

Public Opinion & Party Support in India's 2019 National Election

Pahi Saikia, Indian Institute of Technology-Guwahati
Holli A. Semetko, Emory University
Anup Kumar, Cleveland State University
Jon Mellon, University of Manchester
Anil Varughese, Carleton University

*Thanks to other members of India Election Studies (IES) team,
Emory University Research Council, Carleton University, CVoter Foundation

Key Questions & Data

Given the BJP's landslide in terms of seats, and its substantial support in most electoral contexts in the country, we ask:

- How similar or different are India's states in terms of stability & change in public opinion since Jan. 2019 and over the March, April & May campaign?
- Can we draw any preliminary conclusions about how and when the campaign mattered?
- To address these questions, we draw on CVoter's Tracker poll which was conducted daily across the country, with samples of 1800 to 2000 per day, from Jan. 1 to May 23, 2019, by CATI.
- The Electoral Commission announced Sunday, March 10, with campaigning officially beginning on March 11, and the country voted in 7 phases, starting on April 11, ending May 19. All results were counted live on TV on May 23.
- No exit polls or public opinion polls are permitted to be published from the time voting begins until May 23.

Background

On March 11, parties were still in the process of finalizing their candidate lists. It was not until April 8, just three days before the first phase of voting on April 11, that both the BJP and Congress released their manifestos.

BJP and Congress party leaders had been traveling the country discussing issues important for the campaign since before January.

CVoter Tracker poll provides some evidence of variation and opinion change Jan-May 2019 & reveals commonalities across the several different electoral contexts given the different parties competing, in government:

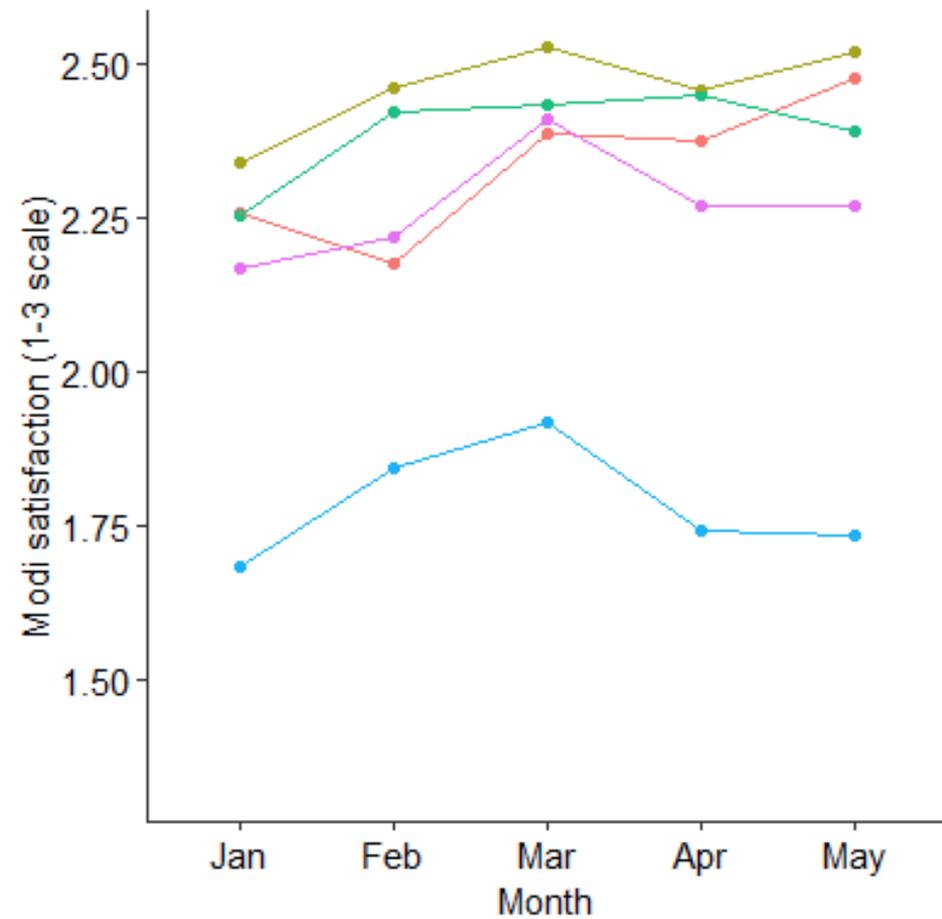
- Assam in the Northeast, BJP Chief Minister (CM) since 2016
- Delhi, capital & National Territory, led by Aam Aadmi Party CM Arvind Kejriwal since 2013/2015
- Karnataka, home to the software & defense industries, & intense Congress/BJP competition
- Kerala, “God’s own Country” with a tradition of Communist Party (M) governance
- West Bengal, with Trinamool Congress (TMC) party, & powerful CM Mamta Banerjee, decimating the Communist Party (I) over the past decade and facing the rise of the BJP in 2019

