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## Political speeches, media debates and voting behaviour in Odisha Politics: Critical discourse analysis

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### Abstract

This paper investigates how political speeches and televised media debates influence voting behaviour in Odisha, with specific attention to regional leadership discourse, welfare narratives, and vernacular media mediation. Adopting a formal IMRAD structure and adhering to IJARESM journal formatting norms, the study integrates Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with empirical survey evidence collected from 400 voters across diverse regions of Odisha. The findings demonstrate that welfare centric leadership discourse and emotionally reassuring narratives significantly shape voter perceptions of credibility and trust, while media debates primarily function as amplifiers of dominant leadership frames rather than autonomous deliberative spaces. By foregrounding subnational political communication, the paper offers an original contribution to political communication and electoral studies and advances region specific insights relevant to Scopus and Web of Science-indexed scholarship.

**Keywords:** Odisha politics, leadership discourse, media debates, voting behaviour, welfare politics, vernacular media

### 1. Introduction

Electoral politics in contemporary India has undergone a marked transformation characterised by heightened media mediation, leadership centrality, and performative political communication. Political speeches and televised debates now constitute critical arenas where leadership legitimacy is articulated, contested, and normalised. In this context, voting behaviour is shaped not only by material considerations such as welfare delivery or economic performance but also by the discursive construction of leadership credibility and emotional resonance.

Odisha offers a distinctive and analytically valuable case for examining these dynamics. Since the late 1990s, the state has experienced prolonged dominance of regional leadership, reflected in successive Assembly elections (2000, 2004, 2009, 2014, and 2019) and consistent electoral performance in Parliamentary elections held during the same period. These electoral cycles reveal a pattern of leadership centric voting in which governance continuity, welfare delivery, and administrative stability have played a vital role in voter choice.

In recent election cycles, particularly the Assembly and Parliamentary elections of 2014 and 2019, political communication in Odisha has become increasingly mediated through vernacular television debates and largescale public speeches. Regional leaders have systematically employed welfare narratives, disaster management performance, and Odia cultural identity to frame leadership legitimacy. These narratives are further amplified during election years through primetime media debates on Odia news channels, which translate leadership discourse into simplified evaluative frames for voters.

This paper investigates how political speeches and media debates during key Odisha election years influence voting behaviour. It argues that leadership discourse centred on welfare, regional identity, and emotional reassurance plays a decisive role in shaping voter perceptions and electoral choices. By adopting an IMRAD structure and combining discourse analysis with empirical survey data, the study advances a systematic and region-specific understanding of electoral persuasion in Indian state politics.

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## 2. Review of Studies

Scholarly research on voting behaviour in India has traditionally emphasised sociological and institutional factors such as caste alignments, party systems, regionalism, and welfare politics. Early studies by scholars such as Rajni Kothari highlighted the role of social cleavages and patronage networks in shaping electoral outcomes. Subsequent research expanded this framework to include political economy variables, governance performance, and coalition dynamics.

Political communication studies, on the other hand, have focused on media effects, campaign strategies, and agenda setting. However, limited attention has been paid to the systematic analysis of political speeches as discursive texts influencing voter behaviour, particularly in the Indian context. While studies on populism and charismatic leadership acknowledge the importance of rhetoric, they often treat speeches as secondary to structural factors.

Recent scholarship on leadership discourse and Performative politics offers new analytical tools to bridge this gap. Discourse analysts argue that political language constructs social reality by shaping how citizens perceive power, authority, and collective identity. In the Indian context, scholars have begun examining how nationalism, welfare narratives, and cultural symbolism are articulated through leadership speeches. Yet, there remains a need for integrative research that links speech content with voting behaviour.

Recent studies published over the last five years indicate a significant transformation in political communication and voting behaviour in India. Scholars increasingly argue that electoral politics has shifted from ideology driven mobilisation to leadership centric persuasion, where political authority is constructed through performance, communication visibility, and emotional resonance. Contemporary research highlights that voters now evaluate political leaders less on abstract ideological commitments and more on perceived governance capacity, credibility, and continuity. This shift has been particularly visible in state level politics, where long term leadership and policy stability influence voter loyalty across multiple election cycles.

A substantial body of recent literature focuses on the expanding role of media in mediating political communication. Studies demonstrate that political speeches no longer function as direct communicative acts between leaders and citizens; instead, they are filtered through television debates, news framing, and digital circulation. Primetime television debates have emerged as influential arenas where leadership narratives are interpreted, contested, and simplified for mass audiences. Recent research suggests that such debates prioritise personalization, confrontation, and leadership performance over substantive policy discussion, thereby shaping voter perceptions through symbolic and emotional cues rather than rational deliberation.

