

## Process tracing and professionalization of political campaigns

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# PROCESS TRACING AND PROFESSIONALIZATION OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

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*Abstract: Recent years have witnessed a significant inner transformation among political parties in both developed and developing democracies of the world. Different factors, such as changes in the structure of the media environment owing to the technological boom in the last two decades and changes in voting behavior, led to the transformation of the political parties in different democracies worldwide. Therefore, studying the patterns of this transformation has become an integral part of the current political science research. Early studies have demonstrated the indexes based on professionalization. However, limited studies have tried to examine the process of transformation relating to professionalization and are almost missing from the studies based on non-western democracies like India. Therefore, against this backdrop, this study tries to expand the literature by providing a theoretical framework consisting of causal mechanisms which would explain the process of professionalization of campaigns with special reference to Indian elections through the theory testing method of process tracing. The framework has been provided in a series of causal mechanisms to answer how the considered individual variables react when they come in contact. This paper concludes by justifying the conceptual framework of professionalization.*

*Keywords: Professionalization; Political Parties; Election Campaigns; Process Tracing; Democracy*

## INTRODUCTION

Process tracing is a qualitative research method specifically used to trace causal mechanisms using empirical evidence from a detailed case analysis. Process tracing attempts to unpack the causal chain to examine how or whether a possible cause affects specified changes or sets of changes (Anguko 2019). This is done by setting up several tests to scrutinize the validity of the evidence and connecting it to the case study to make generalizable assumptions (Collier 2011). Therefore, one of the main features of process tracing lies in developing and testing possible ideas and shedding light on the factors that could be responsible for changes to a particular phenomenon (Collier 2011).

Process tracing can study only a single or a few cases (Anguko 2019). When a case requires a deeper explanation, process tracing could be a reliable method to study case variations to draw a causal inference of the phenomenon (Anguko 2019). The significance of process tracing is that it churns out the causal mechanism at play in a real-world case (Anguko 2019).

Process tracing is generally divided into theory testing, theory building, and outcome process tracing (Beach 2017). Theory building can be considered as the first step where the researcher knows that there is a connection between a dependent and independent variable and goes in search of clues to formulate a causal mechanism between the dependent and

independent variable by building a theoretical foundation based on similar cases around the world (Beach 2017). It is also known as soaking and probing (Beach 2017). On the other hand, theory testing means that a theory has been developed. The possible causal mechanisms between dependent and independent variables have been identified. The researcher's job is to test it and empirically validate whether the theory's explanations are applicable in the present case or if there are other alternative explanations (Beach 2017). The third category of process tracing is known as outcome process tracing. It is a repetitive research strategy. While the other two types concern theorizing and testing causal mechanisms, this method examines a more complex web of case-specific mechanisms to engender outcomes (Beach 2017).

This study will concentrate only on the theory-testing model of process tracing. Moreover, the study will focus on a particular theory to justify how the theory testing model of process tracing can be applied to that theory. Evidence from the literature states that using process tracing to the theory of professionalization about election campaigns could provide a new dimension to political communication studies (Karpf 2015; Ostrá 2021; Strömbäck 2009). Therefore, the study will first seek to explain the contribution of process tracing as discussed in the literature. Then it will take on the theory of professionalization to provide a roadmap analysis for professionalized election campaigns. Thus, there are two key questions:

- What are the contributions of process tracing to the literature about the professionalization of election campaigns?
- How can the theory testing method of process tracing be situated *vis-a-vis* the study of the professionalization of election campaigns with special reference to Indian general elections in the last decade?

## HISTORY OF PROCESS TRACING

Alexander George first conceptualized process tracing as a data interpretation method that became increasingly popular in case study research (Trampusch and Palier 2016, 437; Vennesson 2008). According to George, there was a need for a research strategy to examine if the correlation among different variables empirically discovered through statistical procedures has any causal links (Trampusch and Palier 2016). Hence, he developed a procedure known as process tracing that will track down the steps in a causal process proceeding toward the outcome of a dependent variable of a specific case in a particular historical context (Trampusch and Palier 2016). Several other methods, such as analytical narratives or systematic process analysis, are often debated to have close connections with process tracing (Vennesson 2008).

