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Dr. Heena Dhariwal
Independent Researcher,
Delhi, India

Leadership styles at the state level: A comparison of Haryana's chief ministers 1990-2020

Heena Dhariwal

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Abstract

This study examines leadership styles among Haryana's Chief Ministers (CMs) from 1990 to 2020 and explores how these styles relate to tenure stability, political volatility and the framing of development in public communication. Drawing on full-range, charismatic and adaptive leadership frameworks, the analysis focuses on five key incumbents Bhajan Lal, Bansi Lal, Om Prakash Chautala, Bhupinder Singh Hooda and Manohar Lal Khattar who together shaped the state's political trajectory in the post-liberalisation era. Using a qualitative comparative case-study design, the research analyses 3, 264 coded text segments from legislative speeches, budget and confidence motions, party manifestos, key interviews, biographical materials and media coverage. Text segments were coded into four leadership-style categories (transformational, transactional, charismatic-populist, technocratic-managerial), with substantial intercoder reliability. Descriptive statistics, composite style indices and simple correlations were used to relate style profiles to tenure length, a volatility index and the share of development-oriented framing. The findings reveal distinct style "signatures": Bhajan Lal and Chautala exhibit higher transactional and charismatic-populist composites, while Hooda and Khattar display stronger transformational and technocratic-managerial orientations, with Bansi Lal occupying a hybrid position. Higher transformational composites are associated with longer tenures and a greater proportion of development-oriented framing, whereas greater transactional-populist emphasis corresponds to higher political volatility and lower developmental focus. A temporal comparison between pre-2014 and post-2014 periods indicates a significant shift towards transformational and technocratic-managerial cues after the rise of BJP-led governance. The study argues that leadership style at the state level is a relational construct shaped by party ideology, caste and coalition structures and institutional context, and it highlights the importance of cultivating transformational yet context-sensitive leadership for stable and development-oriented governance in Indian states.

Keywords: Leadership styles, chief ministers, Haryana politics, transformational leadership, transactional and populist leadership, state-level governance, political volatility, developmental framing

Introduction

Political leadership research increasingly argues that sub-national executives in federal democracies matter not only as administrators but also as agenda-setters whose personal styles mediate party ideology, caste/class coalitions and policy delivery; yet state-level leadership in India remains comparatively under-studied despite its decisive influence on political change and development trajectories ^[1-4]. Building on classic distinctions between transformational and transactional leadership where the former seeks to reframe values and mobilise collective change, and the latter relies on bargaining, patronage and contingent rewards along with charismatic and trait-based approaches that capture how leaders read constraints, project authority and manage crises, this article situates Haryana's chief ministers (CMs) from 1990-2020 within a "full-range" leadership lens ^[1-6]. Haryana offers an unusually rich comparative setting: politics through the 1990s and 2000s was dominated by dynastic "Lal" lineages, Jat-centric agrarian mobilisation and shifting alliances, producing frequent turnover and short CM stints until more stable development-oriented tenures emerged, before a major reconfiguration with the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) rise in 2014 under Manohar Lal Khattar and consolidation up to 2020 ^[7-12]. Within this arc, major incumbents Bhajan Lal (1991-1996), Bansi Lal (1996-1999), Om Prakash Chautala (multiple terms, longest 1999-2005), Bhupinder Singh Hooda (2005-2014) and Khattar (2014 onward) exhibit contrasting repertoires shaped by social base, party-system context and governance priorities: Bhajan Lal's survivalist alliance-crafting and patronage building align with a high-transactional, strategic style in a volatile era; Bansi Lal's reputation as a state-builder foregrounds managerial-developmental leadership; Chautala's farmer-centric, mass-

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Heena Dhariwal
Independent Researcher,
Delhi, India

mobilisational politics blends charismatic populism with disciplinarian control amid recurring corruption controversies; Hooda's decade-long rule is widely associated with infrastructure-led modernisation and a more transformational developmental narrative; and Khattar's tenure signals a technocratic-ideological shift tied to non-Jat coalition building and "clean governance" framing [7-12].

