

## The female voter has shifted the arc of electoral politics

Women listed the benefits received (ration, gas and the latest promise of ₹1,000 with her newly made “e-Shram card”) as a rationale for their vote to BJP. While the male voted more on inflation and unemployment.



### Assertive and Independent female vote: Welfare and Charismatic Personality Mix

1. This distinction between the preferences of female and male household members, the emotive connection with Modi and the expressed trust in the promise of welfare benefits was a repeated theme in Uttar Pradesh (UP). This trust has been carefully nurtured over the years.
2. In 2017, Ujjwala — the scheme providing gas cylinders for free — was the instrument for forging a connection and trust among the female vote base. In 2022, it was the Public Distribution System or free ration.
3. This process has melded the strength of the BJP's party cadre with the deification of the Prime Minister (PM) to make welfare delivery, with Narendra Modi as its provider, an effective tool for the political mobilization of women.
4. The narrative constructed around the PM and the affinity many female voters expressed point to an important shift in electoral politics that needs reckoning.

### Female Vote versus the identity, caste-based dynamic

1. The emergence of the female voter as a critical vote bank defies the framework of the identity, caste-based dynamic that has dominated our understanding of politics (particularly in North India).
2. The narratives in eastern UP point to the emergence of a new politics built around the person (Modi) rather than the issue, using the prodigious resources of the party to deify the leader — what political scientist Neelanjan Sircar has called “the politics of Vishwas (trust).”

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3. The female voter is emerging as the foundation of Vishwas politics, with a clear articulation of the female labharthi (beneficiary) of schemes directed specifically at her.
4. A large number of female voters with Jan Dhan accounts recalled receiving funds in their accounts during the first Covid-19 lockdown.
5. The Ujjwala scheme, despite the fact that most beneficiaries do not have the means to refill cylinders, is still popular and its link with Modi is alive in female voter narratives. It is this direct attribution that has been the primary strategy to mobilize female voters.
6. While women often pointed out that ration benefits cannot compensate for joblessness or increased prices, it still provided a reason to vote for the BJP and fit neatly into a narrative that saw the PM as a protector in times of crisis.
7. Cultivating the woman vote through personalistic politics and welfare delivery is not unique to the BJP.

According to Lokniti, there was a seven percentage point gap between women's and men's support for Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress over the BJP in last year's West Bengal elections. In Bihar, too, a similar strategy has been effective for Nitish Kumar.

### **A new trend in the political landscape:**

1. These discernible political preferences between women and men, which the BJP has effectively mobilized, is emerging as the new cleavage in our electoral landscape. It is also different from the politics of caste which was embedded in a narrative of dignity and rights.
2. In the current framing, women are being cast as labharthi linked to personalized politics. Its long-term impact on democracy needs greater examination.

The presence of female voters as a critical vote bank has shifted the arc of electoral politics. The Mandal-Mandir framework which was used to analyze so much of Indian politics has less resonance with the female voter than the emotive appeal of leaders. It is time we take these distinctions seriously.