Nevertheless, process tracing strongly emphasizes key variables, whereas analytical narratives emphasize major actors, their strategies, etc., creating a clear distinction between the two (Trampusch and Palier 2016, 445).

Over the years, process tracing has become popular, and researchers worldwide can be seen using it in different manners (Trampusch and Palier 2016). While some researchers use process tracing to identify the causal mechanism and show a causal link between the dependent and independent variables, others use it to demonstrate the temporal sequences of variables (Trampusch and Palier 2016).

## METHODOLOGICAL DEBATES ON PROCESS TRACING

Most researchers today agree that process tracing is a method for tracing causal and temporal mechanisms (Trampusch and Palier 2016). This method focuses on the relationship between  $x$ ,  $y$ , and beyond. According to Bennet and Checkel, "process tracing is a key technique for capturing causal mechanisms in action" (Trampusch and Palier 2016, 438). Alexander George, who brought the concept of process tracing to the political science discipline, defines it as a method that could establish the causality among the correlated variables by systematically analyzing the relationship among variables (Vennesson 2008). Notably, researchers using process tracing are not concerned with detailed estimates of particular causes but instead focus on the underlying process which links variables that affect the outcome of a particular case (Trampusch and Palier 2016).

Moreover, while analyzing the causal process, researchers include two spectra. The first step is to investigate the effects of variables and then to develop a causal chain based on the mechanisms and their effects (Beach 2017; Trampusch and Palier 2016; Vennesson 2008). Since the causal process is complex, studying the temporal and spatial scope conditions is important to develop the mechanisms for the underlying phenomenon (Trampusch and Palier 2016).

Moreover, literature on process tracing also differs in terms of ontological paradigm, especially in analyzing causal mechanisms and their operation to causal inferences. Literature provides evidence of two ontologies based on probabilistic and deterministic notions of causality (Trampusch and Palier 2016). The probabilistic conception emphasizes scope conditions and the outcome in the mechanism analysis and assumes that some mechanisms might have different results as there are variations in operationalizing these mechanisms (Mayntz 2004; Trampusch and Palier 2016). At the same time, the deterministic conception emphasizes the static notion of causal mechanism, i.e., to examine 'what is constant in a mechanism that links  $X$  and  $Y$ ' (Beach 2017; Trampusch and Palier 2016). Hence it can be argued that while the probabilistic notion is dynamic, the deterministic notion tends to be more static.

Finally, the literature also differs regarding the method's applicability to the theory. It is divided into two sets; inductive contributions try to explore the theories and hence focus on building theories. On the other hand, deductive contributions focus on examining the theory's validity by testing it in a particular case (Beach 2017; Trampusch and Palier 2016). While the former tries to locate the causal links and mechanisms, the latter tries to explore the theory's validity with empirical case analysis (Beach 2017; Trampusch and Palier 2016). However, this differentiation between deductive and inductive approaches has two important significances.

Firstly process tracing becomes the only case study method within political science that has the potential to construct as well as test theories (Trampusch and Palier 2016). Secondly, process tracing tries to connect to a quantitative approach, thereby building an indispensable bridge connecting both qualitative and quantitative paradigms (Trampusch and Palier 2016). Hence it can be argued that process tracing contains elements of both positivist and interpretive paradigms.

## POSITIVIST AND INTERPRETIVIST PERSPECTIVES OF PROCESS TRACING

The Positivist paradigm of process tracing aims to form and examine the connection among different variables (Vennesson 2008). By using historical documents, archives, interview recordings, transcripts, and various other sources, the researcher explores the causal chain of the theory that he found in other cases that can be applied to the present study or not (Beach 2017; Vennesson 2008). Hence, the investigator can check the effectiveness of the indicators in measuring dependent and independent variables (Vennesson 2008). Moreover, the researcher also critically examines the validity and reliability of the data and its representativeness to check for the relative importance of certain possible causal factors (Vennesson 2008). Therefore, this paradigm focuses on the researcher's aim to learn and develop a causal chain where a particular factor could be traced and connected to another factor to establish a causal chain.

