

# DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS

## Working Paper

BJP's Demographic Dividend in the 2014  
General Elections: An Empirical Analysis

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Working Paper 2014-06



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# BJP's Demographic Dividend in the 2014 General Elections: An Empirical Analysis

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## Abstract

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) swept the 2014 General Elections in India and emerged as a single party with absolute majority, a result not witnessed since 1984. Not only did it win a majority of seats, it also managed to increase its vote share in almost all states between 2009 and 2014. Using state-level data, we show that BJP's extraordinary poll results relied crucially on attracting young, especially first time, electors.

**JEL Codes:** D72, R19

**Keywords:** Election, India, states

## 1. Introduction

An orchestrated exercise that gave over eighty million people the right to participate in largely free and fair elections to choose their representatives was easily the biggest such experiment in human history.

The 2014 General Elections in India become even more significant when we consider that India is home to one-fourth of the world's poor. Each election is thought to be a game changer for the economically and socially marginalized in the country, and is often seen as a referendum between two opposing ideologies, namely that of the Indian National Congress (INC) representing the left of centre economic policies with pluralistic social underpinnings and that of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which represents a right wing cultural and economic philosophy. This election marks a major shift in the polity of India with the BJP not only changing the Westminster style Parliamentary elections into a US style Presidential election revolving around personalities, but also using unprecedented amounts of financial

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resources for its campaign. At the national level, this election turned out to be a referendum on the BJP's Prime Ministerial candidate Narendra Modi.

If the month long, eight phase election, unprecedented levels of polling (66 per cent) and almost a yearlong, highly skilled and vitriolic campaign was not enough to stir up the zeal of the politically conscious

Indian, the result left few unimpressed. Results announced on May 16-17, 2014, by the Election Commission showed that the right-wing, Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party has been voted to power with absolute majority. Indian media, with its countless television news channels and even more regional and national newspapers, private observers and experts of various hues, had predicted a BJP victory but almost nobody was able to predict the magnitude of the saffron wave.<sup>1</sup> Even the BJP itself had probably not estimated such a resounding support from the voters as it went to the polls in an alliance with around thirty large and small regional parties hoping to collectively form a government. The most devout supporters of BJP could not have expected a better outcome for Modi and his team, because such a mandate was unheard of since 1984.

In 2014 General Elections, BJP won 282 seats by itself, and together with its allies it now commands a formidable majority of 334 out of 543 seats. Their principal rival, the Congress, which headed the coalition that ruled India for the last ten years, was reduced to their lowest ever tally of 44 seats. While most commentators predicted that the Congress would be defeated, regional heavy weights were expected to play a dominant role in forming the ruling coalition. However, the onslaught of BJP, riding on the popular wave for Modi confined these important state-based parties like All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) and Trinamool Congress to their respective states. Two important

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<sup>1</sup>The [Today's Chanakya](#) Group is the notable exception here.

regional parties, the Janata Dal United (JDU) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), lost the bulk of their votes to the BJP.

In the months and years to come, analyses of the electoral verdict will help us understand the factors that enabled the BJP to sweep the polls this time. Among these explanations will figure factors like the following: (a) the Indian corporate sector's support for the BJP, which probably contributed to the massive amount of funds that the BJP spent in its campaigns (by some estimates 4 times that spent by the Congress), (b) the calibrated use of religious polarization and skillful re-fashioning of caste alliances, especially in the Western and Northern Indian states including the electorally important states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, (c) the virtual take-over of the mainstream media by the BJP's campaign machine, facilitated no doubt by corporate financial and ideological support, (d) the discrediting of the incumbent INC-led government (the second United Progressive Alliance in 2009-14) by the spate of corruption scandals that came to light over the last few years, (e) the half-hearted support of the INC-led government for the same welfare schemes that it (the first United Progressive Alliance in 2004-09) had inaugurated and championed five years ago.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper, we focus on a different factor: the role of young (and first time) electors in ensuring BJP a field day in the elections. The importance of this constituency for the BJP was evident by the strong emphasis that their campaign laid on luring them by engaging them through social media and tailoring their manifesto in accordance to their aspirations and needs. Our analysis shows that there is a strong positive correlation between the proportion of first time electors and change in BJP's vote share (between 2009 and 2014) across Indian states. Thus, states which had a high proportion of first time electors were also the states where BJP increased its vote share significantly between 2009 and 2014.

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, total expenditure on the MGNREGA, the UPA government's flagship welfare scheme, stagnated since 2009. In 2009-10, total expenditure was Rs. 37905.23 crores; in 2013-14, it stood at Rs. 38537.60 crore. Thus, over a period of 4 years when inflation was hovering at double digits, nominal expenditure on MGNREGA increased by a measly 2 percent.

This suggests that one of the important factors underlying BJP's unprecedented electoral victory was its ability to reach out to first time electors.

The rest of the paper is divided into four sections. The next section discusses the BJP's success in the general elections and shows how BJP's campaign strategy paid rich dividends to the party in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. Section 3 discusses our key hypothesis, our empirical methodology and the data set. Section 4 presents and discusses the empirical results. The next section explores some of the reasons behind the decisive voting by the first time electors and its implications for the future elections. The last section concludes the paper. Details of data sources are collected together in an Appendix.

## **2. BJP's Performance**

The significance of the 2014 elections verdict is not lost on anyone. While most political pundits had predicted that the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), a right wing coalition of around thirty national and regional political parties including the BJP, Telegu Desam Party (TDP) Shiromani Akali Dal and Shiv Sena among others, would form the next government, it was not imagined that the BJP would singlehandedly muster complete majority in the Lok Sabha. In a house of 543 members, it won 282 seats independently and the total tally for the NDA reached 336, thereby changing the ideological color of the Lok Sabha from a temperate green to deep saffron. In addition to this being the best performance for the NDA, the 2014 elections have seen the elevation of one of contemporary India's most controversial and divisive politician Narendra Modi, to the post of the Prime Minister.

