

## The Three Farm Laws in the Age of New Media: An Analysis of Digital Discourse

Kunal Anand<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Journalism, Bharati College, University of Delhi

**\*Corresponding Author:** Kunal Anand

\*Assistant Professor, Department of Journalism, Bharati College, University of Delhi

### ABSTRACT

With the introduction of new media platforms, public debate has taken on a whole new form. Diverse perspectives are now encouraged to participate in discussions on socio-political issues and information is disseminated quickly. On 19 November 2021, the Prime Minister through his televised address to the citizens of this country announced that farm laws were to be repealed due to multiple factors including the unending protest against the laws, violence, conflicts, various disagreements, the time period of the protest and the elections in Punjab. The study aims to analyse the three farm laws, through digital discourse, that were introduced in the parliament by the government of India in September 2020 with the intention of freeing the trade in agricultural produce for farmers, to examine the effects, difficulties, and consequences of these laws on farmers, rural economies, and the larger community, with an emphasis on the agricultural landscape. This paper focuses on how these laws are portrayed, received, and used on different online platforms to understand the extent of misinformation, algorithmic biases, and internet echo chambers in polarizing the views of people about agricultural policy.

**Keywords:** Farmers, Laws, Digital Discourse, New Media, Protest

### INTRODUCTION

In light of India's recent farm laws that were later reversed, the nexus between agricultural policy and digital discourse has come under close examination. The dynamics of public opinion formation around these changes have grown more complicated and contentious against the backdrop of a media environment that is fast changing due to the democratization of information distribution and the development of new media platforms. India is a country that has had its roots in the agricultural or primary sector for a long until a decade ago. Therefore, to improve India's agricultural landscape, aiming to increase agricultural productivity, reduce intermediaries and empower farmers the three farm laws were initiated in the Parliament of India in September 2020. These laws were later repealed in the winter session of 2021 following many protests, conflicts and violent attacks by the people having views against it. Prime Minister Narendra Damodar Das Modi, on 19<sup>th</sup> November, announced through his televised address to the citizens of the nation that the government has finally decided to repeal all three laws that have attracted controversy since they were passed in the Monsoon Session of Parliament last September. According to the data released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), the contribution of the agricultural and allied sectors came out to be 19% in 2019-20 and 18.3% in 2020-21 which indicates the deduction in Gross Value Added (GVA) of the country. These three laws are as follows:

1. Farmer's Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act 2020
2. Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020
3. Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020

In chronology, the Lok Sabha approved the bills on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2020 while the Rajya Sabha approved them on 20 September 2020. Mr. Ram Nath Kovind the then President of India gave his precious assent to the bills on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2020 to formulate them into laws. There was an uproar by the opposition party leaders and various farmer's unions when the bills were passed. Many rounds of talks happened between both the parties (the government and farmer's unions) but no adequate conclusion could be drawn out of them. A major factor in influencing public opinion and organizing resistance to the farm laws was the internet realm. Farmers, activists, politicians, and media influencers participated in passionate discussions, shared information, and rallied support for their different stances on social media platforms, which in particular functioned as battlefields for conflicting narratives.

Nevertheless, amid the deafening din of digital discourse, problems like algorithmic prejudices, echo chambers, and the spread of false information surfaced, intensifying division and impeding productive discourse. Critical examination of

digital discourse and its consequences for democratic discussion is imperative, as evidenced by the spread of false narratives and the political weaponization of digital platforms.

In addition, concerns around the effectiveness of policymaking in the digital age and the influence of public opinion on governance results are raised by the ultimate repeal of the agriculture laws. The emergence of digital media has brought to light weaknesses in the policymaking process and underscored the significance of openness, accountability, and responsiveness to public emotion, even as it has democratized access to information and aided in grassroots mobilization. By traversing the intricacies of the online conversation around the revoked farm laws, this study aims to clarify the complicated relationship between politics, media, and policy in modern-day India. Through an analysis of the stories, power structures, and communication techniques used in the digital realm, the research attempts to provide insights into the changing processes of public opinion formation in the era of new media.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To determine the applicability of the three farm laws
- To understand the role of new media platforms in the digital discourse surrounding the three farm laws
- To examine the arguments for and against the repeal of the laws, put forth on social media platforms

## RESEARCH METHODS

To understand the three farm laws and investigate the fate of these laws in the digital space, qualitative research is undertaken. A literature review was conducted to examine existing research on various prospects of the three farm laws and their implications on the individual farmers, the market and the agricultural sector as a whole. *Narrative Analysis* is taken into consideration to study the pros and cons, the arguments provided by the farmer unions, and the multidimensional influence in the implementation to develop an in-depth analysis. The secondary texts with an understanding of people's perspectives supported and created linkages between the laws, their implementation and evaluation through a variety of perspectives. use narrative analysis to explore the many facets of the internet debate related to the farm laws. Throughout the study process, reflexivity is upheld, and ethical considerations direct how sensitive data and privacy issues are handled. Intending to provide a thorough grasp of the online conversation around agricultural laws, this research hopes to shed light on how new media platforms influence public opinion and policy discussions.

### Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis focuses on organising the overall constructs and features of an account. This research method involves examining and interpreting stories or narratives to uncover underlying themes, patterns, and meanings. This technique provides a lens through which to examine the stories created and shared on various digital platforms, offering insights into the processes involved in the creation of public opinion and the shaping of perception. Unpacking the intricacies of modern socio-political issues requires a grasp of the subtleties of narratives circulating in digital media, which is becoming an increasingly important forum for public conversation. Narrative analysis is a useful technique for revealing the underlying discursive forms and power dynamics at work in the setting of agricultural policy, where commercial interests, social concerns, and political dynamics meet. This method is broadly applied to qualitative data. It is a valuable tool for researchers in various fields, including literature, linguistics, media studies, and social sciences. Qualitative research and narrative analysis are closely linked as both approaches involve analysing data to gain in-depth insights into a particular research topic. Secondary texts were reviewed thoroughly and the parameters in the drafts of the three farm laws. Overall, narrative analysis is an important tool for qualitative research for this paper as it provides a way to analyse and interpret textual data to gain deeper insights into a research question and the core of the study.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework provides a thorough explanation of the dynamics at play in the digital discourse around agricultural policy laws by referencing a number of related topics from media theory, social sciences, and communication studies. The following important theoretical stances are included in the framework:

- Theory of Agenda Setting:  
According to agenda-setting theory, the media has a significant influence on how the public is informed by deciding which topics are covered and how to frame them. This theory, when applied to the study article, clarifies how the public's opinions of farm laws are shaped by digital media platforms that emphasize some parts of the policy discussion while downplaying or disregarding others.
- Framing Theory:  
This theory postulates that the way information is presented, or framed, affects how audiences understand and comprehend it. This theory has special significance when examining how narratives related to the farm laws are

constructed in digital discourse. We may obtain insights into the discursive methods used to sway public opinion by looking at how diverse parties frame the problems and utilize rhetorical devices across different digital platforms.

- **Networked Public Sphere:**  
Emphasizing the decentralized and interactive aspect of online discourse, the notion of the networked public sphere expands Habermas' theory of the public sphere to include the digital sphere. This theoretical framework is useful for examining how digital media platforms open up information to the public, promote public discussion, and support grassroots activism in support of farm laws.
- **Technological Determinism:**  
This theory contends that social structures, customs, and behaviours are shaped by the rapid growth of technology. Within the study article, this approach facilitates comprehension of how the affordances of new media technologies—like algorithmic curation, user-generated material, and real-time communication—affect the dynamics of digital discourse surrounding policy laws in agriculture.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

- The primary texts are the three laws titled 'Farmer's Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act 2020, Bill No. 113-C of 2020', 'Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020, Bill No.112-C of 2020' and 'Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020.' They provided a base to understand and formulate various arguments in favour or against the people's perception of these laws (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2020).
- In the article titled "No more APMC monopoly, more choice, freedom for farmers to seek better prices for crops: All you need to know about the bills by the Modi govt", the author emphasises the issues of not finding a well-suited market for the farmers with a fair price being given to their respective produce. To increase investment in the agricultural sector by various companies, exporters, food processing firms etc., formulation of these law-initiated solutions to resolve certain issues (Bhardawaj, 2020).
- The article named "Interrogating the MSP Regime, Farm Laws and Agrarian Future in India" discusses the foundation of protests by the farmers which comes out to be two key demands: the first remains to be the repealing of the three farm laws and the second, making procurement of the farmer's produce on the Minimum Support Price (MSP) a legal right for them to be secured. The article presents a critical review of the three laws where the law itself contradicts its slogan of 'one nation one market' with the prevalence of freedom to sell anywhere and an already integrated market for wheat and paddy (Bhagal, 2021).
- According to the news article "What is there in farm laws that make them so contentious?", the conflict between the farmers and the government has been taken into consideration. The author argues that the government is reluctant to fulfil farmer's demands because of their political priorities and financial inability to secure the MSP system in India. The constantly increasing food bill included in the contemporary MSP system creates pressure on the fiscal deficit when presented with the annual budget (Dutta, 2020).
- In the research article "Farmer's Awareness and Perceptions of the New Farm Laws 2020 in India: Empirical Evidence from a Household Survey", the author through the statistical findings reveals that nearly 50 per cent of agricultural households are not even aware of the three farm laws let alone agreeing or disagreeing with it. According to the mentioned research paper, "These factors are inclusive of the size of the landholdings, level of education of the household head, awareness of government programs, and visits to Kisan Melas." The author suggests that the Indian government should work to generate confidence among the farmers and make the asked amendments (Kumar et al., 2021).
- "Farmer Protests in India and the Mobilization of the Online Diaspora on Twitter" is the title of a research study that explores the important role that social media, especially Twitter, had in amplifying the voices of the Indian diaspora during the farmer protests in India. This research investigates the ways in which the diaspora mobilized, advocated for, and showed support with the farmers who were demonstrating on Twitter (Monteiro, 2021).
- The article "Mixed Reaction by Netizens to Government's Decision of Repealing Farm Laws" is a summary of the many reactions that internet users had to the news that the Indian government was going to repeal the contentious agricultural rules. The article discusses the range of viewpoints, emotions, and responses that netizens have to the government's decision by analyzing social media platforms and online discussions (Press Trust of India, 2021).
- An article in the digital portal of the Indian Express has elaborated on the trader's role that will be attained in the three farm laws. The article titled "Agriculture Reform: Breaking the Trader Cartel" provides the definitions used as provided in the primary bills. Various loopholes concerning the traders' activities, restrictions, registration procedures and limitations have been discussed by the writer of the mentioned article (Biswas, 2016).
- The article "The Pen, the Keyboard and Resistance: Role of Social Media in the Farmer's Protest" delves at the significant contribution that social media platforms have made to both influencing and enabling the current farmer's protest that is taking place in India. It looks at how farmers and others who support them use social media sites like

Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter to plan protests, disseminate information, and enlist public support (Bainiwal, 2021).