However, the interpretive paradigm of process tracing emphasizes the ways and context in which the causal link is visible and how it occurred (Beach 2017; Vennesson 2008). Here the focus is more on the "how" question than the "what" question. Therefore, process tracing from an interpretive sense can explore the reasons an actor presents about his actions and behavior and further examine the link between belief and behaviors (Vennesson 2008). Thus, combining the aspects of both paradigms, it can be argued that process tracing helps the investigators unveil directly or indirectly the mechanisms that actors want to know and compute (Vennesson 2008). The next section will briefly discuss the theory-testing model of process tracing.

## THEORY TESTING MODEL OF PROCESS TRACING

As discussed earlier, the literature on process tracing differs in its applicability to the theory. Hence process tracing is divided into two segments deductive mode and inductive mode. Inductive mode deals with the theory-building segment of process tracing; however, deductive mode deals with theory testing segment of process tracing (Trampusch and Palier 2016). The present study will only focus on the process tracing theory testing segment.

According to Derek Beach's theory testing model is also known as "process verification", "systematic process analysis", "congruence model", and "mechanism tracing" (Trampusch and Palier 2016, 445). As discussed earlier, here, the researcher gathers evidence and then evaluates whether the empirical evidence aligns with the theoretical explanations; thus, based on the empirical shreds of evidence, researchers either confirm or reject the hypothesis (Beach 2017).

However, deductive segments must be differentiated from the analytical narratives as the process seems similar (Beach 2017). Analytical narratives are mainly used to show the extent to which micro-foundational theories are valid through a repetitive process that oscillates back and forth between observations and specific theories in order to refine further the existing theory (Beach 2017; Beach and Pedersen 2013, 14-15). However, those involved in process tracing are curious to analyze the causal mechanism dynamics, what constitutes the changes, and the feedback processes (Beach 2017; Beach and Pedersen 2013, 14-15). Experts of process tracing may sometimes use rival theories to distinguish them from each other instead of focusing on one specific theory.

According to most recent literature on process tracing, the theory testing model uses Bayesian inference logic (Beach 2017; Trampusch and Palier 2016). When employing Bayesian statistics, process tracing takes the deterministic role in which all the parts of the causal mechanism are identified as necessary to test theories and draw causal inferences; thus, Bayesian inference helps predict certain unique causal processes (Beach 2017; Trampusch and Palier 2016). Part-by-part discussion helps to find the empirical evidence that should be expected if the mechanism exists in other cases.

The theory testing model of process tracing becomes relevant to test an established mechanism in a small N case study (Beach 2017). Literature on professional election campaigns has widely used this method to examine whether the indicators of professional election campaigns are empirically valid in a particular country (Ostrá 2021; Strömbäck 2009). Hence, the next section of the article will discuss how the theory testing model can be applied to the theory of professionalized election campaigns by particularly focusing on the Indian elections.

## PROFESSIONALIZATION OF ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

The professionalization of political parties has been an integral part of electoral campaigns. According to Strömbäck, party professionalization is “about expertise and the use of specialized expertise in campaign-related activities” (Ostrá 2021, 9). According to Lilleker and Nergine, professionalization as a concept has become a norm which explains the growth of political campaigns and communication (Ostrá 2021). However, researchers worldwide also argued that the type of professionalization changes depending on the geographical location, types of parties, etc. (Ostrá 2021). Therefore, there is a need to measure the level of professionalization. Hence, different models based on certain types of indicators were introduced by several researchers.