It is not often that the echelons of power in New Delhi open up for state based leaders but Modi, who earlier served as the Chief Minister of Gujarat for three successive terms, managed to achieve this rare feat despite strong opposition from both within and outside his party. His success comes in the backdrop of his image as a leader who provided high GDP growth, guided by high private investment, in

Gujarat at a time when economic growth in the rest of India was stagnating and the Congress led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government in New Delhi was battling a quagmire of corruption scandals and bureaucratic inaction. The sluggishness of economic reform and a weak political coalition in power for a decade created the perfect launching pad for Modi who led a belligerent offensive on the Congress over its rather poor record under UPA-II (2009-2014). By positioning himself as a decisive leader capable of taking tough decisions that would miraculously rid India of its myriad of problems Modi managed to capture the imagination of the Indian youth and the middle classes like no leader in the recent past.

Perhaps the most remarkable feat attained by the Modi brigade was to steer the political discourse away from issues of preserving India's ethnic and religious diversity by breaking traditional caste and class alliances and focusing exclusively on issues of India's economic stagnation, high inflation and industrial slowdown. With his high decibel and sharp rhetoric, Modi himself managed to drown out concerns about his chequered record over protection of religious minorities and his commitment to the heterogeneous and secular fabric of India. The weak counter offensive of the Congress which can at best be described as "too little too late", revolved around questioning the role of Modi administration in the 2002 pogrom in Gujarat that left over 1000 Muslims killed and around 150000 displaced. According to Subramaniam (2014), their lackluster effort to defend their own performance during a decade long rule did not manage to convince the three quarters of a billion voters of India.

Modi launched an aggressive media campaign at a scale never seen before in Indian elections. While the cost of this campaign shall forever remain obscured in the mist of astute book keeping, conservative estimates of the campaign cost alone are around INR 5000 crores (\$830 million), which does not include the expenditure incurred by individual candidates of the BJP (Ghosh, 2014). This campaign, designed by Madison World, employed both traditional methods of advertising like political rallies, print and electronic media but also used social media like Facebook and Twitter and webinars to reach out to

people across the country in a way that forced the other parties to watch enviously even as Modi managed to convert India's parliamentary elections to the US style presidential contest.<sup>3</sup> BJP's primary opponent, the Congress, looked helpless against the Modi tirade which forced its leaders to accept defeat much before the verdict of May 17, 2014.

If the infrastructure supporting the Modi campaign was monumental, the results were equally historic and unprecedented. According to the data released by the Election Commission of India<sup>4</sup>, the 2014 elections saw the highest ever voter turnout of 68.38 per cent which not only bettered the 2009 turnout of 58.19 per cent but also surpassed the 1984 record of 64.01 per cent as almost all states saw a significant increase in the number of people who exercised their right to vote.<sup>5</sup> The majority of the increase in voting percentage, it seems, translated into increasing the vote share of the BJP that saw an increase of over 11 per cent in its vote share (from 18.80 per cent in 2009 to 31 per cent in 2014). The Congress on the other hand, saw a significant reduction in its popularity as its vote share fell from 28.55 per cent in 2009 to 19.31 per cent in 2014.<sup>6</sup>

[Table 1 about here]

In addition to increasing its absolute vote share, BJP managed to break fresh ground in states like Tamil Nadu where it not only managed to increase its votes from 2.3 per cent to 5.5 per cent but also succeeded in winning a seat (see Table 1). Similarly, in Assam its vote share more than doubled from 16.21 per cent in 2009 to 36.9 per cent in 2014. While an increase in vote share may not always imply a corresponding increase in seats, BJP also almost doubled its seats from 4 in 2009 to 7 in 2014 in Assam. Similarly, in Bihar, its vote share increased from 13.93 per cent in 2009 to 29.4 per cent in 2014. The

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<sup>3</sup> Modi organized webinars called '*Chai pecharcha*' (discussion over tea) across 1000 tea stalls in 300 Indian cities and interacted directly with common people (ET, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> The website of the Election Commission of India is <http://eci.nic.in/eci/eci.html>

<sup>5</sup> Only West Bengal saw a minor decline from 82 per cent in 2009 to 81.77 per cent in 2014.

<sup>6</sup> All vote percentages are taken from the website of the Election Commission of India <http://eci.nic.in/eci/eci.html>

corresponding increase in seats was from 12 to 22. In addition, BJP made its presence felt in the erstwhile Communist bastion of West Bengal where its vote share increased from 6.14 per cent in 2009 to 16.8 per cent in 2014. Even in the southern state of Kerala where BJP did not win seats, it managed to garner an impressive vote share of 10.3 per cent.

These unprecedented results have ushered in a paradigm shift in the political landscape of India. So far seen as a party confined to the Northern and North-Western states of India, BJP has expanded its ambit in the North-Eastern and Southern states to supplant Congress as the largest national party of the country. It must be noted here that while it was bringing the southern states in its fold, its traditional stronghold in states like Uttar Pradesh (UP) also solidified. BJP swept the largest state of India, Uttar Pradesh, by winning 71 out of 80 seats. Its vote share increased by over two fold from 17.5 per cent in 2009 to 42.3 per cent in 2014. Also, as expected, Narendra Modi's home state of Gujarat saw a clean sweep by the BJP in all the 29 seats while winning the confidence of 59.1 per cent voters. Likewise, in the desert state of Rajasthan all 25 seats were claimed by the BJP which increased its already high vote share from 36.57 per cent in 2009 to 54.9 per cent in 2014.

Other electorally significant states like Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra also saw a significant increase in the voter confidence in favor of BJP. It claimed 54 per cent and 27.3 per cent of the votes in these two states respectively. This was significantly better than their performance in 2009 where it got 27.3 per cent and 18.17 per cent respectively.

Along with the ascendance of the BJP and the decimation of the INC, one also notices a slow but steady decline of the Left in India's electoral politics. The combined vote share of the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) fell from 7.07 percent in 2004 to 6.76 percent in 2009, and further down to 4.0 percent in 2014. The fall has been sharper in terms of seats: a total of 53 in 2004, which declined to 20 in 2009, and then slid down further to 10 in 2014.



