



THESIS

On

**CHANGING POLITICAL LANDSCAPE AFTER 2014 AND IMPACT ON
THE REGIONAL PARTIES**

SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF

Bachelor of Arts in Journalism

by

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Under the Supervision of

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Aditya Kumar Jha, hereby declare that my research paper on the “Changing political Landscape after 2014 and Impact on regional parties” is an original work done by the researcher. I further reaffirm that the paper has not been published yet.

Approval for research

Recommended that the research report titled “Changing political Landscape after 2014 and Impact on regional parties” prepared by Aditya Kumar Jha under the supervision and guidance is accepted for the subject. There is no content that can cause harm on any basis.

Name: Aditya Kumar Jha

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Signature:

Acknowledgement

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis titled, “Changing political Landscape after 2014 and Impact on regional parties” submitted to Dr. Nidhi Singhal faculty, Department of Journalism, Delhi College of Arts and Commerce, University of Delhi, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the reward of the Bachelors of Arts Journalism, is an original work carried out by Mr. Aditya Kumar Jha.

This research was undertaken under my supervision and guidance, and to the best of my knowledge, the thesis has not been submitted for the reward of any degree or diploma, associateship, fellowship, or any other similar title at any other university or Institution in India or abroad.

Date: April 21, 2025

Place: Delhi

Dr. Nidhi Singhal

Supervisor

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Abstract

Since 2014, Indian politics has undergone a profound transformation marked by the emergence of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) as the dominant national force. This research explores the evolving political landscape in post-2014 India, focusing on how the BJP, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has redefined electoral dynamics, party systems, and the federal balance of power. The study investigates the decline and adaptation of regional political parties that once played a pivotal role in shaping India's coalition-driven democratic structure. It analyses how the BJP's strategic blend of nationalism, welfare populism, digital mobilization, and narrative control has helped it penetrate traditional strongholds of regional parties.

Using a mixed-methods approach, the paper draws on electoral data, political manifestos, campaign material, and case studies from key states including Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu. It assesses the impact of centralized political authority on cooperative federalism, the weakening of institutional autonomy, and the transformation of caste-based voter alliances. The research further examines how digital technologies and welfare schemes have facilitated direct engagement between the central leadership and citizens, effectively bypassing state-level actors and contributing to political homogenization.

Ultimately, the paper argues that India has entered a new phase of party politics, often described as the "fourth party system," characterized by BJP's centrality and the diminishing space for regional pluralism. The implications of this shift are significant, raising questions about the resilience of Indian federalism, the role of opposition parties, and the future trajectory of democratic competition in one of the world's most diverse political systems.

Introduction to Indian Demographics

India is the world's largest democracy and the second largest country in terms of population with about 1.4 billion inhabitants as of 2024 (United Nations Population Division, 2023). The demographic nature of the country is highly diverse in numerous dimensions. India's population growth rate has been decelerating in recent decades, recording around 1.0% annual growth over recent years relative to faster rates of growth in earlier decades (Census of India, 2011; World Bank, 2023). The nation has a fairly youthful population with a median age of around 28 years (United Nations Population Division, 2022), which presents economists with a "demographic dividend" that can be leveraged to drive economic growth if utilized effectively through education and job opportunities.

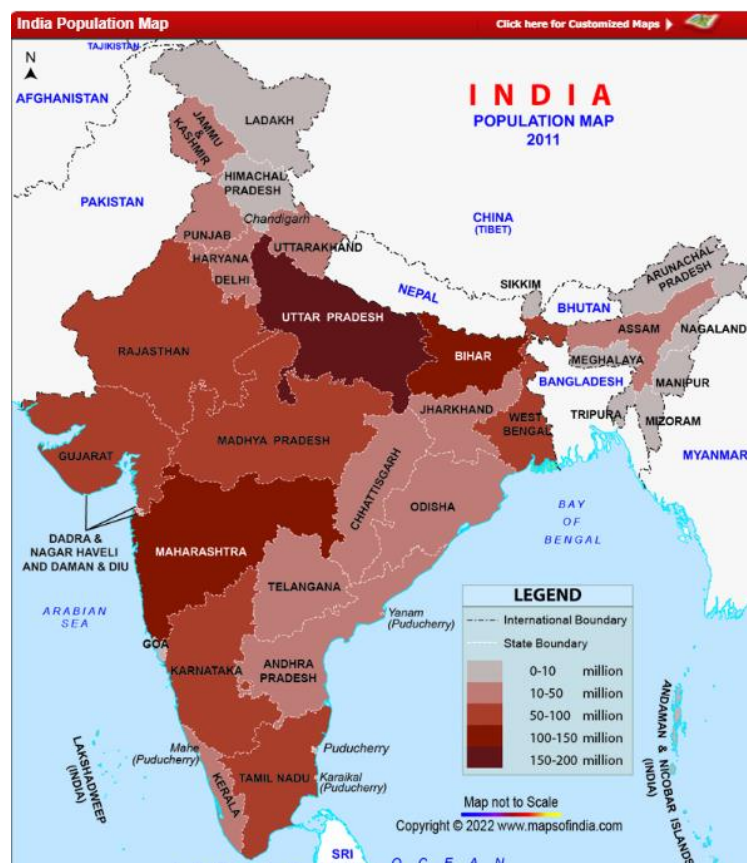
India's population density differs greatly from region to region, with very densely populated urban areas such as Mumbai and Delhi existing in contrast to thinly populated desert and mountain areas. Urbanization is ongoing at a consistent rate, with some 35% of the population living in cities (World Bank, 2022), though this is less than in much of the other developing world. The urban-rural divide is one of India's greatest demographic challenges, with differences in infrastructure, economic opportunity, healthcare, and education.

The religious composition of the country is also of tremendous diversity, with Hindus numbering around 79.8% of the population, Muslims 14.2%, Christians 2.3%, Sikhs 1.7%, Buddhists 0.7%, and Jains 0.4%, with several other religious minorities (Census of India, 2011). The linguistic diversity is no less striking, with the Constitution of India having recognized 22 scheduled languages, although Hindi and English are the official languages at the central level. More than 19,500 languages or dialects are spoken as mother tongues, with 121 languages having at least 10,000 speakers (People's Linguistic Survey of India, 2013; Census of India, 2011).

The caste system, in violation of legal prohibitions on discrimination, still influences social stratification. The government classifies deprived groups as Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC), together making up around 70% of the population and receiving differential forms of positive action (National Commission for Backward Classes; Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2020). Gender demographics

present an increasingly better sex ratio of 940 women for every 1,000 men as of the 2011 census (Census of India, 2011), although gender disparities remain in most spheres of Indian society such as education, work, and politics.

Economic demographics reveal significant inequality, with the top 10% of the population holding over 77% of the national wealth according to some estimates (Oxfam India, 2023; Credit Suisse Global Wealth Report, 2022). The middle class is growing but definitions vary widely regarding its size. Poverty rates have declined substantially over decades but remain a challenge, with variations in measurement making precise figures contentious (World Bank, 2022; NITI Aayog, 2021). Literacy levels have risen to around 74% (National Sample Survey Office, 2018; Census of India, 2011), with gender and regional differences being evident. Life expectancy is now about 70 years (World Health Organization, 2023), which is considerable improvement from independence-era levels of about 47 years, although access to healthcare is still uneven among socioeconomic categories and regions.



Picture: Mapofindia (Google)

Review of Literature

2.1 Introduction

The political landscape of India has historically been marked by multi-party competition, coalition governments, and strong regional identities. However, since 2014, there has been a significant transformation in this structure. A wealth of scholarly work, electoral data, and media commentary has emerged to explain these changes—particularly focusing on the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the decline of regional parties, and the reshaping of India's federal democracy.

This review synthesizes key academic contributions, institutional reports, and media analyses to contextualize the emerging trends in Indian politics post-2014.

2.2 Rise of BJP and the Fourth Party System

Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar (2014, 2019)

Yadav and Palshikar's framework of India's party systems outlines a shift from the Congress-dominant system to a fragmented federal order and finally to the emergence of a fourth party system after 2014, where BJP became the central pole of Indian politics. The BJP's ability to become a "pan-Indian" party, transcending regional limitations, is seen as the most defining feature of this phase.

Milan Vaishnav (Carnegie Endowment, 2017)

Vaishnav attributes BJP's consolidation of power to a combination of "Hindutva ideology", efficient ground-level mobilization, data-driven campaigning, and centralised leadership under Modi. He calls this era a "new political order", deeply marked by narrative control and personalisation of leadership.

Christophe Jaffrelot (2021)

In his seminal work *Modi's India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy*, Jaffrelot argues that the rise of the BJP has not only reconfigured electoral politics but also

reshaped India's secular democratic ethos. He asserts that this dominance is sustained by majoritarian populism, centralised governance, and a weakening of institutional autonomy—especially at the state level.

2.3 Decline of Regional Parties

K.C. Suri (2020) Suri points out that regional parties, once pivotal during the coalition era (1996–2014), are now either being co-opted or outmaneuvered by the BJP. He cites case studies from Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Odisha, showing how the BJP used alliances to gain entry and later marginalized its partners through aggressive expansion strategies.

Louise Tillin (2019): Tillin explores the federal implications of BJP dominance, arguing that the party's centralising tendencies have eroded the spirit of cooperative federalism. She also identifies that the weakening of regional parties has led to fewer checks on central power, especially in fiscal matters and policy framing.

Sanjay Kumar (CSDS): Kumar examines electoral data from state and national elections and notes a steady decline in the vote share and relevance of key regional parties like the Samajwadi Party, BSP, and AIADMK. He highlights how caste coalitions previously harnessed by these parties have fractured, often due to the BJP's strategic outreach to non-dominant caste groups.

2.4 Role of Nationalism and Populism

Arvind Verma and Rahul Verma (2020): In their book *Ideology and Identity: The Changing Party Systems of India*, the authors describe BJP's success as rooted in the blending of ideology with welfare populism. The BJP's development plus identity strategy allowed it to appeal to both aspirational middle classes and historically marginalized groups.

Devesh Kapur and Pratap Bhanu Mehta: They argue that BJP's electoral victories are less about economic performance and more about cultural messaging and political branding. Modi's personal popularity, bolstered by mass media, WhatsApp groups, and direct beneficiary schemes like Ujjwala and PM Kisan, has helped create a "moral economy of governance" that is hard for regional parties to counter.

2.5 Digital Mobilisation and Narrative Control: Ravi Agrawal (2020) – India Connected

Agrawal emphasizes the role of digital penetration and mobile internet in reshaping political campaigns. Post-2014, the BJP has leveraged digital tools more effectively than any other party,

creating a direct channel to voters through platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube. This digital dominance has allowed the BJP to bypass traditional media and control the narrative, particularly during elections.

Joyojeet Pal (University of Michigan): Pal's research focuses on Narendra Modi's social media persona, showing how his digital team has crafted a brand image of Modi as both a strong leader and a grassroots champion. These platforms have been crucial in spreading ideological messages, mobilizing support, and discrediting opposition, often through sophisticated disinformation networks.

2.6 Institutional Transformation and Centralization of Power: Rajeev Bhargava (2021)

Bhargava critiques the erosion of democratic institutions under centralized leadership. He argues that the weakening of checks and balances—such as the Parliament, Election Commission, and even the Judiciary—has paved the way for a majoritarian regime. The result is a system that favors central authority over state autonomy, marginalizing regional leadership in both symbolic and substantive ways.