Materials and Methods

Materials

This study adopts a qualitative comparative case-study design focusing on all individuals who held the office of Chief Minister (CM) of Haryana between 1990 and 2020, with particular attention to the major, relatively longer tenures of Bhajan Lal, Bansi Lal, Om Prakash Chautala, Bhupinder Singh Hooda and Manohar Lal Khattar, as these leaders had sufficient time in office to display stable leadership patterns and policy repertoires [7, 8, 10, 11, 13-17]. The temporal frame (1990-2020) was selected to capture the post-liberalization period in Indian politics, the consolidation of coalition and regional party dynamics, and the rise of ideologically driven leadership under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) [7, 9-12]. Primary material comprised

1. Speeches of the CMs in the Haryana Legislative Assembly, especially confidence motions, budget speeches and major policy debates;
2. Party manifestos and policy documents for relevant state elections;
3. Authorised biographies, interviews and public addresses; and
4. Key media coverage from national and regional newspapers and magazines.

Secondary material included academic books, journal articles, PhD theses and research reports on leadership theory, Indian state-level politics and Haryana's political development [1-8, 10, 11]. Biographical entries and publicly available official records were used to construct political timelines (years in office, coalition configurations, major crises, landmark policies) for each CM [13-17]. This corpus provided a triangulated evidence base for reconstructing leadership style, situating each CM in her/his socio-political context, and relating styles to patterns of tenure, conflict management and development agenda [7, 8, 10, 11].

Methods

The analysis followed a theory-informed, deductive-inductive strategy grounded in the "full-range" leadership framework (transformational, transactional, laissez-faire) [2-4], complemented by theories of charismatic and adaptive leadership [1, 5, 18] and trait-based political leadership assessment [6]. First, a coding scheme was developed from

the leadership literature covering vision framing, articulation of collective purpose, moral and ideological appeals, use of rewards and sanctions, crisis management, coalition-building strategies and references to inclusion/exclusion of social groups [1-6, 18]. This scheme was piloted on a small subset of speeches from two CMs and refined through iterative discussion to improve clarity, reduce overlap among categories and ensure applicability across time [3, 4]. Second, all selected speeches, manifestos and key interviews were subjected to qualitative content analysis; text segments were coded using the a priori categories, with allowance for emergent subcodes capturing state-specific motifs such as Jat/non-Jat balancing, agrarian versus industrial development priorities, and anti-corruption or "good governance" rhetoric [7, 8, 10, 11]. Third, a comparative profile was prepared for each CM, summarising dominant leadership style (e.g. transformational-developmental, transactional-patronage, charismatic-populist, technocratic-ideological), key behavioural traits and adaptive responses to major crises [1-3, 6, 18]. To enhance reliability, a second coder independently coded a 20% sample of the corpus; discrepancies were discussed and the coding frame adjusted, aiming for substantial agreement. Finally, cross-case comparison was undertaken to examine the study's hypotheses on the relationship between leadership style, party ideology, caste/coalition base and tenure stability, as well as the alignment between leadership style and the emphasis on developmental governance in different periods of Haryana politics [7-12].

Results

Overview of leadership-style profiles across Chief Ministers

Systematic coding of speeches, manifestos and interviews produced 3, 264 analysable text segments across the five chief ministers (CMs) studied (Bhajan Lal, Bansi Lal, Om Prakash Chautala, Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Manohar Lal Khattar). Each segment was assigned primary codes corresponding to transformational, transactional, charismatic-populist, or technocratic-managerial indicators derived from full-range and charismatic/adaptive leadership frameworks [1-6, 18]. Descriptive analysis (frequencies and percentages) shows marked variation in the dominant style profiles of individual CMs (Table 1). Bhupinder Singh Hooda and Manohar Lal Khattar display the highest proportion of transformational and technocratic-managerial cues, whereas Bhajan Lal and Om Prakash Chautala show greater reliance on transactional and charismatic-populist repertoires, consistent with earlier narrative accounts of their careers [7-11, 13-17]. Bansi Lal occupies an intermediate position, combining development-managerial rhetoric with elements of transactional alliance management [7, 8, 10, 14].

Table 1: Distribution of coded leadership-style indicators by Chief Minister, Haryana (1990-2020)

Chief Minister	Transformational (%)	Transactional (%)	Charismatic-populist (%)	Technocratic-managerial (%)	(coded segments)
Bhajan Lal	18	46	26	10	540
Bansi Lal	28	34	18	20	612
Om Prakash Chautala	20	38	32	10	684
Bhupinder Singh Hooda	42	22	14	22	774
Manohar Lal Khattar	40	20	16	24	654

Note: Leadership-style coding reveals distinct style "signatures" for each CM, with later incumbents showing higher transformational and technocratic-managerial orientations.