The other progressive force in the Hindi heartland, BSP, also saw its fortunes dwindling. At the national level, its vote share had increased between 2004 and 2009: from 5.33 percent to 6.17 percent. In 2014, it fell to 4.1 percent. BSP's seat tally had increased from 19 to 21 between 2004 and 2009; but in 2014, it could not open its account. At the all-India level, the picture that emerges from consideration of electoral performance of the major national political parties is a consolidation of right-wing forces around the BJP and an erosion of Left and progressive forces.

In an election centered on the personality of Narendra Modi, the BJP bowled the opposition leadership in most constituencies across the country except in states where regional heavyweights stymied its progress. Notable among these were Jaya Jayalalitha (AIADMK) in Tamil Nadu, Navin Patnaik (Biju Janata Dal, BJD) in Odisha and Mamata Banerji (TMC) in West Bengal. Most other regional stalwarts like Mayawati (BSP) of Uttar Pradesh (zero seats), Nitish Kumar (JDU) of Bihar (2 seats) and Mulayam Singh Yadav (SP) of Uttar Pradesh (5 seats) were decimated by the BJP. In an era where the state governments of Lucknow, Patna and Chennai had become indispensable for any government at Raisina Hill New Delhi, the 2014 verdict has turned the clock back to the days of single party majority governments of the 1980s. The legislative ramifications of this change will be more evident in the coming months and years.

In a significant departure from the past, in the 2014 General Elections, the BJP evoked the imagery of a masculine and decisive leader which found great resonance with the highly hierarchical nature of Indian society. Surprisingly, those most drawn to this narrative of a stable and strong government were the youth of the country and in particular the first time electors. BJP's campaign focused on this constituency by using tools like social media and tailored its election campaign to suit the aspirations of the young electors.

The importance of young electors to the 2014 general elections is partly the result of demographic shifts currently underway in India. With fertility rates beginning to decline – faster in the southern states than

in the north – this election may have marked the highest ever political impact of first-time electors.

Hence, this Lok Sabha election has likely reflected the peak of India's electoral demographic dividend with 10% of electors emerging as first-time electors, as shown by a combination of electoral and demographic data.

In this paper, we would like to use this demographic trend as one of the important factors that might have been pivotal in BJP's electoral victory. We would like to study the impact of first time electors in turning the electoral tables in favour of the BJP. Many commentators and analysts have speculated that the relatively large number of young voters in 2014 has been crucial in driving the sweeping victory of the BJP in the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha Elections. In this paper we provide evidence that this intuition is indeed correct.

Data released by the Election Commission of India showed that 23 million 18-19 year-olds had been enrolled to vote, out of a total electorate of 815 million, in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections.

Additionally, analysis of census data showed that there were 120 million people aged 15-18 at the time of the 2011 census, who were not eligible to vote in 2009 elections as they were too young, but became eligible to vote in 2014. These potential first-time voters formed 10 per cent of the population (Rukmini, 2014). This youth bulge might reflect the peak of India's "demographic dividend", as fertility declines and India's population begins to age. For instance, in 2001 Indians aged 15-19 year were only 9.7 per cent of the population. The United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs' latest World Population Prospects shows that India's 15-19 years age cohort will peak in 2015 after which it will begin to decline as a proportion of the population (Rukmini, 2014).

Before we look at the state-level data and analysis, it might be useful to recall the numbers for the whole country to convince the reader that first time electors were a significant proportion of the electorate in 2014, and that they could have in fact made a difference. At the all-India level, our

calculations from the 2011 Census show that there were about 120.53 million first time electors in 2014. Since the electorate was about 833.06 million strong in 2014, first time electors accounted for about 14.47 percent of the same. To get a sense of these numbers, let us recall that 66.4 percent of the electorate cast their ballots in 2014, of which BJP got 31 percent and the INC 19.3 percent. Hence, the difference in total votes polled by the BJP and INC was about 65 million, which is only about half the number of first time electors *who may have voted* in 2014. Thus, any party which could tap into the group of first time electors would certainly have gained in electoral terms.

### **3. Hypothesis, Methodology and Data**

#### **3.1. Hypothesis**

This paper aims to test the hypothesis that young electors, in particular first time electors, were an important constituency in determining that the outcome of the 2014 elections was in favor of BJP. We measure BJP's electoral success by the *change* in its vote share between 2009 and 2014, and capture the importance of young electors by their share in total electors in 2014. While vote share data is from the Election Commission of India, we had to turn to the 2011 Census of India to estimate the share of young electors. This is because the Election Commission of India does not provide detailed age-wise break-up of the electorate.

The 2011 Census of India provides the age-wise break-up of the population of India in 2011 for every state. To calculate the number of first time electors, we added up the population between the ages of 15 and 19 in the year 2011; next, we divided this number by the total number of electors (data on this was taken from the Election Commission of India's website) to get the proportion of first time electors (as a percentage of all electors). These cut-offs of 15 and 19 years give us the number and proportion of first time electors in 2014 for the following reasons. All those who are of age 15 years in 2011 would become eligible voters, i.e., reach age 18 years, in 2014. Similarly, all those who were of age 20 years in

2011 would have been of age 18 in 2009 and would have been eligible to vote in the 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha elections in 2009; hence, they would not be first time electors in the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha elections. Thus, the number of those who became first time electors in the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha Elections in 2014 would be all those who were of between the ages of 15 and 19 years in 2011.

Three caveats regarding this procedure to estimate the proportion of first time electors are in order.

First, not all those who were of age 15 in 2011 would become eligible voters in the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha Elections in 2014. For instance, those who have their birthdays after May would turn into age 18 years only after the elections are over. So, if we had monthly data on birthdays, we would have *excluded* them from list of first time electors. Second, by a similar logic many of those who were of age 20 years in 2011 would not have been eligible voters in the 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha Elections in 2009. Again, if we had month-wise break-up of the persons of age 20 in 2011, we would *include* some in our list of first time electors. Lack of more fine grained data prevents us from making these two adjustments. Third, to arrive at the correct number of first time electors in 2014, we would need to adjust the relevant 2011 Census population with age-specific death rates. We avoid this for simplicity and believe this will not affect the results in any significant manner.