The Campaign in Assam

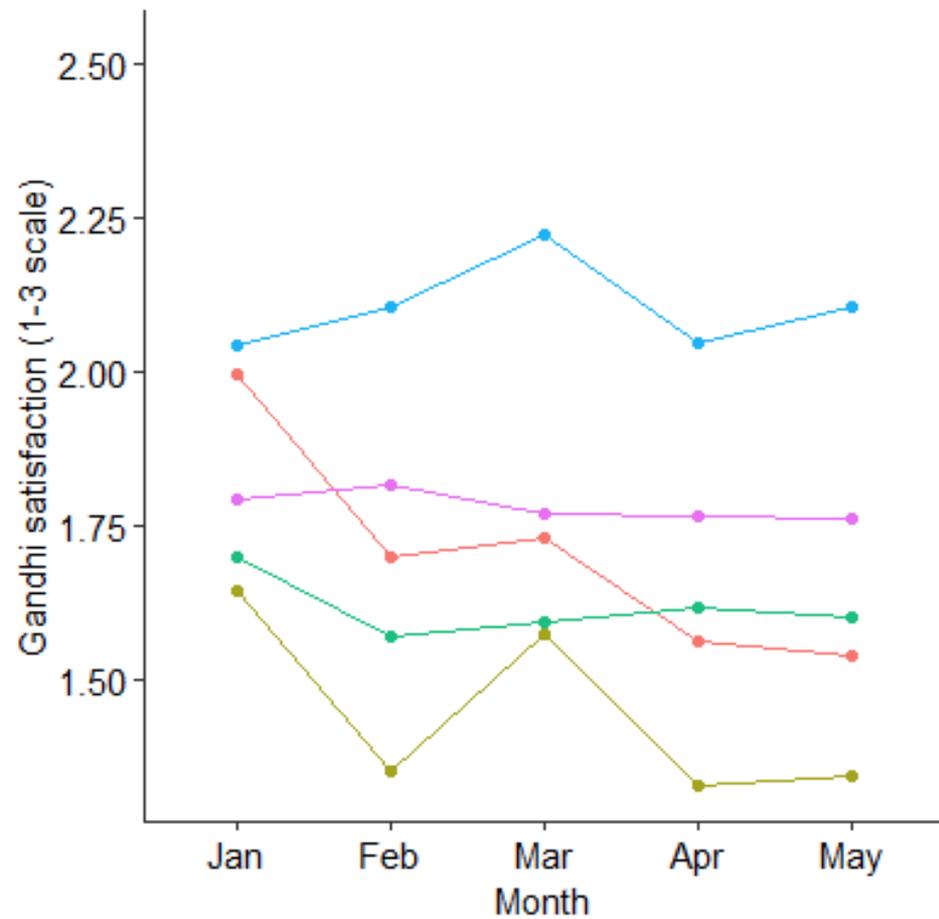
- Assam voted on April 11, April 18 and 23.
- Before the campaign officially began, **the issue of the National Citizen Registry** dominated the news in Assam.
- India's war with West Pakistan to protect East Pakistani/Bengali people from atrocities & many fled to Assam up to and during 1971 war that resulted in free Bangladesh

As we will see in the next slide, in Assam satisfaction with PM Modi increased from February 2019 onwards, and elsewhere from Jan. 2019 onwards, whereas the satisfaction with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi produced almost a flat line in Assam, and variation in the other electoral contexts, over the same period.