- The author of the research article “Farm Laws 2020: A Pragmatic Analysis” tries to display an unbiased discussion around the clauses of the three farm laws and their effect on the agricultural sector in particular. A similarity is drawn between the economic laws of 1991, also known as the LPG policy and the three farm laws of 2020. The author suggests that these agricultural laws will not only increase the growth rate of the economy by their aggregate contribution to GDP but will also sustain the farmers with the agricultural sector at large (Tomer & Jayara, 2021)

### THEMES OF THE STUDY

In order to capture the complex dynamics underlying agricultural policy laws in India, the analysis explores a number of subjects in great detail. Comprehending the subtleties of the internet debate surrounding the three agricultural laws becomes essential as digital media platforms continue to develop and exercise a greater impact on public discourse. The study aims to disentangle the various stories, viewpoints, and factors influencing public opinion in the digital era. By elucidating these issues, one may contribute to a thorough understanding of the ways in which politics, the media, and public opinion interact with one another in the context of agricultural policy changes, providing insights into the intricate dynamics of the modern sociopolitical environment.

**Table 1.1** Themes of the study and their descriptive indicators

THEMES	DESCRIPTION
Current Scenario	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Process</li> <li>● News Headlines</li> <li>● Three Farm Laws</li> </ul>
New media and the digital discourse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Facebook Groups</li> <li>● Twitter</li> <li>● Hashtags</li> <li>● Artificial Intelligence (AI)</li> </ul>
Advantages of laws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Empowerment of Farmers</li> <li>● Modernization of Agriculture</li> <li>● Efficiency and Competition</li> <li>● Enhanced Price Discovery</li> <li>● Increased choices</li> <li>● Decentralising powers of Middlemen</li> <li>● Time Management</li> <li>● Reduced price</li> <li>● No Market Fees</li> <li>● Assured Income</li> <li>● Additional facilities</li> <li>● Dual Benefit</li> <li>● Protecting Ownership</li> <li>● Redressal Mechanism</li> <li>● Government Intervention</li> </ul>
Reasons for repeal and their possible counters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Danger to Farmer Livelihoods</li> <li>● Corporate Control Over Agriculture</li> <li>● Impact on Food Security</li> <li>● Erosion of Agricultural Diversity</li> <li>● MSP Assurance</li> <li>● Lack of communication by the Government</li> <li>● Issue of Trader’s credibility</li> <li>● No limit on the hoarding capacity</li> <li>● Year-long protest</li> </ul>

### CURRENT SCENARIO

"The farmer is the only man in our economy who pays both ways for freight and buys everything at retail and sells everything at wholesale." John F. Kennedy, the 35th President of the United States, issued this declaration on behalf of the country's farmers. But are the conditions facing Indian farmers comparable to this or even worse? How does a farmer go about selling his produce?

The Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC), an organization established by the Indian government, is where farmers sell their produce once the harvesting season ends and they have ploughed out all of their crops. At the APMC markets, the government appoints the only buyer of the relevant agricultural output, and this buyer has the power to purchase any product that the farmers have produced. The intermediaries, or *aarti*, are the purchasers that go by this name. India with a workforce of 54.6% (Census 2011) population is engaged in the agricultural sector and has been obliged to sell their produce at a price fixed by the government. Lower-income results from farmers often earning less than the set price. This not only paints a picture of a capitalist system in which farmers are powerless, but it also tends to highlight the unequal social actions that go unpunished because of gaps in the law. Here are some conclusions about farmers' helplessness as a result of the existing agricultural system:

- The Indian Express: Private players pay 30 to 50% less than MSP as the state fails to procure sunflower, maize
- CITY News: Farmers throw tomatoes on Pune-Nashik highway
- Firstpost.: Why does govt. continue to procure rice and wheat in a big way but ignore nutritional crops?
- WIRE: India's Bumper wheat crop should be giving jitters to the Food Corporation of India

The aforementioned examples all point to the fact that farmers receive prices that are substantially lower than the MSP and that they often scatter their goods on roadways as a form of protest to voice their dissatisfaction with the current system and the government. India produces a wide range of crops annually, however during periods of bumper crop production, the government exclusively purchases rice and wheat, despite the fact that they run out of storage capacity. The intermediaries of the APMC marketplaces are in charge of buying all other agricultural commodities. Therefore, the farmers had no other choice except to sell their goods to the *aartis* until the three agricultural laws were introduced. Knowing the current agricultural system can also help with a significant issue called "food inflation." A growing amount of farmer misery is associated with food inflation, suggesting that despite food inflation and output continuing to rise, farmers' incomes are not keeping pace.

