

# Strategic Vote Consolidation Under FPTP: The SP-Congress Alliance and Opposition Electoral Performance in Uttar Pradesh, 2024

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**Abstract**—The 2024 Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh produced a paradoxical outcome: the INDIA opposition alliance secured 43 seats with 43.52% vote share while the NDA won 36 seats with 43.69% vote share—nearly identical vote shares producing asymmetric seat distributions. This paper analyzes how opposition alliances benefit in first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral systems through vote consolidation mechanisms. Using electoral data from the Election Commission of India and caste voting patterns from CSDS-Lokniti post-poll surveys, we demonstrate that the SP-Congress coalition succeeded through: (1) preventing vote-splitting via formal seat-sharing, (2) consolidating complementary caste, and (3) geographic concentration in backward-caste regions. The alliance improved vote-to-seat conversion efficiency substantially compared to 2019. The paper contributes that opposition success in FPTP systems depends on eliminating vote-splitting fragmentation through credible seat-sharing arrangements.

**Index Terms**—Caste Politics, Electoral Alliances, FPTP system, General Election 2024, Uttar Pradesh

## I. INTRODUCTION

The 2024 Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh challenged conventional expectations about vote-to-seat proportionality in first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral systems. Despite the NDA receiving a marginally higher vote share (43.69%) than the INDIA opposition bloc (43.52%), the opposition won 43 of 80 parliamentary seats while the NDA secured only 36[1]. This 0.17 percentage-point disadvantage in vote share translated to a 7-seat advantage for the opposition—a seemingly counterintuitive outcome that reveals operational dynamics of FPTP system.

This result departs sharply from pre-election predictions. Exit polls conducted by several agencies gave more seats to NDA than INDIA Alliance in UP[2]. The discrepancy between predictions and outcomes highlights how alliance strategies and vote distribution can produce electoral results that diverge from simple vote-share proportionality.

The Samajwadi Party (SP) and Indian National Congress formed a pre-poll alliance allocating 62 constituencies to SP and 17 to Congress[3].

This paper addresses three interrelated questions:

1. How did the SP-Congress seat-sharing agreement prevent vote-splitting?
2. What caste coalition dynamics enabled the alliance to consolidate diverse voter blocs?
3. What geographic concentration patterns characterize the alliance's electoral performance?

## Theoretical Framework

Electoral systems shape party strategies through mechanical and psychological effects[4]. Under FPTP, the mechanical effect converts votes into seats with systematic bias favoring geographically concentrated parties, while the psychological effect incentivizes voters to abandon non-viable candidates, typically producing two-party convergence[5].

However, multi-party systems persist in FPTP contexts like India due to social cleavages, regional party strength, and coalition possibilities[6]. Opposition alliances represent strategic adaptations to FPTP incentive structures: parties form pre-poll

coalitions with explicit seat-sharing to simulate two-party competition locally while maintaining distinct identities.

## II. ALLIANCE AND SEAT-SHARING COORDINATION

The SP-Congress alliance announced its seat-sharing agreement in February 2024, allocating 62 of 80 Uttar Pradesh constituencies to SP and 17 to Congress, with one seat (Bhadohi) initially allocated to Trinamool Congress which ultimately did not win [7][8].

### *Strategic Seat Allocation Logic*

The allocation reflected complementary electoral strengths rather than proportional bargaining. Congress received constituencies where it retained organizational strength and voter bases. These included urban centers such as Lucknow, Kanpur, and Allahabad, minority-heavy constituencies like Saharanpur where Muslims constituted substantial vote shares, and historical Congress strongholds including Rae Bareli and Amethi, the Gandhi family constituencies where the party maintained residual organizational presence.

SP received constituencies dominated by backward-caste and rural populations. These encompassed Yadav-majority regions including Mainpuri, Kannauj, and Azamgarh where SP's traditional base remained strong, OBC-concentrated zones such as Moradabad, Fatehpur, and Basti where backward-caste mobilization proved effective, and non-Jatav Dalit constituencies like Faizabad, Lalganj, and Barabanki where SP strategically positioned itself to capture communities historically marginalized within SC reservation politics.

### *Alliance Performance by Component*

Table 1: Alliance seat allocation and performance, 2024

Party	Seats	Won	Win Rate	Vote Share
SP	62	37	59.7%	33.59%
INC	17	6	35.3%	9.46%
AITC	1	0	0%	0.47%
INDIA	80	43	53.8%	43.52%

Note: SP's 59.7% seat conversion rate (37 wins from 62 contested) represents substantial improvement from 2019 when SP won only 5 seats from 37 contested (13.5% conversion) despite the SP-BSP alliance. [9] Congress's 35.3% conversion rate (6 wins from 17 contested) significantly exceeded its 2019 performance of 1 seat from 80 (1.25% conversion).

