

It's All In The (Bigger) Family

Thanks to BJP's clever campaign pitch, Rajasthan appears to have bought into 'Modi Ka Parivar'. This slogan also taps into most voters' view that politicians must provide and care for them

Anastasia Piliavsky



At his state election launch rally in Kotputli in northern Rajasthan, where voters will go to polls on April 19, Modi addressed the crowd as his *parivar*. "You are my family," he said. "India is my family. For BJP the country is our family, but for Congress, it's their own family that matters more than the country." "Rajasthan has always stood against dynastic politics," he added, "In 2014 it ousted Congress from all 25 of the state's Lok Sabha seats. And it will always act as a shield against the forces of *parivarvadi*."

Parivar vs parivarvadi | In this attack on Congress, which had stood up fairly well to BJP in Rajasthan, winning 99 seats (versus BJP's 73) in the 2018 assembly elections, Modi's *parivarvadi* meant more than dynasty, or inherited rule. He was referring to political familism, or the placement of one's own people above all else.

Modi has been slating *parivarvadi* for a couple of years now. In a speech he gave in Hyderabad in May 2022, he denounced Telangana's "*parivarvadi* parties" as the biggest enemies of democracy, country and youth. He picked up the theme a month ago, again in Telangana: "I condemn *parivarvadi* because it's a threat to democracy, it does not let talent grow and hinders the growth of both the country and individuals."

As response, Lalu Yadav, a Congress ally in Bihar, accused Modi of being insufficiently family-bound: "*Arre bhai*, tell us why are there no children in your family? Modi tells people who have lots of children that they are only doing things for their family. But Modi, you have no family of your own."

BJP's advantage | Modi was quick to turn this slight to his advantage. He declared India's 140 crore citizens to be his family, and the party leadership hooked #ModiKaParivar onto their social media handles. While Rajasthan's legislative assembly has been changing hands between Congress and BJP, the 25 parliamentary seats have passed solidly to BJP a

decade ago, and this year there will be few surprises with only a few seats to be contested in earnest.

The Rajasthan duel | This means that the campaign will be less about political representation and more about the political ideas to be rehearsed during the campaign. The number crunchers may well get bored, but those of

which is best cultivated in families, making leaders from "political families" appear better trained and connected, and easier to trust.

Leaders must provide | More importantly, family is a moral metaphor: India's citizens often insist on politicians treating them like family. Words like *ma*, *baap* or *dada*,

which suffuse everyday politics, are not just turns of phrase; they signal a widely held expectation that politicians should look after their constituents in the way that parents should look after their children, or the way elder brothers look after younger siblings.

They signal the ideal of political leaders not as mere representatives, tasked with legislating on behalf of the citizens, but people tasked with caring for their constituents, held responsible for their people, not only to them. #ModiKaParivar gestures to this pervasive and powerful formula of political responsibility.

Reorienting the family discourse | In Rajasthan, where family enjoys special reverence, the tag has singular purchase. The streets of Jaipur are now full of signs emblazoned with the words "I am Modi's family" and bumper stickers that read: "This car is carrying Modi's family."

This is more than a clever inversion of an opponent's jibe. Modi is in effect reinventing the discourse on family, in which he is setting up *parivar*, or family as a caring community whose responsible leaders deliver development, as the virtuous opposite of *parivarvadi*, or family as dynasticism, nepotism, cronyism and corruption. For all his talk of decolonisation, Modi's attacks on *parivarvadi*, insofar as they have vernacular purchase, are aligning India's political thinking with Western political theory, which has long held state and family politics apart.

With Ram Mandir euphoria now sweeping Rajasthan, one cannot, however, help but wonder how inclusive and caring Modi's "family" will prove to be, and whether BJP will manage without dynastic politics.

The writer is an anthropologist

Rajasthan votes on April 19 in the first (12 seats) of its two-phase elections



us with an interest in India's political thought will have plenty to think about. The idea central to this campaign will be that of family as a political principle. Both parties have been toying with it in their rhetoric, but this summer it will play out at high volume in their skirmish over Rajasthan.

Family, indispensable part of politics | The family, in both practice and principle, has long been at the heart of Indian political life. Prior to and following India's Independence, dynastic or family rule has been shaping the

country's politics; on the political right as much as the left it is still common practice for family members to inherit political jurisdictions and posts. Nor have India's citizens, by and large, thought of this as a bad thing. For one, politics is widely perceived as a professional craft – like medical or legal practice –

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