

# **Populism and Political Parties in Asia: A Comparison of Aam Admi Party (AAP) in India and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in Japan**

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## **Abstract**

Populism is one of the most popular techniques used by Asian political parties. Political parties use this tactic through socio-political movements not only for the larger good of society but also for their own narrow goals. This article investigates two separate political parties from India and Japan. Populist policies have both beneficial and harmful effects on politics. The given promises often failed to address the grievances of the voters. A significant civil society movement propelled the Aam Admi Party (AAP) to political status. It began as a non-political entity and evolved into a political one. Following the formation of AAP, the issue of civil society as a non-political entity arose. The AAP is a regional party that holds power in two Indian states, focusing its populist policies on local issues. As a national party, the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP) is comparatively old and addresses pertinent national issues, like national security. The quality of politics and socio-economic dynamics of the two countries are different. This paper argues that populism as a tool cannot always be beneficial for the political culture of a country. The wide gap between the promises and implementation often creates discontent among the voters. This paper will attempt to delineate the different scenarios of the populist policies of the AAP of India and the LDP of Japan using the content analysis method.

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## **Key Words**

Populism, social movement, Aam Admi Party, politics, India, Japan, Liberal Democratic Party

## **Introduction**

Populism is a political concept that has received significant consideration in recent decades. It alludes to the political philosophy that pits the interests and values of the common people against those of the elite or the establishment. Populist movements have developed in several countries and are now the subject of scholarly interest. It emphasizes the views and concerns of mass people, often in opposition to those of the ruling class. Populist politicians often appeal to the emotions and fears of their supporters and present themselves as champions of the common people. Populism may take many different forms, from right-wing populism, which stresses nationalism and cultural identity, to left-wing populism which emphasizes economic inequality and social justice. Populism has become a global phenomenon. The tactics of populism of the *Aam Admi Party* (AAP) of India and the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP) are chosen to understand the socio-political dynamics of the two different systems.

The literature on populism in South Asia is limited, particularly about the emergence of populism from social movements with political agendas. This paper aims to address this gap by focusing on the political formation of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in India, which originated from a powerful anti-corruption movement led by social activist Anna Hazare. Populism is conceptualized as a “style of politics”. This paper analyzes the images, symbols, political style, and policies used by the AAP to advance its populist politics since coming to power in the New Delhi government in 2014. It argues that the support for the AAP’s populist politics, which lacks a definite ideology, is a reaction of the urban poor and middle-class people towards the political status quo and the limits of market capitalism to induce social and economic change. In a democratic sense, people are citizens who elect their government through polling and demand basic needs and fundamental rights from the government. Some governments follow populist policies to remain in power, often implementing pro-people policies towards marginalized people, women, and elderly citizens. Arvind Kejriwal, the key person of the AAP and the Chief Minister of Delhi, has taken populist policies during his seven-year tenure. The AAP considers “people” in the sense of common masses who were previously dissatisfied with the government due to the non-fulfilment of their rational

demands, the absence of good governance, and the non-securing of human rights. The AAP uses significant party logos, popular propaganda tactics, and agendas to project itself as a popular party and has also used the “soft Hindutva” tool to gain support.

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), one of Japan’s most well-known and enduring political parties, is renowned for its centre-right conservative ideology (McElwain 2014). Founded in 1955, the party has been in power for most of Japan’s post-war history (Tanaka 2007), promoting economic growth, a strong national defence, and traditional values. The LDP was formed as a result of a merger between two conservative parties, the Liberal Party and the Japan Democratic Party (Kohno 2018). The LDP was initially led by Shigeru Yoshida, who served as Japan’s prime minister from 1946 to 1954. Under his leadership, the party promoted a conservative, pro-business agenda, and worked closely with the United States to rebuild Japan’s economy and establish a democratic government (The Economist 2021). The party also played a key role in revising Japan’s constitution, which was enacted in 1947 and remains in force today. LDP uses the policy of populism with promises which could not have been often fulfilled.

These two political entities represent distinct contexts and approaches to populism. The AAP emerged as a grassroots movement in India’s tumultuous political arena, addressing the common person’s grievances. In contrast, the LDP in Japan has employed populism pragmatically to maintain its grip on power while adapting to evolving political landscapes. Through this comparative lens, the paper aims to investigate the nature and strategies of populism of AAP in India and LDP of Japan and to delineate the differences between AAP and LDP. To find out those objectives, the paper addresses three major research questions: 1) What are the nature and strategies of AAP? (2) Which tactics are used by the LDP of Japan in electoral politics? And (3) What are the similarities and dissimilarities between the AAP and LDP?

This comparative study investigates how populism is viewed through the perspective of two prominent political parties in two friendly democratic countries. Thereby, it employs a qualitative method and inductive research approach, combining document analysis and case studies to undefine the objective of this research. While this study relies on secondary data, we have taken diligent measures to ensure research ethics. We have acquired the necessary data for this study through web research, encompassing journals, newspapers, articles, blogs, and pertinent sources. We also gathered secondary data from official party documents, manifestos, and electoral outcomes. Case studies focus on the AAP’s

rise in Indian politics and the LDP's long-standing dominance in Japan. Furthermore, comparative analysis involves identifying key populist strategies, their impact on electoral success, and their influence on policy formulation. Finally, to address the research questions, two broad themes have been developed to define AAP's and LDP's different forms of populist engagements.