[Figure 1 about here]

To present the hypothesis of this paper Figure 1 presents a scatter plot of change in BJP's vote share between 2009 and 2014 against the share of first time electors in 2014 across 23 states.<sup>7</sup> The (linear) regression line included in Figure 1 – from a bivariate regression of the change in BJP's vote share on the percentage of first time electors and a constant – has a slope of 2.49 and is statistically significant at the 1 percent level. Thus, states which had a high proportion of first time electors are also the states that

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<sup>7</sup> We exclude the 6 union territories (other than Delhi) and the 6 states in North-Eastern India from our analysis. Thus, our sample has 22 states and the NCR of Delhi. Together, these 23 states account for 528 of India's 543 parliamentary seats.

saw the largest increase in their vote share. In fact, we can be more precise: on average a 1 percentage point increase in the proportion of first time electors was associated with 2.5 percentage point increase in BJP's vote share between 2009 and 2014. This provides *preliminary evidence* for our hypothesis that BJP's electoral success in 2014 was at least partly the result of its ability to attract young voters.

### 3.2. Empirical Strategy

To strengthen the initial result shown in Figure 1, we will adopt two strategies. First, we will include additional regressors to the basic bivariate regression model to control for the effects of other relevant factors that could have impacted on the change in BJP's electoral fortunes (between 2009 and 2014) and could also be correlated with the proportion of first time electors. Hence, the empirical model we estimate can be represented as

$$\Delta BV_i = \alpha + \beta \times YE_i + \gamma_1 z_{1i} + \dots + \gamma_k z_{ki} + u_i \quad (1)$$

Where  $i$  indexes states,  $\Delta BV$  denotes the change in BJP's vote share between 2009 and 2014,  $YE$  stands for the proportion of young electors in 2014, and  $z_1, \dots, z_k$  denote additional controls.

Second, to rule out the possibility that the result is being driven by the behaviour of older electors, which we have not included in the regression model, we will adopt a novel strategy: we will estimate several specifications of the full model, where we will use an increasingly expansive definition of "young" electors. Thus, we will estimate (1) with 5 different measures of YE: the proportion of people in the age group 18-22 years (first time electors), the proportion of people in the age group 18-23 years, the proportion of people in the age group 18-28 years, the proportion of people in the age group 18-38 years, and the proportion of people in the age group 18-48 years. The change in the magnitude and statistical significance of the coefficients on the variable measuring the proportion of young electors

(YE), as we increase its ambit of definition, will allow us to rule out the possibility that the result is being driven by the behaviour of older, and not young, electors.

### 3.3. Data

Before we present and discuss the main results of this paper in the next section, we would like to offer an overview of the data set – our sample consists of 23 states (22 states and the NCR of Delhi) with variables measured in 2014 – by analyzing summary statistics of the key variables that are part of our analysis in Table 2.<sup>8</sup> The dependent variable in our model is the change in BJP's vote share between 2009 and 2014. Average change in BJP's vote share between 2009 and 2014 is 10.21 percent, with the minimum at -1.36 (Punjab) and maximum at 24.8 percent (Uttar Pradesh). At the low end, states like Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Chhattisgarh and Himachal Pradesh saw a small increase in BJP's vote share. While some of these states are in the Southern part of India, a region that has not been very receptive to BJP's politics in the past, others like Chhattisgarh and Himachal Pradesh already had very high vote shares for BJP in 2009. At the other end, states like Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Rajasthan, Haryana, and Bihar have all seen vote share increases in excess of 15 percentage points. Other states lie between these two extremes, with Jammu & Kashmir at 13.79 percent and West Bengal at 10.66 percent being significant gains for BJP.

The key independent variable is the proportion of young voters, with the latter defined in increasingly exhaustive manners. Thus, the average proportion of first time electors (age group 18-22 years in 2014) was 14.33 percent, ranging from a minimum of 10.73 percent (Kerala) to 17.23 (Jammu & Kashmir). The average proportion of persons in age groups 18-23 years, 18-28 years, 18-38 years and so on, increases, as expected.

[Table 2 about here]

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<sup>8</sup> Details of the sources of our data are presented in a Data Appendix.

To highlight the demographic transition underway in India, we compile data on “young” persons across Indian states in Table 3. Our definition of young starts at the age group 18-23 years and increases to the age group 18-29 years. From Table 3, we see that in 2014 in most Indian states the proportion of “young” persons, where “young” is defined as the age group 18-29 years, was more than a third. This youth bulge is what the BJP managed to tap, as we show below, to seal its electoral victory.

[Table 3 about here]

Other control variables include the percentage of rural persons, per capita Net State Domestic Product (NSDP), the proportion of Muslims, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in each state and finally the levels of literacy in each state. These controls allow us to assess the impact of first-time electors in each state, while controlling for the effect of urbanization, prosperity, religion, caste and literacy. From Table 2 we see that in 2011, average proportion of the rural population was 66.17 percent. On the lower side were Delhi (2.5 percent) and Goa (38 percent), and on the higher side Himachal Pradesh had the maximum at 90 percent. Prosperity levels, as measured by per capita NSDP, varied a lot across states in 2014. While Bihar had a per capita NSDP of Rs. 18928, Delhi and Goa had per capita NDSP in excess of Rs. 15000. Average literacy levels varied from a low of 62 percent (Bihar) to a high of 94 percent (Kerala). While the average proportion of Muslim population was 13 percent, the average of SC and ST populations were 16 and 10 percent respectively. The last variable that figures in Table 2 is what we call the “traditional BJP states”. This is a dummy variable that takes a value of 1 for states that have been the traditional strongholds of the BJP – Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh – and 0 otherwise. The mean of this variable in our sample is 0.52 suggesting that roughly half of the states were traditional BJP strongholds. Controlling for this factor is important because we would like to rule out the possibility that the variable measuring “young voters” is just a proxy for the traditional BJP support base.

