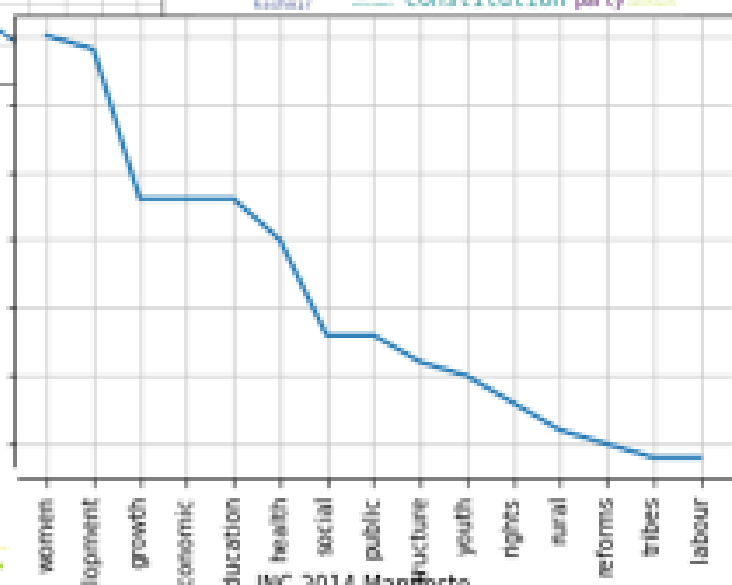
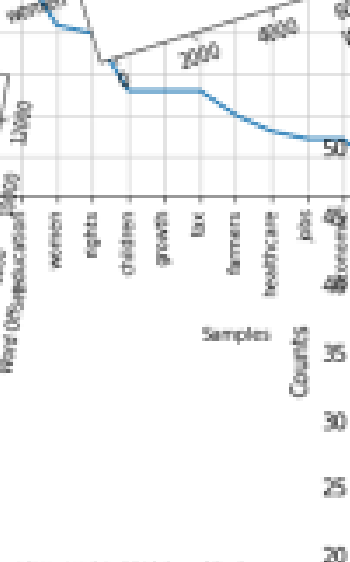
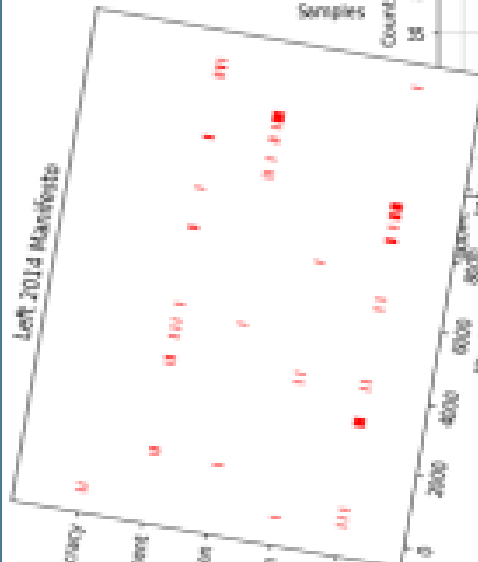
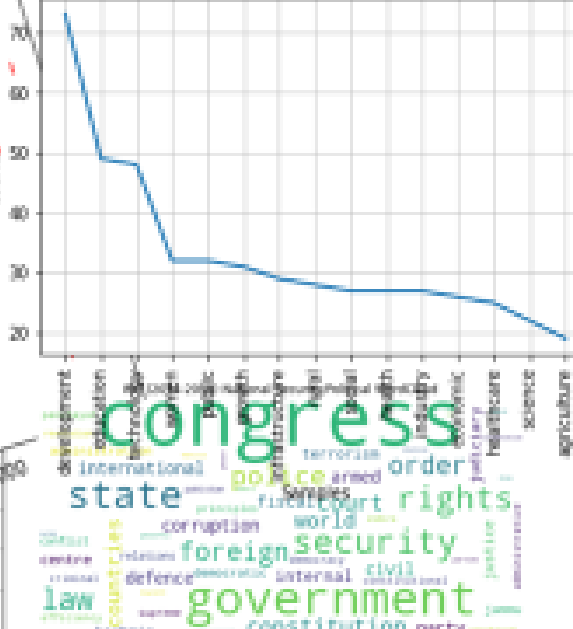
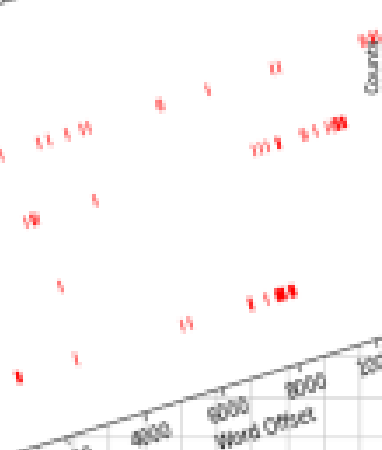
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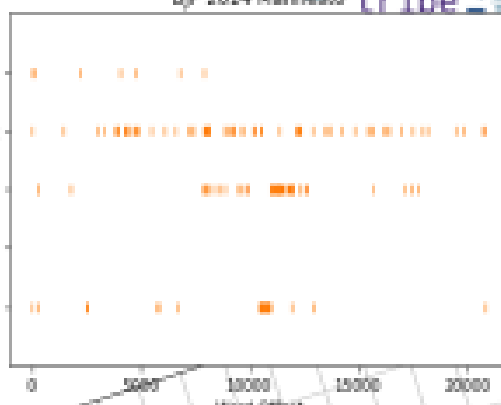
Left: 2019 Manifesto



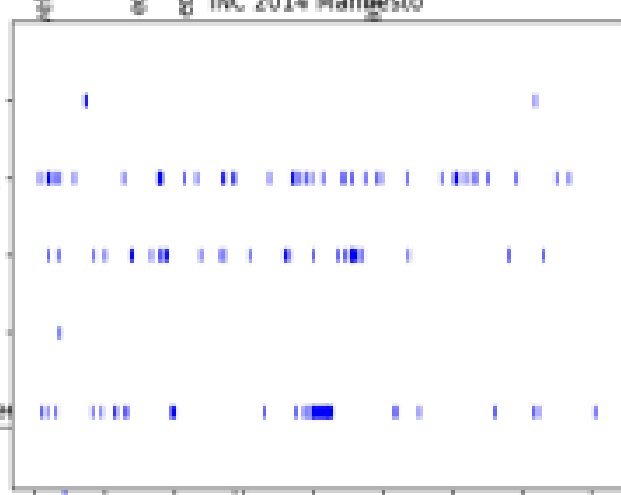
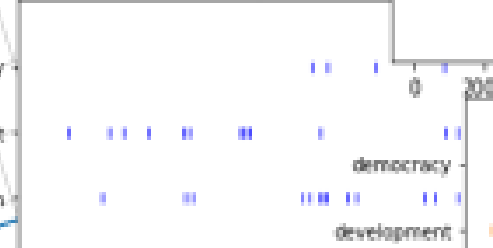
Left: 2019 Manifesto



BJP 2014 Manifesto



INC 2019 Manifesto



BJP 2019 Manifesto

