

The Decline of Political Ideology in Contemporary Democracy: Electoral Opportunism and the Crisis of Public Trust

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Abstract

Political ideology has traditionally acted like the moral, philosophical ground for democratic societies, but lately—almost like, more often than not—contemporary politics has been showing a steady weakening of ideological commitment. Quite several activists and leaders who are tied to particular movements end up shifting their party affiliations, not really for principle but more for electoral convenience, some direct financial nudge, or for the sake of political survival. And when this keeps happening, citizens get a kind of blur on what “real” ideological loyalty even means, so public trust in democratic institutions ends up getting weaker. This monograph looks at the crisis of political ideology inside modern democratic culture, with an emphasis on electoral opportunism, frequent party-switching, and also the commercialization of political activism. It goes on to discuss how media pressure, financial strength, and personality-led politics help produce ideological instability, as if ideas become props rather than guides. Using case-based observations from regional democratic practices in India, the paper suggests that political ideology is slowly becoming secondary to the pursuit of power, and to strategic advantage. The monograph also points out the sociological and psychological aftereffects of ideological inconsistency, especially on youth participation and overall democratic involvement. In the end, the study argues that democratic sustainability depends on ethical leadership, better political literacy, and institutional accountability, so that ideological faith among citizens can be rebuilt, and not just talked about.

Keywords

Political ideology; Electoral opportunism; Democratic ethics; Party-switching; Political activism; Public trust; Contemporary democracy; Political commercialization

Introduction

Political ideology has historically played a central role in shaping democratic societies and political movements. Ideologies such as socialism, liberalism, nationalism, conservatism, and secularism have provided moral direction and collective identity to political organizations and citizens. According to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1848), political movements emerge from broader social and economic conflicts and often represent ideological struggles within society. Similarly, John Stuart Mill (1859) argued that democratic participation depends upon informed public reasoning and ethical political engagement.

In contemporary democratic politics, however, ideological commitment appears to be gradually weakening. Political leaders and activists are increasingly observed changing political affiliations before elections, often accompanied by sudden shifts in political narratives and public statements. Individuals who once strongly criticized a political organization may later become its supporters after joining that same organization. Such transformations create skepticism among citizens regarding the sincerity of political ideology.

The commercialization of electoral politics has significantly contributed to this phenomenon. Elections increasingly depend upon financial resources, media visibility, organizational strength, and strategic alliances. Consequently, political participation often becomes transactional rather than ideological. According to Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman (1988), modern media structures frequently influence political perception by prioritizing narratives that support power structures rather than ideological consistency. Another important factor behind ideological decline is the rise of personality-centric politics. Citizens increasingly support political personalities instead of political philosophies. Political debates are often reduced to emotional polarization and media-driven propaganda rather than policy-oriented ideological discussions. This transformation weakens democratic accountability and encourages opportunistic political behaviour.

In regional democratic contexts within India, the phenomenon of party-switching has become highly visible. Political activists and leaders frequently migrate between ruling and opposition parties depending upon changing political conditions. While democratic

systems naturally allow freedom of political association, repeated opportunistic transitions create the perception that ideology has become secondary to political survival and personal advancement.

Furthermore, globalization and digital communication have accelerated ideological flexibility. Political narratives can now be rapidly modified according to electoral trends and public sentiment. Social media platforms amplify emotional narratives and encourage short-term political mobilization, reducing the importance of long-term ideological consistency. The present monograph critically examines the decline of political ideology in contemporary democratic society. The study aims to analyze how electoral opportunism, party-switching, and commercialization of politics affect democratic ethics, public trust, and citizen participation.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the decline of ideological commitment in contemporary democratic politics.
2. To analyze the impact of electoral opportunism and party-switching on public trust.
3. To explore the influence of money, media, and personality-driven politics on political ideology.
4. To understand the sociological impact of ideological inconsistency on democratic participation.
5. To suggest measures for strengthening ethical and ideology-based political culture.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative case study approach, more or less, to look at how ideological commitment seems to fall away while electoral opportunism gets more space in today's Indian democracy. The focus is on a few selected instances of party switching and political re-alignment across several major states in India, like West Bengal, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Madhya Pradesh, for the stretch from 2014 to 2025. These particular states were chosen because they went through noticeable defections, coalition