Before we move to discussing the main results, we would like to point out that while we acknowledge the BJP having spent huge sums of money for election campaign, we have not included it in our regression model for two reasons. First, no credible estimate for this expenditure is available – and certainly not disaggregated by states – but more importantly, the advertisements and campaign expenditure may be one of the reasons why first time electors were influenced by the BJP. So instead of being independent explanatory variables, they may be the channels through which the stated hypothesis works.

## 4. Main Results

The main results of this paper are presented in Table 4, where we report results from estimating the model in (1) by ordinary least squares (OLS). Recall that the dependent variable is the *change* in BJP's vote share between 2009 and 2014, and the key independent variable is a measure of the proportion of young electors. Each column reports results for a different specification of the model in (1), where the definition of “young electors” changes. The first specification, (A), uses the proportion of first time electors as the measure of “young electors” (age group 18-22 years); the second specification, (B), uses the proportion of the population between ages 18 and 23 as the measure of “young electors”; specification (C) uses the age group 18-28 years; specification (D) uses the age group 18-38 years; specification (E) uses the age group 18-48 years; specification (F) uses the age group 36 years and above; specification (G) is specification (A) with the traditional BJP state dummy as an additional control.

[Table 4 about here]

The first specification, (A), in Table 4 is our preferred specification. It shows that across major Indian states, the proportion of first time electors is strongly positively correlated with the increase in BJP's vote share between 2009 and 2014, even after controlling for income, urbanization, religion, caste and literacy. Thus, states which had higher proportions of first time electors in 2014 were also states where



BJP registered large increases in vote share. The estimate of the coefficient suggests that, on average, states with a 1 percentage point higher share of first time electors gave BJP a 3.7 percentage point *increase* in its vote share between 2009 and 2014. The fact that the standard error is 0.59 suggests that the positive relationship between the proportion of first time electors and increase in BJP's vote share is statistically significantly different from zero. Among the controls, there are three significant regressors: share of Muslims, share of SCs and share of STs. Thus, on average, when states increased their Muslim, SC and ST population by 1 percentage point, BJP's vote share *declined* between 2009 and 2014 by 0.2, 0.8 and 0.5 percentage points respectively. This result is along expected lines: the upper-caste Hindu ideology of BJP is not attractive for Muslims, SC and STs. Interestingly, urbanization, income and literacy are not significant determinants of BJP's electoral success in 2014.

As we move from specifications (A) through (E) in Table 4, we see an interesting pattern: the magnitude and statistical significance of the coefficient on the measure of "young electors" goes down secularly. This decline in the magnitude and statistical significance of the coefficient on "young electors" is crucial for the results of this paper because it allows us to rule out the possible confounding factor of elder voters. To see this note that the decline of the coefficient on "young voters", as we move from specification (A) through (E), means that the strong relationship across states between the proportion of first time electors (age group 18-22 years) and the increase in BJP's vote share becomes numerically smaller and statistically weaker as we increase the ambit of our definition of "young voters". For instance, the coefficient on the age group 18-28 years on the change in BJP's vote share at 1.78 is less than half the magnitude of the corresponding effect of first time electors (3.74). As we move to the age group 18-38 years, the coefficient drops further to 0.94 and *with the age group 18-48 years, the coefficient is no longer statistically significantly different from zero*. Thus, as we include older electors in the measure of "young voters" the strength of the association between this variable and the change in BJP's vote share weakens.

This is the crucial piece of evidence that allows us to rule out an alternative interpretation of our basic results in specification (A). One could have surmised that the result in specification (A) was being driven by the behaviour of older electors. It is possible, one could have argued, that BJP's victory really rested on high support from older electors. States with high support for BJP among older electors could also have had high proportions of young electors. Hence, the variable "first time electors" in specification (A) was really picking up the effect of the support of older electors, the argument would have gone. Our results show that this is not the case. The fact that the magnitude and statistical significance of the variable "young electors" declines as we include older age groups in the definition of this variable rules out the alternative interpretation. In fact, it suggests that it was young electors – especially first time electors – and not electors of all ages that drove BJP's electoral success.

This conclusion is further corroborated by specification (F) in Table 4, which is specification (A) with an additional regressor: the proportion of electors age 36 years and above. If it was older electors, and not younger electors, who had been important to BJP's electoral success then adding this variable – the proportion of electors age 36 years and above – should have given a positive and significant coefficient on it (with the coefficient on first time electors possibly losing statistical significance). Specification (F) in Table 5 shows that the coefficient on "electors age 36 years and above" is negative and significant; but the coefficient on first time electors remains large and strongly statistically significant. Thus, one can conclude that older electors in fact had a negative effect on BJP's electoral performance. This is not surprising: older electors would have had a memory of the devastation of the 1991 Ayodhya campaign and the 2002 Gujarat riots, which might have pushed them to vote against BJP.

The last specification in Table 4, (G), performs another robustness check. In this specification, we estimate specification (A) with an additional regressor: a dummy variable for traditional BJP states. This specification allows us to rule out the possibility that the basic result in specification (A) is being driven

by the traditional strongholds of BJP. One might have surmised that the group of Northern and Western states are both traditional BJP strongholds and have high fertility rates. The latter factor would have translated into a relatively high proportion of young electors. Hence, one could have argued that the variable “young electors” was really picking up the effect of the high support base of the BJP in its traditional strongholds. Specification (G) allows us to rule out such an interpretation. Since the dummy variable is not significant, but the variable “first time electors” remains both numerically and statistically unchanged, compared to specification (A), we can conclude that the result is not being driven by traditional BJP stronghold states.

To conclude, the results of the regression analysis presented in Table 4 show that BJP’s electoral success in 2014 was crucially dependent on the support of younger, especially first time, electors. In the next section we will discuss some factors that may have contributed in attracting first time electors to BJP.

