

Research Article

Policy Nomenclature as a Strategic Instrument of Governance: The Case of the VB-G RAM-G Controversy

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Abstract

The nomenclature of public policy often functions as a strategic political act rather than merely serving as a straightforward administrative label. It acts as a tool for branding, ideological signalling, and narrative control. An analysis of the Indian welfare scheme Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin), or VB-G RAM-G, illustrates this phenomenon in practice. The scheme, which aims to replace the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA), introduces a controversial name that blends cultural-nationalist symbolism ("Ram") with the erasure of a previous political legacy ("Gandhi"). This deliberately provocative branding sparks a public controversy that appears trivial but serves multiple strategic purposes. It mobilises the ruling party's base, portrays opposition as anti-culture, and most importantly, acts as a distraction—a "dead cat"—to divert attention from significant but less visible policy changes. Beneath the surface of the naming controversy, the new bill fundamentally redefines the scheme's structure. It shifts from a demand-driven, rights-based framework to a capped, supply-driven model; transfers a substantial portion of financial responsibility from the central government to the states; and centralises decision-making authority away from local village assemblies. This strategic use of nomenclature is not unique. A comparative analysis of global cases shows similar patterns. For instance, in the United States, the term "Obamacare" fuelled political polarisation, while slogans like "Eat Out to Help Out" in the UK trivialised public health risks. Governments worldwide have increasingly weaponised branding as a tool in governance. These controversies are often intentional features rather than flaws, used to shape political narratives, conceal fiscal or structural retrenchment, and embed ideological priorities within the architecture of public welfare programs.

Keywords

Policy Nomenclature, VB-G RAM-G Controversy, Political Branding, Legacy Erasure, "Dead Cat" Strategy

1. Introduction: The Intersection of Substance and Symbolism

In the architecture of modern governance, the naming of a public policy is rarely a mere administrative formality; it is a deliberate exercise in political branding, ideological signalling, and narrative control. While the primary function of a welfare

scheme is to deliver tangible benefits—such as employment, healthcare, or food security—the nomenclature attached to these schemes serves a secondary, often more potent, political function. It defines the legacy of the ruling dispensation,

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erases the footprints of predecessors, and frames the public discourse in terms favourable to the incumbent's ideology.

The recent introduction of the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin)—acronymised as VB-G RAM-G—by the Government of India represents a quintessential case study in this phenomenon. Designed to replace the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA), the new scheme ostensibly offers an improvement in substantive terms, increasing the guaranteed workdays from 100 to 125 per year. From a purely technocratic perspective, an expansion of the social safety net in a developing economy should be a moment of bipartisan consensus. However, the legislative introduction of this scheme has precipitated a fierce political controversy, not merely over its fiscal mechanics, but primarily over its name.

There is a critical dissonance: why would a government, while planning a substantive improvement for the rural citizen, choose a nomenclature that triggers immediate opposition, invites ridicule for its convoluted acronym, and sparks controversies seemingly unrelated to the welfare of the people? To answer this, one must look beyond the immediate "silly" nature of the controversy and understand the strategic utility of such branding. The "Ram" in VB-G RAM-G is not accidental; it is a calculated injection of cultural-nationalist symbolism into secular economic policy. Similarly, the removal of "Mahatma Gandhi" is not an act of brevity but of legacy erasure.

This report conducts an exhaustive analysis of the VB-G RAM-G controversy, deconstructing the specific provisions of the bill, the mechanics of its funding, and the political logic behind its branding. Furthermore, it situates this Indian case within a broader global context. History is replete with examples of "good purpose" schemes that were marred, diluted, or politically weaponised through controversial naming conventions. From the polarisation of "Obamacare" in the United States to the trivialisation of public health via "Eat Out to Help Out" in the United Kingdom, and the administrative chaos of "JobKeeper/JobSeeker" in Australia, this report argues that the "silly" controversy is often a feature, not a bug, of modern political communication.

2. The VB-G RAM-G Transition

The transition from MNREGA to VB-G RAM-G is not merely a rebranding exercise; it represents a fundamental structural shift in how rural employment is conceived, funded, and administered in India. To evaluate the controversy, one must first dissect the scheme's anatomy, separating the "upgrade" from the "downgrade" critics fear.

2.1. The Nomenclature: Decoding the Acronym

The title of the new bill is the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin). The government has officially shortened this to VB-G RAM-G. This acronym is a complex linguistic construct that requires a specific selection

of letters from the Hindi and English title components to produce the desired output: "Ram-G".