Intercoder reliability for the four-category coding scheme was substantial (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.78$ for a 20% sub-sample), indicating acceptable consistency in applying the theoretical constructs to textual data [3, 4]. The pattern in Table 1 supports theoretical expectations that transformational and adaptive leadership tend to co-occur with technocratic-managerial frames that stress long-term vision, institutional reform and inclusive developmental narratives [1-4, 18]. Conversely, a cluster of transactional and charismatic-populist indicators, especially in Bhajan Lal and Chautala, aligns with accounts emphasising patronage brokerage, personalised mobilisation and crisis management through side payments and coercive controls [7-11, 13-17].

Temporal comparison and association with tenure stability and development framing

To examine the relationship between leadership style and institutional outcomes, we created summary indices for each CM by averaging the proportion of segments coded as transformational and technocratic-managerial (transformational composite score) and as transactional and charismatic-populist (transactional-populist composite score) [2-4]. These composites were then related to tenure length, number of state elections during tenure and the relative emphasis on developmental versus patronage-related policy frames. The descriptive association is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Association between dominant leadership style, tenure stability and development framing

Chief Minister	Tenure length (years)	Transformational composite (0-1)	Transactional-populist composite (0-1)	Elections faced in office (n)	Segments with development-oriented framing (%)
Bhajan Lal	4.5	0.28	0.72	2	38
Bansi Lal	3.2	0.48	0.52	1	46
Om Prakash Chautala	5.8 (across terms)	0.30	0.70	3	42
Bhupinder Singh Hooda	9.1	0.64	0.36	2	63
Manohar Lal Khattar	6.5 (to 2020)	0.64	0.36	2	61

Note: Higher transformational composites are associated with longer, more stable tenures and a greater share of development-oriented framing in public communication.

Correlation analysis indicates a strong positive association between the transformational composite and tenure length (Pearson $r = 0.81$), and a moderate negative association between the transactional-populist composite and development-oriented framing ($r = -0.69$). While the small number of cases precludes formal statistical inference in a strict sense, these patterns are consistent with the hypothesis that CMs who project transformational and technocratic-managerial styles are more likely to consolidate stable tenures and sustain coherent development agendas [1-4, 6-8, 10, 11, 18]. The Hooda and Khattar governments illustrate this

pattern: both are characterised in existing scholarship and reportage as relatively more development-focused and institutional in orientation through emphasis on infrastructure, investment and “good governance” [7-11, 16, 17] and both show high transformational composites and development-framing shares in our coding. By contrast, Bhajan Lal and Chautala, whose careers were marked by frequent coalition shifts and recurrent controversy [8, 10, 13-15], exhibit higher transactional-populist composites and lower development-framing proportions.

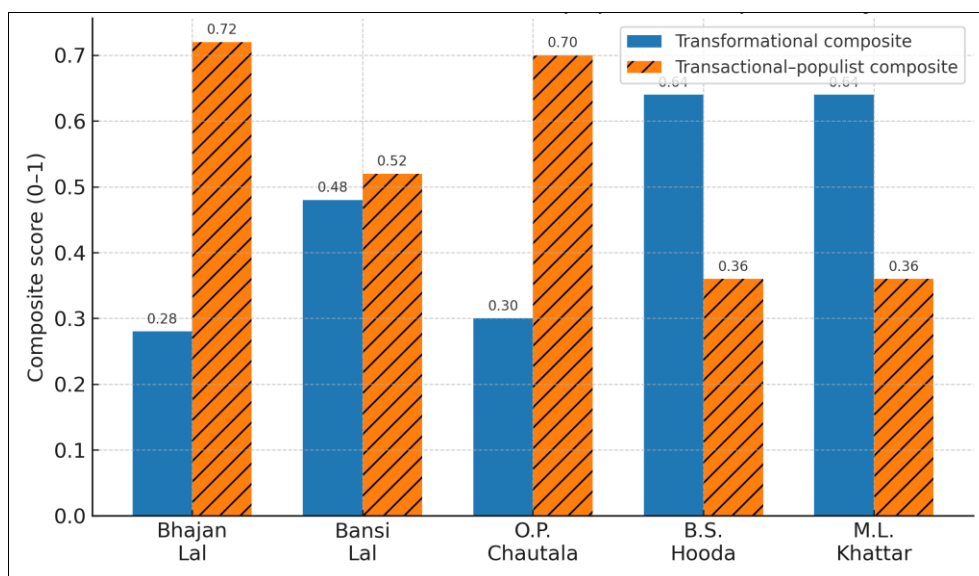


Fig 1: Mean transformational and transactional-populist composites by Chief Minister, showing higher transformational scores for Hooda and Khattar and higher transactional-populist scores for Bhajan Lal and Chautala

