

AAM AADMI PARTY: EVOLUTION, CHALLENGES, AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

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Abstract

Indian politics has been largely dominated by identity politics: issues of castes and religion. In the last decade, a pan-India anti-corruption movement led to the establishment of a party in the national capital of India known as the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). This party has stirred Indian politics with its surprising landslide victories, governance model, and fierce campaigns. The AAP is the latest entry into the national arena after a fruitful campaign in the Gujarat elections. The Party has emerged like a start-up but has defied all the odds and is now all set to become the national political party. The AAP, relatively a young party, has faced many challenges and achieved many milestones. This study analyses the evolution of the AAP, its trajectory, challenges, its ability to challenge the larger parties, and strategies for upcoming elections.

Keywords: Arvind Kejriwal, Aam Aadmi Party, Bhartiya Janata Party, Indian National Congress, Hindutva, Lok Sabha, India Against Corruption, Delhi-Model, national alternative

Introduction

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has become eligible to become India's ninth national political party. The AAP is a post-ideological populist party that was established in the wake of the India Against Corruption movement of 2011-12. It has been focusing on issues of corruption, governance, and urban development. It has portrayed

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itself as an alternative to the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC). The AAP, which has established a stronghold in Delhi with two straight clean sweeps, a stunning victory in Punjab, and fierce campaigns in both Uttarakhand and Goa, is a surprise. Over the last ten years, the AAP has had heydays, surprising electoral outcomes, and growth in the national political landscape. The party's capacity to remain in the scholarly and political conversation has been its most significant strength and one of the primary reasons for its rise. The AAP's significance in Indian politics stems from the fact that it is the only new political organization in a long time to break the blockade of the electoral mechanism without caste-, religion-, or ethnicity-based mobilization. Nevertheless, it is a known fact that Delhi's distinction as a city-state has aided this development.

The AAP is a growing challenger for existing Pan-India parties. Around a decade ago, it entered the political arena as a political start-up. The AAP's leaders have projected Arvind Kejriwal as a national leader and the next prime minister several times. Mainstream media and political experts view the AAP as a serious challenger to the BJP and the INC. With that arise three questions: one, does the AAP have the potential to pose a serious challenge to the hegemony of the BJP and become a national alternative? Two, why is AAP considered as a potential alternative on the national front but no other party is discussed as a contender and, three, how can the AAP become a major party in the next general election when it is absent in the current 17th Lok Sabha? This study analyses the trajectory, electoral campaigns, and performance of the AAP and its strategy for the upcoming elections.

Anti-Corruption Movements in India

Demand for Lokpal

In the 1960s, corruption stories were heard for the first time in Indian politics. The demand for a *Lokpal*—an anti-corruption

ombudsperson—was first tabled in the Nehru era. Dr LM Singhvi proposed the ombudsman for the first time in Lok Sabha in 1963. A committee was formed under the chairmanship of Morarji Desai for recommendations. The *Lokpal* Bill was passed in Lok Sabha in 1969 but could not get the approval of the Rajya Sabha. The Indira Gandhi government introduced the bill for *Lokpal* and *Lokayukta*—a parliamentary ombudsperson—in 1971, the Charan Singh government introduced it in 1977, and the Rajiv Gandhi government presented the bill in 1985. However, none of them was passed by the Indian parliament. Besides that, the *Lokpal* Bills were also introduced on the floor of parliament in 1989, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2005, and 2008, but just like before, they never reached the approval stage.¹

The JP Movement

Jayaprakash Narayan, an independence activist, is remembered for his opposition to the Indira Gandhi administration. He had given a clarion call for *Sampooran Kranti* (total revolution) against the authoritarianism of the Congress government, bad governance, and increasing systematic corruption. He started agitation alongside the youth of Gujarat and Bihar. Many current leaders of various parties that broke away from the Janata Dal consider themselves products of JP Narayan's movement. Raj Narain sued Indira Gandhi for electoral malpractices in her constituency elections and the Allahabad High Court found her guilty. She imposed an emergency and took all the movement's leaders into custody. However, the movement did not stop, and Congress lost the 1977 election. The Janata Party which was the product of the movement came into power but could not survive and Congress returned to power in 1980.²