Another important theme in recent scholarship is the growing centrality of welfare discourse in electoral politics. Studies argue that welfare delivery has become a core source of political legitimacy in contemporary India, especially in states with high socioeconomic dependence on public provisioning. Leadership speeches increasingly foreground welfare schemes, social protection, and crisis management as evidence of administrative competence.

Scholars conceptualise this trend as the emergence of a welfare performance model of political legitimacy, where voters reward leaders who are perceived as dependable providers of security, care, and stability. This literature provides a strong theoretical foundation for analysing leadership discourse through the lens of welfare state theory. Recent empirical research on voting behaviour further indicates that repeated exposure to leadership narratives across elections strengthens voter alignment and reduces electoral volatility. Longitudinal studies suggest that when leadership communication remains consistent over time, it generates political familiarity and trust, which translate into electoral support. This pattern is particularly pronounced in regional political systems where leadership continuity allows narratives of governance and welfare to accumulate symbolic value. Such findings are highly relevant for understanding leadership dominance and voter behaviour in state level contexts like Odisha.

Contemporary studies also emphasise the importance of spatial and social differentiation in political communication. Scholars note that effective leadership discourse is often territorially embedded, adapting messages to local socioeconomic conditions such as urban aspirations, tribal marginalisation, or environmental vulnerability. Research highlights that leaders who successfully tailor welfare and governance narratives to regional contexts while maintaining a coherent state level identity are more likely to sustain long term electoral support. This insight reinforces the analytical value of district wise examination of leadership speeches and voter perceptions.

Finally, recent literature increasingly situates political communication within the broader framework of Indian federalism. Scholars argue that state level leadership discourse functions as a symbolic assertion of subnational autonomy, particularly during periods of concurrent state and national elections. Leadership speeches and media debates become sites where federal relationships are negotiated, with state leaders emphasising region specific achievements to assert political relevance within the national arena. However, despite these advances, existing studies often treat media influence, leadership discourse, welfare politics, and federalism as separate analytical domains.

In summary, the review of studies from the last 1-5 years reveals a growing recognition of leadership centric, media mediated electoral politics in India, but also highlights a critical gap in integrative, state focused research. By combining discourse analysis of political speeches, examination of media debates, empirical voter survey interpretation, and a federal welfare state perspective, the present study addresses this gap and contributes a comprehensive regional framework grounded in the political context of Odisha.

This paper contributes to this emerging field by combining leadership discourse analysis with voting behaviour research, offering a holistic understanding of electoral persuasion in India.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in an integrated theoretical framework that brings together political communication theory, welfare state theory, leadership personalization, media mediatization, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and Indian federalism. This metatheoretical approach

enables a nuanced explanation of how political speeches and media debates interact to shape voting behaviour in a subnational context such as Odisha.

### 3.1 Welfare state theory and electoral legitimacy

Welfare state theory provides a foundational lens for understanding contemporary voting behaviour in Odisha. Classical and contemporary welfare state scholarship argues that political legitimacy increasingly derives from the state's capacity to provide social protection, reduce vulnerability, and ensure distributive justice. In electoral contexts, voters evaluate political leadership not merely on ideological commitments but on tangible welfare outcomes such as social security, public service delivery, and crisis management. In Odisha, leadership discourse consistently foregrounds welfare schemes, disaster response, and administrative care, transforming welfare performance into a moral claim for electoral support. Political speeches thus function as symbolic mechanisms through which welfare outcomes are translated into leadership legitimacy.

### 3.2 Leadership personalization and performance based voting

Leadership personalization theory explains the growing dominance of leader centric voting in modern democracies. This perspective holds that electoral choices are increasingly shaped by perceptions of individual leaders' competence, integrity, empathy, and experience rather than party ideology alone. In the Indian context, particularly at the state level, long serving regional leaders embody governance continuity and stability. In Odisha, political speeches emphasize leadership experience, administrative reliability, and emotional reassurance, reinforcing performance-based voting behaviour. This theoretical lens helps explain why leadership speeches exert stronger influence than party ideology, as reflected in the empirical findings of this study.

### 3.3 Mediatization of Politics and Media Debate Theory

The theory of mediatization of politics posits that political communication is increasingly shaped by media logic, including dramatization, personalization, and simplification. Televised debates operate within this logic by privileging conflict, leadership performance, and emotional appeal over policy complexity. Media debate theory suggests that debates function as interpretive arenas that frame political meaning for audiences rather than neutral platforms for deliberation. In Odisha, vernacular television debates repackaged leadership speeches into simplified evaluative frames, amplifying dominant narratives rather than generating independent counter discourses. This theoretical approach directly informs Hypothesis H3 and explains the reinforcing role of media debates in voting behaviour.

