Electoral Decline Of Aam Aadmi Party: Struggles With Transactional Politics And Ideological Ambiguity

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Abstract

After suffering a decisive defeat in 2025 Delhi Legislative Assembly Elections, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) marked a significant setback in its political trajectory. Initially lauded for its promises of transparent, corruption-free governance and a focus on tangible reforms in education and healthcare, AAP's appeal began to wane due to its reliance on populist strategies while remaining ideology-free and engaging in transactional politics. As AAP expanded beyond Delhi, its inconsistent alliances, shifting political stances, and reactive rather than strategic decision-making weakened its credibility. The party's governance model, though effective in certain areas, was not enough to sustain electoral momentum, especially as rivals with clearer ideological identities mobilized their voter bases more effectively. This lack of a clear, consistent political identity alienated key voter bases, particularly as rivals capitalized on ideological clarity and long-term commitment. As a result, this study aims to analyze the factors contributing to AAP's decline in voter support, examine the impact of populist strategy and transactional politics on electoral outcomes. It also explores the potential pathways for AAP's political revival, emphasizing the importance of ideological consolidation, consistent political messaging, and a more structured organizational framework to regain electoral relevance.

Keywords: Ideology; Elections; Populism; Transactional; Politics

The Indian party system has undergone significant transformations since the country's independence, with the Indian National Congress (INC) initially emerging as the dominant political force. For decades, Congress was the unchallenged political party, steering India through its early post-independence years. However, in the past decade, the political landscape has seen a dramatic shift with the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which has rapidly expanded its influence, effectively challenging Congress's long-standing dominance. The BJP's ascendancy, especially after its decisive victories in national elections, has reshaped the political dynamics, positioning it as a major contender for governing India in the modern era. Amidst this evolving landscape, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) emerged as a promising new force, demonstrating its potential with

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consecutive wins in the Delhi Legislative Assembly elections in 2015 and 2020. These victories highlighted AAP's appeal, propelling it into the ranks of national parties in India.

The AAP is a post-ideological populist party that was established in the wake of the India Against Corruption movement of 2011-12. Arvind Kejriwal laid the foundation of Aam Aadmi Party on 2nd October 2012, the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. The AAP has made an unexpected mark in Indian politics, securing consecutive landslide wins twice in Delhi, a remarkable victory in Punjab, and running vigorous campaigns in both Uttarakhand and Goa. The AAP's significance in Indian politics stems from the fact that it is the only new political organization in a long time to break the blockade of the electoral mechanism without caste-, religion-, or ethnicity-based mobilization (Ali, 2022, p.58-79).

However, despite its earlier successes and being granted national party status, AAP's recent defeat in the 2025 Delhi Legislative Assembly Elections has raised questions about its ability to sustain and expand its influence. This setback appears to have momentarily halted the party's progress, presenting challenges to its ambition of becoming a significant national player.

Ideology and Populism in the Rise of Aam Aadmi Party

The word idéologie (ideology) appeared at the time of the French Revolution. The Enlightenment philosophe Antoine Destutt de Tracy (1754–1836) coined the term as the name for his new "science of ideas." Yet it was Karl Marx who gave "ideology" the sense that has evolved into modern usages of the word (Eidlin, 2015). In political terms, ideology has been defined as a set of stable interrelated beliefs and attitudes that organise views on political and social issues (Claessens, Fischer, Chaudhuri, Sibley & Atkinson, 2020). Ideologies are associated with power structures. Politicians seek power. Political parties are clearly ideological vehicles, designed to fight elections by appealing to the electorate with a manifesto containing policy proposals that are shaped by ideological values. Political ideology now, more than ever before, is very closely linked to state power whatever the political system (Harrison & Boyd, 2003). It suggests that regardless of the type of political system—whether democratic, authoritarian, or otherwise—ideology plays a crucial role in maintaining and exercising state power. Thus, political ideology is not just a set of abstract ideas but a practical instrument used by states to influence and govern societies, often through oversimplified or distorted narratives.

The concept of political ideology, the idea that political opinions and attitudes are linked together in a coherent system, has been theorized as particularly important for a well-functioning democracy (Carmines & D'Amico, 2015). Moreover, India has a vibrant multi-party system, with numerous political parties representing diverse ideologies, regional interests, and social groups. From the Indian National Congress's centrist approach to the Bharatiya Janata Party's right-wing ideology, along with various regional and left-wing parties, the political landscape is dynamic and varied. In this complex political landscape, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) emerged in 2012, presenting itself as a break from conventional politics. While some view AAP as having a clear ideology, focused on governance, welfare, and transparency. Others view it as lacking a consistent ideological foundation, prioritizing practical solutions over fixed beliefs.