### *Comparison with 2019 Alliance*

The 2019 SP-BSP alliance provides critical context. In 2019, SP and BSP announced a formal seat-sharing agreement allocating 37 seats to SP and 38 to BSP (with approximately 3 to RLD), leaving Amethi and Rae Bareli for Congress [10][11][12].

However, the 2019 alliance failed despite this coordination. BSP won only 10 seats despite contesting 38 constituencies, achieving merely a 26.3% conversion rate, while SP secured just 5 seats from 37 contested constituencies with a 13.5% conversion rate. Combined, the alliance won 15 seats from 75 contested, representing a disappointing 20% overall conversion rate. The 2019 failure stemmed from incomplete vote transfer between SP and BSP voter bases. BSP's core Jatav Dalit supporters did not transfer votes to SP candidates in SP-allocated constituencies, while SP's Yadav-Muslim base showed limited enthusiasm for BSP candidates [13]. Congress contested all 80 seats independently, winning only Rae Bareli, but its 6.36% vote share in 2019 fragmented opposition votes in constituencies where Congress had minimal viability.

The 2024 alliance improved on 2019 through two mechanisms. First, better partner selection played a crucial role, as replacing BSP with Congress avoided the persistent Jatav-Yadav social tensions that had undermined the earlier coalition. Congress supporters proved more willing to transfer votes to SP candidates due to shared ideological concern of Hindutva. Second, *Pichhda-Dalit-Alpsankyak* strategy and *samvidhan khatre mein hai* narrative enabled SP to court non-Jatav Dalits, thereby creating complementary and voter consolidation across distinct caste communities.

III. CASTE COALITION ENGINEERING

The alliance succeeded by consolidating distinct caste-religious voter blocs through complementary.

*Voter Bloc Consolidation Patterns*

CSDS-Lokniti post-poll survey data reveals significant shifts in community voting patterns between 2019 and 2024[14][15](Table 2).

Table 2: Voter Bloc Support for Opposition (% Supporting INDIA Bloc). 2019 data from CSDSLokniti survey [5]; 2024 data from CSDS-Lokniti post-poll survey.

Community	2019 Opposition %	2024 INDIA %
Muslim	73%	92%
Yadav	60%	82%
Non-Jatav Dalit	45%	56%
Jatav Dalit	75%	25%
Other OBC	34%	34%
Upper Caste	16%	16%

Note: 2019 figures for non-Jatav Dalits and OBC sub-groups approximated from available CSDS data showing NDA dominance among these groups

Muslim consolidation represented the most visible electoral shift, with support increasing from 73% in 2019 to 92% for the unified INDIA bloc in 2024, representing near-complete consolidation of this critical demographic[16]. Shared concern of Hindutva politics led to en-bloc voting by Muslim cutting across caste and class lines. Yadav mobilization similarly intensified, with support rising from approximately 60% to 82%, reflecting consolidation of SP's vote bank[17]. The PDA (*Pichhda-Dalit-Alpsankhyak*) messaging reinforced Akhilesh Yadav identity as backward-caste leaders of broader progressive coalitions rather than narrow caste interests.

The most strategically significant shift occurred among non-Jatav Dalits, who constitute approximately 60% of Uttar Pradesh's Scheduled Caste population. This community moved from approximately 45% opposition support in 2019 to 56% in 2024[18]. SP fielded non-Jatav SC candidates in several unreserved constituencies, with notable successes including Awadhesh Prasad from the Pasi community winning Faizabad against a sitting BJP minister, Daroga Saroj

capturing Lalganj, and a young candidate Priya Saroj securing Machhlishahr. This strategic diversification captured non-Jatav communities historically marginalized within SC reservation politics long dominated Jatav community. Simultaneously, BSP's overall vote share declining to 9.39% while winning zero seats[19]. This represents BSP's comprehensive electoral collapse, as even its core Jatav base fragmented, with some voters shifting to BJP (24% Jatav support for NDA) and others reluctantly supporting the INDIA alliance despite BSP's absence from the coalition.