## **5. Attracting First Time Electors**

Any investigation of the reasons that induced first-time voters to support Modi must begin with the role of his election campaign, which involved relentless and targeted advertising to win over the youth.<sup>9</sup> From newspaper advertisements to inescapable internet presence, Modi’s message was propagated across the length and breadth of the country.<sup>10</sup> Modi’s promise of providing a strong and stable alternative to the Congress was broadcasted in all languages across the country. In an age where television and mobile phone penetration has been around 74 per cent in India, Modi effectively utilized text messages and phone calls to spread his message even in the most inaccessible heartland of the country. Modi’s campaign highlighted the rudderless progress for five years under UPA-II, the string of

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<sup>9</sup>Modi was reported to have started the BJP’s poll campaign with a youth rally in Hyderabad on August 11, 2013. (TOI, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> For analysis of the effectiveness of the Modi campaign’s use of social media see Das (2014).

corruption scandals that became its hallmark and advertised his own market-based Gujarat model of development as a viable alternative.<sup>11</sup>

Unsurprisingly, through its targeted campaigning, BJP managed to reap rich dividend from the group of first-time electors. For instance, in a 2013 survey conducted by the *India Today Group* and *CVoter Youth*, when first time electors were asked to choose between Narendra Modi and Rahul Gandhi, 47 percent of the 5014 respondents chose Modi and only 34 percent chose Rahul Gandhi (India Today Online, 2013). The survey also questioned first time electors on issues like the Gujarat Riots of 2002 and reported that only 47.2 per cent of India's first time electors believed that the 2002 Gujarat riots will be an important issue in the upcoming elections. Although 82.2 per cent said they wanted the prospective government to be secular, around 49.4 per cent still opined that the Ram temple in Ayodhya would be a crucial issue for voters. Even in 2013, during the early phases of the campaign, BJP and its allies had managed to influence 34.8 per cent of the first time electors who admitted that they would vote for the NDA. The Congress and its allies, on the other hand, were likely to get only 26 per cent of their votes. Moreover, *over 90 per cent of the first-time electors stated that they intended to vote in the elections* (India Today Online, 2013).

Traditionally, young voters are reluctant to vote in significant numbers owing to disengagement with politics. Using data from previous elections, Sanjay Kumar, director at the Center for the Study of Developing Societies, told *The Hindu* in an interview that "Since 1996, we have seen that voter turnout among young voters is 5-6 percentage points lower than the average turnout." (The Hindu, 2014). In addition, young voters, like their older counterparts have earlier formed part of other caste and religion based vote banks and never managed to consolidate their votes. However, this time not only were the

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<sup>11</sup> Senior BJP leader, L. K. Advani, attributed a large part of BJP's phenomenal electoral success in 2014 on the opposition, suggesting that "the massive corruption and errors committed by the previous regime in the last ten years" contributed to BJP's win (TOI, 2014).

young voters in their highest ever numerical strength, they were also predisposed to participate in the elections and vote decisively for the BJP as the *India Today* and *CVoter Youth* survey above highlight.

The BJP had rightly included the “youth factor” in their electoral calculations (Tiwari, 2014). It had focused on the fact that debutant voters would be malleable and could be won over to its cause by aggressive campaigning and targeted electioneering. It also accounted for the fact that Gujarat Riots could not play any significant role in determining the direction in which the first time electors polled as they would be too young, around six to ten years old in 2002 when the riots happened. In fact, BJP ensured that the secular and communal divide in Indian politics was a thing of the past and it did not matter to the new voter. It was easy for Modi to influence new voters by steering the campaign around issues of immediate relevance for them, at least for the first time electors of the majority community. BJP managed to convince these first time electors that the issue of minority rights along with all other social and economic malaise plaguing the country, could be solved by the silver bullet of economic revival.

## 6. Conclusion

The general elections to the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha mark a watershed in Indian political history. A right-wing Hindu nationalist party, the BJP, has been elected to the parliament with an absolute majority. In this paper, we have presented evidence to show that BJP’s massive victory in the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha elections relied on tapping into the group of young voters, especially the first time electors. Using data from the 2011 Census to construct estimates for proportions of first time (and young) voters across Indian states, we show that the change in BJP’s vote share between 2009 and 2014 is strongly and positively correlated with the proportion of first time electors. The relationship weakens but remains statistically significant as we use increasingly broader definitions of young voters (age group 18-23, age group 18-24, so on). While the sociological and political implications of these findings merit further study, we offer some initial

thoughts.

The vote for BJP by the young electors, it seems, was primarily a vote for more inclusive growth and against the incumbent Congress regime; it was not a vote for its divisive, communal agenda. Fed up with the string of corruption scandals, high inflation and lack of employment growth, the group of young electors have voted against the incumbent INC. The BJP campaign was able to convert the widespread anger against the INC into electoral dividends by downplaying the communal agenda and foregrounding the “development” achievements of its Prime Ministerial candidate in the state of Gujarat. Even though there were excellent critiques of the so-called Gujarat model of “development” available, there was no credible political force that could take it to the people and nullify BJP’s campaign (Sood, 2012a; Sood, 2012b; Ghatak and Roy, 2014; Sood and Kalaiyaran, 2014).

If the vote for BJP was a vote for growth, and if the track record of Narendra Modi in Gujarat is anything to go by, this means that there is a distinct possibility for the emergence of a “developmental state” in India. This will be a strong state, along the lines seen in China and Singapore, that will direct the process of growth, will try to foster labour-intensive industrialization, will try to build infrastructure, streamline the bureaucracy and even discipline the capitalist class. While growth might pick up, poverty decline and even living standards improve, it will come together with authoritarianism and systematic marginalization of minorities (as has happened in Gujarat under Modi).<sup>12</sup>

The massive victory of BJP in general and its ability to attract young electors might have important linkages with the pattern of growth that India has been witnessing over the past few decades. As many researchers have pointed out, Indian growth since the early 1990s has been intensely disequalizing: inequalities have grown across dimensions of class, caste, region, and states (Pal and Ghosh, 2007). One important reason underlying the widening of inequality has been the dismal performance of the Indian

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<sup>12</sup> For instance see Peer (2014).

economy on the employment front, both in terms of quantity and quality. In fact, the overwhelming majority of jobs have been of an “informal” kind, either jobs in the unorganized sector or informal jobs in the organized sector. Informal jobs are marked by low wages, lack of job or social security, abysmal conditions of work, and absence of collective bargaining rights. This has meant the large workforce that has emerged over the recent past due to India’s demographic transition has been forced to lead an extremely precarious existence. Absence of strong Left, progressive and democratic political movements has probably made this “precariat” open to the lures of a right-wing, authoritarian leader. The BJP has managed to sell dreams of development to this young, aspirational voter, even as it skillfully airbrushed the 2002 Gujarat riots out of mainstream media discourse.