Even Arvind Kejriwal described AAP as "neither Left nor Right, but practical." However, many of its policies align with left-oriented ideas, similar to Congress's welfare focus. Traditionally, the BJP drew support from Hindu upper castes and middle classes, while Congress positioned itself as a champion of the poor, lower castes, and minorities. In Delhi, AAP targeted these groups, aiming to attract Congress's voter base (Burakowski & Iwanek, 2017).

To fully understand AAP's ideological position and its rapid rise, it is necessary to examine the populist dimension of its political identity. Cas Mudde defined populism as a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite,' and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people (Anselmi, 2018). On the other hand, Ernesto Laclau, Argentinian political theorist, considered populism not as an ideology, rather as "a form of construction of the political" that dichotomizes society into

two levels: the bottom, and the top (Sampath, 2015). This means for Ernesto populism is a political logic, a way of structuring political discourse and mobilizing people.

In this regard, Aam Aadmi Party positioned itself as the party of the "common man," representing ordinary citizens against a corrupt political establishment. At its core, AAP's ideology can be described as a mix of progressive welfarism, governance reform, and populism. A close examination of Indian populism reveals two distinct streams. The first stream, led by the INC from the 1970s onwards and later by regional parties, gained support from the lower and middle strata of society by mobilizing around caste, language, and other social divisions. The second stream emerged after Anna Hazare's 2011 anti-corruption movement, known as the India Against Corruption (IAC) movement. This phase, termed "New Populism," focused on developmental agendas, pragmatic politics, and moved away from traditional social cleavage-based mobilization. The IAC movement eventually resulted in the formation of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) under the leadership of Arvind Kejriwal (Subhash, 2022, p. 125-135).

AAP's symbolism and messaging reinforce this identity. The party's election symbol, the broom, signifies a commitment to "sweeping away" corruption and cleaning up the political system. Their slogans, like *"Main Aam Aadmi Hoon"* (I am a common man), emphasize their connection to everyday people and their struggles (Raikar, 2025). Moreover, AAP's decision to reject red beacon cars for its elected representatives reinforced its narrative of being against the "elite" political class. Through these strategies, AAP presented itself as the voice of the masses, contrasting itself with the "corrupt elite" and advocating for transparent, people-centric governance.

Arvind Kejriwal's signature look—sloppy trousers, an untucked shirt, casual footwear, and a muffler in winter—symbolized the common Indian man. Dubbed the 'muffler man' of Indian politics, his attire reinforced his 'aam aadmi' image. After its victory in the 2015 Delhi Legislative elections, the AAP brought about a fundamental change in social welfare and education. It fulfilled its promise of reducing electricity bills by half and waived bills for those consuming below 200 units. The party also succeeded in securing water from the Munak Canal, despite facing strong criticism for its free water scheme. Hence, the welfare policies of the AAP might be ascertained as populism with a prime focus on the large middle-class population without being rigid and urging people to vote beyond any ideology (Moonakal, 2020).

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) prioritized several key initiatives aimed at social welfare and public safety. These included providing free coaching for students from underprivileged backgrounds, offering complimentary bus and Delhi Metro rides for women, deploying marshals on every bus to enhance women's safety, and installing CCTV cameras across residential and commercial areas to strengthen security (Goswami & Dutt, 2020).

These populist strategies underpinned AAP's meteoric rise in Delhi politics. The party's appeal translated into tangible electoral success. Based on Table 1, it is seen that in the 2013 Delhi Assembly elections, AAP won 28 of 70 seats with 29.49% of the vote share, and in 2015 it achieved a historic 67 of 70 seats (54.3% vote share).