Suhas Palshikar (EPW, 2019): Palshikar asserts that institutional bypassing—where decision-making shifts from formal forums like Parliament to informal executive bodies—is characteristic of the post-2014 era. He links this to the rise of “centralized populism” that seeks legitimacy directly from the people, ignoring legislative scrutiny and federal consultation mechanisms.

2.7 Changing Voter Behavior and Caste Coalitions: Christophe Jaffrelot and Gilles Verniers (2020)

Their study on vote bank shifts explains how the BJP systematically broke the monopoly of regional parties over specific caste groups. In states like UP and Bihar, the BJP appealed to non-Yadav OBCs and non-Jatav Dalits, dismantling traditional caste alliances forged by parties like SP and BSP.

They also observe that the BJP's use of Hindu identity politics coupled with welfare distribution restructured voter preferences, leading to the creation of a multi-caste Hindu vote bank, which had previously been fragmented.

Ashutosh Kumar (2017): Kumar's comparative study across states like Punjab, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal shows that while some regional parties maintained dominance through

identity and welfare, they are increasingly threatened by the BJP's ability to nationalize local issues and project uniform ideological narratives that transcend regional boundaries.

2.8 Regional Case Studies: West Bengal: BJP vs. TMC (Chatterjee, 2021)

Studies of the 2019 Lok Sabha and 2021 Assembly elections show how the BJP mounted a serious challenge to TMC by mobilizing caste groups like Mahishyas and Matua Dalits, and by invoking Bengali Hindu nationalism. Although TMC retained power, the BJP's rise marked a clear erosion of regional party monopoly.

Odisha: BJP vs. BJD (Sahoo, 2024): The BJP's expansion strategy in Odisha after breaking its alliance with BJD is a textbook example of how it builds local cadres, exploits anti-incumbency, and introduces central welfare schemes with a national branding. The 2024 victory over BJD marked the end of a 24-year regional rule, showcasing BJP's long-term strategic investment.

Tamil Nadu: Resistance of Dravidian Model (Vijayabaskar & Kalaiyarasan, 2022): Tamil Nadu remains a stronghold where Dravidian identity politics and regional pride have kept national parties, especially the BJP, at bay. The DMK's governance model is deeply embedded in social justice, secularism, and Tamil identity, which makes it a unique case resisting the BJP wave.

2.9 Decline of Coalition Politics: Zoya Hasan (2023)

Hasan argues that post-2014 India has entered a post-coalition political phase, especially at the center. The BJP's single-party majority ended an era where regional parties held bargaining power, often determining coalition compositions and national policies.

The 2024 election results—where BJP needed NDA allies again—may signal a return to coalitional relevance, but Hasan warns that the structure remains highly skewed, with BJP at the core and regional parties increasingly playing a secondary role.

2.10 Welfare Politics and Political Homogenization

Niraja Gopal Jayal (2020): Jayal observes that Modi-era welfare schemes like Ujjwala, PM Awas Yojana, and Jan Dhan accounts have created a direct beneficiary relationship between the center and citizens, bypassing state governments. This creates a perception that only the central leadership delivers, reducing the visibility and credit of regional parties—even for centrally sponsored schemes implemented at state level.

Varshney, Ashutosh (2019): Varshney notes the emergence of a new kind of political homogenization—not through brute force, but through nationwide policy and cultural narratives that diminish regional distinctiveness. He warns that this might have long-term implications for India's pluralist ethos.

Objectives

1. **To analyse the transformation of India's party system after 2014**, particularly the emergence and consolidation of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as a dominant national force.
2. **To examine the decline, adaptation, or transformation of regional political parties** in the context of BJP's expansion, with specific case studies from states like Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Maharashtra, and Odisha.
3. **To explore the role of nationalism, welfare populism, and digital mobilization** in reshaping voter behavior and political narratives in post-2014 India.
4. **To assess the impact of centralized political leadership on India's federal structure**, including the reconfiguration of center-state relations and erosion of cooperative federalism.
5. **To investigate the changing caste dynamics and social coalitions** that have enabled the BJP to penetrate traditional strongholds of regional parties.
6. **To evaluate the broader implications of the fourth party system** for Indian democracy, including political homogenization, institutional changes, and the future of coalition politics.

Hypotheses

- H1: The rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) after 2014 has significantly contributed to the electoral and organizational decline of regional political parties in India.
- H2: The centralization of political authority under the BJP-led government has weakened the federal character of Indian democracy by marginalizing state-level autonomy and regional voices.
- H3: BJP's strategic use of welfare populism, digital mobilization, and nationalist narratives has played a decisive role in reshaping voter preferences in regions traditionally dominated by regional parties.

Research Methodology

Purpose of the Study

This research is designed to critically examine the transformation of the Indian political landscape since 2014, with particular focus on the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as a dominant national force, and the corresponding decline or adaptation of regional political parties. The study also aims to understand the changing contours of Indian federalism and the emergence of a new political culture shaped by centralised authority, digital mobilisation, and populist nationalism. The primary purpose is to trace how these changes have influenced democratic practices, political pluralism, and voter alignments across different regions of India.

Research Design

The research follows a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods approach, combining elements of descriptive, analytical, and interpretative methodologies. A longitudinal design is used to assess developments over the ten-year period from 2014 to 2024. This approach facilitates the tracing of political patterns, transformations, and their impacts on India's democratic structure. Quantitative data, such as election results and vote share statistics, are complemented by qualitative sources like political speeches, media discourse, and expert commentaries.

Case Study Method

The research employs the case study method to explore state-specific political developments that illustrate the broader national trends. This method allows for an in-depth, contextual analysis of how national political dynamics interact with regional socio-political environments. Each case study functions as a microcosm reflecting the macro-political changes.

Selection of Case Studies

Six states were selected purposively for their political significance and the presence of distinct political trajectories since 2014. These include:

- Odisha: Known for the long-standing rule of a regional party (BJD), which was eventually displaced by BJP in 2024.
- Haryana: A state where BJP initially allied with a regional party (JJP) and later asserted independent control.

- Delhi: A regional-party dominated state where BJP achieved eventual success without formal alliances.
- Maharashtra: A case of internal splits and realignments involving BJP and Shiv Sena factions.
- Bihar: Illustrative of complex alliance politics involving JD(U) and BJP.
- Uttar Pradesh: A key state showing caste-based voter shifts and BJP's long-term consolidation.

These states were chosen based on four primary criteria:

1. Political volatility and history of coalition politics.
2. Presence of significant regional parties.
3. Electoral importance in terms of Lok Sabha seats.
4. Socio-cultural diversity affecting political mobilisation.

Sampling Method

A purposive sampling method was employed, focusing on cases that represent different models of BJP's electoral and strategic expansion. This non-probability method was selected due to its utility in in-depth political studies where the objective is not statistical generalisation but explanatory richness.

Data Collection

The study utilised both primary and secondary data sources:

- Primary Data:
 - Political speeches and interviews from party leaders.
 - Election manifestos (2014, 2019, 2024).
 - Election campaign materials (visuals, slogans, advertisements).
- Secondary Data:
 - Electoral statistics from the Election Commission of India.
 - Reports from think tanks (PRS Legislative Research, CSDS, ADR).

- Scholarly books, journal articles, and policy papers.
- News articles, media analyses, and digital archives.

Analytical Tools and Techniques

- Comparative Analysis: Used to evaluate the performance of parties across different elections.
- Content Analysis: Applied to manifestos and speeches to decode recurring themes and political messaging.
- Discourse Analysis: Used for media narratives and digital mobilisation strategies.
- Electoral Mapping: Graphical representation of vote share and seat distribution across elections.

Challenges Encountered

- Access to Data: Regional party documents and archives were sometimes incomplete or unavailable.
- Bias in Sources: Media and secondary sources occasionally reflected partisan perspectives.
- Dynamic Political Landscape: The post-2024 changes necessitated continual data updates.
- Translation Limitations: Regional language materials required interpretation and introduced potential distortion.
- Lack of Direct Interviews: Constraints prevented the collection of fresh primary interviews with political actors.

Limitations of the Study

1. The purposive nature of sampling limits generalisability.
2. The ten-year period, while comprehensive, may not capture deeper historical trends.
3. Subjectivity in interpretation may affect discourse analysis.
4. Over-reliance on electoral data could overlook ground-level political movements and civil society trends.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to academic research ethics, relying on publicly available data and ensuring neutrality in analysis. All sources are acknowledged, and care was taken to avoid misrepresentation or bias in political interpretation.

Conclusion

The chosen methodology offers a robust framework for exploring the political transformations in India post-2014. By integrating diverse sources, methodological pluralism, and state-level specificity, the study provides a nuanced understanding of the shifts in India's electoral democracy, the reconfiguration of regional party systems, and the rise of a centralized political narrative. The methodological design aligns well with the goals of political inquiry in a complex, pluralistic, and evolving federal system like India.

States and Union Territories of India

India's federal framework organizes the nation into states and union territories, with their number and boundaries changing since independence through a series of States Reorganization Acts. Currently, as of 2024, India has 28 states and 8 union territories, demonstrating the country's intent to accommodate linguistic, cultural, and regional sentiments within a unified federal structure (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2024; Constitution of India, up to amendments made in 2023). Indian states, which are each represented by an elected government and legislature, are: Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, which was created in 2014 as the newest state in India, Tripura, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2024).

The eight union territories, governed directly by the central government to some extent, are: Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu (combined in 2020), Delhi (officially the National Capital Territory of Delhi), Jammu and Kashmir (reorganized from state to union territory in 2019), Ladakh (established in 2019), Lakshadweep, and Puducherry (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2024; The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Act, 2019).

This political landscape has witnessed dramatic changes after independence. The original configuration consisted of 14 states and 6 union territories, which were mostly inherited from British provinces and princely states. Later reorganizations have followed mainly linguistic patterns, starting with the States Reorganization Act of 1956, which realigned boundaries to form linguistically homogeneous states. Subsequent reorganizations reacted to local movements and administrative purposes, carving new states out of existing ones, like the establishment of Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh in 2000 and Telangana in 2014 (States Reorganization Act, 1956; Andhra Pradesh Reorganization Act, 2014; Tillin, 2013).

The last major alteration was in 2019 when the Jammu and Kashmir state was reorganized into two union territories: Jammu and Kashmir (with a legislature) and Ladakh (without a legislature). The reorganization, which was a contentious move, came after the central government scrapped the special autonomous status earlier conferred on the region under Article 370 of the Constitution (The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Act, 2019; Ministry of Home Affairs, 2019).

Every state possesses a legislative assembly (Vidhan Sabha) elected by direct universal adult franchise for a term of five years, unless dissolved earlier. The majority of states possess unicameral legislatures, but seven states—Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, and Karnataka—have bicameral legislatures with a Legislative Council (Vidhan Parishad) as the second chamber. The Chief Minister, who is usually the head of the majority party or coalition in the state assembly, is the head of the state government and council of ministers (Constitution of India, Articles 168-177).

Union territories have different governing arrangements. Delhi and Puducherry possess an elected assembly and chief ministers despite being union territories, indicative of partial statehood. Jammu and Kashmir, after its reorganization, still maintains a legislative assembly but with less power than it had when it was a full-fledged state. The other union territories are governed by Lieutenant Governors nominated by the central government (Constitution of India, Articles 239-241; The Government of Union Territories Act, 1963).