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## Data Appendix

We have used the following sources for the data used in this paper.

1. Electoral data are from the Election Commission of India's website <http://eci.nic.in/eci/eci.html>
2. Data on the age composition of electors have been computed from age-wise data available from the 2011 Census of India <http://censusindia.gov.in/>
3. Data on state-level urbanization (proportion of the rural population) are from the 2011 Census of India <http://censusindia.gov.in/>
4. Data on percentage of Adult Literacy is for the year 2010-2011 from the 2011 Census of India <http://censusindia.gov.in/>
5. Data on the percentage of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are for the year 2010-2011 from the 2011 Census of India <http://censusindia.gov.in/>
6. Data on the percentage of Muslims in the states are for the year 2010-11 from the 2011 Census of India, accessed from the Open Government Data Platform of the Government of India [http://data.gov.in/catalog/state-wise-percentage-muslim-population-and-enrolment-primary-level-dise-flash-statistics#web\\_catalog\\_tabs\\_block\\_10](http://data.gov.in/catalog/state-wise-percentage-muslim-population-and-enrolment-primary-level-dise-flash-statistics#web_catalog_tabs_block_10)
7. Data on per capita net state domestic product (at current prices) are for the year 2010-11 from Table 1.7, Statistical Appendix, *Economic Survey of India 2012-13*.

**Table 1: BJP's Electoral Performance in 2009 and 2014**

	Seats Won			Vote Share (% of votes polled)			First Time Elector in 2014 (% of voters)	State Code
	2009	2014	Change	2009	2014	Change		
Kerala	0	0	0	7.31	10.30	2.99	10.73	KER
Goa	1	2	1	44.78	53.40	8.62	10.74	GOA
Tamil Nadu	0	1	1	2.30	5.50	3.20	11.35	TND
Andhra Pradesh	0	3	3	2.84	8.50	5.66	12.46	APR
Karnataka	19	17	-2	41.63	43.00	1.37	12.61	KTK
Delhi	0	7	7	34.28	46.40	12.12	13.12	DEL
Maharashtra	9	23	14	18.17	27.30	9.13	13.28	MAH
Himachal Pradesh	3	4	1	49.58	53.30	3.72	13.32	HPR
Odisha	0	1	1	16.89	21.50	4.61	13.45	ODI
Punjab	1	2	1	10.06	8.70	-1.36	14.37	PJB
West Bengal	1	2	1	6.14	16.80	10.66	14.42	WBL
Gujarat	15	26	11	46.52	59.10	12.58	14.45	GUJ
Chhattisgarh	10	10	0	45.03	48.70	3.67	14.72	CGH
Bihar	12	22	10	13.93	29.40	15.47	14.86	BIH
Tripura	0	0	0	2.72	5.70	2.98	14.98	TRP
Madhya Pradesh	16	27	11	43.45	54.00	10.55	15.48	MPR
Jharkhand	8	12	4	27.53	40.10	12.57	15.75	JRK
Uttarakhand	0	5	5	33.82	55.30	21.48	15.77	UTT
Assam	4	7	3	16.21	36.50	20.29	16.29	ASM
Uttar Pradesh	10	71	61	17.50	42.30	24.80	16.59	UPR
Haryana	0	7	7	17.21	34.70	17.49	16.63	HAR
Rajasthan	4	25	21	36.57	54.90	18.33	17.10	RAJ
Jammu & Kashmir	0	3	3	18.61	32.40	13.79	17.23	JAK

**Source:** author's calculation using data from the Election Commission of India's website and the 2011 Census of India

**Table 2: Summary Statistics of Key Variables**

	Mean	Median	Min	Max	Std Dev
Change in BJP's Vote Share (2014-2009)	10.21	10.55	-1.36	24.80	7.14
Rural population (% of total)	66.17	69.45	2.50	89.96	18.88
Per capita NSDP (1000 rupees)	62.65	59.98	18.93	159.24	35.60
Muslim population (% of total)	13.04	9.06	1.57	66.97	14.23
Literate population (% of total)	75.74	75.55	61.80	94.00	8.40
SC population (% of total)	15.81	16.80	1.70	31.90	6.74
ST population (% of total)	10.33	7.00	0.00	31.80	10.03
Age group 18-22 (first time electors)	14.33	14.45	10.73	17.23	1.93
Age group 18-23	17.74	17.89	13.01	21.33	2.37
Age group 18-28	31.38	31.56	23.94	37.44	3.41
Age group 18-38	55.02	54.64	44.84	65.16	4.69
Age group 18-48	74.11	72.85	65.36	86.23	5.26
Age group 36 and above	48.26	49.00	40.18	60.29	4.68
Traditional BJP States	0.52	1	0	1	0.51