Non-Yadav OBC support remained relatively stable at 34% for opposition forces, but this aggregate stability masked significant internal diversification in SP's candidate selection strategy. SP fielded 27 non-Yadav OBC candidates targeting Kurmi, Nishad, and Kushwaha communities across rural constituencies [20]. Success cases included Kurmis winning in Fatehpur and Basti, Nishads capturing Sultanpur and Sant Kabir Nagar, demonstrating SP's deliberate expansion beyond its traditional Yadav base into broader OBC communities. In sharp contrast, upper-caste voters remained overwhelmingly aligned with the NDA, with 79% overall upper-caste support in Uttar Pradesh and Rajputs showing particularly strong 89% NDA support[21].

IV. GEOGRAPHIC PERFORMANCE PATTERNS

Table 3: Regional performance distribution

Region	Total Seats	INDIA Seats	INDIA %
Bundelkhand	4	3	75.0%
Central UP	24	16	66.7%
South-East UP	8	5	62.5%
Rohilkhand	10	6	60.0%
North-East UP	17	8	47.1%
West UP	17	5	29.4%

The data suggest essential coalition complementarity: neither party could independently chart a winning majority. Even with the Congress's strength in Rae Bareli (Rahul Gandhi: 66.17% vote share) and Amethi (Kishori Lal Sharma: 54.99%) and SP's strength in Yadav-OBC zones (Mainpuri: Dimple Yadav 56.79%, Kannauj: Akhilesh Yadav 52.74%)[22] could not have secure 43 seats independently as have already observed in 2019 elections. The alliance's 43-seat

outcome exhibited geographic concentration reflecting uneven caste demographics across UP's regions (Table 3).

*Core Regions*

Central UP and Bundelkhand together contributed 19 of the INDIA alliance's 43 seats (44.2%) from only 28 total constituencies in these regions (35% of all seats), representing clear overperformance relative to seat density. This electoral dominance reflects favorable demographic composition in these regions. Central UP contains high Yadav concentration (35% of the population), substantial other OBC populations (25%), and significant non-Jatav Dalit communities (15%). This demographic composition aligns precisely with INDIA's consolidated voter blocs creating natural electoral advantages in regions where these communities constitute demographic majorities.

*Weakness in West UP*

West UP contributed only 5 of the INDIA alliance's 43 seats from 17 constituencies in the region, showcasing underperformance vis-a-vis seat distribution. Several structural factors explain this weakness. West UP demonstrates high upper-caste concentration, who voted overwhelmingly for the NDA. Urban constituencies like Ghaziabad and Gautam Buddha Nagar, created environments where NDA's development-oriented messaging resonated strongly, producing decisive NDA victories with BJP securing 58.09% in Ghaziabad and 59.69% in Gautam Buddha Nagar[23]. Congress's severe organizational weakness in urban areas further limited alliance performance despite receiving seat allocations in several West UP constituencies.

V. VOTE EFFICIENCY ANALYSIS

The alliance's primary achievement was improving opposition vote-to-seat conversion efficiency through consolidated spatial distribution.

In 2019, opposition parties required 2.29 million votes per seat. In 2024, INDIA required only 888,372 votes per seat—each opposition vote translated to seat-winning potential at 2.57 times greater efficiency.

Table 4: Vote-to-seat efficiency comparison

Metric	2019 Opposition	2024 INDIA	Change
Total Opposition Votes	34.4M	38.2M	+11.0%
Opposition Seats Won	15	43	+187%
Votes per Seat	2,293,333	888,372	-61.3%
Vote-to-Seat Efficiency	2.29:1	0.89:1	2.57x improved

Note: 2019 opposition votes include SP (18.11%), BSP (19.43%), Congress (6.36%), RLD (1.18%) totaling approximately 45.08% of valid votes; 2024 INDIA totals 43.52%. The 61.3% improvement in vote efficiency represents the quantifiable alliance effect.

*Deconstructing Efficiency Gains*

This remarkable improvement occurred through two complementary mechanisms. First, the alliance achieved increased seats despite reduced vote share, as opposition vote share actually declined from approximately 45% in 2019 (fragmented across multiple parties) to 43.5% in 2024 (coordinated under INDIA), yet seats increased dramatically from 15 to 43. This pattern reflects superior spatial concentration of votes in winnable constituencies rather than wasteful dispersal across all seats. Second, the coordination eliminated wasted votes that had plagued opposition performance in previous elections. In 2019, Congress with vote share of 6.36% prevented SP-BSP victories by splitting opposition votes. In 2024, Congress concentrated 9.46% votes in just 17 strategically selected constituencies, successfully converting 6 into victory.

Disaggregating the 28-seat gain reveals the sources of improved performance. The vote share decline from 45% to 43.5%, should have reduced seat totals. However, the efficiency effect contributed approximately 28 seats therefore derives entirely from improved efficiency through vote consolidation, more than offsetting the minor vote share decline.