By taking one of the two approaches, the problems might be resolved. With the size of the nation's product market and the government budget, it may not be feasible for the government to start buying all the agricultural output from all the farmers, even at MSP. Alternatively, the government implemented specific agricultural laws.

#### 1. Farmer's Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act 2020

This act came into effect on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2020. The objective of this act was to provide options to the farmers to sell their produce outside the *Mandis* that are established under the APMC. This will not only benefit free trade but will also expand the potential capacities of the farmers, (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2020)

#### 2. Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020

This act aims to generate assured profit from the occupation of farming and legitimise contract farming. A two-way professional relationship will be developed where the farmers and the procurers will come into contract by stating the quantity of produce and the price given to the farmer, before the process of cropping initiates, to have a guaranteed income. (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2020)

#### 3. Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020

It was formed to amend the Essential Commodities Act, of 1955. It tends to increase the income of farmers by liberalizing the contemporary regulatory agricultural system by simultaneously protecting the interests of all the consumers as well. (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2020)

### NEW MEDIA AND THE DIGITAL DISCOURSE

From the perspective of the farmer, social media was being heavily utilized to organize the many farming communities from Punjab, Haryana, and other Indian regions. The Kisan Ekta Morcha Facebook group was one of the main channels used to spread information to farmers across the nation. The farmers found social media to be especially crucial since it gave them the ability to share what was occurring on the ground during the Chalo Dilli campaign and at the Singhu border, without having to rely on the already polarized conventional media.

Social media environments may become segmented, even if attitudes can also grow divided there. The farmers used social

media to convey their story in their own unique way, rather than necessarily to supplant pre-existing narratives in traditional media, as a strategy of protecting themselves from this narrative. Importantly, a lot of farmers who came to the Singhu border claim that social media served as their primary information source about what was going on and how to respond to it (Press Trust of India 2020). The Kisan Ekta Morcha Instagram profile and Facebook group were suspended on December 20, 2020. Facebook claims that due to the Group's increasing activity and suspected infractions of community rules, it was automatically suspended. Following a public uproar over the suspension, the Group was allowed to reopen (Press Trust of India 2020). Thereafter, measures were taken by the government to halt internet access and ban Twitter accounts in order to obstruct communication (Inc42 2021, safety 2021, Mitra and Hollingsworth 2021).

On the other side. Amit Shah, the home minister, tweeted shortly after Rihanna, Greta Thunberg, and other prominent personalities responded internationally, saying "No propaganda can dissuade India's togetherness! along with the hashtags #IndiaTogether and #IndiaAgainstPropaganda. Numerous Indian celebrities, including Lata Mangeshkar, Ajay Devgan, Karan Johar, Sachin Tendulkar, Virat Kohli, Akshay Kumar, and Sachin Tendulkar, supported the Indian government's attempts to find a settlement with the farmers by sending the Home Minister related messages and hashtags. These conveyed the idea that India could handle its "internal" matters without outside intervention (Lalwani 2021).

Transnational contact among diaspora networks is facilitated by social media. In the past, diaspora residents who were dispersed over the globe utilized email and phones to stay in touch with friends and family back home. A variant of such a communication method with some significant distinctions is social media. The ability to communicate many-to-many, have a low marginal cost of usage, enable people to discover new latent connections by navigating existing networks, and facilitate the sharing of media-rich content (text, audio, videos, and images) are the primary benefits of social media over more traditional forms of technology-mediated communication (Dekker and Engbersen 2014, Dekker, Engbersen, and Faber 2016, Dekker, Engbersen, Klaver, et al. 2018). Social media is used by the diaspora as a means of many-to-many communication, enabling them to share their experiences both extensively in the host nation and the past, back home. Many-to-many communication makes it possible to reach a larger audience and, more crucially, incorporates domestic discourse. Even if they are not present in person to witness political issues, they have similar concerns about them. In addition to the more conventional means of communication through remittances, diaspora members can engage in dialogue and exchange via social media with their home country. Diaspora people also engage in online activism or "media work" (Plaza and Below, 2014; And-en-Papadopoulos and Pantti, 2013; Baser and Swain, 2008; Di Leonardo 1987).

A well-known Twitter account called Tractor To Twitter describes itself as a "campaign to support farmers who are protesting against Farm Bills." In 2020, the Union government issued directives to prohibit "farm agitation-related provocative accounts," which led to restrictions on two accounts. Managed by a mixed group of young activists from different backgrounds, the account was crucial in bringing the farmers' demonstration against the three agricultural legislations to a worldwide audience. Consequently, the account has been subject to a "shadow ban," which has greatly impeded its visibility and capacity to draw in new followers on Twitter.

Supporters are perceived by some in the community as having used artificial intelligence to spread their message. One artificial intelligence (AI)-generated image, for instance, depicts Nishan Sahib unfolding on the Red Fort walls, echoing the Punjabi demonstrators' 2021 flag-hoisting at the UNESCO World Heritage Site during the initial wave of protests. Late on Monday night, the site was abruptly closed "for security reasons," coinciding with the spread of AI photos.