### **AAP and Populist Style of Politics**

The Aam Admi Party (AAP) has implemented a populist policy in a nationalistic manner, which has been successful in mobilizing the Indian population in the anti-corruption movement and promoting good governance in Delhi. These two elements hold significant importance in the Indian context, as they reflect the people's understanding of actual nationalism as a corruption-free administration that serves the people. Arvind Kejriwal's approach to populism differs from others, as evidenced by his re-election in February 2020, which demonstrated that his previous tenure was a reflection of genuine nationalism. The voters of Delhi have given their mandate to Kejriwal's model of governance based on his performance, which has attracted common civilians, intellectuals, and marginalized people. The elite, who typically maintain a distance from the common people and play a decisive role in decision-making, have also become supportive of Kejriwal's approach (Ashraf and Sharma 2010). The AAP has successfully mobilized non-resident Indians (NRIs) on a large scale, both as potential voters and party campaigners. However, the party's fundraising methods have been criticized by Kejriwal's mentor, Anna Hazare, and others, as AAP has solicited donations on its website to address its financial crisis (Iwanek 2017).

### ***Symbols and Images of Populist Politics***

Arvind Kejriwal came into the limelight of the media during the anti-corruption movement for the Jan Lokpal Bill in 2011 and 2012 under the leadership of Anna Hazare. His role in anti-corruption movements in a non-violent manner gave him huge popularity and acceptability in India. The civil movement, later on, converted into a political movement through the formation of a political party. In 2012, he launched the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), also known as the Common Men's Party. A long day ago Arvid Kejriwal launched a movement for social change which he had named *Parivartan* (Change). The basic objectives of the movement were assisting citizens in navigating income tax, electricity, and food ration

matters in parts of Delhi. The AAP was started by a first-time politician and had no connections with any age-old political party. The founders of the party were a part of the India Against Corruption (IAC) movement led by veteran activist Anna Hazare. Kejriwal formed AAP on November 26, 2012. It was recognized by the Election Commission in March 2013. AAP was recognized as a 'state party' with a symbol of broom in the state assembly election of 2013 after getting over 30% of the total polled votes. As per Indian Election Commission's norms to be recognized as a state party, a party must have to get a minimum of 8% of the valid votes polled in the entire state or secure a minimum of six per cent of the total votes polled and one Assembly seat for every 30 seats in that State. On December 28, 2013, Arvind Kejriwal took an oath of office as Delhi's seventh Chief Minister at a big rally in Delhi's historic Ramlila Maidan. At the age of 45 years four months and 14 days, he became the second-youngest Chief Minister of Delhi and the fourth-youngest chief minister in the history of India (Kumar 2014).

The AAP was founded by anti-corruption activist Arvind Kejriwal with the unique symbol of a broom. The party's name is derived from the Hindi language and reflects its aim to serve the interests of the common masses, without any elitist element. The broom symbolizes the eradication of corruption from society and represents transparency (Lahiri 2013). The prevailing nationwide discontent with the UPA-II government provided an opportunity for Kejriwal to position himself as the best alternative for the common people. The selection of the broom as the party symbol was a real-time decision made by the Aam Aadmi Party during a time when the Indian people were seeking an alternative. According to party spokesman Manish Sisodia, the broom is a sufficient symbol to convey the party's motives. He further justifies this by stating that Indian households clean their homes in the morning, and the Indian parliament and state assemblies are similar to houses that require cleaning. Therefore, the broom can be used to clean these houses. The election was hotly contested, with the main parties using various conventional and innovative campaigning methods to appeal to voters.

The AAP's electoral strategy included positioning itself as the only credible alternative to the BJP and projecting Arvind Kejriwal as the best chief minister candidate. The party's supporters campaigned extensively by singing a song titled "Paanch Sal Kejriwal" (five years of Kejriwal government). The AAP effectively utilized social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, as well as old-style door-to-door campaigning to mobilize people and ask for voter support. The party also experimented

with other campaigning techniques, such as street plays, art competitions, wall art, music videos, Google+ hangouts, innovative posters and slogans, and friendly conversations with commuters in the Delhi Metro by its volunteers. The AAP's use of its party symbol (broom) and Gandhi cap to symbolize cleanliness and non-violence was also noteworthy (Brahmachari 2015).

### ***Soft-Hindutva***

In the February 2020 Assembly Election of Delhi, the AAP emerged victorious, securing 90% of the seats and enabling Arvind Kejriwal to assume the position of Chief Minister of Delhi for a third consecutive term. The election was characterized by a contest between the populist politics of the AAP and the hardline Hindutva ideology of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The BJP-led central government's decision to revoke Article 370 and implement the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC) through constitutional amendments was perceived as a signal of India's shift towards a Hindu state within the ostensibly secular framework. Kejriwal's political platform, however, did not exhibit any overt indications of Hindutva. Nevertheless, criticisms have been raised that Kejriwal resorted to "soft Hindutva" to retain power, given the demographic composition of Delhi and to counter the BJP's religiously charged politics. During the election campaign, the BJP even went so far as to label Kejriwal as a terrorist.