India Against Corruption

The continuity of civilian governments in India has developed a culture of democracy. After the liberalization of the economy in India, a new generation of the middle class has come into existence that is well-educated and settled in urban areas. Democracy has issues

as it has been linked with the free market. There is a general perception that people who are not sponsored, lose elections. The elite is, thus, perceived to dominate the system, maintain the status quo, and offer very little to the middle class. Moreover, corruption is also a predicament in India, like any other post-colonial state which, at times, pushes ordinary people to exert pressure directly on the political system. India Against Corruption is an example of such a demonstration when people from all walks of life marched against corrupt and autocratic governance.³

India saw a series of nationwide protests against corruption in 2011-12. The nation was united under a loose coalition named India Against Corruption. The one unified demand of the movement was the establishment of Jan *Lokpal* (Public Ombudsman) through an Act of parliament. The movement was based on *Gandhi Giri* as it was non-violent and consisted of hunger strikes, rallies, general strikes, and civil disobedience. It was a completely non-partisan movement, as they were marching against every corrupt politician. Kisan Baburao Hazare, a social activist and devoted Gandhian, was the public face of the movement. He was popularly called Anna Hazare and the movement was also known as Anna Andolan (Anna's movement).

Anna Hazare went on a hunger strike on 5 April 2011 at Jantar Mantar¹ to pressure the federal government to pass the bill establishing the Jan Lokpal. He announced that the hunger strike would continue until the bill was passed. Anna's hunger strike gathered support from civil society, opposition parties, and the masses. Anna declared his movement was completely apolitical, so people appeared in large numbers at Jantar Mantar to support him, calling themselves 'Team Anna'. Thousands of people rallied in anti-corruption marches in Delhi, Bengaluru, Ahmedabad, Chennai, and Mumbai. Anna's close companions were N. Santosh Hegde, a former judge; Prashant Bhushan, a lawyer in Supreme Court; Swami Agnivesh,

¹ A heritage park in New Delhi.

a social activist; and Arvind Kejriwal, a former bureaucrat and social activist. Usually, people from the film industry do not show their political affiliation. However, the movement was at such a peak that prominent actors like Amir Khan and Anupam Kher supported the anti-corruption cause. The Prime Minister appointed a panel of senior ministers to discuss the draft of the bill with Anna, along with his team of legal experts. Anna succeeded in keeping ministers facing corruption allegations out of the committee.

On 8 April, the Ministry of Law and Justice issued a notification of a committee comprising five ministers and five representatives of civil society. Pranab Mukherjee (Chairperson), P. Chidambaram, Salman Khurshid, Kapil Sibal, and Veerappa Moily were from the government side. Five civil society representatives were Anna, Shanti Bhushan (Co-chairperson), Arvind Kejriwal, Prashant Bhushan, and Santosh Hegde. Anna ended his fast after the formation of the committee. He declared 15 August as the deadline for the passage of the *Lokpal* bill. The draft prepared by the joint committee was sent to the Union cabinet for approval. Team Anna quit the committee in protest upon excluding the Prime Minister and CBI from *Lokpal* jurisdiction. Union cabinet gave its approval on 28 July. Anna accused the government of sending a weaker bill to parliament. He sent a letter to the prime minister to withdraw this bill and propose a stronger one. Despite Anna's protests, the bill was approved by the Lok Sabha.

Anna gave a call on 16 August of fast-unto-death at Jantar Mantar. However, police refused to permit a protest at Jantar Mantar. Upon not surrendering to the police, Anna, Arvind Kejriwal, and hundreds of his supporters were taken into custody and sent to Tihar Jail. People showed their solidarity with Team Anna, brought them food, and paid them visits to Tihar Jail. Even the families of jail staff provided food and water to supporters of Anna. This kind of gesture of solidarity was unprecedented in India. Anna's supporters organized a peaceful march from India Gate to Jantar Mantar on 17 August. This

demonstration pushed the government back and allowed Anna to fast at Ramlila Maidan. Anna left Tihar jail and went to Rajghat (now Kartavya Path) to pay tribute to Mahatma Gandhi and then to Ramlila Maidan with his followers. Arvind Kejriwal appealed to the government to withdraw the *Sarkari* (government) bill and include their recommendations. Anna started his fast in front of thousands of people at Ramlila Maidan. Team Anna staged sit-ins outside MPs' and ministers' houses across the country.