Separation of powers among the central and state governments is defined in the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution under three lists: the Union List (subjects for central government authority), the State List (under state authority), and the Concurrent List (both share responsibility). This structure balances national unity and regional autonomy, although center-state relations have undergone periodic tensions since India's formation (Constitution of India, Seventh Schedule; Saxena, 2006; Tillin, 2019).



Picture: Indian Map(google)

Features of Indian Democracy

Indian democracy is an exemplary success in government, especially given the size of the country, its diversity, and the adverse conditions under which it was created. The Indian democratic system is based on the Constitution of India, which was adopted on January 26, 1950, and created the country as a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic (Constitution of India, 1950). This fundamental document, which is one of the world's longest written constitutions, is a detailed charter of basic rights, directive principles of state policy, and government structure.

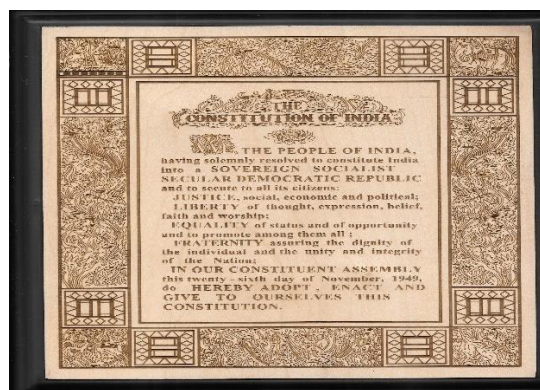
The Indian system of democracy has a parliamentary system of government patterned mainly on the Westminster system of the United Kingdom but modified to suit India's federal framework (Austin, 1999). This parliamentary system has a titular head of state (President) and a head of government (Prime Minister) who presides over the Council of Ministers. The Prime Minister and Council are jointly responsible before the lower house of Parliament (Lok Sabha). This allows the executive to be kept accountable by the legislature, thus establishing a system of checks and balances. Federalism is features of the Indian democracy, where power was shared between the central and state government but at some cases we see that there is power also divided among the local levels. The Constitution establishes three lists—Union, State, and Concurrent—that outline the subjects over which authority lies in each tier of government (Seventh Schedule, Constitution of India, 1950). This federal arrangement has proven flexible enough to accommodate India's diverse regional aspirations while maintaining national unity, though center-state relations have experienced tensions throughout India's history (Arora & Verney, 1995; Tillin, 2019).

Universal adult suffrage represents one of the most progressive features of Indian democracy. Even in its early stages, India afforded a vote to every citizen of 21 and more years of age (now 18 years), irrespective of gender, faith, caste, education, and property qualifications (Article 326, Constitution of India, 1950). This revolutionary action, taken at a time when illiteracy and poverty pervaded the newly independent nation, proved India's adherence to democratic equality and government by the people. The autonomous Election Commission of India (ECI) set up by Article 324 of the Constitution holds elections in all levels and has gained international recognition for taking care of logistical challenges of Indian elections (McMillan, 2010). The Indian judiciary, especially the Supreme Court, acts as the constitutional and fundamental rights watchdog. Judicial review gives power to courts to scrutinize legislative

and executive action for constitutionality, acting as a vital check on government power (Articles 32 and 226, Constitution of India, 1950). The independence of the judiciary, while at times under threat, has broadly been preserved by structural safeguards such as security of tenure for judges (Baxi, 1980; Bhagwati, 1992).

India's democracy upholds pluralism through numerous protective measures for the minority and the disadvantaged. The Constitution bars discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth (Article 15, Constitution of India, 1950), and it gives special provisions to socially and educationally backward classes, Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes. These include reservations (quotas) in education, public employment, and elected bodies, which will redress historical marginalization (Galanter, 1984; Jaffrelot, 2006).

Indian democracy is supported by a strong civil society, with non-governmental organizations, social movements, and an active media. Indian democracy has shown immense strength despite challenges like economic disparity, occasional communal tensions, and regional disparities. Frequent peaceful changes of power through elections are a testament to the strength of the system, especially in a region where democracy has struggled to gain ground (Kohli, 2001; Guha, 2007).



Picture: Constitution of India (Google)

India's First General Election (1951-52)

India's inaugural general election, conducted between October 25, 1951, and February 21, 1952, is a milestone in democratic history—an unprecedented experiment in electoral democracy in a newly independent country beset by abject poverty, illiteracy, and the recent trauma of partition. This gargantuan exercise was the world's largest experiment in democratic rule at the time, laying the groundwork for India's long-standing democratic tradition (Guha, 2007; Quraishi, 2014). The election occurred merely four years after India gained its independence from British colonial rule on August 15, 1947. The country was then governed by an interim government headed by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru prior to this momentous election. The Constituent Assembly that had been instrumental in the drafting of India's Constitution (adopted on January 26, 1950) served as a temporary parliament until the election could procure the democratically elected legislature (Austin, 1999).

The magnitude of this electoral exercise was breathtaking. In all, some 173 million Indians were entitled to vote, out of which nearly 107 million (approximately 62%) actually went to the polls (Election Commission of India, 1952). This huge electorate cut across varied geographical landscapes, from the Himalayas to seacoast villages and from thickly populated cities to far-flung tribal tracts. The election decided the membership of the first Lok Sabha (the lower house of Parliament) with 489 seats, and state legislative assemblies.

The electoral judgment gave a clear mandate to the Indian National Congress, which was the party that had headed the freedom struggle against British colonial rule. Led by Nehru, the Congress won 364 seats (74.4% of total seats) in the Lok Sabha, garnering 45% of all votes cast (Election Commission of India, 1952). The Communist Party of India was the second-largest with a mere 16 seats, followed by the Socialist Party with 12 seats. Other regional parties and independents took up the remaining seats, founding India's unique multi-party system from the very beginning.

Jawaharlal Nehru was then sworn in as India's first democratically elected Prime Minister on May 13, 1952, continuing the leadership role he had played since independence. His vision of a modern, secular, and progressive India would deeply influence the developmental path of the nation in its early years. The first Parliament of independent India was formed on April 17, 1952, completing the transition to democratic rule (Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1952).



Picture: First General Election Voting (Google)

Challenges and Characteristics of India's First General Election

India's inaugural general election faced unprecedented problems that demanded creative solutions and extraordinary dedication from citizens and election officials alike. The most basic challenge was the daunting size of the electorate—about 173 million eligible voters in a nation with limited infrastructure. This figure constituted more voters than the total electorates of Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union combined at the time (Palmer, 1975; Guha, 2007).

Mass illiteracy was another imposing barrier, with more than 85% of the population unable to read or write (Census of India, 1951). This called for innovative adjustments in the electoral process, such as widespread utilization of symbols for representation by political parties and candidates. The Congress Party used the symbol of two bullocks under a yoke, whereas other parties used symbols like a lamp, a hut, and an elephant. These symbols were marked on individual ballot papers and voters would deposit their preferred ballot in an enclosed box, allowing even illiterate citizens to engage constructively with the democratic process (Sukumar Sen, 1952; Quraishi, 2014).

The lack of existing electoral infrastructure meant the whole system had to be constructed from scratch. This involved making electoral rolls, developing ballot papers, setting up polling stations, and training electoral staff. The Election Commission was required to compile separate electoral rolls for every constituency, a task involving a house-to-house count over vast expanses of land. Furthermore, the varied geography of the country made it a logistical nightmare, with polling booths in remote mountain villages, thick jungles, deserts, and island areas—some accessible only by elephant, camel, or boat (Election Commission of India, 1952; Guha, 2008).

Social challenges were equally daunting. Traditional social hierarchies, most notably the caste system, created fears of voter intimidation and the freedom of marginalized groups to vote. Female seclusion (purdah) in certain communities necessitated special measures for female voters such as separate entrances and female voting officials. Moreover, the recent trauma of Partition and communal violence meant security arrangements had to be carefully made to allow religious minorities to vote freely (Weiner, 1967; Guha, 2007).

Despite these challenges, the election featured several innovative elements that would become hallmarks of Indian democracy. The decision to implement universal adult suffrage from the outset was revolutionary, especially given that several Western democracies at the time still maintained various voting restrictions (Keyssar, 2000). The establishment of an independent Election Commission with constitutional authority provided crucial institutional credibility. The election also initiated multi-member constituencies with reserved seats for Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes with the understanding of representation for poor communities (Jaffrelot, 2003).

The use of the symbol system not only solved illiteracy but also established lasting political identities that cut across linguistic and regional divisions. Another characteristic was the staggered holding of elections over almost four months, which enabled the shifting of security personnel and election officials between regions. This is still practiced in modern Indian elections, albeit with shorter periods (Quraishi, 2014).



Picture: First CEC of India Sukumar Sen (ECI)

Electoral Strategy and Process in India's First General Election

The plan for holding India's first general election was formulated under the guidance of Sukumar Sen, India's first Chief Election Commissioner, whose careful planning and innovative methods would set lasting electoral conventions. Foreseeing the Herculean task that lay ahead, Sen started making preparations almost two years in advance of the actual election, establishing a decentralized but coordinated system of implementation (Sukumar Sen, 1952; McMillan, 2010).

The Election Commission used a systematic voter registration strategy, deploying nearly 16,500 enumeration officers who carried out door-to-door enumeration throughout the country. This worked out to the registration of nearly 173 million potential voters, a feat given the lack of antecedent comprehensive census data and the transient movements of the population after Partition. To address concerns about duplicate registrations, electoral rolls were publicly displayed in villages and towns, enabling citizens to verify their inclusion and register objections about inaccuracies (Election Commission of India, 1952; Ramachandra Guha, 2007).

Constituency delimitation was yet another essential preparatory task. The Delimitation Commission drew boundaries for 489 parliamentary constituencies and 3,283 assembly constituencies with great care, keeping in mind the distribution of the population as well as sufficient representation to different communities. About 22% of seats were reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in proportion to their numbers, giving effect to constitutional provisions regarding affirmative action (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1949; Election Commission of India, 1952).

The election used a first-past-the-post electoral system borrowed from the British, where candidates who won the most votes in their constituency would emerge victorious, even if they did not achieve an absolute majority. The system was selected for its simplicity and capacity to deliver decisive results, important factors considering the novel nature of the exercise and the limited experience of the electorate with electoral processes (Morris-Jones, 1967; Guha, 2007).

Voter education was an integral part of election strategy. An extensive campaign, employing radio messages, information films shown in mobile cinema vans, wall posters, and meetings held at the local level, was undertaken by the Election Commission with the objective of making citizens acquainted with voting techniques. Mock polling was also being done in the villages and the towns in order to showcase the process, taking special care that women and oppressed classes, previously kept outside decision-making at public levels (Sukumar Sen, 1952; Quraishi, 2014), are approached.

The phased process of implementation bifurcated the election into 68 individual polling phases distributed over almost four months from October 25, 1951, to February 21, 1952. This tactful scheduling enabled the rotation of polling staff and security personnel over areas and the Election Commission to gain experience from initial phases and improve procedures for later ones. The longer period also supported the poor transportation facilities so that election officials and materials reached out to the distant locations (Election Commission of India, 1952; McMillan, 2010).

The number of polling stations was roughly 196,084 with the aim that no voter should have to go beyond two miles to cast their vote. Special features included separate queues for women, provision for aged and disabled voters, and provision for voting secrecy. The layout of polling stations exhibited a sense of sensitivity towards local traditions, such as provision for women practicing purdah to vote without giving up their traditional practices (Election Commission of India, 1952; Guha, 2007). Ballot security was a major issue in a country with little experience of democratic elections. The Commission provided sealed ballot boxes with unique locks for every polling station. Once voting was over, these boxes were taken under armed escort to counting centers. The process of counting itself was carried out under close supervision with representatives of candidates in attendance, making transparency a pillar of Indian elections (Sukumar Sen, 1952; McMillan, 2010).