reshuffling, and public arguments about whether ideology stays intact or not, even when the incentives shift. For the material, the research leans on documentary analysis of academic work, policy documents, media coverage, records from the Election Commission and also parliamentary debates, plus judicial readings connected to the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution of India, which is basically the Anti-Defection Law. Secondary information was gathered from scholarly publications, government releases, and electoral records that are publicly available, so the sources weren't pulled out of thin air. A thematic analytic framework was used, to sort out repeated patterns concerning ideological change, electoral opportunism, political mobility, public trust, and democratic accountability. Extra care was given to how political defections connect, or don't connect, with what citizens think about democratic legitimacy. The study doesn't aim at statistical generalization. It instead tries to offer an interpretive sense of why repeated party-switching and that transactional sort of political manoeuvring can erode ideological commitment in contemporary democratic life, bit by bit.

Some Case References of Party Switching

Table 1. Selected Cases of Political Party Switching and Political Realignment in India (2014–2025)

State	Key Actor(s)	Political Party	Original Party	New Party/Alignment	Year	Political Context	Relevance to the Study
West Bengal	Sri Suvendu Adhikari (Hon. Chief Minister of West Bengal as of June 2026)	All India Trinamool Congress (AITC/TMC)		Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	2020	Defected prior to the 2021 Assembly Election and emerged as a leading opposition figure.	Demonstrates ideological realignment and strategic political mobility in a highly competitive electoral environment.
West Bengal	Sri Mukul Roy	Trinamool Congress (TMC)		BJP (2017), later returned to TMC (2021)	2017–2021	Shifted between rival political parties during periods of intense electoral contestation.	Illustrates ideological fluidity and the strategic nature of party affiliation.

State	Key Political Actor(s)	Original Party	New Party/Alignment	Year	Political Context	Relevance to the Study
Maharashtra	Sri Eknath Shinde and allied MLAs	Shiv Sena (Undivided)	Shinde-led Shiv Sena faction allied with BJP	2022	Defection resulted in the collapse of the existing government and the formation of a new coalition administration.	Highlights the capacity of defections to alter democratic mandates and governmental stability.
Maharashtra	Sri Ajit Pawar and allied legislators	Nationalist Congress Party (NCP)	NCP faction aligned with BJP-Shiv Sena government	2023	Internal party division produced a significant political realignment.	Reflects the growing prominence of strategic coalition-building over ideological continuity.
Karnataka	Congress and JD(S) legislators	Indian National Congress / Janata Dal (Secular)	BJP-supported alignment	2019	Resignations and defections contributed to the collapse of the coalition government.	Demonstrates how political defections can directly affect governance and legislative stability.
Karnataka	Sri Jagadish Shettar	Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	Congress (2023), later returned to BJP (2024)	2023–2024	High-profile transition between major political parties.	Illustrates the personalized and strategic dimensions of contemporary political affiliation.
Madhya Pradesh	Sri Jyotiraditya Scindia and supporting MLAs	Indian National Congress	Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	2020	Defections led to the fall of the Congress government and the formation of a new administration.	Represents one of the most consequential cases of party-switching affecting state-level democratic outcomes.
Madhya Pradesh	Sri Tulsi Silawat and allied legislators	Indian National Congress	Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	2020	Joined the Scindia-led political realignment.	Demonstrates collective defection and its implications for democratic representation.

State	Key Political Actor(s)	Original Party	New Party/Alignment	Year	Political Context	Relevance to the Study
Assam	Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma (Hon. Chief Minister of Assam as of June 2026)	Indian National Congress	Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	2015	Left the Congress after internal leadership disputes and subsequently became a central figure in BJP's expansion in Northeast India.	Illustrates how political realignment can significantly reshape regional electoral dynamics and party dominance.
Assam	Several Congress legislators and regional leaders	Indian National Congress and regional parties	Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and allied parties	2015–2021	Multiple defections occurred during BJP's consolidation of political influence in the state.	Highlights the cumulative impact of party-switching on regional political restructuring and voter perceptions of ideological commitment.