Arvind Kejriwal recently recited the Hanuman Chalisa and hosted an iftar party during the holy month of Ramadan. This was done to project his religious beliefs as an integral part of everyday life and to strengthen social mobility and interactions in a pluralistic country like India. It is noteworthy that in India, individuals are free to comment on the religious practices and motives of politicians, and there exist multiple narratives on this subject. In particular, intellectuals, especially those who identify as secular or left-leaning, may criticize politicians for engaging in religious practices such as temple visits. However, it is common for politicians, except for left-leaning parties, to visit religious places to connect with the masses and understand their sentiments. It is worth noting that most Muslims in India are religious and do not object to Arvind Kejriwal's temple visits.

Following their narrative, adhering to one's Hindu faith is not objectionable. Mahatma Gandhi once remarked that only Leftists romanticize irreligious politics. Arvind Kejriwal has pursued a soft-

nationalist political agenda in Delhi, opting for quasi-Hindutva. Given the BJP's central political issue of the Ram Mandir and the sentiments of Hindu voters, Kejriwal recited the Hanuman Chalisa and visited Hanuman temples to convey his faithfulness to his religion, while simultaneously emulating the BJP's Hindutva politics. During the election campaign, the BJP employed hard Hindutva tactics, criticizing the Shaheen Bagh protest movement, utilizing the police force at Jamia Millia University, and instigating communal riots in various areas of Delhi to secure the majority Hindu vote. Conversely, Kejriwal refrained from commenting on Shaheen Bagh and avoided it during his campaign trail. The AAP prioritizes the concerns and demands of minority groups instead. He justified his worship of Lord Hanuman stating that listening to the *Chalisa* is good and soothing. This should infuriate old-style secular pundits. Kejriwal is perhaps one of the smartest politicians in the opposition camp. He realized the importance of Hindutva politics much before Rahul Gandhi started hopping from one temple to another. AAP won 67 seats in the previous election, limiting the BJP to three and the Congress to zero seats.

The Delhi government has made special arrangements every year for visiting Kanwariyas. Special tents were erected. Posters and banners welcoming Kanwariyas were splashed all over the city. For senior citizens, his government made special provisions for religious pilgrims. This scheme covers all religions, but the basic aims are to lure Hindus. In its manifesto, the AAP promised that in the next five years, ten lakh senior citizens will be accorded a free pilgrimage. Our secular friends will surely call this mixing religion with politics and pursuing soft Hindutva.

In the Indian context, Hindutva represents a cultural ethos that has been strategically employed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the realm of electoral politics. While there is no inherent contradiction between Hindutva and secularism, the ideology has been selectively utilized by certain political parties and organizations in India, leading to an antagonistic relationship between the two. As Bidyut Chakrabarty and Rajendra Kumar Pandey (2017) note, Hindutva has created a support base for the BJP by emphasizing the importance of preserving the cultural heritage of the country, even if it does not conform to modern standards. However, T.N. Madan argues that secularism is a minority-driven concept that seeks to impose its will upon the majority, but lacks the power to do so in a highly organized polity (Madan 2006). It is challenging to level accusations of either hard Hindutva or minority appeasement against Arvind Kejriwal, whose political stance lies somewhere in between the two.

### ***Populist Agendas and Programs***

The success story of the AAP is laid on the populist policy. To get much more support from the people, from the very beginning Kejriwal has taken tactful tactics. With a Gandhian cap, simple lifestyle, mass connection, the symbol of the party, and media use in the propagation of his activities and the party's manifesto, he projected his futuristic view. As the head of the government, the way Kejriwal addressed the basic demands and grievances of the people. Before coming into power as the dweller of Delhi city, he observed all of his predecessor governments had neglected or overlooked the demand of the common masses called *Am Admi* (in Hindi). During the elections campaigning for the 2020 Assembly elections, Kejriwal promised the installation of water in Delhi city, renovation of sewer pipelines, advanced drainage system, construction of roads, and '*mohalla*' clinics in all the unauthorized colonies of the city.

The AAP party asserted that the AAP-led government has diligently addressed the concerns of the Delhi populace concerning their basic needs and amenities over the past five years. Furthermore, the new government intends to introduce additional developmental initiatives in the upcoming term. Kejriwal has placed significant emphasis on the cleanliness of the national capital and has been actively monitoring the state of the roads. During the previous assembly elections campaign, he pledged to transform Delhi into the world's cleanest city within the next five years. Notably, the AAP-led government has made significant strides in enhancing the primary education system, as per their aforementioned commitment. Specifically, Kejriwal's administration has improved the infrastructure of government-run primary schools in Delhi, resulting in a reduction in the number of school dropouts.