The Election Commission deployed about 380,000 polling officials, 170,000 police officers to ensure security, and countless volunteers to help run the election. These workers went through standardized training on voting procedures, including impartiality and sticking to well-set procedures. The Commission also instituted a pyramidal organizational arrangement of returning officers tasked with the duty of administering elections within their respective areas and handling disagreements under standardized procedures (Election Commission of India, 1952; Quraishi, 2014).

In spite of the colossal complexities, the election was universally accepted as free and fair, conferring essential democratic legitimacy on the new nation. The successful conduct of this gigantic exercise proved that democracy could work efficiently even in adverse socioeconomic circumstances, defying skeptics who had questioned India's ability to govern democratically in view of its poverty, illiteracy, and social cleavages (Morris-Jones, 1967; Brown, 1985; Guha, 2007).



Picture: Election commission of India (Indian Express)

Evolution of the Electoral Process in India

India's electoral process has undergone tremendous transformation from the earliest general election, reconciling itself to the changing social conditions, technological development, and new challenges without disturbing the fundamental democratic principles. The elementary framework from the earliest election—universal adult franchise, autonomous Election Commission, and first-past-the-post method of voting—remained intact, but various procedural and technical improvements have made the system more efficient, transparent, and inclusive (Quraishi, 2014; Sridharan, 2014).

The most important event was in 1989 when paper ballots were replaced by electronic voting machines (EVMs), initially on an experimental scale and subsequently across the country. These locally designed machines made voting easier, sped up vote counting, invalidated improper votes, minimized paper usage, and put an end to booth capturing and ballot stuffing. In spite of the occasional controversies, EVMs have overall enhanced electoral integrity while minimizing the logistical challenges involved in paper ballots (Election Commission of India, 2018; Wolchok et al., 2010).

The promulgation of the Model Code of Conduct is another significant development, demarcating definite rules for political parties and contestants in campaigns. The code, which

becomes operative on the announcement of elections, governs speeches, rallies, polling day operations, and government communications to provide a fair level playing field. Not being statutorily binding, the moral force of this code has normally established compliance among political players (Election Commission of India, 2019; Mendiratta, 2017).

Voter identification protocols have also seen significant changes. Although the initial election depended chiefly on electoral lists for authentication, the use of voter ID cards in the 1990s and subsequently more advanced Electors Photo Identity Card (EPIC) has intensified identity authentication and minimized impersonation. These strategies, coupled with indelible ink marked on voters' fingers, have fortified electoral integrity (Election Commission of India, 2020; Quraishi, 2014).

Campaign finance laws have experienced incremental changes to make politics more transparent and reduce the role of money in politics. Some of these are compulsory disclosure of donations above specified amounts, campaign expenditure ceilings, and a requirement for candidates to file detailed returns of election expenditures. Still, enforcement issues remain, with unaccounted "black money" still having a major presence in campaigns (Association for Democratic Reforms, 2023; Sridharan, 2014).

The last few decades have seen concerted efforts to boost the turnout of voters, especially from historically marginalized sections. The "Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation" (SVEEP) initiative by the Election Commission has used focused awareness campaigns, including online outreach, to promote voting among young people, city-dwellers, women, and marginal groups. Voting has increased in general over time to about 67% in the 2019 general election from 62% in the first election (Election Commission of India, 2019; Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2020). Electoral roll management has also grown more sophisticated from manual to computerized databases, updated periodically with de-duplication activities. The National Electoral Roll Purification program has focused on the elimination of duplicate and incorrect entries with full coverage. Likewise, delimitation or the periodic exercise of redrawing constituency boundaries has been undertaken to keep up with population shifts, although political sensitivities have sometimes caused delays in this process (Delimitation Commission, 2008; Election Commission of India, 2020).

Technology has changed many aspects of election management, including voter registration and identification, calculation of results, and their dissemination. ERONet has computerized many of the registration procedures, while citizens can access electoral services through

smartphones using the Voter Helpline app. Results are sent electronically and usually available in hours instead of days or weeks as in previous elections (Election Commission of India, 2021; Kumar, 2019).

Security deployments have adjusted to emerging dangers, especially in troubled areas. Central Armed Police Forces deployment is now common in sensitive locations, and vulnerability mapping assists in pinpointing likely hotspots that need more security. Multi-phase polling still allows security personnel to travel between regions, although the number of phases has tended to come down with enhanced logistics and security capabilities (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2021; Quraishi, 2014).



Picture: Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) (Bar & Bench)

India's Electoral System: FPTP and PR

India uses a mixed electoral system that integrates First Past the Post (FPTP) and Proportional Representation (PR) aspects. The combination of both is used to strike a balance between direct representation and political voice diversity.

First Past the Post (FPTP)

India applies FPTP to elect members to the Lok Sabha (House of Parliament) and State Legislative Assemblies. In this system, the nation is broken up into single-member constituencies, and the candidate who wins in each constituency wins the seat, whether or not they have achieved an absolute majority.

Main Features of FPTP in India

The FPTP system offers direct representation between constituencies and elected representatives. Voters vote for a particular candidate, not a party, although party identification plays a major role in voting. The system favors large parties and usually results in majority governments, even when the winning party has less than 50% of the national vote.

One major benefit is simplicity—voters merely tick their chosen candidate, making the system available to a broad electorate. But it may underrepresent smaller parties whose support is dispersed across several constituencies rather than concentrated in one area.

Proportional Representation (PR)

India applies PR principles mainly in its upper house, the Rajya Sabha, and State Legislative Councils. They are indirectly elected members, whose seats are filled proportionally depending on the relative strength of the parties in the respective state legislatures.

Key Features of PR in India

The PR component helps ensure representation of diverse political viewpoints and regional interests. It provides a counterbalance to the FPTP system's tendency to favor larger parties. The PR elections occur through an indirect voting system where elected representatives in state assemblies vote according to a proportional formula.

This ensures federalism is preserved by guaranteeing that states are well represented nationally regardless of size, especially in the Rajya Sabha where states enjoy proportional representation.



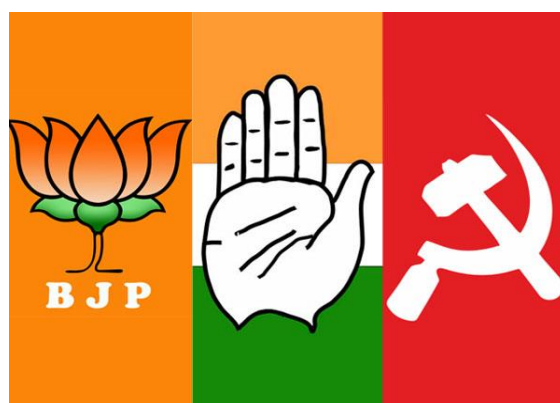
Picture: The Most Two Important Electoral system India followed FPTP And PR (Google)

Criteria for National Party Status

The Election Commission of India (ECI) awards "national party" status on the basis of electoral performance. Under the latest guidelines, a political party can be designated as a national party if it fulfils any one of the following conditions:

1. The party secures 2% seats in the Lok Sabha from three or more states.
2. The party obtains a minimum of 6% of the valid votes polled in four or more states in Lok Sabha or State Assembly elections, and also gains four Lok Sabha seats.
3. The party achieves the status of a state party in four or more states.

This status yields a number of advantages, including a reserved symbol accepted throughout India, time allocated on state media during election periods, and higher institutional legitimacy.



Picture: National Political Parties (One India)

National Political Parties

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

Bharatiya Janata Party, whose symbol is the lotus, is one of India's strongest political movements today. Established in 1980, the BJP is a product of the previous Bharatiya Jana Sangh founded by Syama Prasad Mukherjee in 1951. The ideological base of the party lies strongly in Hindutva, which is a type of Hindu nationalism that supports India's cultural identity being inherently linked to Hindu traditions and values. This school of thought was greatly influenced by scholars such as V.D. Savarkar and M.S. Golwalkar, who advocated for cultural nationalism. The BJP has close affiliations with its ideological parent body, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which gives philosophical direction and mobilization at the ground level.

The BJP under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee established India's first non-Congress government coalition that lasted a full term from 1999-2004. The party underwent transformative development under Narendra Modi, who guided the BJP to sweeping victories in 2014 and 2019 general elections, creating single-party majorities after decades of coalition governments. The political ideology of the BJP is a blend of economic liberalization and cultural conservatism, supporting free-market reforms along with the preservation of Hindu cultural values. In time, the party has broadened its reach from its traditional strongholds in northern and western India to establish substantial inroads in northeastern states and portions of eastern and southern India. It has done this through a combination of alliance with regional parties and grass roots organizing. The BJP is in power in many state governments of India and has the highest membership among any political party globally, with over 180 million members according to recent reports.



Picture: Bhartiya Janata Party Logo (BOOM Fact Check)

Indian National Congress (INC)

The Indian National Congress, symbolizing an open palm, is the oldest political party in India whose roots go back to 1885 when the party was first established as an Indian forum of participation in political governance under the British colonial state. The Congress guided India's struggle for independence under such leaders as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, evolving from an elite party to a mass movement that negotiated India's passage to independence. Following independence in 1947, the Congress emerged as the preeminent political force, ruling India nearly continuously for the first thirty years under Prime Ministers Jawaharlal Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri, and Indira Gandhi.

Ideologically, the Congress is centrist with an orientation towards social liberalism, progressivism, and secularism. The economic ideology of the party has changed immensely over the years—from Nehruvian socialism and state-led economics to accepting liberalization under P.V. Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh during the 1990s and 2000s. The party has traditionally defended India's secular character, insisting on equal treatment of all religions by the state. The Congress experienced major internal crises, such as a serious split during the Emergency years (1975-77) declared by Indira Gandhi. After her assassination in 1984, her son Rajiv Gandhi brought the party to its biggest-ever parliamentary majority. The Congress has been dominated for most of the last few decades by the Nehru-Gandhi family, with Sonia Gandhi being the longest-serving president and Rahul Gandhi taking charge in recent years. After decades of dominating Indian politics, the Congress has been electorally decimated since 2014, losing space to the BJP in many states. Still, it continues to be India's main opposition party with a presence in all states, although its pockets have declined enormously.



Picture: Indian National Congress Logo (Wikipedia)

Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M)

The Communist Party of India (Marxist), symbolized by hammer, sickle, and star, was the result of a division in the initial Communist Party of India in 1964 on ideological grounds concerning the Sino-Soviet conflict and methods of working in Indian politics. Under leaders such as E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Jyoti Basu, and Harkishan Singh Surjeet, CPI(M) became a major political force, especially in Kerala, West Bengal, and Tripura. The ideology of the party lies in Marxism-Leninism and stands for socialist transformation of society in a democratic way. The party has all along been opposing neoliberal economic practices, privatization, and "imperialist influence" on the foreign policy of India.