Table 1: Delhi Assembly Elections 2013 and 2015

Political Party	2013 Seats Won	2013 Vote Share (%)	2015 Seats Won	2015 Vote Share (%)
Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)	28	29.49	67	54.34
Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP)	31	33.07	03	32.19
Indian National Congress (INC)	08	24.55	00	9.65

Source: Election Commission of India

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Transactional Politics and Short-term Gains

While AAP's populist ideology initially secured major electoral successes and reshaped Delhi's governance model, its later journey showed a shift from idealistic activism to pragmatic, short-term politics. To understand this shift, it is essential to explore the concept of transactional politics. Transactionalism is a foreign policy approach that favours bilateral to multilateral relations, focuses on short-term wins rather than longer-term strategic foresight, adheres to a zero-sum worldview where all gains are relative and reciprocity is absent, rejects value-based policymaking, and does not follow a grand strategy (Bashirov & Yilmaz, 2019). It refers to a style of political engagement where decisions, policies, and alliances are driven primarily by mutual benefit rather than ideological alignment, long-term vision, or shared values. Some leaders seek to achieve a quick and spectacular political success that can be immediately presented to the voters. This allows them to enhance the legitimacy of their power or/and may contribute to winning the next election. This also means that the main goal is political gain, which may require making quick decisions that bring politically visible short-term benefits to the state (Jaskolska, 2023).

Many political parties in India engaged in transactional politics rather than adhering strictly to ideology. However, AAP was the first to openly embrace this approach as a defining characteristic. AAP's 2013 campaign centered on education, water, healthcare, electricity prices, Jan Lokpal, and a corruption-free system. Over time, the party became more associated with the freebies it offered and promised to voters. The politics of freebies helped the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) win two consecutive elections in Delhi. By offering free electricity, water, bus rides for women, and healthcare services, AAP cultivated a loyal voter base among the lower-income sections. However, in the latest election, this strategy did not yield the same results. With no ideology tethering its core base, the party lost chunks of voters who were offered a better welfare deal by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (Jyoti, 2025). Kejriwal also suggested the idea of including images of Ganesha and Lakshmi on currency notes (Gosh, 2022). This way AAP tried to appeal to both Hindu nationalist sentiments and secular voters without taking a clear stand, which confused and alienated anti-BJP voters, leading them to choose Congress or another alternative instead.

Aam Aadmi Party has also engaged in alliances with other parties for strategic purposes even if it means compromising on long-principles. Arvind Kejriwal vehemently opposed any alliance with the Congress or BJP, declaring**,** "I swear on my children there can be no tie-up between us. We are fighting the election against these scam-ridden parties," (Pandit & Lalchandani, 2013). However, despite this strong stance, AAP ultimately formed its first government in Delhi on December 28, 2013, with the outside support of the Congress. While AAP positioned itself as an anti-establishment force, its acceptance of Congress's support—justified by the claim that they were working together only to solve Delhi's problems—highlighted the pragmatic approach in in favor of immediate political gains. In 2019, AAP explored an electoral alliance with Congress in Delhi to counter the BJP. However, seat-sharing disagreements led to the failure of negotiations. Kejriwal took everyone by surprise in a rally in old Delhi when he said that he was tired of convincing the Congress leadership for an alliance in the capital (Kaushal, 2019). The move itself showed AAP's willingness to ally with its former adversary for electoral advantage, despite years of opposing Congress's governance.

Indian National Development Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), which was formed in 2023 to consolidate efforts against the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA), was the first such alliance between the two erstwhile rivals Congress and Aam Aadmi Party to jointly contest from Delhi, Haryana, Goa, Punjab and Gujarat for 2024 Lok Sabha elections (Mishra, 2024). It is quite interesting that despite his past allegations of 'most corrupt politicians' against leaders like Rahul Gandhi, Sharad Pawar, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Kapil Sibal, P Chidambaram and Farooq Abdullah, are now Kejriwal's allies in INDIA Bloc. Arvind Kejriwal defended himself by saying that Congress is secular whereas Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) is communal, violent and engage in hooliganism. He stated that in order to make a big impact nationally, it is essential to become a part of alliance (Business Today, 2024). However, internal dynamics within the alliance started growing more complex as differences emerged among the member parties. Recently AAP announced that it would seek Congress's removal from the INDIA bloc if action was not taken against Congress leader Ajay Maken for his

recent statement against the AAP supremo (Times of India, 2024). This highlights how AAP has shifted its alliances based on its electoral conveniences.