Before the Delhi State Assembly Elections 2015, the AAP published a 70-point action plan where the politics of populism was highly manifested. Some of the populist agendas are as follows: 1) Electricity bills for usage up to 400 units were waived and an independent CAG audit of power discos was established; 2) 20,000 litres of lifeline water every month were made free; 3) A SIT was formed to provide justice to victims of the anti-Sikh killings; 4) For empowering economically backward schedule caste and schedule tribe people, 5500 new auto rickshaw permits were issued; 5) As the rise of AAP was based on an anti-corruption movement, to ensure a corruption-free and transparent administration. an anti-corruption helpline was set up for the common people to inform their grievances to the government; 6) The VIP culture of the lifestyle of the leaders and ministers was abolished; and 7) AAP has tried to touch upon all desired demands

of the people to gain mass support. Kejriwal as the leader successfully tried to protect the rights of the marginalized class. By promoting sports, preserving heritage literature resurgence of some important languages like Punjabi, Sanskrit, and Urdu, making a drug-free Delhi, and controlling price rise, AAP tried to hold its popularity. These issues are very touchy and important which is why credit can be given to Kejriwal in addressing these issues in a manner of propaganda.

In the 2020 Assembly Elections, the AAP pursued a populist policy aimed at promoting the welfare of the people. Arvind Kejriwal, the party's leader, projected the issue of human rights in a manner that is appropriate and effective. The protection, preservation, and promotion of human rights are integral to the activities of modern nation-states. India's post-colonial democracy has responded to questions of human rights and human development, particularly for the common people (Mukhopadhyay 2016). The AAP appropriately addressed the issue of human rights and attempted to implement it in a populist manner. The party's populist policy has been evident in its provision of free rides for senior citizens on public buses. Additionally, Kejriwal promised to provide free bus and metro rides for women before the last assembly elections, thereby seeking to garner support from women and senior citizens. Delhi is a city with a high risk of crime against women, and the recurrence of petty crimes and illegal activities highlights the vulnerability of governance. The AAP's role in pursuing a populist policy before the last assembly elections was projected in a highly proactive manner. The Kejriwal government made desperate promises to install CCTV cameras and Wi-Fi hotspots in all areas of Delhi to enhance the security of women. In the months leading up to the assembly elections, the Delhi government was on an overdrive to implement these measures.

Delhi is the most polluted city in India. There is no doubt during the second term of his government Kejriwal took numerous steps to reduce pollution. Air pollution was a key election agenda in Delhi, which was faced with a tremendous level of pollution during the winter. Before the last assembly elections, he emphasized 10 points of development including extending free travel on public transport to students in addition to women currently, basic facilities for unauthorized colonies, good education for students until graduation, affordable and quality healthcare, improved security for women, uninterrupted power supply, and improved cleanliness by ensuring efficient disposal of garbage.

Despite the financial burden, the AAP-led government has continued some unprecedented welfare activities. The opposition and political analysts are divided into two parts regarding the role of Kejriwal for the

common people. Some argue that this is nothing but populism. On the other hand, some opine that Kejriwal is an exceptional Chief Minister in contemporary India. During his last tenure of 5 years, the AAP-led government ensured free lifeline electricity of 200 units and free water for poor people. The politics of populism has a connection with social justice. To ensure social justice, the Constitution of India arranged some privileges for scheduled caste (SC), scheduled tribe (ST), other backward classes, and minorities. In a populist manner, Kejriwal took some initiative to ensure social justice for socially and economically backward classes and castes. According to Subhas Palshikar (2017), “politics over the share of different caste groups began to shape much more because of the failure of a routine democratic process to produce a change in many parts of India” (Palshikar 2017). Kejriwal did not play caste politics.

In Indian politics, there is a trend of capturing power through force or violence. The way AAP came into power for the third time is called non-violent means or populism. Ataul Kohli(1995) rightly observed the nature of Indian politics when he said that “the most obvious indicator of increasing problems of governability in the pursuit of political goals by violent means, either by the state or by its citizens” (Kohli 1995). In this connection, it can be said the path of Kejriwal-led AAP is very much acceptable in comparison to the common acts of other political parties in India.

### ***Failure of Promises***

Over-commitment poses a significant challenge not only for political parties but also for their future activities. The AAP has made numerous promises and announced several projects to address public demands. However, it has been observed that 75% of these promises have not been fulfilled. Prior to the 2020 Assembly Elections, AAP released a manifesto titled the Guarantee Card of Kejriwal or ‘Kejriwal ka Guarantee Card’. An evaluation of the party’s performance in fulfilling the promises made during the 2015 elections reveals that 75% of the commitments were not met. Despite this, Kejriwal was unwilling to accept criticism of his performance and maintained that he had fulfilled most of the promises made in 2015. One of the key promises was to provide piped water to 14 lakh households and ensure access to pure drinking water as water is considered a fundamental right. However, it has been observed that there is a significant disparity in the supply of water between the rich and the poor.