The first index was developed by Gibson and Rommel and introduced in 2009. They created an additive index known as the CAMRROF index (Gibson and Römmele 2009; Ostrá 2021). This was divided into two categories subjective and objective. The objective spectrum depends on direct mail, telemarketing, and internal communication systems. In contrast, the subjective spectrum depends on using computer databases, PR consultants, use of polls, etc. these indicators were measured specifically by analyzing the election survey data, and the resultant output was given a range from 0-30 (Gibson and Römmele 2009; Ostrá 2021). Over the years, various other models were discovered by researchers. For instance, Strömbäck 2009 provided a modified version of the model mentioned above by adding two indicators first is based on the importance of focused groups, and the second one reflects the strengths as well as weaknesses of the political parties (Ostrá 2021; Strömbäck 2009). The second indicator is important as it helps the party retrospectively and works on their weakness (Ostrá 2021). His model has 11 indicators, and he provided his model by observing the Swedish elections (Ostrá 2021; Strömbäck 2009).

Tenscher and Mykkanen provided another model for professionalizing political campaigns (Ostrá 2021; Tenscher et al. 2016). While previous models focused on only campaign structure, this model is an improvement over other models as it provides a two-dimensional model focussing on campaign structure as well as strategies, i.e., concentrates upon the changes



in the management of campaigns as well as the strategies for political parties (Tenscher et al. 2016). They justified their model by gathering certain empirical observations. It has 15 indicators and is considered a party-centered model (Ostrá 2021; Tenscher et al. 2016).

However, the latest one was presented by Restrepo-Echawarria, Rodriguez-Diaz, and Castromil in 2018 (Ostrá 2021). It is another two-dimensional index, the INPROCO index comprising the organizational and communication spectrum. While the former could be measured using 13 indicators, the latter could be measured using 14 (Ostrá 2021). All these indicators were derived from previous studies by Plasser, Mancini, Rommel, and Gibson (Ostrá 2021).

The literature so far has demonstrated the indexes based on professionalization. However, only a few pieces of literature have tried to construct a causal chain based on the professionalization of election campaigns. Therefore, this study will try to expand the literature by providing a theoretical framework consisting of causal mechanisms which would explain the process of professionalization of campaigns with special reference to Indian elections.

There have been few studies on professionalized election campaigns in western democracies (Gibson and Römmele 2009; Strömbäck 2009; Tenscher et al. 2016). However, the same has not been studied thoroughly in non-western democracies like India, which is the largest democracy in the world. Hence, the present study will concentrate on the Indian election campaign due to its huge cultural and population diversity.

This study will try to build a causal model of professionalization based on the theory-testing model of process tracing. The model will be constructed based on the literature and gathering evidence by studying the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) electoral journey over the last few decades.

The operationalization of causal mechanisms in the present study has been firmly theorized in the literature on the professionalization and transformation of political parties. Gibson and Rommel also presented a causal model of parties' professionalization and measuring the degrees of professionalization (Gibson and Römmele 2009). According to their model, political parties play a significant role in their transformation. They took inferences from the integrated party change theory by Harmel and Janda in order to make three specific presumptions:

- First, every party has its own primary goal.
- Secondly, the most significant transformation in a party could be due to some external shock.
- External shocks act as a medium that could directly affect the party's primary goal.

The roots of the professionalization of campaigns could be found in the social changes within the party (Ostrá 2021). Social changes could occur due to the party's ideological shift or be based on societal modernization (Ostrá 2021). These could be further categorized into a decline in voter turnout, a decrease in focus on economic and social ideologies, a decrease in interest in political party membership, the performance of the present ruling party, and a decline in the popularity of the incumbent party. These categories are drawn from the literature on Indian elections, collectively known as environmental factors (Chhibber and Verma 2014; Singh