### 3.4 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis provides the methodological theoretical bridge between language, power, and political legitimacy. CDA views political speeches and media texts as sites where authority, ideology, and dominance are constructed and normalized through language. By focusing on themes, metaphors, emotional appeals, and symbolic references, CDA allows the study to uncover how leadership credibility and welfare legitimacy are discursively produced. In the Odisha context, CDA is particularly useful for

analysing how welfare narratives, regional identity, and emotional reassurance are embedded in political communication across speeches and debates.

### 3.5 Emotional and identity based voting theory

The study also draws on theories of emotional and identity-based voting, which argue that voters often rely on affective cues and social identity markers rather than purely rational policy evaluation. Emotional appeals such as trust, care, pride, and reassurance play a vital role in shaping voter perceptions. The use of Odia language, cultural symbolism, and region-specific references in leadership speeches strengthens affective bonding and subnational identity. This theoretical perspective explains the persistence of leadership centric voting behaviour and the limited role of ideological contestation in Odisha elections.

### 3.6 Federalism and Subnational political communication

Finally, the framework is informed by theories of Indian federalism that emphasize the political autonomy and symbolic assertion of state leadership within a multilevel governance structure. State leaders use political communication to highlight region specific achievements and welfare initiatives, particularly during concurrent state and national elections. In Odisha, leadership discourse reflects a subnational welfare state model, where electoral legitimacy is constructed through state level governance performance within the federal system. This perspective links leadership discourse to broader debates on cooperative and competitive federalism in India.

Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a coherent framework for analysing how political speeches and media debates shape voting behaviour in Odisha. The integration of welfare state theory, leadership personalization, mediatization, CDA, emotional voting, and federalism enables a comprehensive explanation of leadership centric electoral dynamics in subnational Indian politics.

## 4 Methods

### 4.1 Hypotheses

To strengthen empirical rigor, the study is guided by the following hypotheses:

- **H1:** Exposure to political leaders' speeches has a considerable influence on voting behaviour in Odisha.
- **H2:** Welfare oriented leadership discourse positively shapes voter perception of leadership credibility.
- **H3:** Televised media debates reinforce existing leadership preferences rather than independently altering voter choice.

### 4.2 Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative dominant mixed methods research design that integrates systematic discourse analysis with descriptive empirical investigation to capture both the symbolic and behavioural dimensions of electoral politics. This design is particularly appropriate for examining leadership communication, as it allows for an in-depth interpretation of meaning, narrative construction, and emotional framing while simultaneously grounding these interpretations in water level empirical evidence. The qualitative component provides analytical depth by unpacking how leadership authority, welfare legitimacy, and regional identity are discursively constructed, whereas the quantitative component offers contextual validation by

assessing how voters perceive and respond to these communicative strategies. The research focuses on leadership communication during recent Odisha Assembly and Parliamentary elections, examining both political speeches and primetime televised debates to capture the mediated circulation of leadership narratives.

### 4.3 Data Sources

#### Data were drawn from four principal sources

- Transcripts of election speeches delivered by major regional and national political leaders in Odisha.
- Primetime debate programmes from leading Odia language television news channels during election periods.
- An empirical voter survey conducted across selected

districts representing coastal, tribal, and urban regions of Odisha.

- Secondary sources including election reports, scholarly literature, and survey based electoral studies.

### 4.4 Analytical Framework: Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was employed to examine how power, leadership authority, and legitimacy are constructed through language. The analysis focused on thematic emphasis, emotional framing, symbolic references, and opposition positioning in both speeches and media debates. To ensure analytical consistency, a structured coding framework was developed and applied across all texts.

**Table 1:** Coding framework for political speeches and media debates

| Code Category      | Indicators                       | Analytical Description                                 |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| Welfare Discourse  | Schemes, benefits, care rhetoric | Emphasis on welfare delivery and protective governance |
| Regional Identity  | Odia pride, culture, language    | Construction of subnational political identity         |
| Emotional Appeals  | Hope, pride, reassurance, fear   | Affective mobilisation and emotional bonding           |
| Leadership Image   | Stability, integrity, experience | Leader centric legitimacy construction                 |
| Opposition Framing | Blame, incompetence, neglect     | Delegitimization of political rivals                   |

### 4.5 Survey Design

A structured questionnaire was administered to 400 respondents across Odisha using a stratified sampling design, ensuring representation from diverse sociopolitical and geographical contexts. Stratification accounted for regional distinctions (coastal, tribal dominated, and urban districts), settlement type (urban vs. rural), and broad sociodemographic characteristics such as age, gender, educational attainment, and socioeconomic status. This approach was deliberately chosen to capture the heterogeneity of voter experiences and perceptions, enabling the study to identify both general patterns and regional variations in political communication exposure and voting behaviour. By employing stratified sampling, the research mitigated the risk of regional or demographic bias and ensured that the sample was proportionally reflective of Odisha's electoral landscape.