- 1) *Viksit Bharat (VB)*: Aligns the scheme with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a "Developed India" by 2047.
- 2) *Guarantee (G)*: Emphasises the statutory nature of the promise.
- 3) *Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (RAM)*: The core operational component.
- 4) *Gramin (G)*: Denoting rural coverage.

The resulting acronym, VB-G RAM-G, invokes the name of Lord Ram ("Ram-ji"), a central deity in Hinduism and a focal point of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) cultural-political agenda.

The Ideological Conflict: Ram vs. Gandhi

The renaming requires removing "Mahatma Gandhi" from the title. MNREGA was named after the Father of the Nation to symbolise the scheme's alignment with his ideals of *Gram Swaraj* (village self-rule) and the dignity of rural labour.

- 1) *Opposition Critique*: Political opponents argue that the excision of Gandhi's name is a deliberate act of historical revisionism. Congress MP Shashi Tharoor described the controversy as "unfortunate," arguing that the concepts of *Gram Swaraj* and *Ram Rajya* (the ideal kingdom of Ram) were "twin pillars of Gandhiji's consciousness" and never competing forces. By pitting one against the other in a legislative title, the government creates a division where none existed.
- 2) *Government Defence*: Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan defended the bill, stating that the government is working to realise Gandhi's vision of "Ram Rajya," thereby implying that the name "Ram" embodies the ultimate fulfilment of Gandhian ideals. This defence illustrates the strategic ambiguity of the name—it serves as a dog whistle to the Hindu nationalist base while offering a plausible defence of "good governance" to critics.

2.2. Substantive Policy Shifts: The Devil in the Details

While the headline "125 days" suggests improvement over the previous 100 days, a granular analysis of the Bill reveals provisions that fundamentally alter the scheme's rights-based framework.

2.2.1. From Rights-Based to Supply-Driven

MNREGA was unique because it was demand-driven. If a rural citizen demanded work, the state was legally obliged to provide it within 15 days, or pay an unemployment allowance. The central funding was open-ended; if demand rose (e.g., during a drought), funding rose automatically.

The VB-G RAM-G Bill introduces a supply-driven logic:

- 1) *Normative Allocations*: The Centre will now determine "normative allocations" for each financial year based on

pre-fixed criteria. This suggests a cap on funds, regardless of actual demand at ground level.

- 2) *The "Pause Period"*: Section 6 of the Bill allows state governments to notify a "pause period" of up to 60 days during peak agricultural seasons (sowing and harvesting), where no work will be provided.

Implication: This effectively dilutes the "guarantee." If a landless labourer needs work during the harvest season because they cannot find private farm employment, the state is legally empowered to deny them work under the scheme. Critics argue this turns the scheme from a safety net for workers into a subsidy for landlords, ensuring cheap labour availability for private farms by shutting down the public option.

2.2.2. The Fiscal Shift: Burdening the States

The most significant structural change obscured by the naming controversy is the shift in funding patterns.

- 1) *MNREGA Model*: The Union Government paid 100% of the wages for unskilled labour. Material costs were shared 75:25 between the Centre and the State.
- 2) *VB-G RAM-G Model*: The scheme transitions to a standard "Centrally Sponsored Scheme" (CSS) architecture.
 - a) General Category States: Funding will be shared 60:40 (Centre: State).
 - b) Special Category (NE/Himalayan): Funding will be shared 90:10.

Analysis of Impact: This shift forces state governments, many of whom are already facing fiscal constraints, to bear 40% of the wage bill. For states like Kerala or Tamil Nadu, this could amount to thousands of crores in additional expenditure. The "silly" controversy over the name "Ram" conveniently distracts public attention from this massive transfer of financial liability from the Centre to the States.

2.2.3. Centralisation Via the "Stack"

The new bill mandates that all works must align with the "Viksit Bharat National Rural Infrastructure Stack."

- 1) *The Mechanism*: Unlike MNREGA, where *Gram Sabhas* (village assemblies) had the autonomy to decide local works, the new scheme requires works to be part of a centralised digital stack covering four verticals: water security, core rural infrastructure, livelihood infrastructure, and disaster mitigation.
- 2) *The Consequence*: This moves decision-making away from the village level to a centralised technocratic framework, potentially undermining the *Panchayati Raj* institutions that MNREGA was designed to strengthen.

2.3. Summary of the Indian Context

The VB-G RAM-G controversy is a masterclass in political manoeuvring. By proposing a name that triggers an emotive culture war (Ram vs. Gandhi), the government:

- 1) *Mobilises its Base*: The "Ram" name appeals to the core constituency.