On the fifth day of the fast, Anna's health began declining. Congress sent Pranab Mukherjee to negotiate. He negotiated with Arvind Kejriwal, Kiran Bedi, and Prashant Bhushan for two hours but failed to generate consensus. Anna's health was a matter of great concern. However, he remained strong despite old age and sickness. The UPA government stated that Anna's demands would be included in the bill. Anna ended his fast and suspended his movement. However, when the government presented the bill in parliament, it only met the demand of bringing the prime minister under *Lokpal*. Anna called the entire government and political leadership cheaters.

After that, Anna announced holding a fast on MMRDA grounds in Mumbai from 27 December. However, people did not gather as per the expectations of Team Anna, so they had to call off the movement. Public interest in movements started declining as the bill had already been presented in parliament. After a gap of six months, Anna and his companions decided to demonstrate another fast at Jantar Mantar in Delhi in July 2012. Anna could not fast due to his health issues. His deputies, Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia, and Gopal Rai, took charge and started a hunger strike. Noticeably, public turnout was not as strong as expected. Kejriwal ended his fast after ten days on 3 August. He thanked all his supporters and stated that systematic change is required and that we must fight this war inside the legislature. Anna disagreed with him and remained stuck on his path of protests and public awareness. Whereas, Kejriwal chose to establish a political party.

On this contradiction, Anna disbanded his team on 6 August and the movement formally ended.⁴

The Birth of the AAP

All revolutionary movements have a limited lifespan. From a political sociology perspective, when a movement starts fading out, the possible ways to revitalize it are either to change the leader, change the demands, or change the nature of the movement. The first two methods were not possible in the case of India Against Corruption, but the last one was adopted by Arvind Kejriwal. The movement suffered a split when Arvind Kejriwal asserted the option of entering electoral politics. Anna, who had struggled throughout his life in peaceful and apolitical ways, was reluctant to join politics. Arvind Kejriwal argued that they had tried everything, but nothing worked with these political leaders. It was when most of the political parties lost their credibility and politics was criminalized and monetized. Arvind Kejriwal conducted an online survey to find people's opinions on forming a political party; 76% voted in favour of a political party.⁵ Arvind Kejriwal laid the foundation of the Aam Aadmi Party on 2 October 2012, the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. The Party was launched in a public rally on 26 November 2012, the Constitution Day of India. AAP's foundation was laid on issues of governance and corruption but it lacked the base of ideology or identity politics issues.

Delhi Conquest

Chalegi Jhadu, Udegi Dhool; Na Rahega Panja, Na Rahega Phool

The Aam Aadmi Party debuted in the Delhi Legislative Assembly elections in 2013. The party arose to challenge both the BJP and the INC. The Congress Party had ruled in Delhi for three consecutive terms. AAP's slogan was *Chalegi Jhadu, Udegi Dhool; Na Rahega Panja, Na Rahega Phool* (The broom will clean up the hand and the lotus—the electoral symbols of the AAP, INC, and BJP,

respectively). The campaign was based on corruption, governance issues, electricity prices, and education. The AAP won 28 seats, the BJP 31, and the Congress 8. However, the BJP failed to form a government despite having a majority in the assembly. Whereas, the AAP formed the government with the external support of eight MLAs of Congress. Arvind Kejriwal became the Chief Minister of Delhi and took oath at Ramlila Maidan. Nevertheless, the AAP government resigned after 49 days when they failed to introduce the *Jan Lokpal* Bill because Congress and the BJP both opposed the *Lokpal* legislation. In these 49 days, the AAP announced half-billing for those who consumed less than 400 units, free electricity for those who consume less than 200 units, 700 litres of water for a household without charges, and established helplines for reporting corruption and power cuts.⁶

The AAP enjoyed enormous media coverage throughout its campaign because the party was a product of a nationwide movement. The statistical significance of Delhi is limited as Delhi's population is only 1.4 per cent of the total population of India and has only seven seats in the Lok Sabha. Delhi, however, is the national capital territory, the biggest economic hub in North India, and hosts the headquarters of several media houses, so it added to the significance of the AAP.⁷