With social media, online forums, and digital news outlets acting as arenas for conflicting narratives and ideologies, the study has demonstrated the crucial role that digital media platforms have had in constructing the narrative around agricultural laws. Farmers and other underrepresented stakeholders may now gather support and attract international attention for their cause because the internet sphere facilitated voice amplification. In summary, the examination of new media and digital discourse related to India's three farm laws bears witness to the revolutionary potential of digital technologies in moulding the socio-political environments of the modern era. We must always be aware of the potential and difficulties posed by new media as we traverse the constantly shifting landscape of digital conversation and work toward a more inclusive, open, and interactive public dialogue in the era of digital technology.

## ADVANTAGES

The three farm laws collectively have various advantages that would mould the agricultural sector for good. They can be understood as follows:

- **Empowerment of Farmers:** A popular narrative on social media platforms supported agricultural laws as a means of empowering farmers by giving them more control and flexibility over how they sell their goods. Users present examples of how farmers have forged direct relationships with local and foreign clients by eschewing traditional middlemen and mandis through tales, videos, and testimonies. In these digital storylines, farmers are frequently seen haggling over fair rates for their goods, eliminating needless layers of middlemen, and taking pleasure in having more influence over their

market dealings. A tweet may, for instance, include a video testimonial from a farmer who describes how they were able to sell their goods directly to customers through an online marketplace, avoiding the constraints and unpredictabilities that come with using more conventional procurement routes. This allowed them to secure better revenues.

- **Modernization of Agriculture:** Social media advocates for the farm laws frequently highlighted how they modernized India's agriculture industry and brought in a new age of prosperity and innovation. Users demonstrated the transformational effect of the changes through digital discourse, pointing to the birth of several digital agriculture projects. For instance, they gave instances of farm-to-fork e-commerce sites that facilitated direct communication between farmers and customers, optimizing profits for farmers while simplifying the supply chain and guaranteeing fresher products. Through the presentation of case studies and success stories of digital agriculture businesses thriving in the new market conditions, social media users helped to create a positive and forward-looking narrative about the modernization of agriculture. Proponents of the changes hoped to mobilize support for programs that use technology to transform farming methods, enhance livelihoods, and guarantee food security for everyone through their digital lobbying activities.
- **Efficiency and Competition:** The benefits of bringing efficiency and competition to agricultural markets through farm laws were often discussed on social media sites. Participants participated in an online dialogue to clarify how easing market laws produced observable advantages for growers and consumers. Users demonstrated how the changes improved market access for farmers, decreased transaction costs and raised pricing transparency by exchanging data, analysis, and reports. To avoid middlemen and guarantee proper compensation for their goods, they can, for instance, give instances of farmers who were able to directly negotiate pricing with customers. The rise of digital trade platforms and online agricultural markets, which helped farmers reach a larger buyer base and go beyond conventional limits, were also emphasized by users. Social media users promoted the extension and continuation of laws aimed at establishing a more transparent, inclusive, and sustainable agriculture sector by sharing success stories and factual proof of the beneficial effects of efficiency and competition in agricultural markets. They aimed to create momentum for policies that put the needs of farmers and consumers first, guaranteeing a more robust and successful agricultural future for India, through their digital advocacy work.
- **Increased choices:** The farmers have been provided with options to sell their respective produce wherever they want as APMC is not the only designated market anymore. Now the individual farmers as well as the unions will look for other sponsors that will proceed to enter into a contract with them and the major online platforms set up by the Government of India such as eNAM (National Agriculture Market) will receive a greater demand. So, a dual benefit of choices and technological shift will take place.
- **Decentralising powers of Middlemen:** Due to the provided options, the powers of the middlemen are not absolute anymore thus discarding the monopolistic market as well. It is the farmer's decision to sell it to the buyer directly or to get engaged with the intermediaries. Most of the time the middlemen used to purchase the farmer's produce at a cost lower than the MSP fixed by the government but as the heightened selling price was according to the market forces of demand and supply, therefore, earning profit was never an issue for them.
- **Time Management:** From the sowing period to generating income, the process used to consume a lot of time. The involvement of farmers in the inter-state trade and being engaged in transportation, advertising and harvesting of produce cost them a lot of their time. With the coming of the three farm laws, the time has lessened due to the direct contact between the farmers and the buyers.
- **Reduced price:** Because of the removal of middlemen between the farmers and the consumers, the profits directly reach the former and the produce to the latter. The income of the middlemen is now distributed among the producer and the receiver, making the two ends of the spectrum sustainable. This will also enhance the competitive capacities of the industrial units by choosing the adequate quality of produce from all the contemporary producers.
- **No Market Fees:** Before the implementation of these laws the farmers were levied with market fees to sell their respective produce within the APMC market. The transportation cost for intra or inter-state trade was also incurred by them. But after these bills were passed in the Lok Sabha, no such compulsory charges were presented for the farmers.
- **Assured Income:** The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Service Act, 2020 was formulated to ensure that agriculture and farming become a profit-generating profession. The contract between the farmers and the buying party or the sponsor states that the former should be contacted before the commencement of crop production and a specific price should be decided by both the involved parties.
- **Additional facilities:** When a party invests in a particular crop, they tend to provide additional facilities for better production and higher profits such as quality seeds, infrastructure, pesticides, supervision and other equipment.
- **Dual Benefit:** The farmers shall be protected from market scrutiny and fluctuations. They will also be provided with due compensation for the natural events that might harm them in the unforeseen future. This contract stays under "*Force Majeure*" which says which makes it compulsory for the sponsors to fulfil the contract once they get the desired product irrespective of how much time it takes. The sponsors also benefit by getting quality products that will generate a higher profit for both parties.