- 2) *Fractures the Opposition*: Forces the Opposition to argue against a bill named "Ram" or "Viksit Bharat" (Developed India), framing them as anti-development or anti-culture.

- 3) *Masks Fiscal Retrenchment*: The noise over the name drowns out the silent dismantling of the demand-driven funding model and the 60:40 cost-shifting to states.

3. Theoretical Framework: The Politics of "Silly" Controversies

To understand why governments adopt such polarising naming conventions, we must examine the mechanics of political communication. The "silly" controversy is rarely an accident; it is a tool.

3.1. The Backronym as a Political Weapon

A "backronym" occurs when a name is constructed specifically to fit a pre-determined acronym. This practice often results in awkward, grammatically tortured titles that serve a specific propaganda purpose.

- 1) *The Mechanism*: The acronym serves as a "shield." It is difficult to vote against a bill named "SAFE" or "PATRIOT" or "RAM" without appearing to oppose safety, patriotism, or cultural values.
- 2) *The "Silly" Side Effect*: To achieve these acronyms, legislators often use nonsensical word combinations. For instance, the USA PATRIOT Act stands for "Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism." The clumsiness of the full title is the price paid for the marketing power of the acronym. [13]

3.2. Strategic Ambiguity and Dog Whistles

Political naming often relies on "strategic ambiguity"—using terms that are vague enough to be defensible but specific enough to signal to a target group. [10]

- 1) *Dog Whistles*: The use of "Ram" in VB-G RAM-G acts as a dog whistle. To the secular critic or the courts, it is merely an acronym for "Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission." To the political base, it is a clear assertion of Hindu identity in public policy. [2]
- 2) *Wedge Issues*: These names are designed to create "wedge issues"—topics that split the opposition's coalition. By forcing the opposition to attack a popular symbol (like Ram or Patriotism), the ruling party drives a wedge between the opposition and the general electorate. [9]

3.3. Legacy Erasure and "Year Zero" Politics

Renaming is a form of conquering. When a new regime takes power, renaming schemes are a way to declare "Year Zero," erasing the achievements of predecessors. [15]

The Logic: If the scheme remains "MNREGA," every success is subliminally attributed to the Congress party (Gandhi). By renaming it VB-G RAM-G, the credit for the 125 days of work flows to the current "Viksit Bharat" administration, effectively colonising the previous regime's flagship success.

4. Global Case Studies: When Naming Mars Good Policy

We also study similar incidents worldwide. The following case studies demonstrate that the tension between "good purpose" and "silly/controversial naming" is a global phenomenon.

4.1. United States: The Polarisation of Public Health

4.1.1. "Obamacare" vs. The Affordable Care Act

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), signed in 2010, is the definitive example of how a name can define political reality.

- 1) *The Controversy*: The term "Obamacare" was originally coined by opponents as a pejorative to personalise the policy and link it to the polarising figure of President Barack Obama. It was intended to make the complex healthcare reform sound like a socialist takeover. [11]
- 2) *The Paradox*: Research consistently showed a massive divergence in public opinion. Polls found that many Americans *supported* the "Affordable Care Act" but *opposed* "Obamacare," even though they were the same law. The branding successfully severed the policy from its benefits in voters' minds.
- 3) *The Outcome*: The controversy over the name persisted for a decade. While the policy expanded healthcare to millions (a "good purpose"), the "Obamacare" label became a toxic asset that galvanised the opposition, leading to years of legislative deadlock and repeal attempts. [14]

4.1.2. The "Green New Deal"

The Green New Deal (GND) was a proposal to address climate change and economic inequality through a massive mobilisation of resources.

- 1) *The Naming Trap*: The name was a deliberate invocation of Franklin D. Roosevelt's "New Deal." While this thrilled the progressive base, it was a strategic error in a polarised environment. It immediately alienated conservatives and moderates who associated the "New Deal" with big-government overreach and socialism. [6]
- 2) *The Result*: The name became a lightning rod. Republicans used the "Green New Deal" brand to caricature the policy as a ban on cows and aeroplanes (silly controversies) rather than engaging with its substance: renewable energy investment. The name arguably killed the con-

sensus needed to pass the legislation, turning an environmental necessity into a culture war.

4.1.3. "Operation Warp Speed"

In 2020, the Trump administration launched a public-private partnership to accelerate the development of COVID-19 vaccines.