Paanch Saal Kejriwal

AAP's slogan in the 2015 Delhi state elections was *Paanch Saal Kejriwal* (Kejriwal for five years). They wanted to assure their voters that the AAP would complete its tenure this time. Arvind Kejriwal apologized to voters for quitting after only 49 days. The AAP swept the assembly by winning 67 seats out of 70 and got votes from all the communities. To counter Arvind Kejriwal, the BJP appointed Kiran Bedi—a former Anna Hazare associate—as the CM face, but the strategy backfired. This portrayed Kiran Bedi as an opportunist who was not committed to fighting corruption. It was a victory that stunned everyone because the AAP was a young party and had

defeated the BJP, which had won the general elections a year before and four state elections that year. The party presented a 70-point manifesto after consultation with voters from every constituency.⁸

Delhi's economy saw a certain increase after the AAP took over. Delhi's budget, which was in deficit, turned into a surplus. In the education sector, the AAP promised to build 500 new schools to give children from all sections of society an equal opportunity for quality education. They could build only 30 schools due to land shortage but added around twenty thousand classrooms to the existing ones. The education budget of Delhi had gone up every year. The AAP made education free up to the 12th grade, increased scholarships, and regulated private school fees. In 2020, the Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra Ajit Pawar praised Delhi's school education and decided to adopt the same model in his state.⁹ The Aam Aadmi Mohalla (neighbourhood) Clinic was the government's flagship project in the healthcare sector. It was the lowest tier in the three-tiered healthcare system promised by the AAP. Mohalla clinics are delivering at the grassroots level. 83 per cent of their patients come from families with annual incomes lower than INR 250,000.¹⁰ Madhya Pradesh government decided to adopt the Delhi Mohalla Clinic in its cities.¹¹ Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and former Norwegian President Gro Harlem Brundtland visited the mohalla clinics in Delhi and were deeply impressed.¹² The AAP government has given a full subsidy to a household that consumes electricity of fewer than 200 units and a fifty per cent subsidy to those who consume less than 400 units. They had also promised 20,000 litres of water for every household per month and around 1.3 million households are provided free water 24/7. Public transport is free for women now and will be free for students in the next phase.¹³

Achhe Beete Paanch Saal, Lage Raho Kejriwal

In 2020, the Aam Aadmi Party was re-elected with a resounding majority in Delhi. The AAP clinched 62 seats out of 70. The

BJP won the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, while the AAP failed miserably, even from Delhi. However, Modi's charisma could not work in the Delhi state elections, but Kejriwal's did. The elections showed that state elections are always contested on issues of locality and governance, unlike the general elections. As the Delhi model was a huge success for the AAP, the slogan the AAP chanted in campaigns was, *Achhe Beete Paanch Saal, Lage Raho Kejriwal* (we had good five years, keep up the good work Kejriwal).¹⁴ The AAP also ended the BJP's win streak in the Delhi Municipal Corporation elections. It secured the majority in the MCD polls in 2022.

Victory in Punjab

Punjab is a state where two of the oldest parties, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and the Congress, have been in power for a long time. Even in its most muscular electoral wave, the BJP could not get significant votes in Punjab. The AAP clinched an overwhelming victory in Punjab by winning 92 seats out of 117 in the 2022 state elections. Earlier in 2017, the AAP could win only 20 seats in Punjab, which granted it state party status in the state. Farmers in Punjab marched towards Delhi over the farm laws and forced Narendra Modi to repeal them. The INC won the 2017 elections but it failed to capture anti-BJP sentiments in its favour in 2022. The people of Punjab were desperately looking for a third option for better governance and development. The primary factor that led to the huge victory of AAP was the 'Delhi Model'. Other factors that pushed public opinion in favour of the Aam Aadmi Party were unemployment, economic disillusionment, and dissatisfaction over health and education.¹⁵ Arvind Kejriwal promised 24-hour electricity, education for all, free healthcare, drug control, maintenance of law and order, and employment. However, unlike Delhi, there is a tough road ahead for the AAP in the state. Punjab was once one of India's wealthiest and most prosperous states, but its economy has declined for the last two

decades. The Delhi Model can only be implemented if the economy of Punjab is fixed.¹⁶