- **Protecting Ownership:** It has been stated in the law that the government shall reject any jeopardizing of the ownership against the farmers at any stage of the contract. The redressal court has also mentioned that the sponsors will still pay the recovery amount in cases of natural calamities.
- **Redressal Mechanism:** The Sub-Divisional Officer will exercise all the powers of any civil court. Any of the parties either the farmer or the sponsor can appeal in the redressal court and the issue is to be resolved within the period of 30 days. This maintains accountability on the part of both parties to remain in the contract and keep up with their respective work.
- **Government Intervention:** The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act 2020 has given space for government intervention if the market indulges in any foul play. In case of any sudden or unusual price hike for crops such as pulses, edible oils, cereals, potatoes, onions etc. the government can hold capacities of stock and provide it to the public at the adequate time. The intervention is limited to the needs of the market when asked for.
- **Enhanced Price Discovery:** In order to guarantee fair pay for farmers, supporters of the idea used digital platforms to push for the elimination of monopolistic structures and the introduction of competitive pricing systems. Proponents demonstrated how market-driven price discovery gives farmers the power to bargain for prices that reflect the value and demand of their goods by exchanging ideas, papers, and case studies. These show how the elimination of monopolistic control over agricultural markets created a more open and dynamic price environment where purchasers bid against each other for farmers' produce based on merit rather than unfair business methods. Social media users helped to shape a narrative that supported the economic empowerment and autonomy of farmers in India's agricultural environment by endorsing changes that emphasised market-driven price discovery. With a view to a more equitable and prosperous future for India's farming communities, they aimed to mobilize support for policies that advance justice, transparency, and efficiency in agricultural markets through their digital advocacy initiatives.

## REASONS FOR REPEAL

The three farm laws were repealed by the Government of India on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2021. The following were the major reasons to understand why the laws were repealed after continuation for more than a year:

- **Danger to Farmer Livelihoods:** Users of social media have made it common to voice worries about how agricultural changes would affect farmers' livelihoods, emphasizing the dangerous circumstances that small and marginal farmers must deal with. It is said that the establishment of commercial marketplaces and the dissolution of the old mandi system were turning points that made the problems farmers faced worse. Stories of farmers' efforts to get fair prices for their goods in the new market environment surfaced through tweets, Facebook posts, and other digital discussions. For example, there were rumours circulating that farmers were forced to sell their produce at below-market rates because corporate purchasers predominated or there were opaque pricing processes in place. Furthermore, the new market framework's lack of legal safeguards and rights for farmers was frequently emphasized, exacerbating concerns about exploitation and financial hardship. These social media narratives helped to give voice to farmers who felt disenfranchised and marginalised by the laws, illuminating the human cost of policy choices and igniting a public conversation about the necessity of preserving farmers' livelihoods and financial security in the face of structural changes in the agriculture industry.
- **Corporate Control Over Agriculture:** A rising number of people were voicing their worries about corporate control over agriculture on social media sites, expressing fear about the expanding power of huge businesses in agricultural markets. Users used a variety of digital content—such as articles, videos, and infographics—to demonstrate how corporate entities have a widespread influence over the terms of trade and procurement in the agriculture industry. These electronic resources frequently presented striking illustrations of how powerful corporations used their position to control supply chains, establish terms for prices, and bind farmers to contracts. While articles and films provided in-depth analysis of individual examples where farmers had been exposed to unfair trade practices or exploitative contracts, infographics represented the consolidation of market share within a small number of businesses graphically. These accounts highlighted how small-scale farmers were becoming more and more isolated and powerless in the face of corporate domination, undermining their autonomy and negotiating ability. By sharing these digital tools, social media users advocated for laws that put farmers' rights and livelihoods ahead of corporate profits, raising public awareness and inspiring group action to oppose the expanding power of corporate interests in agriculture.
- **Impact on Food Security:** Social media platforms function as forums where debates on the possible effects of agricultural changes on food security are highly visible. Participants participated in conversations marked by hot themes and hashtags that emphasized narratives about farmers facing tough choices as a result of the changes. These accounts frequently told of farmers who, as a result of economic constraints heightened by changes in agricultural policy, were forced to sell their land or switch to income crops. It is said that these changes in cropping patterns and land use were causing food production to fall, which presented a real risk to food security for both urban and rural people. By sharing personal stories, articles, and multimedia information on social media, users illuminated the complex network of variables influencing agriculture policy, livelihoods, and food access. The impact of policy decisions on the resilience