Consequently, AAP strategically adopted Hindu imagery and narratives to appeal to traditional BJP voters while maintaining its secular stance. Ahead of the 2020 Delhi Assembly elections, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal openly declared himself a "kattar Hanuman bhakt" (a staunch devotee of Lord Hanuman). During a televised interview, when asked about accusations of being anti-Hindu, he firmly stated, "I am a kattar bhakt of Lord Hanuman." To further emphasize his devotion, Kejriwal went on to recite the Hanuman Chalisa live on television (Shekhar, 2020). He visited the Prachin Hanuman Mandir in Connaught Place, positioning himself as a devout 'Hanuman bhakt' to counteract accusations of being "anti-Hindu." This move was seen as an attempt to resonate with Hindu voters and counter the BJP's narrative (Srivastava, 2025). Last year on 24 December, AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal inaugurated the Pujari Granthi Samman Yojana, a scheme offering a monthly honorarium of ₹18,000 to Hindu and Sikh priests in Delhi, at the Marghat Wale Baba Temple near ISBT (The Tribune, 2025). In response to concerns about funding, Arvind Kejriwal dismissed the apprehensions. He stated, "I am a magician... I will not let there be any dearth of funds for this scheme," (Mishra, 2024). He also expressed this sentiment previously. For instance, during the announcement of the Mukhya Mantri Mahila Samman Yojna, which provides financial assistance to women, he remarked, "I'm a Baniya's son, a magician. Don't worry, do you want to eat mangoes or count them," (Rajput, 2025).

Challenges to Populist and Transactional Governance

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is currently navigating a challenging political landscape following its recent electoral defeat in Delhi. The loss in Delhi has prompted introspection within AAP regarding its political strategies and governance model. While AAP's populist appeal initially strengthened its connect with the electorate, the very nature of populism carries inherent limitations.

Populism creates a division between the common people and the political elite, a perspective that guided AAP's approach. However, despite positioning itself as a party for the people, the party was distracted from its foundational claims, and several AAP leaders were arrested on corruption charges, contradicting its anti-elitist and anti-corruption stance. Probes by central agencies led to the arrest of top AAP leaders including Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia, and Sanjay Singh. These arrests forced Sisodia to step down as deputy chief minister. The "Sheesh Mahal" controversy, involving the luxurious renovation of the chief minister's residence, further harmed Kejriwal's public image (Saxena, 2025).

He championed Lokpal as a corruption cure but abandoned it after gaining power. His "kattar imaandar" image was undermined by corruption scandals involving senior ministers. Though he presented himself as an "aam aadmi", his move to a lavish "Sheesh Mahal" shattered his clean-politics narrative. These contradictions eroded public trust, revealing the failure of his populist strategy (Jha, 2025). Kejriwal himself admitted that he had failed to fulfill three promises: cleaning the Yamuna, providing clean drinking water and upgrading Delhi's roads (The Mint, 2025). These contradictions exposed the limitations of his populist approach, revealing a gap between his promises and actual governance. It also suggests that symbolic politics and welfare schemes alone are insufficient if core governance issues and ideological clarity remain unaddressed, contributing to public disillusionment with Kejriwal's leadership.

To illustrate the extent of AAP's recent political decline, it is essential to compare its 2025 Delhi Assembly election performance with its earlier dominance in 2020. The following table highlights this electoral shift, marking a significant turning point in the party's political trajectory.

Table 2: Delhi Assembly Elections 2020 and 2025

Party	Seats Won 2020	Seats Won 2025
Aam Aadmi Party	62	22
Bhartiya Janta Party	08	48
Indian National Congress	00	00

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Source: Election Commission of India

On the other hand, adopting transactional tactics allowed AAP to handle electoral strategies and short-term governance decisions effectively, but this shift also created tensions with the party's original principles and reformist image.

While multiple parties in India deploy religious symbolism to appeal to specific voter groups, the consequences of such appeals depend on the party's ideological history and organizational identity. For the BJP, Hindu symbolism reinforces an already-established ideological narrative; for the Congress, occasional religious gestures are balanced by a long-term secular positioning. However, for AAP—whose electoral identity was built on governance efficiency and welfare delivery—overt Hindu appeals marked a significant ideological departure. Kejriwal's projection as a 'kattar Hanuman bhakt,' temple visits, and schemes benefiting Hindu priests introduced a form of 'soft Hindutva' that neither matched the BJP's ideological coherence nor aligned with AAP's earlier secular-activist image.