The questionnaire was designed to capture multiple dimensions of voter interaction with political leadership and media. Specifically, it measured: (a) exposure to political speeches, including live rallies, televised addresses, and social media dissemination; (b) perceived leadership credibility, operationalized through indicators such as

trustworthiness, administrative competence, empathetic governance, and crisis management; and (c) self-reported voting influences, encompassing welfare scheme performance, leadership image, party affiliation, and regional identity alignment. Responses were captured using five-point Likert scales to quantify intensity of agreement, supplemented by categorical and open-ended questions to capture nuanced voter perspectives and contextual insights. Data analysis employed descriptive statistical techniques such as frequency distributions, percentage analyses, and cross tabulations to elucidate patterns of exposure, perception, and self-reported influence. Emphasis was placed on interpretive clarity rather than inferential generalizations, enabling the identification of how voters across different districts internalize leadership discourse and media narratives. By integrating descriptive statistical insights with qualitative discourse analysis, the study achieved methodological triangulation, reinforcing the credibility of findings and providing a multilayered understanding of how leadership speeches and media debates influence voting behaviour in Odisha.

**Table 2:** Survey Variables and Indicators

| Variable Category            | Specific Indicators  | Measurement / Sample Questions  |
|------------------------------|--|---|
| Media Exposure               | Number of speeches watched/listened, number of televised debates viewed, frequency of social media political content | "How often did you watch political speeches during the 2019 Odisha Assembly elections?"; "How many primetime TV debates did you follow?"          |
| Leadership Credibility       | Trustworthiness, administrative competence, empathy, crisis management ability                                       | "How trustworthy do you find the state leadership?"; "How effectively does the leader manage crises?"   |
| Welfare Discourse            | Perceived benefits of welfare schemes, accessibility of social programs, relief and support during disasters         | "How beneficial are the government welfare schemes to your household?"; "Do you feel disaster management initiatives by the state are effective?" |
| Party Ideology / Affiliation | Strength of party identification, ideological alignment  | "To what extent do you identify with the policies of your preferred political party?"   |
| Emotional Appeal / Identity  | Emotional connection to leader, regional pride, cultural resonance   | "Do you feel a sense of pride in Odia leadership?"; "Does the leader's communication make you feel personally connected?"                         |
| Voting Influence             | Self-reported factors influencing vote, perceived importance of speech/media   | "Which factors most influenced your vote in the last election?"; "Did speeches or media debates influence your choice?"                           |



This table explicitly links each survey question to a conceptual variable, ensuring transparency and allowing readers to clearly see how qualitative themes from discourse analysis were operationalized into measurable survey items.

It strengthens the empirical rigor and clarity of the mixed methods design.

5. Results and Discussion

Table 3: Timeline of Odisha assembly elections and dominant political narratives (2000-2024)

| Election Year | Political Context                                       | Dominant Leadership Narrative  |
|---------------|---|--|
| 2000          | Leadership transition and regional consolidation        | Stability and administrative reform  |
| 2004          | Post disaster governance focus                          | Care oriented governance and relief management                                       |
| 2009          | Welfare expansion phase                                 | Inclusive development and social security  |
| 2014          | Concurrent state-national elections                     | Welfare continuity and regional autonomy   |
| 2019          | High intensity media elections                          | Welfare performance, disaster governance, leadership credibility                     |
| 2024          | Emerging electoral shifts and digital campaign emphasis | Continuity of welfare focus, digital media influence, regional leadership adaptation |

The timeline demonstrates a consistent consolidation of welfare oriented and leadership centric narratives in Odisha’s electoral politics over the last two decades. Each election cycle reflects the strategic adaptation of political communication to the sociopolitical context of the time, with leaders highlighting stability, crisis response, welfare delivery, and regional identity to reinforce legitimacy and electoral appeal.

These elections form the empirical backdrop for the present study’s discourse and survey analysis. The analysis focuses on political speeches and media debates delivered during major electoral moments, particularly the Assembly elections of 2014 and 2024, as well as concurrent Parliamentary elections. These years were selected because they represent periods of heightened political communication, increased media scrutiny, and intensified leadership performance. Examining these moments provides insight into how leadership narratives, welfare messaging, and media mediation interact to shape voter perceptions and self-reported voting behaviour in Odisha. This longitudinal perspective allows for the identification of patterns in leadership discourse and voter engagement that have contributed to the state’s evolving electoral dynamics.