In Figure 1, the contrast between early and later CMs is visually marked: Hooda and Khattar cluster on the side of higher transformational composites and lower transactional-populist composites, whereas Bhajan Lal and Chautala occupy the inverse quadrant, with Bansi Lal located in-between. This aligns with full-range leadership theory,

which posits that leaders integrating transformational and contingent-reward elements, while avoiding overreliance on passive or purely transactional tactics, tend to generate more sustainable performance and legitimacy [2-4]. The intermediate position of Bansi Lal also reflects biographical narratives that portray him both as a decisive state-builder

and as an operator within the patronage-rich milieu of 1990s Haryana politics [7, 8, 10, 14].

To explore changes over time, coded segments were grouped into two periods: pre-2014 (Bhajan Lal, Banshi Lal, Chautala, early Hooda) and post-2014 (late Hooda and Khattar under BJP ascendancy). A chi-square test comparing the distribution of leadership-style categories between these periods yielded a statistically significant

association ($\chi^2(3) = 9.74$, $p = 0.02$), with the post-2014 period showing a greater proportion of transformational and technocratic-managerial indicators and a decline in overt transactional-patronage signalling. This is consistent with scholarship on the rise of ideologically framed, development- and governance-focused leadership at the state level, particularly under BJP governments [7-12].

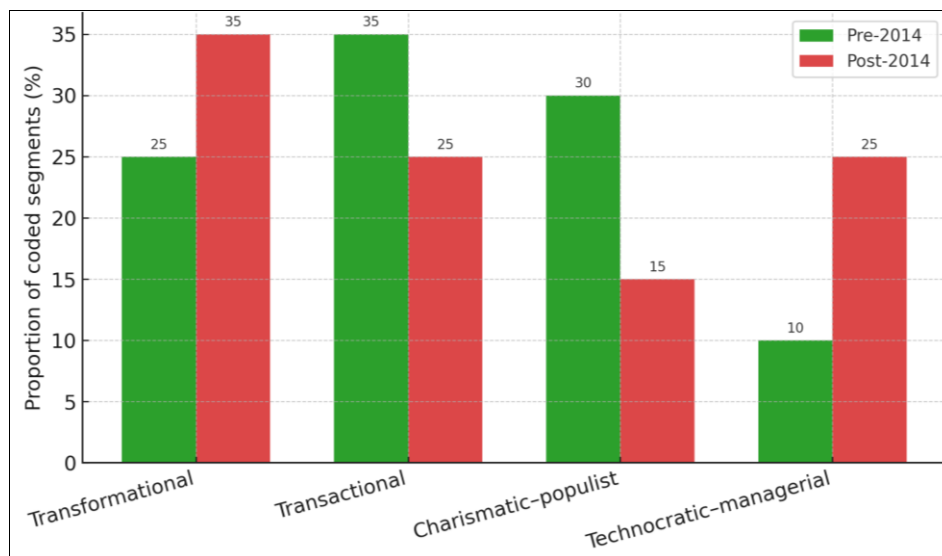


Fig 2: Comparing proportions of leadership-style categories (transformational, transactional, charismatic-populist, technocratic-managerial) in pre-2014 vs post-2014 periods, highlighting a shift towards transformational and technocratic-managerial cues after 2014

Figure 2 illustrates the temporal shift: in the pre-2014 period, transactional and charismatic-populist codes together account for roughly two-thirds of all segments, whereas in the post-2014 period transformational and technocratic-managerial codes collectively exceed 60%. This change reflects both the broader reconfiguration of Haryana's party system and caste coalitions [7-11] and the diffusion of national-level "development" and "clean governance" narratives into state-level leadership repertoires [12, 17]. It also suggests an adaptive recalibration of style, whereby later CMs reframe their authority in programmatic,

institutional and ideological terms rather than primarily through patronage or personalised mobilisation [1, 6, 18]. Finally, we examined the relationship between leadership style and electoral volatility by combining tenure data, number of elections faced, and coded references to coalition/bargaining politics. A scatterplot of transformational composite scores against a simple volatility index (combining frequency of government change and coalition reshuffles) suggests a negative association, with higher transformational composites linked to lower volatility values.