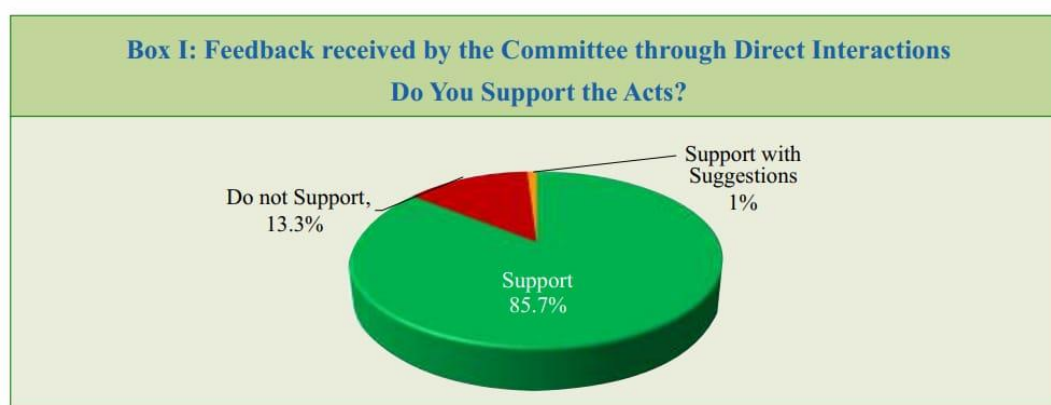
and sustainability of food systems was emphasized by these digital discourse narratives, which also served as a catalyst for discussions on the necessity of policies that gave equal access to nutrient-dense food, rural livelihoods, and food sovereignty priority. Social media users increased the urgency of addressing the possible threats posed by agricultural changes to food security by using the platform to advocate and raise awareness. They also encouraged politicians to take into account the larger implications for the resilience and well-being of society.

- **MSP Assurance:** A common notion prevailed within the farmer’s community that the traders would occupy the State APMC markets and create a monopoly of their own. This will result in the formulation of a privatised community that for their monetary benefit would eradicate MSP, which will oblige the farmers to sell their produce at a lower price decided by them. In a few years, the agricultural system will be sustained with the benevolence of the trader’s community.

**Counter.** Competitive markets controlled by private institutions or individuals work through the interaction between the market forces of demand and supply. Every private player invests in a profession to attain monetary profits, therefore, to win the competitive race and generate the maximum amount of profit for a long-term period, each private corporation will make sure to remain in a long-term contract with the farmers at large. Also, the aim of the laws was to procure the produce at a rate higher than the MSP which was under scrutiny for a long time. As the farmers did not have any option to sell their produce except for the APMC markets, the middlemen had the power either to procure it on the designated MSP by the government or at a price lower than that. In fact, with the coming of external competition, the situation of the Mandis or the treatment given by the moneylenders may begin to get better. Logistically, nowhere in the three bills abolition of MSP has been mentioned. Therefore, if any law or bill has to be amended, the newer statements will automatically find its mention but if it doesn’t the earlier provisions remain entitled. Moreover, before the laws were repealed the government agreed to create a written draft for the assurance of MSP continuation when it was further added by the Union Agriculture Minister, Narendra Singh that APMCs come under the surveillance of State laws and the three farm laws introduced by the Central government would not impinge on the functioning of the markets or *mandis*.

- **Lack of communication by the Government:** The government failed in the presentation of the farm laws and in creating in-depth awareness regarding the features and benefits of the same. The multiple notions over a singular subject could have been easily countered by the government using its tools of the press and the media. The government could have also been transparent in the display of procedures followed or the parliamentary expert committees created while formulating the mentioned three bills. In March 2021, a committee appointed by the Supreme Court disclosed its findings on the farm laws stating that more than 85.7% of the farmer unions and organisations were in favour of the extremely controversial three farm laws. Thus, the government did not ponder over the benefits that could have been enjoyed by the ‘Silent Majority’ and repealed the law by listening to a handful of organisations.

**Fig 1.3** Feedback received by the Committee through Direct Interactions



Credit: SC Panel Report

- for the purpose of wholesale trade, retail, end-use, value addition, processing, manufacturing, export, consumption or for such other purposes.” The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers’ Welfare has stated that any trader who avails his **Issue of Trader’s credibility:** Section 2(n) of the first ordinance defines a “trader” as “a person who buys farmers’ produce by way of Inter-State trade or Intra-State trade or a combination thereof, either for self or on behalf of one or more persons PAN Card would be able to purchase agricultural produce from the farmers in the trade area. Earlier, with the due process of registrations and licensing an individual was selected to set up their authority of trade for produce procurement. Those people were accountable to the farmers and to the public at large which also increased

their credibility in the market. However, after the formulation of these three farm laws, the government declared that anyone who has a PAN card can commence trading in the agricultural produce within the market. This gives enough scope to speculations being drawn on the credibility and intention of these traders.

**Counter.** The year-long protest created its epicentre in the states of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh where there is an abundance of wheat and rice. Two of these crops are largely procured by the Government of India to transport them within and outside the nation. These are essential crops that are placed under the buffer stock to be on the safer side if any natural calamity hits the country. The issue arises with the rest of the crops which associates itself with the price rather than the credibility (that can be addressed by the Sub-Divisional Officer or the fast-track courts established for this sole purpose). Although a PAN card itself is proof of authentication if the farmers do not wish to remain in a contract with the new people, there exists the older option of selling the produce to the *aartis* in the APMC *mandis*.