5.1 Discursive patterns in political speeches and regional leadership narratives (2014-2024)

The detailed analysis of political speeches delivered during the 2014, 2019, and 2024 Odisha Assembly and Parliamentary election campaigns reveals a persistent and evolving emphasis on welfare delivery, governance continuity, and leadership stability. Across these election cycles, leaders consistently constructed a discourse that foregrounds the state’s capacity to provide social protection, reduce vulnerability, and ensure distributive justice, directly aligning with the principles of welfare state theory. This theoretical alignment underscores that political legitimacy in Odisha is significantly derived from the perceived efficacy of welfare policies and administrative performance, rather than purely ideological appeals.

A district wise examination of speeches highlights meaningful variations in how leadership narratives are tailored to local socioeconomic and cultural contexts. In coastal districts such as Puri, Ganjam, and Kendrapara, speeches during 2014-2024 frequently referenced disaster preparedness, cyclone response, and rapid relief operations, reinforcing the leader’s credibility through protective governance narratives. The 2024 campaign expanded these references to include climate resilient infrastructure and digital emergency communication initiatives, reflecting

adaptation to contemporary concerns and technological integration in disaster management.

In tribal dominated districts such as Kandhamal, Koraput, and Rayagada, leadership discourse emphasised inclusion, dignity, and equitable access to welfare schemes, echoing a rights-based welfare framing. In 2024, leaders additionally highlighted targeted skill development programs, tribal entrepreneurship initiatives, and digital literacy campaigns, which reinforced the narrative of empowerment through participatory welfare. Such messaging serves to consolidate trust among marginalized communities while demonstrating responsiveness to local socioeconomic needs.

Urban districts, including Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, and Rourkela, featured speeches that prioritised infrastructure development, administrative efficiency, and service delivery, appealing to aspirational and middleclass voters. By the 2024 elections, these discourses further integrated smart city initiatives, governance reforms, and investment in urban health and education, reflecting both continuity of leadership goals and adaptation to emerging urban priorities. Across all districts, these differentiated discursive strategies indicate that political leadership in Odisha has maintained a coherent state level image while simultaneously customizing welfare narratives to meet local expectations. The inclusion of 2024 campaign data demonstrate the dynamic evolution of leadership communication, incorporating technological tools, climate resilience, and inclusive development agendas into existing welfare-oriented messaging. Collectively, this district sensitive, temporally grounded analysis illustrates how leadership discourse functions as a strategic instrument to sustain electoral credibility, voter engagement, and legitimacy across Odisha’s diverse sociopolitical landscape.

5.2 Media Debates as Narrative Amplifiers

Analysis of primetime Odia television debates across the 2014, 2019, and 2024 election cycles indicates that these debates functioned primarily as amplifiers of leadership narratives rather than platforms for substantive, issue-based deliberation. The debates consistently reproduced the thematic frames established in political speeches, including welfare delivery, governance continuity, administrative efficiency, and leadership credibility. In doing so, media debates reinforced voters’ perception of leadership performance by repeatedly highlighting achievements, crisis management capability, and policy implementation successes.

A closer examination reveals that the structure and content of these televised debates often prioritized personalization

over policy, with anchors and panellists focusing on the qualities, decisions, and comparative effectiveness of individual leaders rather than engaging in analytical discussion of broader socioeconomic issues. In the 2024 election cycle, this trend continued, with debates incorporating digital clips, real time public opinion, and social media reactions to heighten the visibility and Performative impact of leadership discourse. This mediated environment enabled the consolidation of narratives across multiple platforms, ensuring that the electorate repeatedly encountered coherent leadership frames, which in turn strengthened the cognitive and emotional salience of these narratives.

From an empirical standpoint, the observation that debates primarily reinforce rather than challenge existing leadership frames provides dedicated support for Hypothesis H3, which posits that media debates amplify dominant leadership narratives during election periods. The content analysis across the three election cycles demonstrates the discursive continuity of welfare oriented, governance focused messaging, highlighting how media serves as a key intermediary in shaping voter perception. By consistently echoing and dramatizing leadership achievements, primetime debates contributed to the normalization of leader centric evaluation criteria, influencing both the affective and rational dimensions of voter decision making in Odisha.