The AAP has been observed to adopt a 'clientelistic' approach in garnering support from voters. However, the party has faced significant financial constraints and a strained relationship with the Central government, which have hindered the fulfillment of pre-electoral promises. Following their ascension to power, the AAP criticized certain media outlets for their biased and unfavorable portrayal of the party. Regrettably, the AAP-led government has been unable to effectively address the COVID-19 pandemic, in that inadequate awareness and sensitization programs were implemented. This resulted in a dire situation in Delhi, where patients were unable to receive timely treatment for COVID-19, despite CM Arvind Kejriwal's public assurances to the contrary. The implementation of measures such as social distancing and public hygiene practices were crucial in mitigating the spread of the virus. Under a neoliberal regime, the traditional relationship between the state and its citizens has been redefined, with social welfare schemes primarily targeting vulnerable groups, rather than the middle class, which comprises individuals employed in the government sector, small trade, and other occupations (Singh and Vhora 2014). Kejriwal has attempted to address the concerns of the general public in a populist manner.

### ***Future of the AAP's populism***

The emergence of Arvind Kejriwal in the Indian political scenario was very surprising to the rest of the veteran political leaders of the decades-old political parties. Through a civil society movement, he became a popular political leader and sucked all light into him to his credit. Much has been written and researched on AAP and its leader. AAP came into power for the third time in a symbiotically significant state, the heart of the country through some populist policies and mass connectivity with a promise of the establishment of good and transparent governance. On the question of good governance, Kejriwal has to face a lot of critical interrogations. His party is still a state party, not a national party. There is no ideological base of this party. This party does not have any strong religious standpoint or not even caste-based consideration. There is no connection between ethnic or class consciousness. There are two basic agendas of this party: (1) corruption-free government, and (2) meeting the basic demands of the people. It has no all-India connectivity and network. The activities of this party are confined within the state of Delhi. It has no impact in neighboring Haryana, UP, and Punjab or anywhere else. It is very difficult to make it a choice for entire nations like the BJP and Congress. BJP is a cadre-based

party with a connection with RSS, the beliefs on the polarization of voting politics in India with a specific outlook of Hindutva.

AAP tried to nominate some candidates in some states in India during the Parliamentary Elections of 2019. The AAP won the provincial elections in Punjab in 2022 through populist propaganda. In the province of Punjab, over 500 *mohalla* (locality) clinics have been established, providing healthcare services to a significant number of individuals. Specifically, between 12 to 15 lakh people have utilized the services offered by these clinics (The Indian Express 2023). The landslide victory of the AAP in Punjab was expected to have a consequential impact on the neighboring state of Haryana. Nonetheless, it is imperative for the party to establish a robust local leadership and organizational framework in order to revitalize its presence in the region (Kumar 2022). Another reason behind the non-flourishment of AAP beyond Delhi is the centralized party system. The process of decision-making within the AAP party is highly centralized, even the coordination between the central leadership and state units is very weak and unorganized. Coalition politics is one of the basic features of Indian politics. To come into power in the center, each party is going for a coalition through pre-poll or post-poll negotiations. In that case minimum, a common program can be a factor of convergence. The success of a coalition in India depends upon the ability of coalition partners to agree on common socio-economic goals (Chakraborty 2014). For the AAP party, it is very difficult to join a coalition considering its way of political mechanism. Without a coalition political arrangement, it is very difficult to play a significant role in national politics in India.

The AAP is purely volunteer-based model which offers a large number of common masses to participate in the activities of the AAP and to join the party (Roy 2014). There are two implications of this model: (1) open-door accession of membership, and (2) without testing the dedication and background if a political party offers membership to unknown persons, then it can be harmful to the party in the long run. It also manifests the structural lacuna.

There is a hope of light in the flourishing of AAP across the country in the future by applying this model in selected urban areas, cities, towns, and rural areas. As the activities and manifesto of the AAP are urban-based, it will have to change its mechanism to spread its organizations across the country. The basic challenges that might be faced by AAP are caste, regional and religious divisions, and equations. The diverse and plural character of Indian society is to be properly understood by the leadership of the AAP as well as political culture. Kejriwal is the key person and the

AAP and other leadership are revolved around him. On the one hand, he is Chief Minister of Delhi and on the other hand, he is the national convener of the party. The capital of this party is image and perception-based. As Wyatt has said, “Arvind Kejriwal has been called a ‘political entrepreneur’ who has refused to accept existing patterns of party competition and used the issue of corruption for political mobilization” (Wyatt 2015).

### **Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) of Japan**

In the 1960s and 1970s, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) shifted towards a more interventionist approach (Winkler 2014), which emphasized government-led economic growth and social welfare. Since the 2000s, the LDP has continued to evolve, and its policies have become more diverse and complex, i.e., environmental protection, gender equality, and regional revitalization. However, it has faced numerous challenges, including corruption scandals (Kitami 2021), factionalism (Olsen 1979), and public dissatisfaction (Rich 2021) with its leadership. In 1993, the LDP lost power for the first time in almost 40 years, as a result of a series of political scandals and a split within the party. It was replaced by a coalition government led by the Japan New Party, but this government was short-lived, and the LDP returned to power in 1994. Besides, there was another short break from 2009 to 2012 when the LDP was not in power. During most of the period, the party held the largest number of seats in the legislature, as well as the prime ministerial position (Umeda 2019). The LDP supports policies that encourage business, promote technological innovation, and preserve Japan’s cultural identity.