Source: *Compiled by the author from Election Commission of India records, parliamentary debates, judicial documents relating to the Anti-Defection Law, and publicly available political reports (2014–2025).*

Disclaimer: *The cases discussed in this study are based on publicly documented political events and are included solely for academic and research purposes. The author does not intend to criticize, endorse, or undermine any political party, political leader, or ideological position. While numerous instances of political realignment and party-switching have occurred across India, only some of the most prominent and widely reported cases have been selected for illustrative and analytical purposes. All interpretations are offered in the interest of scholarly examination of democratic processes and political behavior.*

Ideological Crisis and Electoral Opportunism in Modern Democracy

Political ideology once represented long-term philosophical commitment and collective social aspiration. Political workers often dedicated decades of activism to a particular ideological movement despite economic hardship or political suppression. According to

Alexis de Tocqueville (1835), democracy survives when citizens actively participate in public life through moral responsibility and civic consciousness.

However, modern democratic politics increasingly reflects the decline of ideological loyalty. Electoral politics is now heavily influenced by strategic alliances, economic interests, and media management. Political workers frequently shift party affiliations according to electoral possibilities and changing power structures. This creates a perception that ideology is negotiable rather than principled. The professionalization of politics is another major reason behind this transformation. Politics is no longer viewed solely as a form of social service but also as a pathway toward influence, security, and economic advancement. As a result, many activists prioritize political survival over ideological consistency.

The expansion of digital media has intensified this phenomenon. Political communication today is highly dependent on social media narratives, emotional propaganda, and visual representation. According to Francis Fukuyama (2014), modern democratic institutions face increasing challenges due to declining trust, weak ideological structures, and identity-based political mobilization.

Financial influence during elections further contributes to ideological erosion. In many democratic societies, electoral campaigns require significant economic resources. Consequently, activists may become vulnerable to financial incentives and political patronage. Citizens observing such transformations often become politically cynical and emotionally detached from democratic institutions.

The youth population is particularly affected by this ideological confusion. Young voters increasingly perceive politics as opportunistic rather than ethical. Instead of engaging in ideological debates, many become emotionally polarized through digital propaganda and personality worship. This weakens democratic participation and reduces critical political awareness. The following comic-based image best describes the entire scenario.



Comic: Ideological Crisis and Electoral Opportunism in Modern Democracy (Made through Canva AI)

Personal Statement Based on Case-Based Observations

As an observer of contemporary democratic life, I've personally felt this uneasy shift, where ideological politics seems to be slowly fading away. In earlier times, people often treated political engagement as something like a moral duty, tied to social change and shared well-being. Political workers were seen as genuinely committed, with a kind of steady ideological backbone, and yes, they were even respected for personal sacrifice. Now, though, contemporary politics just doesn't behave the same. We often see rapid changes in ideology, and it feels less like conviction and more like electoral convenience, or plain strategic advantage. During elections, activists and leaders sometimes switch affiliations almost overnight and repackage their messages at the same time. Citizens watch these swings, and they start to ask, in a more tired way, whether ideology still means anything real within democratic society. For me, this trend has seriously weakened public trust. Many ordinary citizens can't really make sense of how someone can swing their ideological stance so dramatically in such a short stretch. Of course, democracy should protect freedom of political association. Still, when these changes happen again and again, in an opportunistic fashion, it leaves people confused about ethics, and also about who is actually accountable. I also think there's another pressure at work, financial influence, which has sort of commercialized political activism (Pal, 2024). Economic insecurity, unemployment, and reliance on patronage networks make activists easier to pull into transactional bargains. Under these conditions, ideology doesn't just lose its edge, it gradually sheds its emotional and philosophical weight, like it's becoming less a guiding principle and more a temporary instrument.