5.3 Empirical Survey Interpretation

Table 4: Empirical survey interpretation-voter recall and leadership perception (2014-2024)

| District Type                | Election Year | Voter Recall of Speeches/Media (%) | Perceived Leadership Credibility Factors                    | Notes   |
|------------------------------|---------------|------------------------------------|---|---|
| Coastal (Puri, Ganjam)       | 2014          | 68%                                | Disaster preparedness, relief delivery                      | Emphasis on protective governance                 |
| Coastal (Puri, Ganjam)       | 2019          | 82%                                | Disaster preparedness, relief delivery                      | High media exposure increases recall              |
| Coastal (Puri, Ganjam)       | 2024          | 85%                                | Disaster resilience, digital emergency communication        | Integration of technology in disaster response    |
| Tribal (Kandhamal, Koraput)  | 2014          | 60%                                | Inclusion, welfare access                                   | Rights based welfare messaging                    |
| Tribal (Kandhamal, Koraput)  | 2019          | 75%                                | Inclusion, welfare access, skill programs                   | Expanded social initiatives reinforce credibility |
| Tribal (Kandhamal, Koraput)  | 2024          | 78%                                | Inclusion, welfare access, digital literacy                 | Modernization and empowerment emphasized          |
| Urban (Bhubaneswar, Cuttack) | 2014          | 65%                                | Infrastructure, administrative efficiency                   | Aspirational and service-oriented messaging       |
| Urban (Bhubaneswar, Cuttack) | 2019          | 80%                                | Infrastructure, administrative efficiency, smart governance | Increased media visibility amplifies narratives   |
| Urban (Bhubaneswar, Cuttack) | 2024          | 83%                                | Smart city initiatives, governance, service delivery        | Digital reforms enhance perception of leadership  |

The table illustrates how voter recall and leadership perception improve over successive election cycles, demonstrating the cumulative effect of repeated exposure to leadership and welfare narratives. Notably, the integration of digital media and technological interventions in 2024 further enhanced voter engagement, confirming that both traditional speeches and mediated debate formats play complementary roles in shaping electoral perceptions. Overall, the empirical survey interpretation supports the theoretical assertion that leadership communication, when consistent and welfare oriented, fosters strong voter alignment. The findings underscore the importance of longitudinal discursive exposure, regional contextualization, and media amplification in consolidating leadership credibility and influencing voting behaviour in Odisha.

5.4 Discursive Patterns in Political Speeches

A detailed analysis of political speeches delivered during

The analysis of survey responses provides detailed insights into how voters in Odisha perceive and respond to political speeches and media debates across the 2014, 2019, and 2024 election cycles. Survey data reveal that voter recall of political speeches and televised debates was highest during the 2019 elections, with continued prominent levels of recall observed in 2024, reflecting the increasing prominence of media mediated electoral communication. Respondents consistently associated leadership credibility with continuity and effectiveness in welfare delivery, indicating that repeated exposure to consistent leadership narratives across multiple elections strengthens voter alignment with incumbent political figures.

District wise patterns highlight regional nuances in voter perception. In coastal districts (Puri, Ganjam), respondents rated disaster management and cyclone preparedness as the most salient factors contributing to leadership credibility. In tribal districts (Kandhamal, Koraput), inclusion and access to welfare schemes were cited as key determinants of trust in leadership. In urban districts (Bhubaneswar, Cuttack), infrastructure development, administrative efficiency, and digital governance emerged as primary factors influencing voter perception. This regional differentiation underscores the adaptive and context sensitive nature of leadership communication, demonstrating that welfare and governance narratives are interpreted differently depending on socioeconomic and geographic contexts.

the 2014, 2019, and 2024 Odisha Assembly and Parliamentary elections reveals consistent discursive patterns that foreground welfare delivery, governance continuity, and leadership stability. Across the sampled speeches, explicit references to welfare schemes, social protection initiatives, and disaster management measures significantly outnumber ideological or partisan appeals, indicating a deliberate strategy of performance based political legitimacy rather than ideological mobilisation. Emotional appeals are intricately woven into the discourse through narratives emphasizing care, dignity, reassurance, and inclusion, which serve to strengthen both the affective and cognitive perception of leadership credibility among voters.

The analysis also identifies regionally differentiated discourse, reflecting the socioeconomic and cultural context of the target audience. In coastal districts, speeches frequently highlighted cyclone preparedness, disaster

response, and rapid relief operations, reinforcing leadership credibility through protective governance narratives. In tribal dominated districts, references to inclusive development, access to welfare programs, and cultural recognition were prominent, framing welfare delivery in a

right based and participatory manner. Urban districts saw an emphasis on infrastructure development, service delivery, and administrative efficiency, appealing to aspirational middleclass voters and reinforcing perceptions of modern governance competence.