The CPI(M) created history by establishing the world's first democratically elected communist government in Kerala under E.M.S. Namboodiripad in 1957. The most prominent period of the party in power was in West Bengal, where it governed uninterruptedly for 34 years (1977-2011) under Chief Ministers Jyoti Basu and Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee. It made substantial land reforms and a strong panchayati raj (local self-government) system during this time. Yet controversies relating to the acquisition of land for industrial endeavors in Singur and Nandigram helped bring about its 2011 electoral loss. The CPI(M) has served as a key member in numerous left coalitions at the all-India level and has been an outside supporter of center-left governments, most prominently during the United Front government (1996-1998) and UPA-I government (2004-2008), which it withdrew support on account of the Indo-US nuclear deal. In recent years, the party has faced electoral challenges, losing ground in its former strongholds of West Bengal and Tripura, though it continues to maintain significant influence in Kerala, where it leads the Left Democratic Front government.



Picture: Communist Party of India (Marxist) logo (Globalsecurity.org)

Communist Party of India (CPI)

The Communist Party of India, symbolized by ears of corn and sickle, was founded in 1925, making it one of India's oldest political parties. Born during India's freedom struggle, the CPI was subject to severe repression by British colonial governments in its early years. The party took a multifaceted role throughout the freedom movement, sometimes coordinating with the Congress and at times taking independent revolutionary routes. After independence, the CPI emerged as India's first opposition party within Parliament. In terms of ideology, the CPI follows Marxism and communism and works towards a socialist reformation of society through democratic processes. The party prioritizes workers' rights, land reforms, and resistance to what it sees as imperialism and capitalist exploitation.

The party saw a major split in 1964 when the more dogmatic group broke away to create the CPI(M) on the issue of the Sino-Soviet split and strategic means to Indian politics, with the CPI broadly being more centrist in orientation and aligned with the Soviet Union. Its leaders at the time included S.A. Dange, Indrajit Gupta, and A.B. Bardhan, the CPI was a member of several coalition governments at the state level and backed progressive coalitions at the national level. The party has had its most powerful presence in states such as Kerala, West Bengal, and northeastern India. In modern-day Indian politics, the electoral power of CPI has waned, but it still espouses causes connected to workers' rights, farmers' welfare, and social justice using parliamentary channels as well as mass movements.



Picture: Communist Party of India (Swarajya)

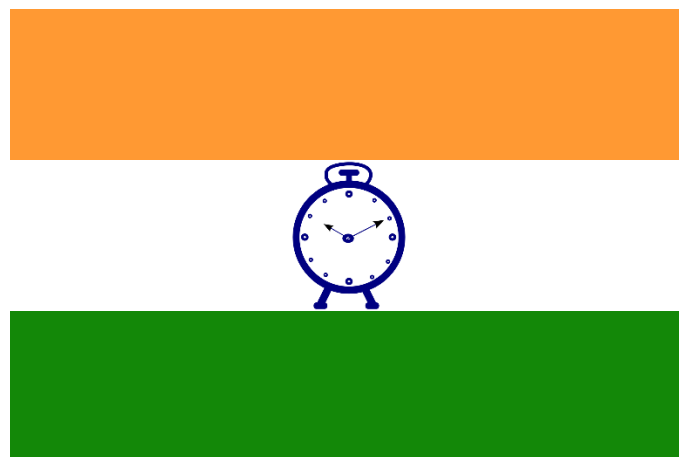
Nationalist Congress Party (NCP)

Nationalist Congress Party, symbolized by the clock symbol, was established in 1999 after a split within the Indian National Congress. It formed after Sharad Pawar, P.A. Sangma, and

Tariq Anwar were disqualified from the Congress on the issue of Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin and whether she could be a candidate to rule the nation. The NCP is ideologically a centrist, secular party that believes in social democracy, farmers' welfare, and regional development, especially in Maharashtra. Under Sharad Pawar's leadership, the party has maintained a pragmatic approach to coalition politics, willing to align with various political formations based on specific contexts.

The NCP's power base has predominantly been in Maharashtra, particularly in the western regions and among the Maratha community. The party has played a crucial role in Maharashtra politics, forming governments in alliance with the Congress for multiple terms and participating in various coalition arrangements.

On a national level, the NCP was a part of the governments of the United Progressive Alliance for 2004-2014, with Sharad Pawar as the Union Minister of Agriculture. The party has seen intra-party conflicts and splits in the recent past, such as an important split in 2019 when Sharad Pawar's nephew Ajit Pawar transiently joined hands with the BJP to create a short-lived Maharashtra government. In 2023, there was another significant split in the party, further dividing its organizational setup. Despite this, the NCP still remains influential in Maharashtra politics and holds seats in both Parliament houses.



Picture: Nationalist Congress Party Logo (Wikimedia Commons)

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)

The Bahujan Samaj Party, represented by an elephant, was established by Kanshi Ram in 1984 as a political party for India's marginalized groups, specifically Dalits. The name of the party itself indicates its central philosophy—"Bahujan" is used for the majority of scheduled castes,

scheduled tribes, other backward classes, and religious minorities who have traditionally been underrepresented in Indian politics.

The BSP is based on the philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar and pleads for social justice, equality, and power to the downtrodden. The political trajectory of the party picked up pace under the leadership of Mayawati, who became the first Dalit woman Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh and has been leading the party since Kanshi Ram's retirement from active politics.

The political strategy of the BSP changed from initially opposing all the mainstream parties to subsequently following a more pragmatic strategy of entering into alliances when the situation demanded.

The party won its greatest electoral gains in Uttar Pradesh, winning majority governments in 2007 and joining coalition governments at other times. In times of governance, the BSP pursued policies aimed at Dalit welfare, law and order, and symbolic expressions of Dalit identity in the form of monuments and parks. Outside of Uttar Pradesh, the BSP has had variable presence in states such as Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan. During recent elections, the party has struggled to translate its support base into electoral success, especially

since other parties have joined forces to secure Dalit votes. Nevertheless, the BSP remains an important political force championing India's historically oppressed groups.



Picture: Bahujan Samaj Party Logo (News18)

All India Trinamool Congress (AITC)

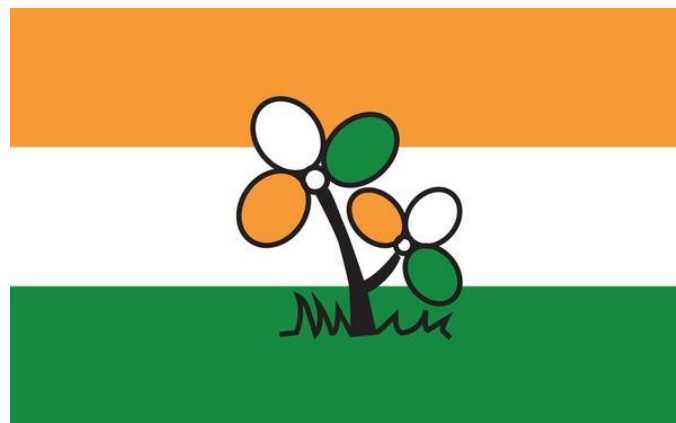
The All India Trinamool Congress, symbolized by the flower and grass symbol, was formed in 1998 by Mamata Banerjee after she left the Indian National Congress. The name "Trinamool," which means "grassroots" in Bengali, signifies its founding tenet of championing the interests of common citizens against what Banerjee described as the communist authoritarianism of the

Left Front government in West Bengal. Ideologically, the AITC frames itself as a centrist populist party with sharp regionalist flavor, advocating for Bengali cultural identity and adhering to secularism. Welfare-oriented economic agendas are blended together with cultural resonances of Bengali pride and identity.

The political trajectory of the AITC picked up considerable steam in 2011 when it put an end to the 34-year Left Front rule in West Bengal.

Under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee as Chief Minister, the party has introduced several welfare schemes for poor and marginalized groups, such as Kanyashree (girl child education), Sabuj Sathi (distribution of bicycles to students), and various health insurance schemes. The party has continued to rule West Bengal through subsequent elections, successfully fending off challenges from both the Left and the emerging BJP.

Although West Bengal continues to be its stronghold, the AITC has spread its influence to a few states in the northeastern region and taken part in national politics as part of multiple coalitions. The party has had an ambivalent relationship with national coalitions, both supporting and opposing NDA and UPA governments alternately based on selective issues. In recent years, the AITC has established itself as one of the primary opposition forces to the BJP's spread in eastern India.



Picture: All India Trinamool Congress logo (Shutterstock)

National People's Party (NPP)

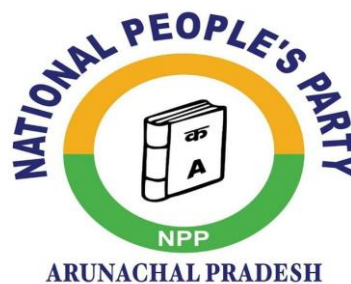
The National People's Party, which is represented by a book, was established in 2013 by P.A. Sangma, the erstwhile Speaker of the Lok Sabha, following his exit from the NCP. Upon the death of P.A. Sangma in 2016, leadership of the party passed to his son Conrad Sangma. The

NPP mainly speaks for the interests of tribal people in northeastern India, promoting the safeguarding of indigenous cultures, languages, and rights.

The ideology of the party is a mix of regionalism with more general nationalist issues, with special emphasis on the growth of northeastern states and the incorporation of tribal issues into national policy agendas.

The NPP has recorded its biggest success in Meghalaya, where it has Chief Minister Conrad Sangma heading a coalition government. The party has extended its reach into other northeastern states such as Manipur, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh. At the national level, the NPP has aligned itself with the National Democratic Alliance but without compromising its independent character focused on northeastern and tribal issues.

The growth of the party reflects the rising political voice of India's northeast and its unique concerns over development, cultural conservation, and political autonomy within the federal framework. With Conrad Sangma as the leader, the NPP has focused on balanced development, ecological conservation, and cultural conservation in the face of the complex northeast Indian political terrain.



Picture: National People's Party logo (Deccan Herald)

Key Regional Political Parties

Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)

The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, represented by the rising sun, developed out of the Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu that originated as a socio-political movement against Brahminical domination and for stronger Tamil cultural assertion. It was founded in 1949 by C.N. Annadurai after breaking away from the Dravidar Kazhagam under the leadership of E.V. Ramasamy "Periyar,"

the DMK initially advocated for an independent Dravida Nadu (nation) but later shifted to working within the Indian federal structure while pushing for greater state autonomy. The party's ideology combines elements of social justice, Tamil cultural nationalism, rationalism, and opposition to caste hierarchies. Under Annadurai's leadership, the DMK came to power in Tamil Nadu in 1967, ending Congress dominance in the state.

Following Annadurai's death in 1969, M. Karunanidhi headed the party for more than five decades before his death in 2018, when his son M.K. Stalin took over the leadership. The DMK has had several welfare schemes and Tamil language and culture-promoting policies and implemented many of them during its long history, such as introducing reservation policies for backward classes. The party witnessed a major split in 1972 when M.G. Ramachandran split off to form AIADMK.

Since then, politics in Tamil Nadu has been dominated by these two Dravidian parties to a great extent. Nationally, the DMK has been involved in all kinds of coalition governments like National Front, United Front, NDA for a short while, and UPA, frequently using its presence to negotiate advantages to Tamil Nadu.

Today, the DMK is ruling the Tamil Nadu government headed by Chief Minister M.K. Stalin and continues to espouse federalism, linguistic rights, and social justice.