Still, the ideological transformation itself isn't always unethical. Political beliefs can change because of intellectual maturation, shifting social realities, or even plain discontent with organizational structures. The real ethical worry shows up when those ideological shifts happen over and over for quick electoral rewards, rather than for principled self-reflection. According to Rawls (1993), a stable democratic society depends upon public reason, mutual respect, and adherence to shared principles of justice despite ideological differences. Frequent opportunistic ideological shifts weaken this foundation and reduce citizens' trust in democratic institutions. Speaking as both researcher and

citizen, I feel democracy needs more than just periodic elections. It also relies on ideological openness, ethical leadership, and civic awareness. When participation turns totally into a type of trading, a transactional exchange, democratic culture can quietly lose its moral base. So educational institutions, civil society organizations, and independent media should encourage political literacy and democratic values within younger citizens. Public conversations ought to push critical thinking, not just automatic political devotion. Only by demanding ethical accountability and building ideological awareness can democratic societies recover public trust.

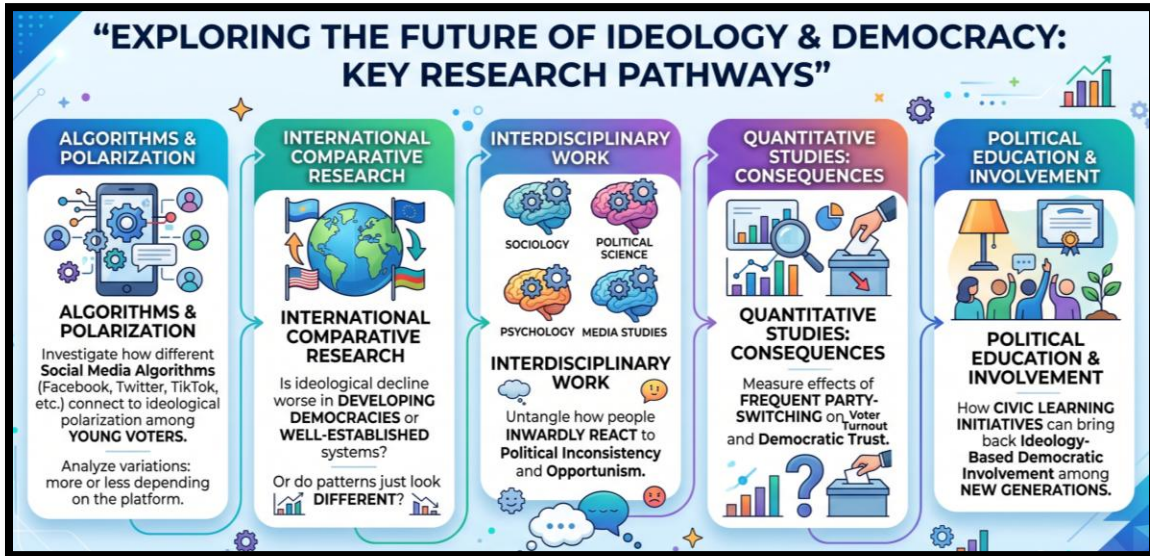
Conclusion

The decline of political ideology in today's democratic society seems to create a big problem for democratic ethics and the trust people have in institutions. Electoral opportunism, sudden party-switching, financial influence, and personality-led politics have made ideological commitment much weaker among a lot of political actors. So, citizens start to see politics as mostly transactional, not really principled. Even if democratic systems usually let ideology evolve and allow political mobility, too much inconsistency can slowly erode public confidence and harm democratic stability. When politics has no solid ideological roots, it can end up depending almost completely on strategic power struggles and some aggressive media steering. Getting back ideological trust needs ethical leadership in politics, clearer democratic institutions that do not hide behind complexity, political literacy for ordinary people, and real citizen involvement. Democracy, in the end, does not just live on elections but on keeping ideological integrity, moral accountability, and civic duty in place.

Further Research Prospects

Future studies could look into how social media algorithms connect, with ideological polarization among young voters, I mean like more or less, depending on the platform. Comparative international research might also ask if ideological decline is worse in developing democracies than it is in well-established democratic systems, or even if the patterns just look different. Interdisciplinary work, mixing sociology political science psychology and media studies, may even untangle how people inwardly react to political inconsistency and opportunism. Quantitative studies might, for instance, measure whether frequent party-switching has a direct effect on voter turnout and democratic trust,

too. Going forward, scholars may further consider how political education—such as civic learning initiatives—can help bring back ideology-based democratic involvement among new generations.



Infographics: The above figure shows the further scope of research (Created using Gemini AI).

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