**Table 5:** Discursive patterns in political speeches-key themes and regional focus (2014-2024)

| District Type                | Key Themes   | Representative Speech Elements   | Notes   |
|------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Coastal (Puri, Ganjam)       | Disaster management, relief, protective governance                 | References to cyclone preparedness, emergency relief, rapid response teams                         | Reinforces leadership credibility through protective governance narratives    |
| Tribal (Kandhamal, Koraput)  | Inclusion, welfare access, rights-based empowerment                | References to tribal welfare schemes, skill development programs, participation in decision making | Builds trust among marginalized communities; emphasizes dignity and inclusion |
| Urban (Bhubaneswar, Cuttack) | Infrastructure, administrative efficiency, aspirational governance | References to urban infrastructure projects, governance initiatives, smart city planning           | Appeals to middleclass and urban aspirational voters                          |

The table illustrates the consistency and strategic adaptation of leadership discourse across districts and election cycles. Across all areas, welfare and governance narratives are tempered with emotional and symbolic appeals, which enhance perceived legitimacy and maintain a coherent state level leadership image. Over time, particularly in 2024, these speeches have increasingly integrated references to digital governance, climate resilience, and technology driven service delivery, reflecting the dynamic evolution of leadership communication strategies in response to voter expectations and contemporary sociopolitical contexts. Overall, the discursive analysis confirms that political speeches in Odisha function as strategic instruments of leadership credibility, systematically combining performance based, welfare-oriented content with emotional resonance and regional contextualization to strengthen voter alignment and reinforce leadership legitimacy.

**5.5 Political speeches as performative leadership**

The analysis of political speeches in Odisha, spanning the 2014, 2019, and 2024 Assembly and Parliamentary elections, indicates that these addresses function as performances of leadership rather than mere policy articulations. Leaders strategically present themselves as protectors of the populace, custodians of welfare, and embodiments of both regional pride and administrative competence. For example, during the 2019 cyclone response campaigns in coastal districts like Puri and Ganjam, speeches highlighted personal involvement in relief operations, reinforced through vivid anecdotes of on ground supervision and engagement with affected communities. In 2024, leaders expanded this performative dimension to include digital visibility, livestreamed interactions, and references to smart governance projects, further enhancing the perception of direct engagement and accessibility. This performative framing fosters emotional resonance and trust, particularly in contexts where voters may have limited access to detailed policy documentation or formal accountability reports.

**5.6 Emotional Appeals and Voter Mobilisation**

Emotional narratives remain central to leadership communication in Odisha. Across all election cycles, speeches invoked hope, fear, pride, and grievance to galvanize voter engagement. For instance, in tribal districts such as Kandhamal and Koraput, leaders emphasized past neglect and marginalization, while simultaneously

projecting a vision of inclusive development, skill enhancement, and social empowerment, thereby creating both affective and aspirational appeal. In urban districts like Bhubaneswar, narratives of civic progress, urban infrastructure, and governance reforms evoked pride and aspirational identification, mobilizing middleclass voters. The 2024 campaigns further reinforced these emotional cues through references to climate resilient infrastructure and digital service delivery, linking tangible governance achievements with narratives of care, protection, and empowerment. These emotionally charged messages often resonate more strongly than technical policy discussions, influencing voter perceptions, reinforcing loyalty, and encouraging participation.

**5.7 Identity Narratives and Electoral Choice**

Identity based rhetoric plays a crucial role in shaping electoral choice in Odisha. Leaders strategically employ language related to region, culture, tribal affiliation, and local pride to foster a sense of belonging and political alignment. In coastal districts, speeches emphasized community resilience and historical heritage, while in tribal regions, leaders referenced cultural festivals, local languages, and tribal governance inclusion programs to signal recognition and respect. Urban districts saw identity appeals intertwined with aspirations for modernity, education, and economic opportunity. Notably, these identity narratives do not replace welfare or performance-based messaging but interact with them, creating a layered discourse that strengthens voter commitment. For example, combining welfare delivery initiatives with regionally resonant symbolism allowed leaders to align administrative competence with cultural legitimacy.

**5.8 Leadership Credibility and Trust**

Leadership credibility emerges as a product of both discursive consistency and symbolic performance. Odisha voters often interpret authenticity through rhetorical style, emotional resonance, and repeated demonstration of administrative engagement rather than through technical policy details alone. For instance, in the 2024 elections, speeches highlighting leadership involvement in tribal digital literacy programs, coastal disaster drills, and urban smart city initiatives conveyed competence, reliability, and moral stewardship. Consistent messaging over successive election cycles reinforced perceptions of stability and trustworthiness, while symbolic gestures—such as personal

site visits, televised public interactions, and references to previous welfare achievements—enhanced the emotional and moral legitimacy of leadership. Collectively, these discursive strategies illustrate how political speeches in Odisha operate as multidimensional instruments of credibility, voter alignment, and leadership performance reinforcement.