### ***LDP’s Populist Style of Politics***

One of the LDP’s political styles is populism, which has played a significant role in shaping Japanese politics and society. The LDP’s populism can be traced back to the party’s founding in 1955. The new party’s leaders realized that they needed to appeal to a broader base of voters, including working-class and rural voters who had been neglected by the previous conservative parties (Umeda 2019). To do so, they adopted a more populist political style, emphasizing their commitment to improving the lives of ordinary people and addressing their concerns.

To mobilize support from farmers, the party candidates first relied on local notables in rural areas (Kabashima and Steel 2018). Due to the influence of the notables, the traditional communities declined. As a

result, the LDP candidates organized *Koenkai* or formed each candidate's support group, which directly engaged constituencies (Umeda 2019). During the crisis, the *Koenkai* expanded even more thanks to the campaign donations received in exchange for public policies. The establishment of *Koenkai* groups (Kraus and Pekkanen 2018) and the pork barrel provision (Winkler 2014) both made significant contributions to the LDP's victory, particularly in rural areas. Pork barrel politics refers to the practice of utilizing public funds to support regional initiatives that benefit particular groups. This strategy has been particularly successful in rural areas, where people frequently place a higher priority on local concerns than on national politics. Also, the LDP has been successful in securing funding for significant public works initiatives like highway and bridge construction, which has aided in promoting economic growth and employment creation. A large redistribution of legislative seats in favor of rural areas resulted in the state maintaining a constant legislative majority (Umeda 2019).

Another aspect of the LDP's populism is its emphasis on maintaining traditional Japanese values and culture (Compton 2020). The party has often presented itself as a defender of Japan's unique identity and way of life, particularly in the face of globalization and cultural homogenization. This has led to focus on promoting traditional Japanese arts and crafts, such as pottery and weaving, as well as preserving historic sites and landmarks. Besides, the LDP's populism has also been characterized by its close ties to business and industry. The party has long been associated with the so-called 'iron triangle' (Feldhoff 2007) of politicians, bureaucrats, and business leaders, who work together to shape economic policy and allocate resources. This has led to a perception that the LDP is more interested in protecting the interests of the business community than in promoting the welfare of ordinary citizens. However, it has also helped to create a stable and prosperous business environment, which has been one of the keys to Japan's economic success.

One of the hallmarks of populist politics is the use of charismatic leadership to inspire and mobilize supporters. The LDP has been led by a series of charismatic leaders over the years, including Shinzo Abe and Junichiro Koizumi. These leaders have employed various tactics to appeal to the emotions and aspirations of the Japanese people, such as emphasizing their commitment to national security, economic growth, and social welfare. Due to the antagonistic and sound-bite politics, Koizumi was interpreted as a populist politician in Japan (Yoshida 2020). He adopted a 'theatrical style', i.e. preferring to communicate directly to the public through television (Ohtake 2009). Perhaps the most important

element of the LDP's populist style of politics is its commitment to policies that benefit mass people. The party has consistently promised to improve the lives of Japanese people through a combination of economic growth, social welfare, and infrastructure development. For example, the LDP has implemented a variety of economic policies aimed at stimulating growth and creating jobs, such as the Abenomics program launched by Shinzo Abe in 2013 (McBride and Xu 2018). The LDP's current leader, Fumio Kishida, has continued this tradition of charismatic leadership. He has emphasized his commitment to economic revitalization, administrative reform, and digital transformation, and has promised to put the interests of the Japanese people first.

The LDP's populist style of politics has had a significant impact on Japanese society and politics. On the one hand, it has helped to create a sense of stability and continuity in Japanese politics, as the party has been able to maintain its grip on power for most of the post-war period. This has allowed Japan to pursue a long-term economic development strategy, which has led to the country's emergence as a major economic power. On the other hand, the LDP's populism has also contributed to some of the problems and challenges facing Japan today. The party's focus on delivering tangible benefits to specific constituencies has led to a fragmented and inefficient public sector, with multiple layers of bureaucracy and overlapping responsibilities. The party's close ties to business and industry have also contributed to a lack of transparency and accountability in economic decision-making, which has contributed to corruption and cronyism.

### ***Populist Agendas and Programs***

The LDP's populist agenda is grounded in a commitment to economic growth and stability, social welfare, and national security. These priorities are reflected in the party's policies and programs, which have evolved in response to changing social, economic, and political conditions. Japan was still mostly an agricultural country and rebuilding after the destruction of the war at the time the LDP was formed. Two-fifths of the total workforce was employed in the farming sector (Masumi 1985). Farmers in Japan who benefited from the post-war occupation period's land reform remained steadfast supporters of conservative parties (Umeda 2019). Particularly, local notables, who maintained authority in the villages, helped the LDP garner support among those farmers (Iyasu 1984, Umeda 2019).

The party has placed a strong emphasis on fostering a business-friendly environment and promoting the growth of the Japanese economy

through government subsidies and protectionist trade policies (Sasada 2015). Besides, in terms of military alliance and economic ties, the LDP has been a steadfast and strong partner of the United States. During the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was agreement within the LDP to amend Japan's constitution to give the Japanese military a larger role in maintaining world peace (Liff 2016).