Modi satisfaction



Gandhi satisfaction



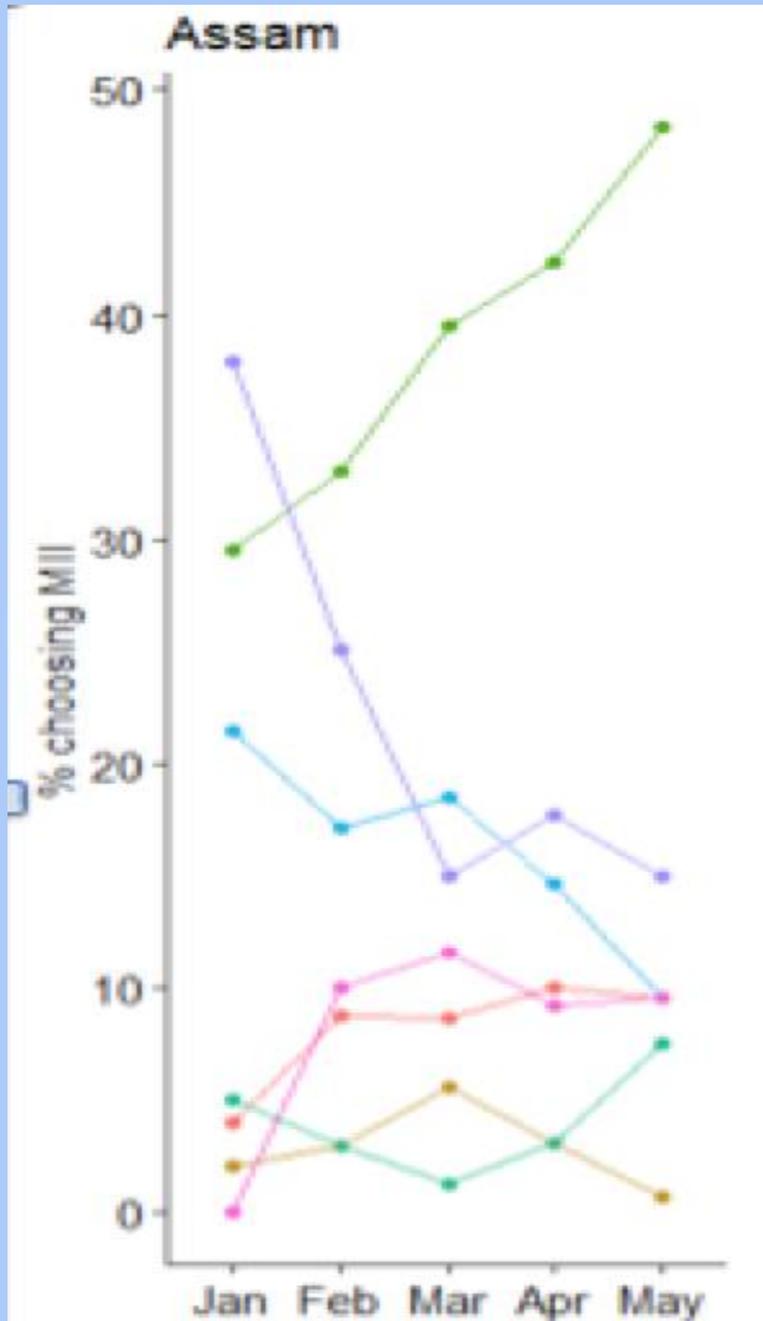
State — Assam — Delhi — Karnataka — Kerala — West Bengal

Assam & Most Important Issue (MII)

As next slide shows, perceptions of the **Economy** (which included jobs, poverty & more) as MII increased at the start of the year to the start of the campaign in March, while category of variety of issues '**Others**' category, which was largest before the campaign began, dropped off significantly with almost the same slope as economy rising, increased slightly by April then continued to descend...

While there was a steep increase in perceptions of **Terrorism & Security** as MII from Jan. to peak in March, from April onwards those naming **Ethnic conflict** as MII increased. **Infrastructure & services** declined Jan. to Feb., then increased slightly to March before declining again. **Corruption** increased from Jan. to peak in April, whereas **Crime & Women's safety** peaked in March.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE (MII) 2019