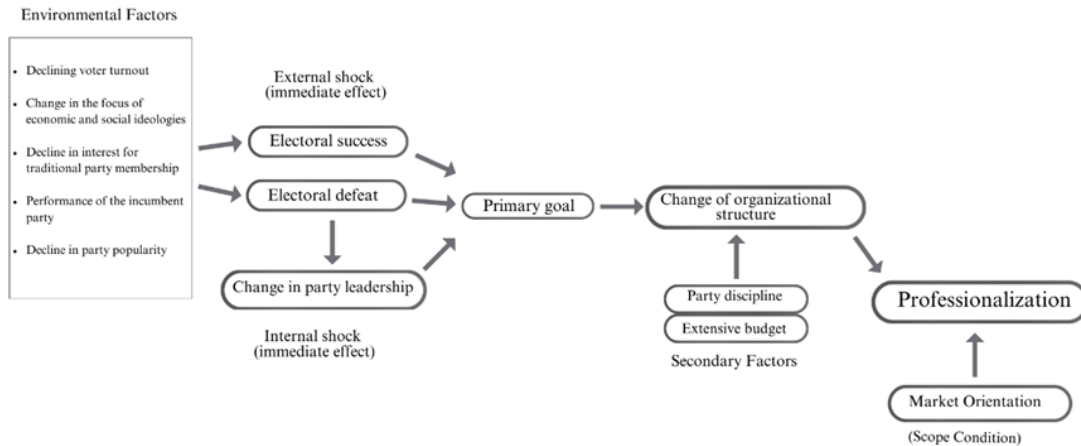
2013; Verma 2019). These factors are long-term factors that affect in the form of external shock resulting in either electoral loss or electoral success.

Literature also argues that parties tend to change their leadership whenever there is electoral defeat, thus facilitating internal shock. Therefore, when such changes occur, political parties adopt new marketing and political branding techniques (Ostrá 2021). According to Gibson and Rommel, new techniques are adopted solely for vote maximization (Gibson and Römmele 2009; Ostrá 2021). They also provided certain organizational features which could play an important role in political branding and vote maximization (Gibson and Römmele 2009; Ostrá 2021). According to the causal mechanism of the study, the first feature is related to the availability of resources and materials required for branding. Secondly, a systematic hierarchical structure of the party is necessary to operationalize the changes needed for professionalization.

However, market orientations are considered tools and expertise to describe a particular type of activity. The literature on professionalization has mixed views on using marketing orientation as a causal factor toward professionalization. While some authors (Kumar and Dhamija 2017; Kumar 2022) argued that professionalization should not be confused with marketing as the latter concentrates not just on marketing techniques but also its principles and procedures. Others (Jaffrelot and Verniers 2020; Neyazi, Kumar, and Semetko 2016) believed that marketing models complement professionalized campaigns. Hence, the present study will include market orientation under scope conditions. The remaining features of formal organizational structure, such as extensive budget and the party's internal discipline, are included as the secondary factors giving rise to organizational change of the party structure, thus contributing to the degree of professionalization.

Therefore, based on the above literature, the present study develops a causal mechanism of the professionalized political campaign. The causal mechanism states that certain long-term factors in the form of a decline in voter turnout, a change in focus on economic and social ideologies, a decrease in interest in political party membership, the performance of the present ruling party, and a decline in popularity of the incumbent party give rises to external shock in the form of electoral defeat or electoral success. When it is in the form of electoral defeat, it will give rise to internal shock in the form of changing leadership of the party, which ultimately affects the primary goal. Furthermore, a change in primary goals eventually leads to a change in organizational structure determined by certain secondary factors such as party discipline and party budget, thus creating a background for professional political parties. An estimated model of a causal mechanism using evidence from literature has been presented in Figure 1 (Ostrá 2021; Strömbäck 2009).





**Figure 1: Proposed Causal Mechanism of Professionalization of Political Campaign**  
(Source: Author's research)

### Operationalization of the Evidence

Process tracing has been commonly used by researchers when it comes to deriving causal mechanisms (Beach 2017; Ostrá 2021). Therefore, if process tracing has been adopted for a particular research, the first phase is the conceptualization phase. After that, the operationalization phase occurs, where all the types of evidence need to be properly determined and clearly defined (Beach 2017; Ostrá 2021). This is important because it helps to indicate the presence of a causal mechanism in a particular case. As argued by Beach, if actual evidence that connects each part of the mechanism could be found and matches the prescribed propositions about evidence, then it can be inferred that the hypothesized causal mechanism is present in the case based on Bayesian logic (Ostrá 2021, 16). Certain examples will support the evidence with special reference to the Indian election, particularly BJP's journey from the 2004-2014 elections.