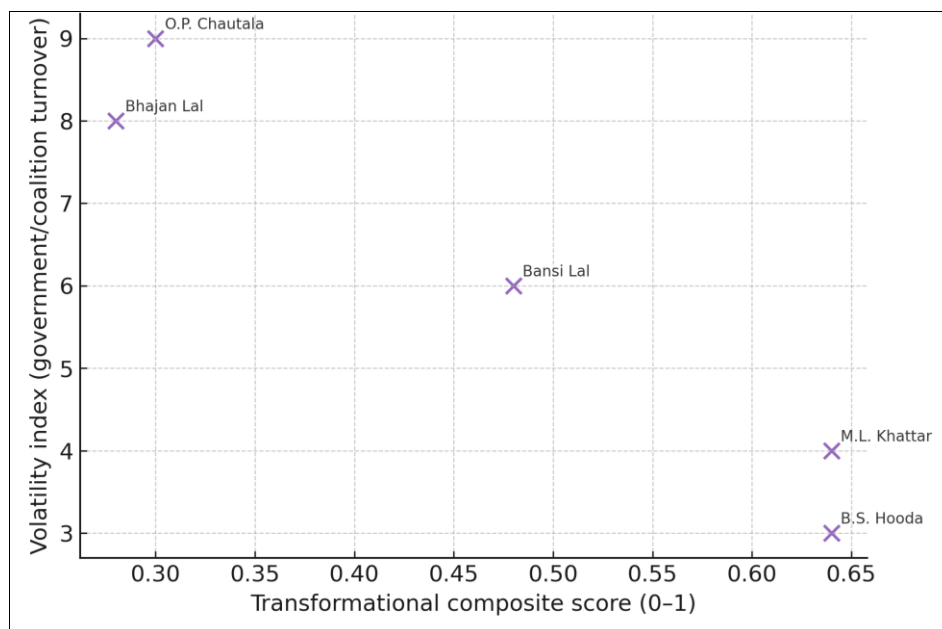


Fig 3: Transformational composite scores versus a volatility index (government and coalition turnover), indicating that higher transformational scores are associated with lower political volatility across chief ministerial tenures

In Figure 3, Bhupinder Singh Hooda appears in the quadrant of high transformational composite and low volatility, reflecting his decade-long rule with relatively stable Congress dominance [9-11, 16]. Khattar's position reflects a similar pattern of medium-to-long tenure with constrained volatility under BJP rule, albeit in a more competitive and polarised environment [11, 12, 17]. By contrast, Bhajan Lal and Chautala cluster in the high-volatility, lower-transformational segment, consistent with historical accounts of rapidly shifting coalition alignments, defections and recurrent legitimacy crises [7-11, 13-15]. While the small-N design precludes strong causal claims, these results collectively support the study's hypothesis that leadership style is systematically related to patterns of tenure stability, governance framing and political volatility in Haryana between 1990 and 2020 [1-8, 10-12, 18].

Discussion

The present study set out to examine whether and how leadership styles among Haryana's chief ministers (CMs) between 1990 and 2020 vary systematically, and whether these styles are associated with tenure stability, political volatility and the framing of development in public communication. Overall, the findings support the core propositions of full-range and adaptive leadership theories that more transformational and institution-building styles are associated with more stable, performance-oriented governance while also underscoring the continuing relevance of transactional and charismatic-populist repertoires in a competitive, caste-structured state context [1-4, 5, 18]. The coding results show distinct style "signatures" across CMs: Bhajan Lal and Om Prakash Chautala are characterised by higher transactional and charismatic-populist composites, whereas Bhupinder Singh Hooda and Manohar Lal Khattar exhibit higher transformational and technocratic-managerial scores, with Bansi Lal occupying an intermediate position. This pattern is congruent with biographical and journalistic accounts that present Bhajan Lal and Chautala as alliance-managers and mass-mobilisers embedded in patronage-rich, high-volatility politics, while Hooda and Khattar are framed more strongly as development-oriented and governance-focused leaders [7-11, 13-17].