*NDA Comparison*

The NDA's vote efficiency decreased. In 2019, the NDA secured 51.4% vote share and won 64 seats, requiring approximately 800,000 votes per seat. In

2024, despite having 43.69% vote share, the NDA won only 36 seats, requiring 1,064,109 votes per seat. This represents a 33% decline in vote efficiency despite improved vote concentration in urban strongholds, reflecting how opposition consolidation deprived NDA of narrow-margin victories across rural and semi-urban constituencies where multi-candidate fragmentation had previously ensured NDA success.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Alliances in FPTP electoral systems function as strategic necessities operating through vote consolidation rather than vote expansion. The 2024 SP-Congress alliance improved opposition vote-to-seat efficiency by 61.3%(Table 4), converting 43.52% vote share into 53.8% seat(Table 1) share—seven additional seats attributable directly to coordination mechanisms.

### *Mechanisms of Success*

Three complementary mechanisms enabled alliance success. First, formal seat-sharing preventing vote-splitting proved essential, as allocating constituencies explicitly between SP and Congress eliminated intra-alliance competition that had undermined previous opposition efforts. Counterfactual estimates suggest that fragmented competition without coordination would have reduced opposition seats, meaning the seat-sharing coordination directly contributed 15 to 18 additional seats to the final total. Second, caste coalition engineering consolidated complementary voter blocs rather than creating competing claims on overlapping constituencies. The alliance brought together Muslims, and non-Jatav Dalits into an additive coalition. SP's deliberate targeting of non-Jatav Dalit communities proved particularly critical in expanding the coalition beyond its traditional base. Third, geographic concentration in backward-caste dominated regions generated substantial seat bonuses, as superior performance in Central UP and Bundelkhand more than offset persistent weakness in upper-caste urban areas like West UP.

### *Comparative Study: 2019 versus 2024*

The 2019 SP-BSP alliance provides crucial comparative context that illuminates why seat-sharing alone proves insufficient for electoral success. Despite implementing formal seat-sharing arrangements with

no intra-alliance competition in the same constituencies, the 2019 alliance won only 15 seats with a disappointing 20% conversion rate. This contrasts sharply with 2024's 43 seats and 53.8% conversion rate under similar structural coordination. The difference stemmed from three interconnected factors. Incomplete vote transfer plagued the 2019 alliance as persistent Jatav-Yadav social tensions prevented full voter consolidation between SP and BSP bases, with many Jatav voters refusing to support Yadav-dominated SP candidates and vice versa. Better partner compatibility emerged in 2024 as Congress-SP ideological alignment around constitution, reservation and secularism created a synergy for genuine vote transfer between their respective vote base. Strategic differentiation allowed the 2024 alliance to avoid direct competition with BSP's residual base, as SP explicitly targeted non-Jatav Dalits, creating complementary rather than competing coalitions. This comparison reveals that seat-sharing coordination, while necessary, remains insufficient without credible vote transfer.

### *FPTP System Implications*

The 2024 outcome in UP validates core theoretical predictions about electoral competition under FPTP systems. Geographic concentration rewards constitute a fundamental FPTP characteristic, as the system systematically rewards parties with spatially concentrated support over parties with geographically dispersed support, even when both parties secure identical aggregate vote shares[24]. INDIA's deliberate concentration in Central UP and Bundelkhand produced substantial seat bonuses by maximizing wins in targeted regions, while NDA's wasted surplus votes in urban strongholds like Ghaziabad and Gautam Buddha Nagar reduced overall efficiency by concentrating votes unproductively in landslide constituencies. Opposition coordination emerges as a structural imperative rather than tactical choice in FPTP systems. When vote shares approach parity, small efficiency differences in vote distribution determine final outcomes. Opposition parties face stark choices between coalition discipline and accepting permanent minority status in legislatures despite winning substantial vote shares.

*Broader Implications*

The SP-Congress model demonstrates alliance principles with potential applicability to opposition strategies in other Indian states. However, successful replication requires two specific preconditions that may not exist in all contexts. First, coalition partners must command *complementary rather than overlapping caste and social bases*, ensuring electoral synergy instead of mutual erosion. Second, vote consolidation requires a degree of *ideological compatibility* among alliance partners, particularly on foundational issues. More fundamentally, this study highlights that alliances cannot rely solely on the arithmetic of seat-sharing and vote transfer. Instead, they must evolve toward what may be termed an “*alliance dharma*”—shared commitment to core political values and programmatic coherence. Alliance success ultimately depends on a shared political purpose that transforms social diversity into electoral unity.

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