Declining voter turnout is one of the significant factors that can significantly affect the party's performance. Therefore, the party's potential to mobilize its voters through campaigns becomes a major issue that could harm its overall performance (Beach 2017; Ostrá 2021). If the party is incapable of mobilizing the voters, it will result in declining voter turnout, which could negatively affect the overall results of the election. Traditionally mobilization occurred through networking and contacts (Ostrá 2021). However, in modern times, television, newspaper, and the internet add a new dimension where parties use these platforms to reach the general masses.

Secondly, party ideologies also play an important role in shaping election outcomes. It can often be linked to declining voter turnout. If the party's ideology does not match the voter's interest, parties can shift their ideologies, significantly impacting the final election outcome. For instance, in 2009, BJP's ideology concentrated on social conservatives. It was mostly known as a Hindu nationalist party, owing to some anti-Muslim programs in BJP-governed states. As a result, there was a declining voter turnout as people belonging to only that particular group supported BJP (Chhibber and Verma 2014; Singh 2013).

Moreover, BJP produced a pathetic performance in 2009 as the share of votes went below what was secured in 1991 and lost 3.3% of the valid votes compared to the 2004 general

elections (Singh 2013). However, by 2014 BJP managed to draw a middle ground by shifting its ideology, thus pooling both socially conservative and those who believed in a liberalized economy (Chhibber and Verma 2014). Moreover, BJP also systematically targeted the rising middle class, forming the country's greater vote share (Chhibber and Verma 2014). Hence, in 2014 BJP's voter turnout was significantly high compared to what it was in 2009. Therefore, these two environmental factors play a significant role in developing a professionalized orientation for the party's political campaign. Voter turnout could be measured using voter data and changing ideologies using a model provided by Jackel to measure party ideologies (Jäckle 2009). Jäckle provided a model where he introduced 13 categories extracted by combining four different types of methods, i.e., classification of party families, surveys of general masses and experts, apart from hand-coded and automated text analysis approaches, and finally behavioral measures (Jäckle 2009). Some categories are social liberalism, welfare *vs.* taxes, and deregulation. Therefore, based on these indicators, parties' positions could be measured (Jäckle 2009).

A decline in party membership is another important factor that could create a distance among the parties which are in a coalition. This usually happens when parties directly shift their policies to attract many members from different parties to form a coalition. This, however, can lead to a negative outcome, such as declining voter turnout (Ostrá 2021). This could be measured using data on the number of members of political parties and the number of coalition parties (Ostrá 2021). Evidence of such factors could be found in BJP's electoral journey, specifically from 1999 to its defeat in 2004 (Singh 2013). In 1999 BJP formed the government with the help of 24 other parties, known as the National Democratic Alliance (Singh 2013). However, after forming the government, the BJP-led NDA faced many problems from other coalition parties and within BJP. Maintaining different ideological perspectives was not easy; therefore, halfway through its term BJP appeared extremely fragile as many coalition member parties, such as Trinamool Congress, J&K National Conference, etc., came out of the coalition seeing their ideologies and interest best fulfilled outside the coalition (Singh 2013). As a result, this coalition became unstable and eventually led to their defeat in 2004. The alliance of 24 parties in 1999 decreased from 22 parties in 2004 to about 7 in 2009 (Singh 2013). This can also be associated with the ideological position as BJP came to be known as the Hindu nationalist party many parties in the coalition feared that they will lose the Muslim voters which formed a large base of their vote share, especially in the southern parts of India as a result of which they left the coalition (Singh 2013).