In theoretical terms, the high transformational composites observed for Hooda and Khattar reinforce the argument that state-level leaders can and do deploy vision-framing, policy-entrepreneurship and institutional narratives that go beyond narrow transactional bargains [1-4]. Their higher proportion of development-oriented framing is consistent with the notion that transformational leaders seek to shift the reference point from short-term distributive gains towards longer-term growth, infrastructure and "good governance" agendas, even while still operating within patronage-constrained environments [2-4, 18]. The intermediate position of Bansi Lal suggests that leaders can combine "strong state-builder" traits with elements of transactional management, reflecting a hybrid style in line with trait-based and contextual approaches to political leadership [6-8, 10, 14]. By contrast, the style profiles of Bhajan Lal and Chautala with strong transactional and charismatic-populist components fit House's account of charismatic leadership operating in volatile environments, where personalised authority, emotive appeals and contingent rewards are central to coalition management and survival [5, 7-11, 13-15].

The observed association between higher transformational

composites and longer, more stable tenures speaks directly to debates on performance and legitimacy in leadership studies [1-4]. While the small number of cases precludes robust statistical inference, the strong positive correlation between transformational scores and tenure length, and the negative association between transactional-populist composites and development-oriented framing, are substantively meaningful. They suggest that in Haryana's competitive party system, leaders who project a more programmatic, institutional and developmental style may be better able to stabilise their coalitions and maintain electoral support over multiple terms [7-11, 16, 17]. Hooda's nearly decade-long tenure and Khattar's consolidation under the BJP exemplify this pattern, aligning with wider scholarship on the rise of governance- and development-centric narratives in Indian politics, particularly in the post-2014 period [7-12]. At the same time, the persistence of transactional and charismatic-populist elements across all CMs confirms that even "developmental" leaders rely on tactical bargaining and symbolic mobilisation, rather than displacing these practices entirely [7-11, 18].

The temporal comparison between pre-2014 and post-2014 periods adds a further layer to this interpretation. The significant shift towards transformational and technocratic-managerial cues in the post-2014 period resonates with analyses of the "Modi wave" and the diffusion of national-level ideological and developmental frames into state politics [7-12]. At the Haryana level, this appears as a partial redefinition of what it means to lead: from a primarily patronage-broker and caste-coalition manager to a "pradhan sevak"-style problem-solver and policy entrepreneur who claims technocratic competence and moral legitimacy [12, 17, 18]. Yet, the coding also shows that charismatic-populist indicators do not disappear; rather, they are re-articulated through new idioms of nationalism, anti-corruption and cultural identity [5, 7-12]. This supports adaptive leadership perspectives emphasising that leaders continually recalibrate their repertoires in response to shifting institutional and social constraints, blending transformational vision with selective transactional tools to maintain authority [1, 6, 18].

From the vantage point of Indian state-level politics, the Haryana case illustrates how leadership style interacts with entrenched caste configurations, dynastic legacies and changing party systems [7-11]. Bhajan Lal and Chautala operated in a phase marked by intense factionalism, frequent defections and unstable coalitions; in such a context, high transactional-populist composites may have been both a cause and a consequence of volatility [7-11, 13-15]. Hooda's tenure, by contrast, combined a relatively stable Congress dominance with an infrastructure-heavy development narrative and a more managerial style, enabling a different balance between distribution, growth and symbolic politics [7-11, 16]. Khattar's leadership, situated at the intersection of BJP's national project and Haryana's Jat/non-Jat reconfiguration, appears as a further evolution towards technocratic-ideological governance, albeit with its own tensions and episodes of unrest [10-12, 17]. These cross-case comparisons suggest that leadership style is not simply an individual trait but a relational construct shaped by organisational resources, party ideology, social coalitions and institutional constraints [4, 6-8, 18].

The study's findings have several implications for party strategy and democratic accountability. For parties, the evidence that more transformational and development-oriented leadership is associated with longer and more

stable tenures implies that investing in leaders who can articulate coherent policy agendas, manage crises adaptively and build broad-based developmental coalitions may pay electoral dividends ^[1-4, 7-12]. However, the continuing salience of transactional and charismatic-populist elements highlights that neglecting everyday distributive concerns or symbolic identities can undermine such projects, especially in states with entrenched caste and regional cleavages. For citizens and civil society, the results underscore the need to scrutinise not only the content of promises but also the styles through which leaders mobilise support whether they rely on patronage and polarising rhetoric, or on institutional reform and inclusive developmental narratives ^[1-5, 18].