Picture: Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam Logo (TV9 Bharatvarsh)

All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK)

The All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, symbolized by the two leaves symbol, was established in 1972 by actor-turned-politician M.G. Ramachandran (MGR) after his expulsion from the DMK. The party was named after DMK founder C.N. Annadurai (popularly referred to as "Anna"), the AIADMK has several ideological roots in common with the DMK, such as Dravidian identity, Tamil nationalism, and social justice, although it has tended to take more centrist stands and be more willing to collaborate with national parties. With MGR's magnetic leadership, the party soon became a significant political force, winning the 1977 Tamil Nadu Assembly elections and holding power until his death in 1987.

After MGR's death, the party also experienced a power struggle before his protégée J. Jayalalithaa took over as its leader. During Jayalalithaa's tenure, the AIADMK traded places with the DMK in power, with Jayalalithaa herself being Chief Minister for several terms until her death in 2016.

The party acquired a reputation for populist welfare programs such as the "Amma" branded programs (canteens, pharmacies, etc.), while retaining a very Tamil character. At the national level, the AIADMK has allied with a range of coalitions, both BJP-led NDA and Congress-led UPA at different times.

After Jayalalithaa's death, the party suffered immense internal strife and factionalism, with such leaders as O. Panneerselvam and Edappadi K. Palaniswami fighting for dominance. In spite of these troubles, the AIADMK remains an important political force in Tamil Nadu, one pole of the state's bipolar politics.



Picture: All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam logo (The Statesman)

Shiv Sena

Shiv Sena, represented by bow and arrow, was established by Bal Thackeray in 1966 as a party with local political roots defending the rights and interests of Maharashtrians, especially in Mumbai (then called Bombay). The party was concerned at first with resisting the economic domination of non-Maharashtrians, and most notably South Indians, in Mumbai, as well as with upholding the cause of Marathi language and culture.

With time, the ideology of Shiv Sena developed to have very strong elements of Hindu nationalism as well as its regionalist platform. Bal Thackeray led the party in developing a very strong grassroot organization in Mumbai and its surrounding areas by taking recourse to direct action and using very aggressive mobilization tactics.

Shiv Sena entered government in Maharashtra for the first time in coalition with the BJP in 1995, when Manohar Joshi became Chief Minister. The party has had specific strongholds in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region and sections of Konkan and Western Maharashtra.

After Bal Thackeray's passing in 2012, his son Uddhav Thackeray took over as leader, slowly moving the party toward a slightly more moderate stance. In 2019, following Maharashtra Assembly elections, the Shiv Sena ended its historic alliance with the BJP on the Chief Minister's chair and formed the Maha Vikas Aghadi government with ideologically farthest NCP and Congress parties.

In 2022, the party was hit by a serious split when Eknath Shinde, with a large majority of MLAs, revolted against the leadership of Uddhav Thackeray, causing the collapse of the MVA government.

This led to rival groups of Shiv Sena, with the Election Commission ultimately accepting the Shinde group as the legitimate Shiv Sena and permitting it to use the party symbol of bow and arrow. The original group headed by Uddhav Thackeray took the name Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) with the flaming torch as its symbol.



Picture: Shiv sena Party logo (ThePrint)

Samajwadi Party (SP)

The Samajwadi Party, represented by a bicycle, was established in 1992 by Mulayam Singh Yadav from the Janata Dal at a time of political re-alignment after the adoption of the Mandal Commission recommendations. The ideology of the party is socialist with a special emphasis on representation of backward classes, especially the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) such as Yadavs, Muslims, and other backward communities of Uttar Pradesh. The SP promotes secular politics, social justice, and the welfare of farmers and opposes what it describes as communal forces.

During the tenure of Mulayam Singh Yadav, the SP emerged as a dominant political force in Uttar Pradesh and formed governments several times. The party's tenure was strongest in power during the years 2012-2017 when the son of Mulayam, Akhilesh Yadav, was Chief Minister, the agenda of his government being to develop infrastructure, welfare schemes and technology drives like distribution of laptops to students.

The SP retains a solid presence among Yadavs, Muslims and parts of Uttar Pradesh's backward classes, but mainly in Uttar Pradesh's center and eastern half of the state. At the national level, the party has generally been allied with secular coalitions and opposed the BJP.

In 2017, the party witnessed infighting when Mulayam Singh Yadav and his brother Shivpal Yadav differed with Akhilesh Yadav's decision-making, ultimately leading to Shivpal floating a different party. After the death of Mulayam Singh Yadav in 2022, Akhilesh Yadav has strengthened his leadership of the party, making the SP the lead opposition to the BJP in Uttar Pradesh.



Picture: Samajwadi Party Logo bicycle (Samajwadi Party website)

Telugu Desam Party (TDP)

The Telugu Desam Party, symbolized by a bicycle, was established in 1982 by N.T. Rama Rao (NTR), a Telugu film acting legend who ventured into politics with the task of protecting Telugu pride and self-respect against what he felt was the Congress party's centralized authority and disregard for regional interests. The TDP made history in that it reached power in nine months of its inception, breaking the Congress stranglehold in the then-united Andhra Pradesh. The ideology of the party blends Telugu cultural nationalism with populist welfare policies and support for more federalism and state autonomy.

During NTR's tenure, the TDP launched several welfare programs, such as subsidized rice schemes and shelter schemes for the poor. The party saw an internal crisis in 1995 when NTR's son-in-law, N. Chandrababu Naidu, orchestrated a coup against him and took over the leadership. Under Naidu's pragmatic leadership, the TDP changed its focus to economic liberalization, technology, and governance reforms, making Hyderabad an IT hub during his Chief Ministerial tenure from 1995-2004. The party suffered electoral losses after the bifurcation of the state in 2014, which resulted in the formation of separate Telangana and Andhra Pradesh states. Though the TDP first came to power in vestigial Andhra Pradesh during Naidu's rule between 2014-2019, it later lost power to the YSR Congress Party. At the national level, the TDP has been part of many coalition governments such as the United Front, NDA, and for a brief period with the UPA. The party still retains considerable presence in Andhra Pradesh politics, fighting for the development of the state and its rights within the federal setup.



Picture: Telugu Desam Party Logo (TDP legal cell)

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)

The Aam Aadmi Party, represented by a broom, developed out of the India Against Corruption movement under the leadership of social activist Anna Hazare. Established in 2012 by Arvind

Kejriwal, the party considered itself an alternative to conventional political mainstreams with a focus on anti-corruption, good governance, and citizen-based policies. The ideology of the AAP is a mix of populism, welfarism, and grassroots democracy with a focus on education, healthcare, basic services, and good governance. The party entered electoral politics in a dramatic fashion when it established a minority government in Delhi in 2013, although Kejriwal resigned after 49 days when his Jan Lokpal Bill could not be tabled.

The AAP came back with a thumping mandate in Delhi in 2015, securing 67 out of 70 assembly seats, and has continued to rule in the national capital region via subsequent polls. The party, during Kejriwal's tenure as Chief Minister, introduced path-breaker schemes such as mohalla clinics (local health centers), education restructuring, cheap electricity and water, and free public transport for women. The AAP widened its footprint outside Delhi by emerging victorious in the 2022 Punjab Assembly polls and gaining representation in Goa and Gujarat. The AAP's model of governance is centered on direct public service delivery, curbing corruption, and involving citizens. The AAP is one of the few successful new political parties in India's otherwise rooted party system, although it has been criticized over time for concentrating power and deviating from some of its early promises of revolutionary politics.



Picture: Aam Aadmi Party Logo (The Economic Times)

Conclusion

India's politics mirrors the country's incredible diversity and intricate social fabric. The national parties offer broad ideological frameworks and government strategies that try to respond to pan-Indian issues, while regional parties symbolize unique cultural, linguistic, and regional ambitions. This multi-level party system, though at times creating governance issues in the form of coalitions and fragmentation, finally reinforces India's democratic fabric by providing for varied voices to be given political voice. As India grows up as the globe's biggest democracy, these parties—with their symbols, histories, and ideologies peculiar to them—will

continue at the core to determine the destiny of the nation through cooperation as well as competition.

Indian State Chief Ministers and Their Political Parties

The Indian political scene at the state level is a manifestation of India's multi-party democracy with regional differences in party dominance. Chief Ministers, being the heads of state governments, have considerable power over state administration and policy implementation. Their political affiliations provide information on regional political trends and the balance of power between national and regional parties (Election Commission of India, 2023; State Government Websites, 2024).

In northern India, Uttar Pradesh state, the most populous in the country, has been led since 2017 by Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. His government has pushed for infrastructure growth, police reforms, and cultural programs that are attuned to the party's Hindu nationalist agenda. The neighbouring state of Uttarakhand is also governed by BJP with Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, who became the chief minister in 2021 due to party leadership shifts (Government of Uttar Pradesh, 2024; Government of Uttarakhand, 2024).



Picture: In frame CM Yogi Adityanath (UP) and CM Pushkar Singh (UK) (NDTV)

Punjab has a different political composition, with Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) becoming chief minister in 2022 after his party's landslide victory over the historically ruling Congress and Shiromani Akali Dal. This signalled AAP's expansion beyond its original Delhi roots to state-level governance. Haryana's BJP Chief Minister, Nayab Singh Saini, was sworn into office in March 2024, succeeding long-term Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar in a leadership change leading into state elections (Government of Punjab, 2024; Government of Haryana, 2024).



Picture: In Frame Left to right CM Nayab Saini (HR) and CM Bhagwant Mann (PB)

(India TV Hindi)

In the Hindi heartland, Rajasthan came back into BJP hands in December 2023 with Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma assuming office after beating the sitting Congress government. Madhya Pradesh remains under BJP rule with Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, who replaced the veteran Shivraj Singh Chouhan after the 2023 state election despite the party holding onto power. Chhattisgarh also experienced a change of government during the same election cycle, with BJP's Vishnu Deo Sai being elected as Chief Minister after defeating the then Congress government (Government of Rajasthan, 2024; Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2024; Government of Chhattisgarh, 2024).



Picture: From left to right CM Mohan Yadav (MP), CM. Bhajan Lal Sharma (RJ) and CM Vishnu Deo Sai (CG) (Jansatta)

Bihar is an example of coalition politics, where Chief Minister Nitish Kumar of the Janata Dal (United) heads a government in coalition with the BJP. Kumar's political career has involved several changes in alliance partners while retaining the Chief Minister post through various coalition governments. Chief Minister Hemant Soren of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) rules Jharkhand, leading a coalition with Congress and other state parties, although his

government has faced legal tussles (Government of Bihar, 2024; Government of Jharkhand, 2024).



Picture: From Left to Right CM Nitish Kumar (BR) and CM Hemant Soren (JH) (Jagran)

Western India's Gujarat is considered, with good reason, a stronghold of the BJP and is headed by Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, who succeeded Vijay Rupani in 2021 as part of the party's strategy of change. Maharashtra is the place where complicated coalition politics are on display, with Chief Minister Eknath Shinde heading a government that was born after a rebellion within the Shiv Sena party, supported by a group of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and the BJP. The government of Goa is led by Chief Minister Pramod Sawant from the BJP, who replaced Manohar Parrikar after the latter died in 2019 (Government of Gujarat, 2024; Government of Maharashtra, 2024; Government of Goa, 2024).



Picture: From Left to Right CM Bhupendra Patel (GJ), CM Eknath Shinde (MH), and CM Pramod Sawant (GA) (Google)

The political makeup in Eastern India is varied. West Bengal remains in the grip of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of the Trinamool Congress (TMC), who has held power since ousting the Communist Party of India (Marxist) from 34 years of rule in 2011. Odisha experienced a political change in 2024 when Mohan Charan Majhi of the BJP took over as

Chief Minister, putting an end to the 24-year rule of Naveen Patnaik of the Biju Janata Dal (BJD). It is led by BJP Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who took over in 2021 after working as a significant minister in the earlier BJP regime (Government of West Bengal, 2024; Government of Odisha, 2024; Government of Assam, 2024).