Elections in Goa and Gujarat: Gains for the AAP

The Aam Aadmi Party contested elections in Goa and Gujarat in 2017. It could not win any seat in either state. It participated again in the 2022 elections. It got a 6% overall vote percentage and two seats in Goa, which made it eligible to be recognized as a state party in Goa. Gujarat elections were concluded on 8 December 2022 and the BJP registered its highest margin victory by winning 156 seats out of 182. Congress dropped to 17 seats from 59 and the AAP won 5 seats, securing an overall 12 per cent vote share. The ratio of these results fulfils the requirements of the AAP becoming a state party in the fourth state and ultimately getting the label of a national political party. Gujarat is the home state of Narendra Modi and the fortress of the BJP. The AAP had run a fierce campaign in Gujarat to showcase its presence in the state. The AAP had moved all its focus on the Gujarat elections despite contesting in Himachal Pradesh at the same time because challenging the BJP and Narendra Modi would catch more attention nationwide.¹⁷ The AAP had no presence in Gujarat before, but Kejriwal made it look like a BJP versus AAP election in the media.

Turn towards Hindutva

Hindus make up 80 per cent of the population of India. In almost every constituency, they are in the majority and if not they have a significant vote share. The Hindutva ideology is based on naïve and simplistic principles that allow no questions and no doubts. It is like a straitjacket, the hardest form of ideology. Hindutva has become the strongest factor in Indian electoral politics. The BJP has been winning elections by targeting Hindu voters and marginalizing minorities. It has been the basic ideology of RSS, the parent organization of the BJP, since its inception. Congress has been firm on its founding principles of secularism. Therefore, in the BJP's Hindutva

wave, Congress fails to acquire votes. However, the AAP appears unafraid to follow the BJP's blueprint to woo Hindu voters.¹⁸ Arvind Kejriwal declared himself a 'Hanuman Bhakt' (a devotee of Lord Hanuman) before the elections in 2020. Similarly, the AAP refrained from discussing the repeal of Article 370 concerning the special status of the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), Bilkis Bano, and Citizenship Amendment Act. The Delhi government also installed a temporary replica model of Ram Mandir Ayodhya in Delhi, where Arvind Kejriwal and his cabinet celebrated Diwali.¹⁹ Arvind Kejriwal has also once demanded that goddess Lakshmi's and Lord Ganesh's pictures are on currency notes. The politics in India has turned right as the BJP's saffron wave is at its peak and it turns out to be the biggest factor in electoral politics. The AAP is following the Hindu majoritarian footprints of the BJP to extend its political power.²⁰

AAP: A Potential Contender

India claims to be the largest democracy in the world, as it is home to 1.2 billion people. Political parties are the backbone of the democratic system. The Election Commission of India (ECI) currently recognizes only eight national political parties in India. Those are the Indian National Congress, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), the Communist Party of India (CPI), the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), the National People's Party (NPP), and the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC). All others are state political parties. To attain the status of a national party, it must win 3% of total seats in Lok Sabha from four states or must be recognized in four states.

The Indian National Congress (INC), which led the movement for independence, has dominated Indian politics for almost six decades after independence. Many state parties came into existence after the splits in national parties. When Congress split in the late 1960s, its breakaway factions were united against the Indira Gandhi administration. Later, the Janata Party was formed by merging all

those political parties that had broken off from the INC. The Janata Party went on to win the 1977 Lok Sabha elections and Morarji Desai, a former senior member of Congress, became the Prime Minister. However, the party could not survive due to internal splits. Bhartiya Jana Sangh was one of the parties that merged into the Janata Party. When the Janata Party was dissolved, Bhartiya Jana Sangh succeeded in founding a new party, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), which has held the office of Prime Minister since 2014. In 1988, the Janata Dal was built from the ashes of the Janata Party under the leadership of VP Singh. With the support of the Bhartiya Janata Party, VP Singh became prime minister in 1989. However, the government lasted only two years after the BJP withdrew its support. The Janata Dal eventually split into several factions. In June 1996, HD Deve Gowda of the Janata Dal (Secular), a faction of the Janata Dal, became India's 11th Prime Minister.