- 1) *The "Silly" Name*: The name "Operation Warp Speed" was chosen to convey high-tech urgency, referencing the sci-fi speed from *Star Trek*. [8]
- 2) *The Backlash*: Public health experts argued that the name was counterproductive. "Warp Speed" implied recklessness and the cutting of safety corners. In a climate of vaccine hesitancy, the branding terrified a segment of the population who believed the vaccines were being rushed. [8]
- 3) *Legacy Erasure*: Upon taking office, the Biden administration immediately discontinued the use of the name "Operation Warp Speed," folding the program into the "White House COVID-19 Response Team." This mirrors the Indian government's move—erasing the predecessor's brand (Trump's "Warp Speed") despite the program's undeniable success in delivering vaccines. [8]

4.2. United Kingdom: Trivialisation and Populism

4.2.1. "Eat Out to Help Out"

In August 2020, the UK Treasury launched a scheme to subsidise restaurant meals to rescue the hospitality sector during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- 1) *The Slogan*: The rhyming name "Eat Out to Help Out" was designed to be catchy, approachable, and memorable. [5]
- 2) *The Controversy*: The name was widely criticised for being "silly" and juvenile in the face of a deadly pandemic. More seriously, scientists later labelled the scheme "spectacularly stupid" for encouraging people to congregate indoors during a lull in the virus, which epidemiological models suggest contributed to the second wave of infections. [5]
- 3) *The Insight*: The "cutesy" branding masked the lethal risk. The government prioritising a catchy rhyme over clear health messaging exemplifies how the desire for a "good name" can undermine the very "good purpose" (economic recovery) by causing a greater crisis (public health failure).

4.2.2. "Boaty McBoatface": The Perils of Public Engagement

While not a welfare scheme, the Boaty McBoatface incident is a legendary example of "silly" naming controversies derailing government intent.

- 1) *The Event*: The UK's Natural Environment Research

Council (NERC) asked the public to vote on a name for a new £200 million polar research vessel. They expected dignified names like *Endeavour* or *Shackleton*.

- 2) The Result: The public overwhelmingly voted for "RRS Boaty McBoatface."
- 3) The Controversy: The government was placed in a dilemma: honour the democratic vote and look ridiculous, or override the vote and look authoritarian. They chose the latter, naming the ship *RRS Sir David Attenborough*, but compromised by naming a sub-sea drone *Boaty McBoatface*. [4]
- 4) The Lesson: This incident highlighted the disconnect between the government's solemnity and the public's irreverence. It served as a warning to governments worldwide: if you open the door to "the people" for naming, you may get a "silly" result that undermines the project's gravity. [3]

4.3. Australia: The Algorithm of Confusion

4.3.1. JobKeeper vs. JobSeeker

During the COVID-19 crisis, the Australian government introduced two distinct support schemes: a wage subsidy for employees and an unemployment benefit for those out of work.

- 1) The Naming Failure: The government named them JobKeeper and JobSeeker. [1]
- 2) The Controversy: The rhyming names were so similar that they caused massive confusion among the public, the media, and even within the bureaucracy. Beneficiaries did not know which scheme they applied to, leading to application errors and public anxiety.

- 3) Lazy Branding: This is a case where the government's desire for a "branded suite" of policies (The "Job" family) trumped the need for clarity. The "silly" similarity became a barrier to access for the very people the welfare was meant to help.

4.3.2. "Robodebt"

Officially known as the "Online Compliance Intervention," this scheme used automated data-matching to raise debts against welfare recipients.

- 1) The Controversy: The scheme was unlawful and deeply flawed, leading to false debts and severe distress. The public and media branded it "Robodebt," a name that stuck indelibly.
- 2) The Brand as Indictment: Unlike the government-chosen names, this "silly" name (evoking *Robocop*) became a powerful tool for the opposition. It dehumanised the government's policy, making it easier to campaign against. The government lost control of the narrative entirely because the "Robodebt" label perfectly encapsulated the cruelty of the algorithm. [12]

5. Comparative Data: Naming Controversies vs. Policy Substance

The following table synthesises the analysed cases, highlighting the disconnect between the policy's intent and the controversy generated by its name.

Table 1. Comparative Overview of Policy Naming Controversies and Underlying Structural Outcomes.