Another important aspect of the LDP's populist agenda is its support for increased public spending on infrastructure and social welfare programs. This has involved a range of policies and programs aimed at promoting innovation, investment, and entrepreneurship. In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis and the subsequent economic slowdown, the LDP promoted policies aimed at stimulating economic growth through public spending and investment. This included large-scale public works projects, such as the construction of high-speed railways and new airports, as well as increased funding for social welfare programs such as healthcare and education. The party played a leading role in the development of Japan's universal healthcare system, which provides affordable and high-quality medical care to all citizens (Sakamoto, Rahman, Nomura, Okamoto, Koike et al. 2018). The LDP has also been involved in the provision of education, including the expansion of vocational training programs and the promotion of science and technology education. For example, the then prime minister Tanaka declared 1973 as *Fukushi Gannnen*, the first year of the welfare state in Japan (Umeda 2019), by extending pension benefits and offering older people free medical care.

Immigration policy is another area where the LDP has adopted populist rhetoric (Carroll 2022). The aging population and low birth rate in Japan have been significant issues in recent years. To solve these demographic issues, some LDP members have stated that greater immigration is required, and they have urged for more liberal immigration policies. Conservative party members have, however, vehemently opposed this stance, claiming that immigration might jeopardize Japan's cultural uniqueness. Another area in which the LDP has adopted populist rhetoric is environmental policy. For instance, then Prime Minister Sato established the Environment Agency in 1971 to address environmental issues, particularly pollution problems (Umeda 2019). In recent years, the party has promoted policies aimed at reducing Japan's reliance on fossil fuels and promoting renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind power. This has included the introduction of subsidies for households and businesses that install solar panels, as well as tax incentives for companies that invest in renewable energy technologies.

Even in the latest LDP election manifesto in 2022, centered on the slogans of ‘protecting Japan’ and ‘building a future’, the party included different populist agendas, particularly the pledge to combat rising prices and bolster Japan’s defense. Due to the Ukraine war and the COVID-19 pandemic, prices of everyday goods have been climbing. The LDP called for ongoing measures to prevent abrupt fluctuations in gas prices and actions to prevent rising prices for consumers as a result of rising raw material costs in their manifesto (Panda 2021). A task force was established by Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, and its major objective is to lay forth a clear plan for reducing the cost of food and power (The Japan Times 2022).

While these policies may be seen as populist in their focus on addressing issues that are of concern to the general public, they are also consistent with the LDP’s broader conservative ideology. The party’s emphasis on economic growth, national identity, and traditional values remains at the core of its policy agenda, even as it adopts new policies and rhetoric to respond to changing political and economic conditions. It should be noted, however, that the LDP’s adoption of populist agendas and programs has not been without controversy. Some have criticized the party’s focus on public spending as unsustainable, and have argued that it risks increasing Japan’s already large public debt. Others have raised concerns about the potential social and cultural impacts of increased immigration, particularly in light of Japan’s history of ethnic homogeneity. Finally, some have argued that the LDP’s environmental policies do not go far enough in addressing the urgent global challenge of climate change. Overall, the LDP’s adoption of populist agendas and programs reflects its ongoing efforts to respond to the changing needs and concerns of the Japanese public. While these policies may not always align perfectly with the party’s conservative ideology, they demonstrate a willingness to adapt and evolve in response to changing circumstances. As such, they represent an important component of the LDP’s ongoing efforts to remain a dominant force in Japanese politics.

### ***Failure of Promises***

The LDP of Japan has been in power for much of the post-World War II period, and during this time, it has made a variety of promises to the Japanese people regarding economic growth, social welfare, and national security. While the LDP has had some successes in these areas, it has failed to deliver many of its promises, leading to frustration and disillusionment among many Japanese citizens. One of the key promises made by the

LDP has been to stimulate economic growth and create jobs. The party has implemented a variety of economic policies over the years, such as the Abenomics program launched by Shinzo Abe in 2013, which aimed to revive the Japanese economy through a combination of monetary easing, fiscal stimulus, and structural reforms. While some of these policies have had a positive impact on the Japanese economy, the overall results have been mixed. Despite years of economic stimulus and structural reform, Japan's economy has remained sluggish, with low inflation, low growth, and high levels of public debt (Masterson 2022). This has led to frustration among many Japanese citizens, particularly younger people who face a challenging job market and stagnant wages.

Another key promise made by the LDP has been to provide social welfare policies that support families and children, particularly in light of Japan's declining birth rate and aging population. The party has implemented a variety of policies over the years, such as universal health care, pensions, and education. However, these policies have also faced criticism for being inadequate and ineffective. For example, Japan's universal health care system has been criticized for its high out-of-pocket costs (Sakamoto, Rahman, Nomura, Okamoto, Koike et al. 2018), which can be a burden for low-income families. The country's pension system has also faced criticism for its low payouts and for not providing adequate support for older people who are unable to work. The party has also been criticized for its lack of action on issues such as LGBTQ rights, gender equality, and immigration reform (Siripala 2023).