In southern India, Tamil Nadu's Chief Minister M.K. Stalin of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) became chief minister in 2021, following the state's two-party tradition of alternating between the two major Dravidian parties. Kerala continues its tradition of alternating between Left Democratic Front (LDF) and United Democratic Front (UDF) governments, with incumbent Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) heading an LDF coalition. Karnataka reverted to Congress rule in 2023 with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah taking office after his party obtained a clear mandate over the ruling BJP (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2024; Government of Kerala, 2024; Government of Karnataka, 2024).

Governance in Andhra Pradesh moved to N. Chandrababu Naidu of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) after the 2024 election, bringing the five-year Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's YSR Congress Party rule to a close. Neighboring state Telangana had a changeover in December 2023 when A. Revanth Reddy of the Congress defeated the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) that had ruled the state since its establishment in 2014 (Government of Andhra Pradesh, 2024; Government of Telangana, 2024).

The northeastern states have unique regional political dynamics. Manipur is led by Chief Minister N. Biren Singh of the BJP, who has a coalition government in this politically intricate state. Meghalaya's Chief Minister Conrad Sangma of the National People's Party leads a coalition with the BJP as an ally. Mizoram is headed by Chief Minister Lalduhoma of the Zoram People's Movement (ZPM), which brought an end to the Mizo National Front's rule in the 2023 state election. Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio heads the Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) in alliance with the BJP. Tripura reverted to BJP control in 2023 with Manik Saha as Chief Minister, and Sikkim has just switched to P.S. Tamang of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha as Chief Minister following the 2024 state election. Arunachal Pradesh remains under BJP rule with Chief Minister Pema Khandu (Government websites of respective northeastern states, 2024; Election Commission of India, 2023-24).

Data Analysis and Interpretations

India's Democratic Journey

India's experience with democracy after independence is one of the greatest political experiments in the modern era. The successful organization of the first general election in 1951-52 provided a basis for democratic rule that has survived many challenges, confounding initial doubts regarding the ability of democracy to survive in a society plagued by poverty, illiteracy, and deep social cleavages (Guha, 2007; Khilnani, 1999).

The unprecedented size of the first election—empowering 173 million voters from a wide range of geographical and social terrains—amassed both unprecedented bureaucratic skill and mass popular commitment to democratic engagement. The creative responses instituted to counter problems like illiteracy, geographical remoteness, and social hierarchies created lasting aspects of Indian electoral democracy, such as the symbol system, sequential voting, and special arrangements for marginalized groups (Sukumar Sen, 1952; McMillan, 2010).

Through 17 general elections and many state elections over the course of following decades, Indian democracy has grown and developed. The use of electronic voting machines, improved voter identification processes, better campaign rules, and computerized electoral management systems has brought the electoral process into the modern era while preserving its fundamental principles of universal franchise and autonomous administration (Election Commission of India, 2019; Quraishi, 2014).

The political landscape has shifted from the Congress Party's initial dominance to a dynamic multi-party system with national parties, regional parties, and coalition governments. This transformation is an indication of the system's adaptability to India's plural regional, linguistic, religious, and caste identities. The smooth changes in power between rival political formations are strong evidence of the institutionalization of democratic norms (Sridharan, 2014; Palshikar et al., 2019).

India's federal structure, with its 28 states and 8 union territories, has provided mechanisms for accommodating regional aspirations within a unified constitutional framework. The system's flexibility has allowed for territorial reorganizations, power-sharing arrangements, and varying models of center-state relations that reflect the country's complex diversity. Chief Ministers from diverse political parties govern states according to distinct regional priorities while operating within the national constitutional framework (Tillin, 2019; Saxena, 2006).

Even with these successes, Indian democracy remains beset by serious challenges. Economic disparity, corruption, criminalization of politics, communal tensions, and regional disparities are persistent issues. The digitalization of electoral processes introduces new possibilities for engagement and openness but also poses issues regarding privacy, disinformation, and cybersecurity. The balancing of national security needs against civil liberties is ongoing challenges, especially in areas of conflict (Jaffrelot, 2021; Varshney, 2013; Chhokar, 2018).

Despite numerous challenges, Indian democracy has endured, and its resilience provides valuable lessons regarding the compatibility of democratic government with socioeconomic heterogeneity and development issues. The trajectory from the inaugural general election to modern democratic practice illustrates both striking continuity in underlying principles and dramatic adaptation to evolving conditions. This evolutionary strength—upholding essential democratic principles while innovating institutional procedure—may be a factor in the survival of what political scientist W.H. Morris-Jones

General Overview of 2019 and 2024 General Elections

On June 9, 2024, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was sworn in for a third consecutive term, alongside his carefully selected Council of Ministers, following the conclusion of India's eighteenth general election. While the top leadership of the new government bore a strong resemblance to the previous Modi administration (2019–2024), significant shifts were taking place beneath the surface of Indian politics.

The 2024 general election unfolded over forty-four days in seven phases, during which widespread expectations pointed toward a comfortable victory for Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Two primary indicators fed this confidence. First, early-2024 pre-election surveys, including the India Today Mood of the Nation poll, forecasted a sweeping win for the BJP—predicting around 304 seats for the party alone, with its National Democratic Alliance (NDA) allies expected to contribute an additional 31 seats. Second, the BJP itself projected overwhelming optimism, encapsulated in its campaign slogan, "Abki Baar 400 Paar" ("This time, over 400 seats"), aiming for a parliamentary supermajority.

Exit polls, while slightly more cautious, still suggested a smooth path to majority for the BJP, even if the goal of a supermajority seemed overly ambitious. However, the actual results deviated considerably from these forecasts. The BJP secured 240 seats—falling 32 seats short of the simple majority threshold of 272 and 63 seats fewer than its 2019 tally. For the first time

since Modi's rise to national power in 2014, the BJP found itself dependent on coalition partners within the NDA to form the government. The alliance, nevertheless, managed to collectively win 293 seats, ensuring a stable governing majority. Meanwhile, the opposition coalition—Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA)—exceeded expectations with 234 seats, significantly buoyed by the resurgence of the Indian National Congress, which captured 99 seats, nearly doubling its performance in 2019 and signaling early signs of a national revival.

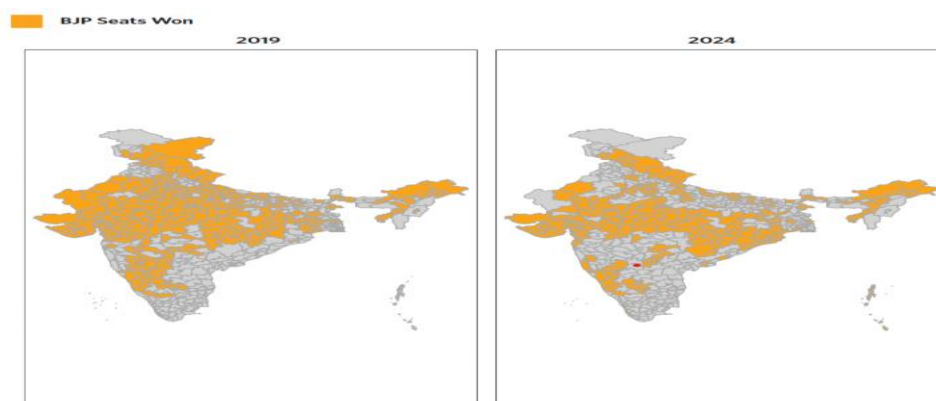
On the surface, these outcomes seem to mark a re-emergence of coalition politics in India—a notable departure from the single-party dominance the country witnessed under the BJP for a decade. Between 1989 and 2014, India operated within a coalition-driven political framework where no single party could independently form a government. During this period, regional parties played a pivotal role in shaping the balance of power, both at the center and in the states, making their support indispensable to national political stability.

The BJP's landmark victory in 2014, winning 282 seats, ended this coalition era decisively. It was the first time since 1984—when the Congress Party swept to power in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination—that a single party had secured an outright majority in the Lok Sabha. The BJP not only replicated this feat in 2019 with an even stronger mandate but also firmly established itself as the centerpiece of what political analysts have termed India's "fourth party system." This system is characterized by the BJP's national dominance, the decline of Congress, and the marginalization of regional players in many states.

The outcome of the 2024 election raises important questions about whether this dominant-party era is beginning to wane. Does this result signal a breakdown of the fourth party system and a return to a more fragmented, coalition-based political order? Using fresh electoral data from the 2024 polls, this paper argues that while the BJP's dominance has indeed been curtailed, several core features of the fourth party system remain intact. The BJP, though no longer holding an outright majority, continues to shape the political agenda at both the national and state levels. Most political parties still define their electoral strategies in relation to the Modi-led BJP—either in alignment with or in opposition to it.

Moreover, the BJP maintains its position as the single largest party in the Lok Sabha, the Rajya Sabha, and in numerous state assemblies across the country. Although the 2024 verdict introduced greater political fragmentation, intensified competition, and a more decentralized political discourse, it did not fundamentally upend the structure of dominant-party politics.

Instead, the results indicate a weakening—but not a collapse—of the foundations that have upheld the fourth party system. In the sections that follow, this paper outlines the defining characteristics of the fourth party system and compares them with earlier party systems in Indian political history. It then uses empirical data from the 2024 election to assess whether these features are being dismantled or merely evolving. Key areas of focus include the persistence of a dominant national party, increasing centralization of political authority, the changing landscape of political competition, nationalization of electoral narratives, enhanced voter engagement in general elections, and shifts in caste-based representation and mobilization. Finally, the paper discusses potential factors that may disrupt or reshape the existing political order in the near future. The decline of regional parties in India, particularly after the 2019 general elections, reflects a significant shift in the country's political landscape. Historically, these parties played a crucial role in national politics, especially during the coalition era from 1996 to 2014. However, the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has challenged their influence, prompting efforts from regional leaders to counter this trend. Efforts and Challenges Leaders like K. Chandrashekar Rao, Chandrababu Naidu, and Mamata Banerjee attempted strategies such as forming alliances and advocating for decentralization. Despite these efforts, the 2019 election results showed the BJP's success through social engineering, appealing to non-Yadav OBCs and non-Jatav Dalits, particularly in the Hindi heartland, which weakened regional parties' traditional vote banks. Future Outlook. The future of regional parties depends on their ability to adapt to the BJP's nationalist agenda and resist centralization. This involves strengthening regional identities and forming effective alliances, but there is ongoing debate about their capacity to do so effectively.



Picture: General Election of 2019 and 2024, BJP seats marked with orange colour (ECI)

Case Study Assembly Elections of Odisha, Haryana and Delhi

The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) has employed a political strategy in various states of forming alliances with regional parties to establish a foothold, only to later assert its dominance and, in some cases, marginalize or displace its former allies. This pattern is evident in states like Odisha, Haryana, and more recently Delhi. Below, I'll outline how this strategy has played out in each of these regions, supported by relevant examples and outcomes.

Odisha: The BJD-BJP Alliance and Its Aftermath

The Biju Janata Dal (BJD), founded in 1997 by Naveen Patnaik, has been a dominant force in Odisha since 2000. The BJD and BJP formed an alliance in 1998, which proved successful in both Lok Sabha and state assembly elections in 2000 and 2004. During this period, the coalition governed Odisha, with Patnaik as Chief Minister, allowing the BJP to expand its influence in a state where it previously had a limited presence.