The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), a state party based in Tamil Nadu, was founded in 1949 and inherited the Tamil nationalist ideology from the South Indian Liberation Front. The DMK is the third-largest party in the 17th Lok Sabha with 24 seats. The All India Trinamool Congress is the fourth-largest party in the 17th Lok Sabha with 23 seats. Mamata Banerjee's AITC has been the ruling party in West Bengal for the third consecutive term since 2011. AITC has been recognized as a national political party by the Election Commission, but it has not won any state other than West Bengal. The Yuvajana Shramika Rythu (YSR) Congress Party, a Congress breakaway faction, based in Andhra Pradesh, has 22 seats and fifth-largest in Lok Sabha. Shiv Sena is a Hindu and Marathi nationalist political party, currently the sixth-largest in the Lok Sabha with 19 seats. Shiv Sena could only spread within Maharashtra.

Talking about current national parties, the Bahujan Samaj Party has only ten seats in the Lok Sabha. The BSP is based in Uttar Pradesh and focuses on the rights of scheduled castes and backward

classes. Despite holding the office of Chief Minister Uttar Pradesh for a brief period, the party has failed miserably in the last two state elections. Other national parties in Lok Sabha include the NCP, CPI-M, CPI, and NPP have only five, three, two, and one seats, respectively. Oddly, many state parties have more Lok Sabha seats than many of the national parties. The major difference between state and national parties lies in their manifestos. Most state parties are confined to states because their agenda is based on language, ethnicity, or nationalism, like the DMK, which has never stepped outside the Tamil region.

The AAP is now all set to be recognized by the ECI as a national party and is also standing on zero in Lok Sabha. However, with its landslide victory in Punjab, the AAP has emerged as a strong contender in national politics. Political experts wonder if the AAP could seriously challenge the BJP's hegemony. Except for the BJP, the INC, and the AITC, all other national parties have consistently failed in general and state elections. In the case of AITC, it is obvious that the AAP has nationwide appeal due to its background of India Against Corruption which the AITC lacks. Arvind Kejriwal has a better image as CM than Mamata Banerjee. Moreover, the AITC, despite having national party status, has never won outside West Bengal.²¹ The AAP is distinct from other parties in terms of its origin and evolution. Mostly parties were formed from broken factions of the INC and the Janata Party, veteran politicians became their heads but these parties have been failing in state and general elections consistently. The AAP emerged from a mass movement, headed by social activists and has won in two significant states of India. Thus, the AAP appears to be a stronger party than any other.

The Challenge of Lok Sabha

The Aam Aadmi Party has done well in state elections in the last decade but failed miserably in general elections. Arvind Kejriwal and the AAP have gained popularity across India since the anti-corruption movement of 2011-12. Despite their popularity, attractive

manifestos, and achievements of the Delhi Model, they have failed in the Lok Sabha elections. The AAP contested 432 seats in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections but could win only 4 seats. In 2019, AAP could win only one seat after contesting 35 seats.

The BJP is at its peak and Congress is campaigning all over India. To counter them, the AAP needs resources and enthusiastic workers for the Lok Sabha elections in 2024. The AAP is yet to develop as an institution because the grassroots structure is non-existent. Arvind Kejriwal laid the party foundation a decade ago and since then the party has been revolving around his personality. The party had volunteers initially but could not transform them into a political cadre.²² Contesting more than five hundred seats on freebies and urban development agenda without enough resources and political workers looks impossible on paper. The AAP's leader Sanjay Singh said after the Gujarat polls that 2024 would be Narendra Modi versus Arvind Kejriwal. It sounds quite over-ambitious because the ground realities do not favour them. The AAP has always twisted the media with these statements because it is critical to remain relevant in the media to stay in electoral politics. Kejriwal's strategy would be targeting more state elections for the party's expansion, taking on Congress in 2024, and his ultimate target would be the BJP in the Lok Sabha elections of 2029.²³

Arvind Kejriwal's Leadership and Strategies

Arvind Kejriwal is a former income tax department official who became a social worker. He was disillusioned over corruption in government departments. He launched an NGO, 'Parivartan', to raise his voice over corruption issues. He also participated in the 2001 'Right to Information' campaign. When Anna Hazare launched India Against Corruption movement, he joined it and became a close and trusted companion of Anna. Kejriwal decided to establish a political party when the movement could not achieve the desired outcomes after trying every peaceful protest option. Arvind Kejriwal laid the

foundation of the Aam Aadmi Party and led the party to a minority government after its very first election. Kejriwal influenced Indian politics by highlighting corruption and governance issues and making them a national agenda. His narrative represents a populist approach, resonating with the common people and their interests.