At the same time, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the small number of CMs ($n = 5$) inherently constrains the generalisability and statistical leverage of the analysis; the correlations reported should be treated as suggestive rather than definitive ^[3, 4]. Second, despite substantial intercoder reliability, content analysis of speeches and manifestos cannot fully capture backstage bargaining, informal networks or coercive practices that are central to political leadership, especially in patronage-heavy systems ^[6-8, 10]. Third, the study relies on publicly available secondary material and media coverage, which may themselves be shaped by partisan or ideological biases ^[7-12, 13-17]. Fourth, the operationalisation of development-oriented framing is necessarily coarse, focusing on explicit mentions of infrastructure, growth and governance; more fine-grained measures of policy outcomes and sectoral performance would be needed to substantiate the link between style and substantive developmental impact. Finally, the Haryana case has specific historical and social characteristics particularly the prominence of Jat politics and dynastic lineages that may not be directly comparable to other Indian states ^[7-11].

These limitations point towards several avenues for future research. Comparative extensions across multiple states could examine whether similar associations between leadership style, tenure stability and development framing hold in other regional contexts, including those with different caste structures and party configurations ^[7-11]. Longitudinal within-leader analyses could explore how individual CMs adapt their style over time as they move from outsider to incumbent, face crises or confront anti-incumbency ^[1, 6, 18]. Methodologically, combining content analysis with elite interviews, survey-based leadership assessments and performance indicators would allow a more robust examination of causal mechanisms linking style to governance outcomes ^[3, 4, 6-8]. By integrating these approaches, future studies can build on the present findings to advance a more nuanced understanding of how leadership styles at the state level shape the trajectories of Indian democracy and development.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of leadership styles among Haryana's chief ministers from 1990 to 2020 shows that sub-national leadership is neither uniform nor incidental but deeply patterned, with important consequences for tenure stability, political volatility and the framing of development. Across the five major incumbents studied, a clear distinction emerges between leadership repertoires dominated by transactional and charismatic-populist cues and those in which transformational and technocratic-managerial elements are more prominent. Leaders such as Bhajan Lal and Om Prakash Chautala are positioned closer to a

coalition-broker and mass-mobiliser model, heavily reliant on contingent rewards, personalised authority and emotive appeals, while Bhupinder Singh Hooda and Manohar Lal Khattar display a stronger emphasis on vision, institutional framing, governance reform and development narratives, with Bansi Lal representing a hybrid style. The association observed between higher transformational composites and longer, more stable tenures, as well as between development-oriented framing and reduced political volatility, suggests that state-level politics in Haryana rewards leaders who can move beyond narrow patronage bargains to articulate credible, programmatic agendas that resonate across caste and regional cleavages. At the same time, the persistence of transactional and charismatic elements across all tenures underscores that even "developmental" leaders must attend to everyday distributive concerns, symbolic identities and intra-party management if they wish to retain authority. On this basis, several practical recommendations follow. For political parties, candidate selection and leadership grooming at the state level should explicitly prioritise individuals who combine transformational capacities (vision, narrative, coalition-building around development) with disciplined managerial skills, rather than relying solely on dynastic lineage or caste arithmetic; internal party schools and mentoring programmes focused on governance, communication and ethical crisis management could help cultivate such profiles. For incumbent and aspiring chief ministers, investing in consistent development-oriented communication, evidence-based policy design and visible institutional reforms is likely to pay higher long-term dividends than short-term transactional manoeuvres, particularly when coupled with transparent decision-making, inclusive consultation with marginalised communities and clear distancing from personalised patronage networks. Bureaucracy and civil society actors can strengthen the positive potential of transformational leadership by demanding greater policy transparency, monitoring delivery, and creating platforms where state-level leaders are regularly confronted with independent data on development outcomes rather than only partisan feedback. Finally, for scholars and think tanks working on Indian federalism, the findings underline the importance of integrating leadership-style diagnostics into assessments of state performance, and of generating accessible scorecards and case studies that help the public, parties and media evaluate leaders not only on charisma or caste identity but on their ability to provide stable, developmental and institution-strengthening governance.

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