Political analyst Manisha Priyam stated that Delhi had been Kejriwal's stronghold and the source of his political strength. She noted that his massive defeat had weakened his position in Punjab, where AAP was not as strong as in Delhi. She also pointed out that Bhagwant Mann was not a bigger leader than Kejriwal, who had clearly outperformed expectations. Priyam predicted challenges ahead for AAP, as its top leadership had suffered a significant setback (Bhushan, 2025). AAP secured a landslide victory in Punjab in 2022, winning 92 out of 117 assembly seats (See Table 3). It campaigned on the promise of implementing the "Delhi Model," offering free electricity, financial aid for women, improved healthcare, and better education. However, Pramod Kumar, chairperson of the Institute for Development and Communication, expressed skepticism. He remarked that AAP had pledged to bring the Delhi model to Punjab, but given its challenges in Delhi, it would likely face the same issues in Punjab. He emphasized the need for a Punjab-specific approach, as the Delhi model would not be effective in the state (Times of India, 2025).

Table 3: Punjab Assembly Election 2022 Result

Party	Seats Won	Vote Share (%)
Aam Aadmi Party	92	42.01
Bhartiya Janta Party	02	6.60
Indian National Congress	18	22.98

Source: Election Commission of India

While the party has expanded beyond Delhi and Punjab, internal dissent and leadership crises pose significant hurdles to its stability and electoral prospects. Over the years, several prominent leaders have either resigned or been expelled due to ideological differences and power struggles. Founding members like Prashant Bhushan and Yogendra Yadav were expelled in 2015 after questioning the party's internal democracy. Although Kejriwal claimed that they were removed for gross indiscipline and anti-party activities, Mr. Bhushan stated that the party was at risk of becoming a "one-man show" and acknowledged that there had been a "breakdown of communication" with Mr. Kejriwal (BBC, 2015). Kumar Vishwas, once a close associate of Arvind Kejriwal, distanced himself following disagreements over leadership decisions. After being denied a parliamentary seat in 2018, senior AAP leader Kumar Vishwas felt increasingly isolated within the party. Citing a "lack of support" from the leadership, he stated that he had ceased campaigning in Rajasthan that year (Firstpost, 2018). In a significant political development, senior Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and Delhi Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot resigned from both his ministerial position and the party on November 17, 2024. He cited unfulfilled promises and recent controversies, notably the "Sheesh mahal" issue, as reasons for his departure. He expressed concerns about the party's deviation from its founding principles and criticized the ongoing conflicts between the Delhi government and the central government (Bharti, 2024). Notably, on January 31, 2025, seven AAP MLAs, including Naresh Yadav (Mehrauli), Rohit Kumar (Trilokpuri), Rajesh Rishi (Janakpuri), Madan Lal (Kasturba Nagar), Girish Soni (Madipur), Pawan Sharma (Adarsh Nagar), and Bhawna Gaur (Palam), resigned from the party. Their departures were attributed to allegations of corruption

within the party and dissatisfaction over being denied tickets for the upcoming Delhi Assembly elections (The Indian Express, 2025).

This shows that these internal tensions may not have been resolved, and dissatisfaction continues within the ranks. These developments have posed significant challenges for AAP, affecting its leadership structure and raising questions about its ideological integrity which threaten its future trajectory in Indian politics. As key figures resign or switch sides to rivals like the BJP or Congress, AAP may find it challenging to maintain electoral momentum, especially in upcoming state and national elections.

Future Prospects for Revival

The Aam Aadmi Party now stands at a critical juncture in its political trajectory. Having experienced both remarkable electoral successes and subsequent setbacks, its future depends on whether it can evolve beyond the limitations of its populist and transactional approaches. AAP needs to bolster its grassroots presence and party cadre to counteract opposition strategies effectively.

In the coming days and months, the biggest challenge for the AAP will be to keep its head above water as it fights for survival. According to political experts, the AAP leadership will have to work hard to ensure that party leaders and workers stick together and its government in Punjab remains intact (Mishra, 2025). With AAP still in power in Punjab, its governance in the state will be critical in determining the party's credibility and ability to sustain itself in national politics. A party insider revealed that while Kejriwal continues to oversee Delhi, his primary attention has increasingly shifted toward Punjab. Several key members of his core team, including former Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, have reportedly been operating from Punjab for some time (Babu, 2025).

AAP's Delhi president, Saurabh Bharadwaj, stated that the party is implementing a regular three-tier meeting structure and strengthening grassroots support. A senior leader added that AAP assists communities facing slum demolitions by providing legal aid and fighting for relief, citing help to Karol Bagh residents who received eviction notices (Babu, 2025).