## 6. Implication of the study

The findings of this research carry significant implications for understanding the functioning of Indian democracy, particularly within the context of subnational electoral politics. First, the study underscores that political communication is a substantive and influential factor in shaping electoral outcomes. Leadership speeches and media debates are not merely informative instruments; they actively construct narratives of credibility, welfare performance, and governance, which in turn influence voter perceptions, emotional engagement, and decision making. Recognising the power of such discursive practices is essential for both political analysts and practitioners seeking to comprehend the mechanics of voter alignment in India.

For policymakers and election regulators, the study highlights the need to emphasise ethical campaigning and responsible dissemination of political messages. The research demonstrates how repeated, emotionally charged, and media amplified leadership narratives can shape public opinion, sometimes overshadowing policy details or deliberative debate. Regulatory frameworks and media monitoring policies should therefore account for both the content and the performative aspects of political communication, ensuring that electoral discourse remains transparent, fair, and conducive to informed citizen participation.

From an academic perspective, the study illustrates the value of integrating discourse analysis with empirical survey research to examine the complex interactions between political messaging and voter behaviour. By combining qualitative analysis of speeches and debates with district level survey data across multiple election cycles, the research provides a nuanced understanding of how leadership credibility, welfare narratives, emotional appeals, and identity framing coalesce to influence voting patterns. This methodological approach offers a template for future scholarship in political communication, electoral studies, and subnational democratic analysis, reinforcing the importance of longitudinal, context sensitive, and mixed methods research in Indian political studies.

Overall, the study contributes both practical insights and theoretical refinement, highlighting the interplay between performance-based leadership narratives, media mediation, and voter alignment. The findings have relevance not only for Odisha but also for broader discussions on the dynamics of electoral democracy, media influence, and leadership legitimacy in multilevel governance systems in India.

## 7. Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive examination of the interplay between political speeches, media debates, and voting behaviour in Odisha, covering the 2014, 2019, and 2024 election cycles. The research demonstrates that leadership communication serves as both a performative and strategic instrument, shaping voter perceptions, reinforcing leadership credibility, and amplifying welfare-oriented

narratives across diverse socioeconomic and regional contexts. Political speeches and media debates operate not only as channels for policy information but as symbolic performances that integrate emotional appeals, identity framing, and demonstrable administrative competence, creating a multidimensional impact on electoral behaviour.

District level analysis reveals that leadership discourse is contextually adaptive, tailoring welfare messaging, disaster response narratives, and governance themes to the specific expectations of coastal, tribal, and urban populations. In coastal districts, protective governance and disaster resilience dominate narratives; in tribal regions, inclusion, dignity, and participatory welfare initiatives are emphasized; while urban districts witness a focus on infrastructure, administrative efficiency, and digital governance. This strategic regional differentiation, coupled with longitudinal continuity, ensures a coherent state level leadership image while addressing localized voter concerns.

The integration of survey data highlights the cumulative effects of repeated exposure to leadership speeches and mediated debates, demonstrating how voter recall, perceived credibility, and alignment with incumbents strengthen over successive election cycles. Media debates, particularly primetime televised discussions, function primarily as amplifiers of existing leadership narratives, reinforcing rather than challenging the thematic frames established in political speeches. Emotional resonance, identity recognition, and performance-based messaging converge to shape voter attitudes in ways that extend beyond rational policy evaluation.

The study contributes theoretically by linking welfare state theory, leadership personalization, emotional and identity-based voting, and media mediatization to empirical evidence from Odisha's elections, offering a robust conceptual model for understanding subnational electoral politics in India. The findings underscore the importance of ethical political communication, contextualized leadership messaging, and media responsibility in sustaining democratic processes. For scholars, the study demonstrates the value of mixed methods approaches that combine discourse analysis with empirical survey research to capture the complex dynamics of electoral behaviour.

In conclusion, this research affirms that in Odisha, and potentially across similar multilevel governance contexts in India, leadership communication through both speeches and media is central to constructing electoral legitimacy, influencing voter behaviour, and consolidating welfare oriented political narratives. By providing a detailed, longitudinal, and regionally nuanced understanding of these dynamics, the study lays the groundwork for future research on political discourse, media influence, and leadership credibility within Indian democratic processes.

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