Other environmental factors, like the incumbent party's performance and the decline in party popularity, go hand in hand. As the ruling party keeps winning election after election, it is evident that the opposition will certainly lose its popularity with electoral defeat in each election cycle. A decline in party popularity could be measured using data on voter turnout and the election survey data sets. The incumbent party's performance could assess the policies introduced by the ruling party through the election survey data set. Evidence of these environmental factors could be found in the Indian election, where at one point, especially after the 2004 elections, BJP lost the entire plot leading to their defeat in 2009, where vote share also declined, and several parties stepped out of the coalition (Singh 2013). As a result of which, many scholars termed the BJP as a 'dying party'. However, after the 2009 elections, the ruling

party Congress faced many corruption charges, including some renowned cabinet ministers (Chhibber and Verma 2014). This came as a ray of hope for the BJP to start fresh for the 2014 elections.

### **Internal and External shock**

The causal mechanism clearly defines the internal and external shock. If a party in question loses in the previous election, the outcome is electoral defeat, and if it manages to win, it results in electoral success. The causal mechanism will only consider national-level elections to make the election types uniform. Furthermore, this could be assessed by going through polls and election results. For instance, these primary factors could be seen in Indian elections. BJP's prime ministerial candidate for the 2004 elections was Atal Viharee Bajpayee, whom LK Advani replaced in 2009, and Narendra Modi in 2014 (Chhibber and Verma 2014; Singh 2013). The party concentrated on changing leadership each time after facing electoral defeat. However, after the 2009 election, they changed their strategies and tried to brand Modi's name since he had had a significant impact, especially in his state of Gujrat (Chhibber and Verma 2014).

### **The Primary Goal and Organisational Structure**

Evaluating the changes in the primary goal is a complex issue. At first political parties generally stick to their ideologies. However, after facing electoral defeat, political parties slowly restructure their goals to suit the public interest. Evaluating the primary goal is solely based on the matter of interpretation by the researcher, as no standardized models exist and could be measured using public statements by party representatives or internal materials of the party. An instance of change in primary goal could be found in BJP's electoral journey after two consecutive defeats in 2004 and 2009 (Singh 2013). BJP in 2009 focused only on criticizing Congress's policies and setting up negative agendas. However, in the wake up of the 2014 elections, BJP could read the political scenario and framed agendas at the national level based on good governance and economic development (Bajaj 2017). Their agendas were in response to the incumbent party's corrupt practices, thus trying to portray themselves as the harbinger of change and an image of a corruption-free India if the party comes to power (Bajaj 2017).

The organizational structure is another important aspect of the causal mechanism. This aspect also depends on the researcher's subjectivity. However, the researcher should generally focus on certain factors, such as clearly defined roles for each party member, streamlining the decision-making structure, centralization, etc. (Ostrá 2021). This could be assessed using internal materials of the party, such as party statutes. Moreover, change in the organizational structure is also led by certain secondary factors such as party discipline and extensive budget. Party discipline can be linked to organizational structure as a disciplined party with clearly defined roles has a strong organizational structure compared to a party where roles are not defined clearly (Ostrá 2021). Party discipline could be measured using party documents, interviews with party members, etc. Another factor associated with the organizational structure is the party budget, which is how much a party has spent on election campaigns (Ostrá 2021). It could be measured by comparing its budget expenditure in two successive elections (Ostrá 2021).

An instance of this could be found in BJP's party structure after the defeat of the 2009 elections. It has a strictly hierarchical and disciplined structure where each segment has clearly defined rules. Moreover, the party introduced an IT cell in 2014 whose sole responsibility is to look after the election campaigns (Bajaj 2017). The IT cell is structured in such a way that it has its roots at the grassroots level, similar to the organizational structure of the BJP. The IT cell of BJP, during the 2014 elections, tried to attract the youth and first-time voters by using social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, etc. (Bajaj 2017). They framed agendas at the national level based on good governance and economic development (Bajaj 2017). Therefore, by studying the population structure, it used an information control tweet that tries to divert users' attention to a particular type of tweet that the party wants its public to look at (Bajaj 2017). This type of tweet has a positive effect on the election outcome.