The LDP has also promised to promote national security and defend Japan's interests in the region. The party has emphasized the importance of Japan's alliance with the United States and has called for greater military preparedness and diplomatic engagement with key partners. However, the LDP's nationalist and conservative agenda has also led to controversy and criticism, particularly about its handling of historical issues such as Japan's wartime aggression and its relations with neighboring countries such as China and South Korea. The party's emphasis on Japan's military capabilities has also been criticized by some who argue that it goes against Japan's pacifist constitution.

The failure of the LDP to deliver its promises has contributed to frustration and disillusionment among many Japanese citizens. While the party has had some successes in areas such as economic growth and social welfare, it has also faced criticism for its inadequate policies and controversial agenda. The LDP's continued dominance of Japanese politics suggests that many voters still believe in its populist message of economic

growth, social welfare, and national security, but the party will need to address the criticisms and challenges it faces if it hopes to maintain its position as Japan's leading political party.

### ***Future of the LDP's Populism***

The LDP of Japan has been known for its conservative policies and dominant position in the country's political landscape since its formation in 1955. However, as the country faces new challenges in the 21st century, the future of the LDP's populism is uncertain. One of the key challenges facing the LDP's populist agenda is Japan's rapidly aging population and declining birth rate. This has put pressure on the country's social welfare system, which was designed to support a younger and more economically productive population. As the population ages, the demand for health care, pensions, and other social welfare programs is likely to increase, putting a strain on the government's finances (Jones 2009). This demographic shift may also have political implications. The LDP's support base has traditionally been older voters, who have benefited from the party's social welfare policies. However, younger voters are increasingly disillusioned with the party's failure to address issues such as job insecurity and income inequality. The party will need to find ways to appeal to younger voters if it hopes to maintain its support in the long term.

Another challenge facing the LDP's populist agenda is the rapid pace of technological change, which is transforming the economy and society in Japan and around the world. As new technologies such as artificial intelligence and automation disrupt traditional industries and employment patterns, the LDP's emphasis on job creation and economic growth may become increasingly outdated. At the same time, new technologies are also creating new opportunities for social welfare and national security policies. For example, advances in medical technology and remote care may help address some of the challenges facing Japan's aging population. The LDP will need to stay abreast of these technological changes and find ways to adapt its populist agenda to meet the evolving needs of Japanese society.

Finally, the LDP's populist agenda is likely to be shaped by broader trends in globalization and geopolitics. Japan is a small island nation that relies heavily on trade and international cooperation for its economic growth and security. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the LDP will need to find ways to navigate complex global issues such as climate change, cybersecurity, and the rise of China. At the same time, the LDP's emphasis on national security and its alliance with the United States

may face new challenges as the global balance of power shifts. The party will need to find ways to maintain its strategic partnership with the United States while also building relationships with other countries in the region.

However, the future of the LDP's populist agenda is uncertain, as the party faces new challenges and opportunities in a rapidly changing world. Demographic changes, technological innovation, and geopolitical shifts are likely to shape the party's policies and priorities in the coming years. The LDP will need to find ways to adapt its populist message to meet the evolving needs of Japanese society and to maintain its position as Japan's leading political party. Whether it can do so remains to be seen.

## **Conclusions**

This paper has studied comparatively the AAP in India and LDP in Japan through the prism of populism. Several intriguing insights emerge from this study. These two parties, operating in vastly different political contexts, have harnessed populist sentiments to shape their respective nations' political landscapes. The AAP, with its grassroots approach and anti-establishment rhetoric, represents a unique experiment in Indian politics. Founded on ideals of transparency and participatory governance, the party has resonated with the common people's frustrations, particularly concerning corruption and inefficient governance. Its success in Delhi's state elections demonstrates the power of populism when paired with a clear focus on improving the lives of ordinary citizens. This approach has ignited hope that Indian politics can transcend traditional party lines and prioritize the welfare of the "*aam aadmi*" (common people). On the other hand, the LDP in Japan has adopted a more pragmatic form of populism. As a long-standing political force, it has skillfully adapted to changing political landscapes and has managed to maintain its hold on power by incorporating populist elements into its strategy. Unlike the AAP, the LDP is an entrenched part of Japan's political establishment, leveraging populism to connect with voters and address their concerns while maintaining stability and continuity in governance.

This comparative study highlights that while populism can be a powerful political tool, its manifestations and outcomes vary widely based on the socio-political contexts in which it operates. The AAP takes grassroots, insurgent approach, while the LDP follows a top-down, established-party strategy. However, both parties have effectively connected with the concerns and hopes of their voters. This shows that when used

well, populism can change politics and affect government policies. The AAP and the LDP serve as intriguing case studies of how populism can be harnessed in different political contexts to connect with citizens, drive electoral successes, and impact governance. This study underscores the dynamic nature of populism, which can take on various forms and strategies, depending on the prevailing socio-political environment. Understanding these nuances is crucial for comprehending the ever-evolving dynamics of contemporary politics worldwide.

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