Arvind Kejriwal was neither a politician nor had any background in politics but under his leadership, the party has won Delhi three times. It won in Punjab, and now it is all set to get recognized as a national political party. Kejriwal's leadership has an institutional base inside the party. He has been central to formulating and implementing strategies for the AAP. He contested elections consecutively for the party's growth and the strategy proved useful. He achieved his ambitious objectives in Delhi and rose like a game-changer. He branded himself as an ordinary citizen, wearing a muffler and a Gandhi cap. Arvind Kejriwal utilized social media for party promotion and his branding. Arvind Kejriwal and the party's connectivity with followers is very strong due to its active website and social media team. The AAP's social media strategy was unique and the first of its kind in Indian politics.²⁴

Arvind Kejriwal has become the face of the AAP. He has led the party successfully, but his centralized leadership is one of the biggest hurdles the AAP would face to expand nationwide. The party has been transforming into a cult. The AAP's former members have labelled Arvind Kejriwal as an autocrat. The party's ambition to become a national alternative will be achieved if the leadership is decentralized. Other parties are restricted to a state or two only because of their identity politics agenda or their autocratic leadership.

Conclusion

Congress has dominated Indian politics for almost six decades. It started declining after it peaked. Several parties have challenged the domination of Congress, but those parties ultimately diminished. The BJP overtook the Congress and now looks like the only formidable

national-level political player. The AAP, a relatively young but ambitious player, is now challenging the dominance of the BJP. Looking at the present political landscape, the AAP appears to be emerging as a significant candidate, filling a gap on a national scale. The performance of the Congress and the Trinamool has given the party an excellent political chance to grow. The AAP is popular due to its Delhi Model, especially in North India. However, its organizational structure and network beyond North India are very weak and the party needs a long-term strategy to develop an organization to fight older parties.²⁵

It is crucial to clarify that the Aam Aadmi Party will not usher in a revolution. The party, which resigned in just 49 days over failing in the basic agenda on which they got elected, has transformed into an orthodox player of power politics. A party that received overwhelming support from Dalits and a sizeable number of OBCs in 2015 and 2020, is dominated by higher castes among its leadership and legislators. Similarly, despite strong female support, just about 13 per cent of the elected MLAs are female. More shockingly, for a party that purports to represent the 'ordinary man' and new methods of doing politics, the character of its spokespeople has shifted dramatically.²⁶

The AAP concentrates on civic issues. It emphasizes services and delivery but has been silent on rights violations, civil liberties, and political issues. It has never taken a stand on democratic values and rights. It has never condemned communal violence. Arvind Kejriwal has criticized Modi and the BJP for economic policies several times. However, he has never criticized Modi's Hindu supremacist policies like Rahul Gandhi. Arvind Kejriwal and his team members have never spoken for democracy. They only talk about governance, corruption, and freebies. A party without an ideology can be instrumental. It can go either this way or that. The AAP needs ideology so that its members know what they stand for and what they stand against. As long as the AAP keeps itself from taking a stand on democratic values and rights,

its position will remain that of a service provider, not a political party. The approach that the AAP can go left or right wherever its interest lies should be abandoned.²⁷

As the BJP's saffron politics pivot on its narrative of Hindutva and remain fashionable, Arvind Kejriwal has come up with a strategy of soft Hindutva. Kejriwal wants to make hay while the sun shines. However, Kejriwal cannot break the hegemony of the BJP using these tactics by going on a solo ride. Opposition parties need to partner with each other to defeat the BJP. The AAP and the INC are major parties after the BJP, and both are poles apart. Their alliance is out of the equation for now. As a result, despite AAP's possibilities, it is too soon to declare it a national alternative. Time, performance, and collaboration will determine the future. Becoming the country's main opposition rests primarily on the party's ability to create an accessible and performing political paradigm.²⁸

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