Moreover, the party invested heavily in social media platforms compared to the 2009 elections (Jaffrelot 2015). This new strategy comprising of change in organizational structure coupled with a disciplined orientation and extensive budget led to a successful election campaign in 2014 (Jaffrelot 2015). The organizational structure of the BJP is depicted in Figure 2.



Figure 2: BJP's Organisational Structure  
(Source: Organisation of the Bharatiya Janata Party 2023)

### Scope Condition

Market orientation comes under scope conditions and is very closely related to professional political campaigns. It is termed as tools and expertise to describe a particular activity. It could be measured using the index provided by Less and Marshment in 2001 (Ostrá 2021). However, it is included under scope conditions based on the debates about political marketing in campaigns, specifically in India. According to some scholars like Kumar, political marketing should not be confused with professionalization as professionalization includes only marketing strategies; however, political marketing also includes marketing principles as well as procedures along with strategies (Kumar and Dhamija 2017; Kumar 2022).

On the other hand, scholars like Jafferlot argued that political marketing is an important aspect of political campaigns and could be certainly linked to the party's organizational structure (Jaffrelot and Verniers 2020; Neyazi, Kumar, and Semetko 2016). For instance, BJP in 2019 used the Hollywood movie Avengers poster and portrayed Modi as the nation's leading hero and protector. Such marketing techniques targeted young voters who could relate these political leaders to the movie characters (Jaffrelot and Verniers 2020).

## CONCLUSION

The primary goal of this paper was to design a conceptual framework for the professionalization of election campaigns. This article tries to shed light and extend its understanding of a wide range of literature on the complex structure within political parties, which results in the professionalization of election campaigns. The framework has been provided in a series of causal mechanisms to answer how the considered individual variables react when they come in contact. The confidence of the causal model in the study could be set high by collecting the evidence and assessing the inferential weight of the evidence by conducting four tests provided in the literature.

The process tracing method was chosen for the study because it is considered one of the effective methods to study one single case or studies with a small number of N. Primary aim of this approach is to trace conditions of causality, prescribed settings, and finally, mechanisms leading to the emergence of a certain outcome. In this case, the theory testing model of process tracing has been employed as the study presents a causal mechanism. A theory has been deduced from current literature and tested by providing operationalized evidence.

However, process tracing also has certain limitations. The first is related to confirmation bias, where the researcher might find information that supports their way of thinking and hence could skip the other types of information that could potentially contradict his/her belief (Vennesson 2008). This can have a serious impact on the comprehensive research report. However, such problems can be overcome by considering alternative explanations that could lead to the final output based on the researcher's interest level (Vennesson 2008). Moreover, accounting for alternative explanations can lead to counterfactuals, which are a powerful tool against pre-existing theories (Vennesson 2008). Another potential limitation of process tracing is that the causal mechanism through process tracing can have high confidence only when a clear causal path exists between the causes and the observed outcomes at the appropriate level of analysis, explicitly defined by the theory testing model of process tracing (Bennett and George 1997). Hence, any negative evidence related to an intervening variable could seriously impact the hypothesized causal mechanism that relies solely on the causal pathway (Bennett and George 1997). Moreover, another potential problem is directed toward theories that do not always predict and explain all steps in a causal process, especially regarding complex cases (Bennett and George 1997). Therefore, if data related to certain evidence of the studied case is unavailable or if the theories could not properly explain the steps of the causal mechanism then the process verification can give rise only to certain provisional conclusions (Bennett and George 1997).

Nevertheless, process tracing is one of the most effective measures for unpacking the imaginary black box and identifying a causal mechanism inside the box. It helps the researcher to develop a strong conclusion about causal processes (Bennett and George 1997). As process tracing can follow the position and action of the actors, it can unravel the causal mechanism (Trampusch and Palier 2016). Hence it is considered one of the most common and valuable methods in social science research. Additionally, it improves Mill's comparison method and can be applied to reduce the risk of inferential mistakes that this method creates (Bennett and George 1997). The sole method of observation that may infer causal relationships beyond covariation is process tracing, which is the most significant (Bennett and George 1997).



## COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

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