**Table 3: Age Distribution of Young Electors across Indian States, 2014**

	<b>Age 18- 23</b>	<b>Age 18- 24</b>	<b>Age 18- 25</b>	<b>Age 18- 26</b>	<b>Age 18- 27</b>	<b>Age 18- 28</b>	<b>Age 18- 29</b>
Kerala	13.01	15.16	17.34	19.50	21.69	23.94	26.10
Goa	13.39	15.79	18.24	20.60	23.06	25.84	28.36
Tamil Nadu	13.99	16.24	18.50	20.73	22.99	25.81	28.12
Andhra Pradesh	15.82	17.97	20.49	22.67	24.99	28.53	30.80
Karnataka	15.91	18.20	20.96	23.21	25.71	29.15	31.62
Delhi	16.25	18.83	21.78	24.32	27.00	30.24	33.04
Maharashtra	16.52	19.17	22.08	24.58	27.15	30.38	32.96
Himachal Pradesh	16.14	18.77	21.54	24.11	26.70	29.38	31.90
Odisha	16.80	19.12	21.87	24.16	26.41	29.83	32.24
Punjab	17.67	20.34	23.29	25.89	28.53	31.56	34.21
West Bengal	17.86	20.38	23.42	25.84	28.36	31.70	34.37
Gujarat	17.89	20.57	23.48	26.07	28.68	31.96	34.54
Chhattisgarh	18.10	20.54	23.42	25.82	28.24	31.33	33.70
Bihar	18.54	20.61	23.47	25.42	27.50	31.49	33.74
Tripura	18.60	21.59	24.75	27.62	30.60	34.22	37.24
Madhya Pradesh	19.16	21.63	24.63	27.03	29.46	32.72	35.18
Jharkhand	19.56	21.88	25.01	27.23	29.65	33.73	36.30
Uttarakhand	19.13	21.71	24.60	26.93	29.39	32.31	34.68
Assam	20.16	22.94	26.30	28.97	31.73	35.94	39.02
Uttar Pradesh	20.37	22.53	25.23	27.18	29.25	32.32	34.30
Haryana	20.45	23.46	26.79	29.66	32.58	36.12	39.06
Rajasthan	21.29	23.90	27.14	29.65	32.13	35.79	38.22
Jammu & Kashmir	21.33	24.29	27.56	30.41	33.39	37.44	40.56

Note: author's calculation from 2011 Census of India.

**Table 4: Regression Results**

**Dependent Variable: Change in BJP's Vote Share between 2009 and 2014**

	(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(G)
Age group 18-22	3.736*** (0.59)					3.091*** (0.66)	3.74*** (0.69)
Age group 18-23		3.143*** (0.51)					
Age group 18-28			1.777*** (0.44)				
Age group 18-38				0.938** (0.38)			
Age group 18-48					0.62 (0.38)		
Age group >= 36						-1.336*** (0.40)	
Traditional BJP States							5.54 (3.35)
Rural (% of popn)	-0.013 (0.08)	-0.001 (0.08)	-0.011 (0.11)	-0.013 (0.13)	-0.012 (0.15)	0.09 (0.09)	-0.013 (0.08)
Per capita NSDP	-0.039 (0.06)	-0.041 (0.06)	-0.077 (0.08)	-0.083 (0.10)	-0.066 (0.11)	-0.001 (0.06)	-0.039 (0.06)
Muslim (% of popn)	-0.196** (0.09)	-0.2** (0.09)	-0.226* (0.12)	-0.202 (0.16)	-0.165 (0.18)	-0.106 (0.09)	-0.196* (0.11)
SC (% of popn)	-0.762*** (0.18)	-0.76*** (0.18)	-0.783*** (0.24)	-0.662** (0.29)	-0.587* (0.32)	-0.728*** (0.17)	-0.763*** (0.21)
ST (% of popn)	-0.508*** (0.11)	-0.531*** (0.12)	-0.593*** (0.16)	-0.55** (0.21)	-0.505** (0.24)	-0.463*** (0.11)	-0.509*** (0.12)
Adult literacy (%)	0.068 (0.15)	0.131 (0.16)	0.003 (0.20)	-0.143 (0.23)	-0.288 (0.24)	0.244 (0.17)	0.068 (0.16)
Constant	-25.369 (16.42)	-32.668* (17.56)	-18.794 (22.38)	-5.682 (28.27)	7.518 (30.83)	-14.029 (16.51)	-25.361 (17.01)
Adjusted R-2	0.742	0.733	0.549	0.326	0.2	0.777	0.724
N	23	23	23	23	23	23	23

Note: standard errors in parentheses; \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

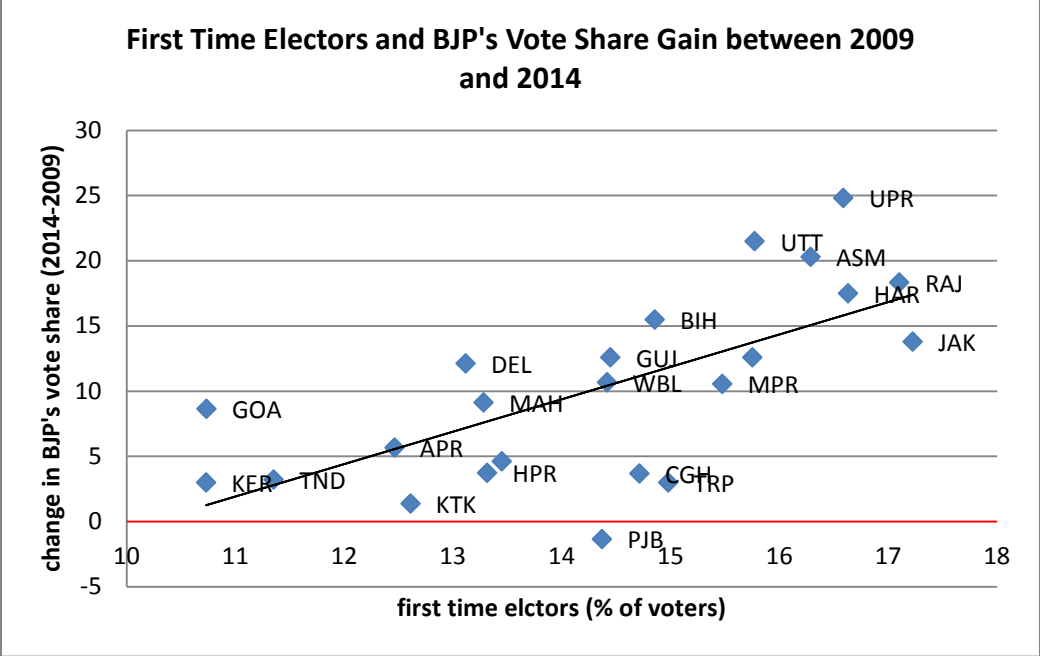


Figure 1: First time electors in 2014 and change in BJP's vote share between 2009 and 2014 across Indian States. The bivariate regression line has a slope of 2.49 (t-stat=4.17).