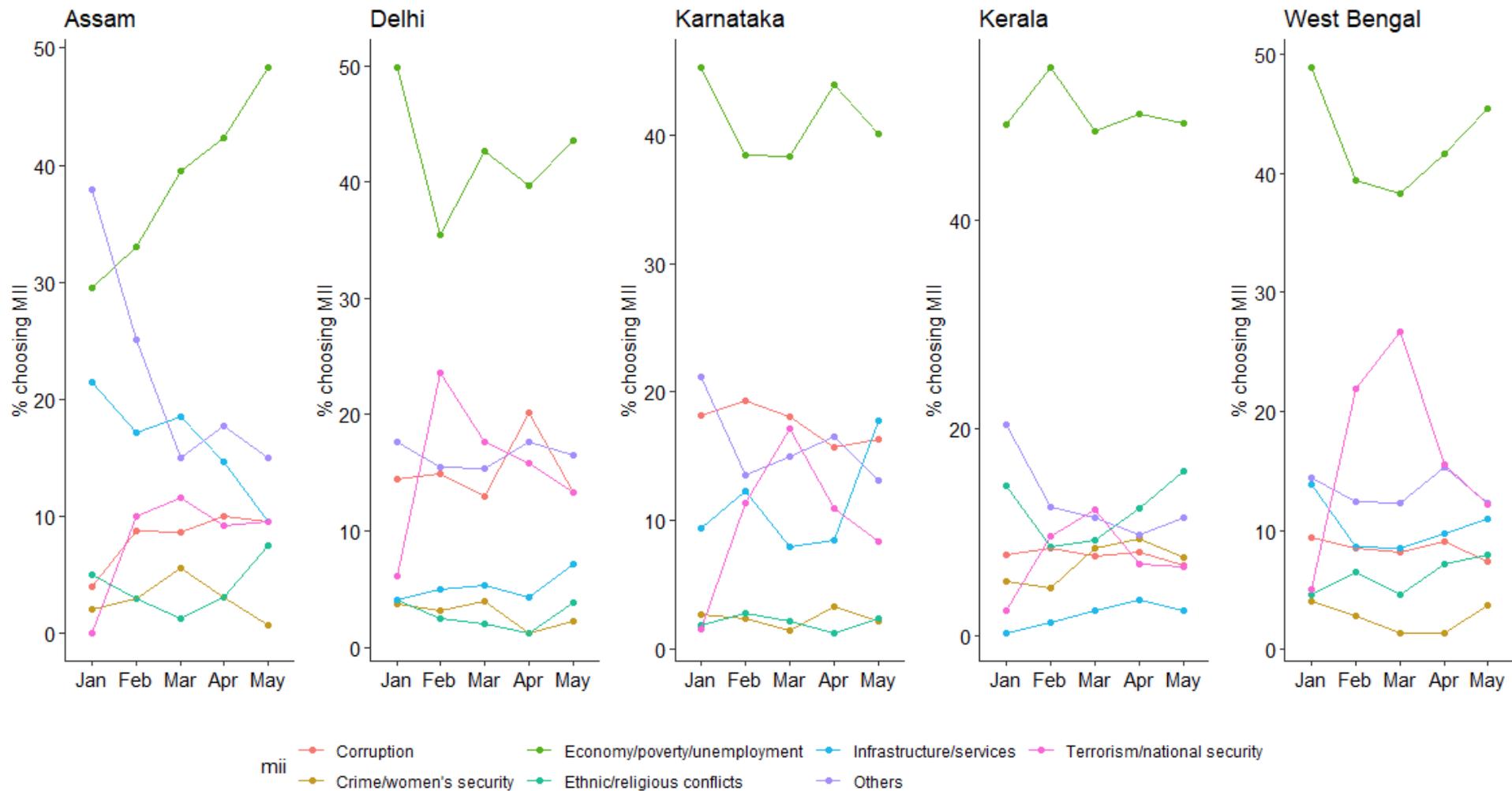
- Economy/poverty/unemployment
- Ethnic/religious conflicts
- Infrastructure/services
- Others
- Terrorism/national security
- Corruption
- Crime/women's security

Assam's BJP campaign "on message" or as musical metaphor?