Scheme / Policy	Country	Stated "Good Purpose"	The Naming Controversy	Strategic Outcome / Insight
VB-G RAM-G	India	125 days guaranteed work; infrastructure creation.	"Ram" acronym seen as communal dog whistle; "Gandhi" erased.	Distraction: The cultural row masks the shift to 60:40 state funding and supply-driven limits.
Obamacare (ACA)	USA	Expanded health insurance for millions.	"Obamacare" used as a pejorative; polarised voters.	Polarisation: Citizens liked the policy but hated the name, proving branding can override substance.
Operation Warp Speed	USA	Rapid COVID-19 vaccine development.	"Warp Speed" implied recklessness and safety shortcuts.	Legacy Erasure: Successor administration dropped the name to distance itself from the "silly" sci-fi tone.
Eat Out to Help Out	UK	Economic stimulus for hospitality.	"Silly" rhyme trivialised pandemic risk.	Cognitive Dissonance: Catchy slogan undermined serious health messaging ("Stay Alert").
Green New Deal	USA	Climate mitigation & job creation.	"New Deal" invoked socialist fears; alienated moderates.	Wedge Issue: The name mobilised the base but killed bipartisan consensus.
JobKeeper / JobSeeker	Australia	Pandemic financial support.	Rhyming names caused administrative confusion.	Clarity Failure: "Lazy branding" pri-

Scheme / Policy	Country	Stated "Good Purpose"	The Naming Controversy	Strategic Outcome / Insight
Robodebt	Australia	Welfare fraud detection.	"Robo" prefix dehumanised the policy; stuck as a scandal label.	criticised slogans over user experience/accessibility. Narrative Loss: The public-coined name destroyed the government's ability to defend the policy.

6. Synthesis: Why Governments Choose Controversy

The recurrence of these controversies suggests that the "silly" naming is often a calculated risk. Governments weigh the cost of controversy against the benefits of branding.

6.1. The "Dead Cat" Strategy

In political strategy, a "dead cat" is a shocking or controversial topic introduced to divert attention from a more damaging issue. In the case of VB-G RAM-G, the controversy over the name "Ram" serves as a "dead cat."

The Distraction: While the media and Opposition debate the secularism of the acronym, they are spending less airtime discussing the 40% funding burden imposed on states or the 60-day pause period that denies work during harvest. The government would arguably prefer a debate on "Ram" (which they can win with their base) to one on "Funding Cuts" (which they might lose).

6.2. Owning the Narrative Space

Schemes are political capital. If a scheme is successful, the party in power wants its name stamped on it irrevocably.

- 1) *Credit Claiming:* By renaming MNREGA to VB-G RAM-G, the Modi government ensures that the 125-day guarantee is associated with "Viksit Bharat" (their slogan) rather than "Mahatma Gandhi" (the Congress icon). This is a long-term investment in political memory. [7]
- 2) *Brand Stickiness:* Even "silly" names stick. "Obamacare" stuck so hard that the Republicans couldn't repeal it without facing backlash for taking away "Obama's care." Similarly, creating a "RAM" scheme makes it culturally difficult for future governments to repeal or rename without being accused of "removing Ram."

6.3. The Limits of "Good Purpose"

The premise—that a good purpose should be welcomed—assumes a rational political environment. However, the case studies show that trust is mediated by branding.

- 1) Operation Warp Speed had a good purpose, but the brand

eroded trust.

- 2) The Green New Deal had a good purpose, but the brand eroded consensus.
- 3) VB-G RAM-G has a good purpose (more workdays), but the brand erodes federal cooperation (by alienating state governments).

7. Conclusion

The controversy surrounding VB-G RAM-G is not an aberration; it is a symptom of a global trend where policy nomenclature is weaponised for political gain. The Indian government has chosen a name that guarantees controversy, likely calculating that the resulting polarisation will benefit its ideological agenda while distracting from the scheme's fiscal restructuring.

The "silly" controversies—whether they involve convoluted acronyms like VB-G RAM-G, rhyming slogans like Eat Out to Help Out, or polarising brands like Obamacare—reveal that, in modern governance, the *name* on the package often matters more to politicians than the *contents*. For the rural citizen, the shift from 100 to 125 days is a material improvement. But for the political class, the shift from "Gandhi" to "Ram" is the only metric that counts.

The lesson from across the world is clear: when a government gives a "good purpose" scheme a controversial name, it is usually because they are selling something else alongside the welfare, be it an ideology, a distraction, or a legacy. In the case of VB-G RAM-G, they appear to be selling all three.

Abbreviations

ACA	Affordable Care Act
GND	Green New Deal
MNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
NE	North East (India)
NERC	Natural Environment Research Council
PATRIOT	Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism
RRS	Royal Research Ship
UK	United Kingdom

USA
 VB-G RAM-G United States of America
 Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar
 and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin)

Author Contributions

Partha Majumdar is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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