Recent electoral gains further highlight AAP's capacity for revival. The Party celebrated victories in the Gujarat and Punjab by-elections, signaling a positive shift in its fortunes in BJP-dominated states. Atishi noted that wins in Ludhiana West and Visavadar reflect public demand for effective governance and underscore Kejriwal's nationwide ambitions. With the 2027 Assembly polls approaching, these successes suggest that AAP can recover from setbacks and strengthen its presence in Indian politics, demonstrating both organizational resilience and voter appeal (Shankar, 2025).

Hence, in a political environment increasingly shaped by identity politics, nationalism, and competitive populism, AAP's challenge lies in recalibrating its founding ideals while developing a clearer and more consistent ideological narrative. Its revival, therefore, depends less on reclaiming its old ideological purity and more on constructing a balanced synthesis between ethical governance, coherent identity formation, and pragmatic adaptability. Only by addressing these structural weaknesses can AAP reposition itself as a credible alternative in the evolving political landscape.

Conclusion

The Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) rise in Indian politics has been marked by both remarkable successes and significant challenges. It initially rose to prominence with its pro-people ideology, focusing on governance reforms, transparency, and welfare policies. This approach resonated with voters, helping AAP secure electoral victories in Delhi and later in Punjab. By prioritizing free electricity, healthcare, and education, the party positioned itself as a champion of the common people, challenging traditional political forces.

A key testament to AAP's growth came in April 2023 when the Election Commission of India recognized it as a national party. Following this achievement, AAP MP Raghav Chadha described it as the "fastest-growing political startup" in an interview. He attributed this success to the party's electoral victories in Delhi and Punjab, as well as its ability to surpass the required vote share threshold in Gujarat and Goa (Phadke, 2025).

AAP spokesperson Abhinandita Dayal Mathur says, "There is a real demand for Kejriwal's model of governance in the country. Our focus is and will always remain health, education, environment, women empowerment and economic stability," underlining where the party's appeal lies (Chakravarty, 2022). Even the party acknowledges that Kejriwal prioritizes a service-driven approach over a rigid ideological stance.

However, AAP's meteoric rise was soon met with challenges that ultimately led to its downfall in the 2025 Delhi Legislative Assembly elections. The party's initial success was largely driven by its populist policies and governance-centric approach, but this very strategy proved unsustainable in the long run. While AAP's targeted subsidies and cash transfers ensured continued support from slum dwellers, migrant workers, and daily wage laborers—its most loyal voter base—the party struggled to retain middle-income voters. Many in this bracket felt overlooked as their pressing issues, such as rising living costs, deteriorating civic amenities, and failing public infrastructure, were either sidelined or overshadowed by AAP's welfare-centric approach. This growing dis-connect between the party and the middle class ultimately culminated in a major electoral setback in 2025 (Mufti, Verma & Srivastava, 2025).

As AAP tried to respond to political challenges, it shifted towards a more transactional approach to politics, forging strategic alliances and adjusting its stance based on immediate electoral gains rather than ideological consistency. This pragmatism, however, alienated both its core supporters—who initially saw AAP as an anti-establishment force—and new voters, who found the party indistinguishable from traditional political outfits. The leadership's increasing reliance on political maneuvering over its original commitment to clean governance and transparency further dented its credibility. N. Sukumar, professor of University of Delhi made a similar point, saying Kejriwal placed a portrait of B.R. Ambedkar in his office but lost credibility amongst Dalits by edging out the Dalit minister Rajendra Pal Gautam from the government and then the party. "This is how a leader loses credibility, when the people are no longer sure about his ideological stand," he said (Mishra, 2025). Allegations of opportunistic alliances, internal dissent, and accusations of corruption only worsened AAP's electoral prospects.

Ultimately, the combination of ideological ambiguity, an unsustainable populist model, and a shift towards transactional politics culminated in the party's significant setback in the 2025 elections. Once heralded as a fresh alternative in Indian politics, AAP found itself struggling to maintain its identity amid shifting political currents. This serves as a crucial lesson on the limitations of both populism and pragmatism when not grounded in a coherent and sustainable political vision. In the days and months ahead, AAP's biggest challenge will be to stay afloat as it struggles for survival. The party's leadership will need to make a concerted effort to maintain unity among its leaders and workers while also safeguarding the stability of its government in Punjab. Nevertheless, it would be unreasonable to assume that AAP will fade into irrelevance in the country's political landscape, given Arvind Kejriwal's sharp political instincts and adaptability. Even in his speech conceding defeat, he avoided questioning the EVM or the electoral process, demonstrating political maturity by accepting defeat with grace (Phadke, 2025).

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