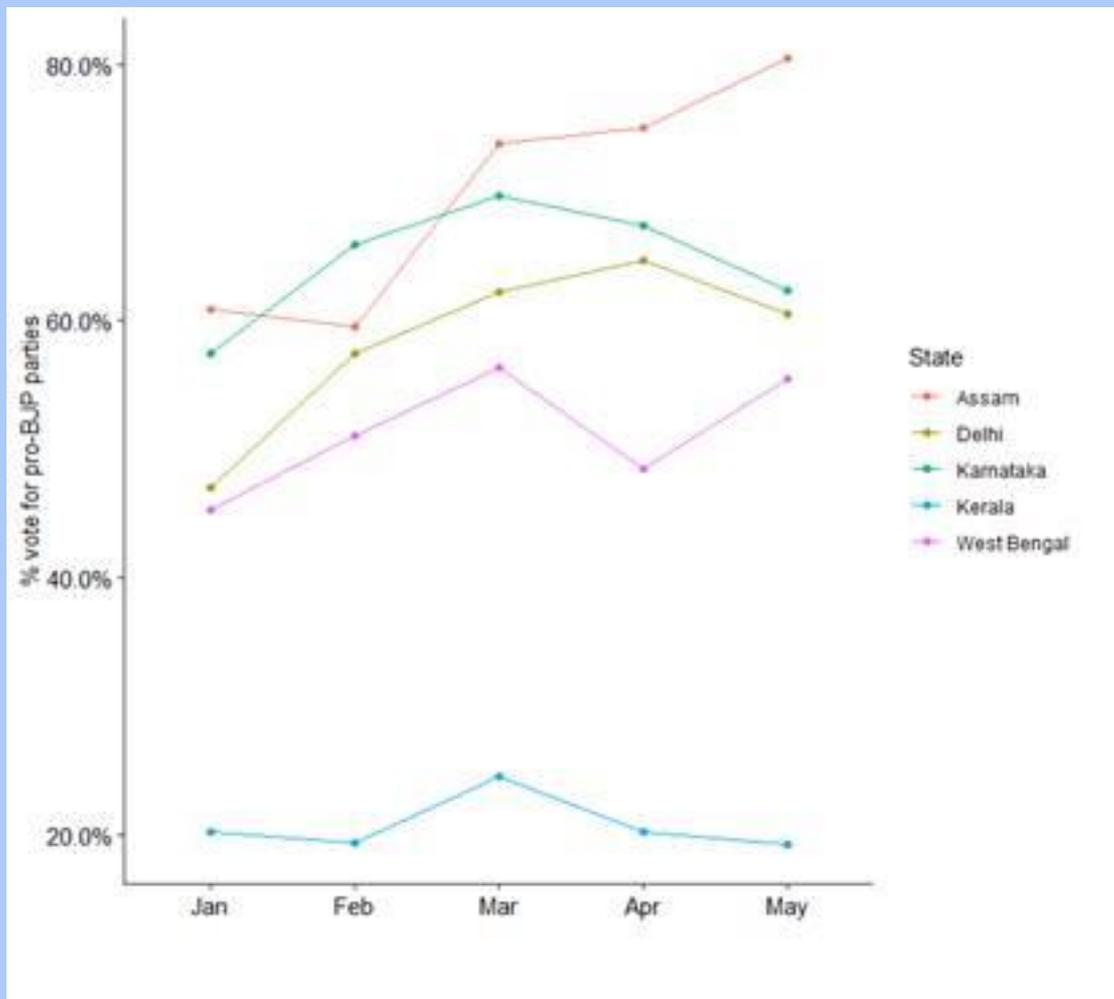
Think of the BJP in leadership at the state level in Assam, and BJP at the federal level, as Master Conductor of an Orchestra consisting of Most Important Issue trends within Assam, with the **Economy**, and related issues in that category, as by far most important notes recurring throughout the performance.

Terrorist attack killing all Army trainees on a bus & India's retaliation (Balakot), had a percussion-like impact from Feb. to March, also trumpeting the rise of **Terrorism/National security** as MII harmonizing with **Women's Security & Crime** as MII, with the crescendo of strings of **Ethic Conflict** and related issues from March to the vote in April

Open ended Most Important Issue question shows Economy/poverty/unemployment ahead yet changing month-to-month



PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS IN EACH ELECTORAL CONTEXT INTENDING TO VOTE BJP OR HAVING VOTED FOR BJP (or PRO-BJP PARTIES)



Conclusions

Important similarities exist across these different electoral contexts including the importance of **Economic issues, Terrorism and Security** issues, but also considerable *variation* in the importance placed on **Corruption, Infrastructure, Crime & Women's security, Ethnic & Religious conflict** over time across these contexts.

Balakot

Subsequent research will expand our lens to look at all electoral contexts -- all states in the CVoter Tracker survey.

We will also explore whether statements made by politicians shortly before each phase led to changes in reported satisfaction with party leader performance, and perceptions about the salience of issues.

THANK YOU
QUESTIONS?