- **No limit on the hoarding capacity:** Within the earlier agricultural set-up only the farmers, Farmer Producer Organisations (FPO) and the farmer cooperatives had permission to stock the produce and they were not restricted by any limit as they would then make an informed decision on when to sell the produce by observing the market price. Whereas under the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act 2020 the sponsors, the companies and the traders have been provided with enough freedom to stock as much produce as they wish to. This may progress to hoarding of the required products that are needed at the contemporary time but are hoarded to gain relatively more profit in the near future.

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**Counter.** Hoarding has been in existence since the conception of agriculture but under the name of subsistence farming where food is produced for farmers' own consumption. Under the farm laws, provisions of government intervention have been mentioned under the law where any malpractice that is considered to be against the welfare of the farmers will be assumed to be an offence or they may be imposed with a greater tax rate. The government can put a limit or cap on stock holding by individuals or organisations.

- **Year-long protest:** The protests commenced when the three farm laws came under public domain. The continuous agitation by a group of farmers against the government and their policies was being politicised and clubbed up with many other malpractices. The protest took the shape of communal violence very shortly. A number of rapes, assaults, and murders were clouding the very reason why the protest had commenced. This year-long protest forced the government to repeal the laws.

**Counter.** Although the government after seeing crimes happening under the garb of protest, could have suspended the protest with the radical elements involved in the end, the whole narrative was about the farmers who are the providers of food for the entire nation and are treated as noble in the society. Also, to not undermine the very spirit of democracy the protest continued for more than a year and to protect national security.

- **Impending elections in Punjab and Haryana:** This was suspected by the Opposition parties that the three farm laws were repealed as there were elections approaching in the states of Punjab and Haryana. There were two significant states to win over as the majority of farmers who were agitating against the bills were based in these states only. Farm laws were acting as an obstacle for the BJP government to win the hearts of the people and gain votes in the upcoming election of 2021. Therefore, repealing of laws was considered a ray of hope by the party which ultimately did not work out and the citizens gave their esteemed votes to the then-emerging Aam Aadmi Party (AAP).

**Counter.** Elections not only are a medium for people to let the political parties know whatever their desires are but also give an edge to the government to shape public opinions and inform the citizens of their state about the actual procedures and advantages of the three farm laws. The Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) believed that they would be able to re-launch the three farm laws once they were in power in that respective state by implementing them as a scheme developed by the State.

- **Erosion of Agricultural Diversity:** The worries in the digital sphere centred around the new laws' potential to erode agricultural variety. People expressed their concerns about the uniformity of agricultural landscapes through social media platforms, which were frequently shown by the agribusiness-driven monoculture and the replacement of traditional crops and farming methods with monoculture. Users demonstrated how once-diverse agricultural ecosystems had given way to the demands of commercialization and industrial farming by sharing personal tales, images, and films, which provided concrete proof of this trend. Because growing a small variety of crops results in soil erosion, insect outbreaks, and decreased resistance to climate change, these digital narratives highlighted the negative effects of monoculture on environmental sustainability and biodiversity. To emphasize the many facets of

the effects of agricultural homogeneity, users also drew attention to the disappearance of indigenous knowledge and cultural legacy connected to conventional farming methods. Users incited public awareness and advocacy campaigns for the preservation of agricultural diversity, the advancement of sustainable farming methods, and the long-term well-being of food systems and ecosystems by sharing these worries often on social media platforms. Social media users worked towards fostering a future where agricultural variety flourishes, bolstering the resilience and well-being of both farmers and the earth, by promoting policies and taking collective action against the pressures that drive agricultural homogeneity.

## CONCLUSION

The contemporary agricultural set-up has taken its inspiration from the Economic Reform of 1991 that worked for the parameters of Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization. Although the number of advantages has somehow outnumbered the issues with the laws and their implementation with certain adherence to various communication gaps, clarification on issues of privatization, MSP Assurance and hoarding capacities would have worked extremely efficiently. The government of India repealed the farm laws on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2021 that were mentioned as 'revolutionary' by the government itself. This study has offered an extensive analysis of the complex processes underlying changes to agriculture policy in the digital age. It has illuminated the nuances of public opinion formation, stakeholder participation, and policy discussion through an examination of digital discourse across several platforms, such as social media, online forums, and digital news sites.

The examination demonstrated the crucial function of novel media channels in moulding the storyline about the trio of agricultural laws introduced in India. Farmers and their supporters have found that social media in particular is an effective instrument for gaining support, amplifying voices, and igniting grassroots activity. To illustrate the difficulties in navigating modern media environments, the digital conversation around the changes was also marked by polarization, echo chambers, and the spread of false information.

When a policy can affect and influence a large number of people such as the agricultural population of India, there erupts an urgent need to resolve the issues that have gathered everyone's attention. This study's examination of themes has provided insightful information on how politics, the media, and public opinion interact with one another when it comes to changes to agricultural policy. Being aware of the potential and difficulties posed by digital platforms is crucial as we continue to debate the effects of new media technologies on public discourse and government. Policymakers, media practitioners, and civil society actors may strive toward promoting a more transparent, egalitarian, and participative public discourse in the digital era by understanding the processes through which digital media impacts public perceptions and influences policy results. provides insights that are pertinent not only to the Indian context but also to a broader understanding of the difficulties of digital debate around agricultural policy laws.

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