Picture: PM Modi with Naveen Patnaik (Google)

Breaking the Alliance: The partnership dissolved in 2009, largely due to disagreements over seat-sharing and tensions following the 2008 Kandhamal riots, which raised concerns about communalism. After the split, the BJD maintained its stronghold, winning elections in 2009, 2014, and 2019. Meanwhile, the BJP worked to build its organizational base in Odisha

Party Wise Results				
Party		Won	Leading	Total
Bharatiya Janata Party – BJP		78	0	78
Biju Janata Dal – BJD		51	0	51
Indian National Congress – INC		14	0	14
Communist Party of India (Marxist) – CPI(M)		1	0	1
Independent – IND		3	0	3
Total		147	0	147

Picture: ECI State assembly results (Election commission of India)

BJP's Breakthrough: The turning point came in the 2024 elections, when the BJP defeated the BJD in both the Lok Sabha and state assembly polls. The BJP won 20 out of 21 Lok Sabha seats and secured a majority in the state assembly, ending the BJD's 24-year rule. This victory was the culmination of years of effort by the BJP to strengthen its presence, leveraging anti-incumbency sentiments against the BJD. It illustrates how the BJP used an initial alliance to gain traction, then broke away to eventually overtake its former partner.



Picture: Odisha Assembly Election trends (ECI)

Haryana: Alliance with JJP and Shifting Power Dynamics

Alliance Formation: In Haryana, the BJP allied with the Jannayak Janta Party (JJP), led by Dushyant Chautala, after the 2019 state assembly elections. The BJP fell short of a majority with 40 seats out of 90, while the JJP won 10 seats.

The alliance enabled the BJP to form the government, with the JJP providing crucial support. The JJP, a breakaway faction of the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD), had influence among the Jat community, making it a valuable partner.

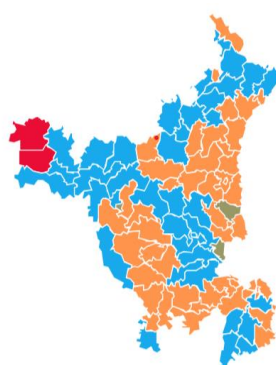
Tensions and Independence: Over time, the alliance faced strains, particularly over issues like the farmer protests and differing governance priorities. The BJP, having consolidated its position in Haryana, began to assert its dominance. In the 2024 Haryana Assembly elections, the BJP contested independently and won a majority with 48 seats, while the JJP's tally dropped significantly. This outcome reduced the BJP's reliance on the JJP, effectively marginalizing its regional partner.

Party Wise Results

Party	Won	Leading	Total
Bharatiya Janata Party – BJP	48	0	48
Indian National Congress – INC	37	0	37
Indian National Lok Dal – INLD	2	0	2
Independent – IND	3	0	3
Total	90	0	90

Picture: Haryana Assembly elections results (ECI)

Strategic Outcome: The BJP's trajectory in Haryana shows how it uses alliances to secure power initially, builds its own strength, and then diminishes the influence of its regional ally once it can govern alone. This has allowed the BJP to establish a stronger independent presence in the state.



Picture: Haryana Demographic Map (ECI)

Delhi: Challenging and Overtaking AAP Initial Context:

Delhi has been a stronghold of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) since 2013, with the AAP securing landslide victories in the 2015 (67/70 seats) and 2020 (62/70 seats) assembly elections. The BJP, lacking a strong local base, historically struggled to challenge the AAP's dominance. Unlike Odisha and Haryana, the BJP did not form a formal alliance with a regional party in Delhi but instead focused on direct competition.

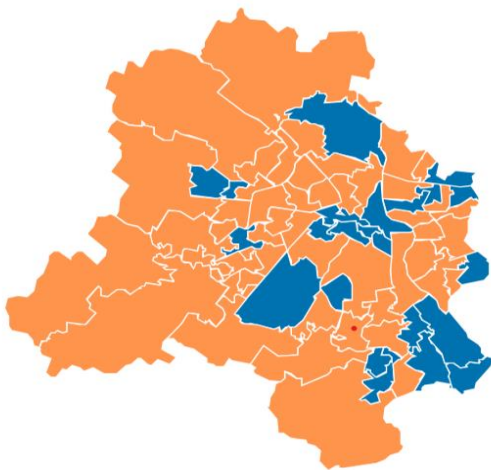
Building a Stronghold: Over the years, the BJP worked to strengthen its organization in Delhi, capitalizing on national issues and its performance in Lok Sabha elections (where it

consistently won all seven Delhi seats since 2014). In the 2025 Delhi Assembly elections, the BJP achieved a breakthrough, winning 48 out of 70 seats and ending the AAP’s 12-year rule. The AAP’s tally dropped significantly, marking a shift in the state’s political landscape.

Party Wise Results			
Party	Won	Leading	Total
Bharatiya Janata Party - BJP	48	0	48
Aam Aadmi Party - AAP	22	0	22
Total	70	0	70

Picture: Delhi Assembly election results (ECI)

Relevance to the Strategy: While the Delhi case does not involve a formal alliance with a regional party, it aligns with the broader pattern of the BJP establishing a presence in a region dominated by a regional player (AAP) and then overtaking it. The BJP’s sustained efforts to build its base, even without an initial alliance, mirror its long-term strategy of displacing regional parties to assert dominance.



Picture: Demographic Map of Delhi (ECI Website)

BJP's Strategic Alliances and Electoral Outcomes in Odisha, Haryana, and Delhi

State	Alliance Period	Alliance Partner	Alliance Outcome	Alliance Dissolution	Subsequent BJP Performance
Odisha	1998–2009	Biju Janata Dal (BJD)	Successful coalition; governed Odisha together.	Dissolved in 2009 over seat-sharing disagreements and communal tensions.	In 2024, BJP won 78 out of 147 assembly seats, ending BJD's 24-year rule.
Haryana	2019–2024	Jannayak Janta Party (JJP)	Formed government post-2019 elections; JJP provided crucial support.	Alliance ended in 2024 due to seat-sharing disputes.	In 2024, BJP secured 48 out of 90 seats, achieving a majority independently.
Delhi	No formal alliance	None	Direct competition with Aam Aadmi Party (AAP); BJP lacked strong local base.	Not applicable.	In 2025, BJP won 48 out of 70 assembly seats, ending AAP's 12-year rule.

Picture: Comparison table for the State of Odisha, Haryana and Delhi

Fall of regional parties and their significance

Detailed Analysis of Regional Parties in India Post-2019 This detailed analysis expands on the decline of regional political parties in India following the 2019 general elections, focusing on the article "The Decline and Fall of Regional Parties" by K.K. Kailash, published on June 9, 2019, in Live mint. It integrates insights from additional sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of the political dynamics as of April 20, 2025, acknowledging the evolving nature of Indian politics.

Article Overview and Context The article, available at Live mint News, was published shortly after the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, where the BJP secured 303 seats, reinforcing its dominance. This shift challenged the relevance of regional parties, which had been significant during the coalition era. K.K. Kailash, from the University of Hyderabad's Department of Political Science, analyses this decline, with additional resources like business news, breaking news, and latest news linked for context, alongside the Mint News App for mobile access.

Historical Context: The Peak of Regional Parties (1996-2014) The period from 1996 to 2014 is identified as the golden era for regional parties, a time when coalition politics dominated national governance. No single national party could secure a majority, leading to governments formed with regional parties like the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). These parties held key ministerial positions and influenced policy, with reduced central intervention, notably fewer uses of Article 356, reflecting a more federal approach. This autonomy enabled regional parties to address state-specific issues, making them integral to national politics. Additional insights from Carnegie Endowment highlight that regional parties controlled one-third of the 22 largest states in 2013, peaking in 1997, and had a stable vote share of around 50-53% from 1996 to 2009, occupying 41% of Lok Sabha seats.

The BJP's Ascendancy and Its Impact The 2014 elections marked a turning point, with the BJP, led by Narendra Modi, achieving a majority of 282 seats, ending decades of coalition politics. The 2019 victory, with 303 seats, further solidified this dominance, reducing reliance on regional allies. This shift marginalized regional parties, as the BJP positioned itself as the sole representative of national interest, often at the expense of regional identities.

this resurgence of a one-party system, breaking 25 years of coalition politics, as a key factor in the decline.

Efforts by Regional Leaders and Their Setbacks In 2018, regional leaders responded to the BJP's rise with various strategies. K. Chandrashekar Rao (TRS, Telangana) called for early elections, which his party won, and

pushed for decentralization. Chandrababu Naidu (TDP, Andhra Pradesh) left the NDA and allied with Congress. Mamata Banerjee (TMC, West Bengal) hosted a "United India" rally, critical of the BJP. Mayawati (BSP) and Akhilesh Yadav (SP) formed a mahagathbandhan in Uttar Pradesh, leveraging caste arithmetic. Despite these efforts, the 2019 results showed BJP's success through social engineering, appealing to non-Yadav OBCs and non-Jatav Dalits, breaking traditional alliances. For instance, the BJP attracted support from sub-castes like Kurmis and Pasis, diluting regional parties' vote banks, particularly in the Hindi heartland.

Distinction Between Regionalist and Regionally-Located Parties

The article distinguishes regionally-located parties (e.g., BSP, SP), focusing on caste and community interests, from regionalist parties (e.g., TDP, DMK), with state-specific agendas. The BJP has been more successful in penetrating regionally-located parties by exploiting caste dynamics, as seen in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. However, in states with strong regionalist parties, like Tamil Nadu, the BJP faces challenges, with parties like DMK maintaining dominance. regional parties based on identity, statehood, autonomy, and development have historically fulfilled regional aspirations, but their effectiveness has waned post-2019.

Central-State Relations and Federalism

During 1996-2014, central-state relations saw reduced intervention, supporting regional parties' growth. However, post-2014, with the BJP's majority, there is a perceived shift towards centralization. Critics argue the central government has influenced state politics through actions like demonetization and using agencies like the CBI and ED against opposition leaders, raising concerns about federalism's erosion. This trend threatens regional parties' autonomy, as noted in Vivekananda International Foundation, which discusses growing regional tensions and financial problems in Centre-State relations.

Fragmented Unity: BJP's Centralized Power in a Decentralized Democracy

Since 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has emerged as the dominant national political force in India, often walking a tightrope between coalition politics at the Centre and aggressive state-level expansionism. While it has relied on regional parties such as the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and Janata Dal (United) [JDU] to form or strengthen its position in the central government, it has simultaneously worked to marginalize or dismantle regional players in their own strongholds. This dual strategy reflects both political pragmatism and a long-term goal of unchallenged national dominance.

Historically, regional parties were kingmakers in Indian politics, particularly during coalition-heavy decades such as the 1990s and early 2000s. The BJP, under Atal Bihari Vajpayee, led the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), a broad coalition of regional players including Shiv Sena, Akali Dal, TDP, and JDU. However, this dynamic shifted after 2014 when Narendra Modi led the BJP to its first single-party majority in three decades. In 2014, the BJP secured 282 Lok Sabha seats with a 31% vote share, and in 2019, it improved to 303 seats and 37.7% vote share (Election Commission of India).

Despite this rise, the BJP continues to engage with regional parties out of necessity in states where its organizational strength remains limited. For instance, in 2014, the BJP allied with the TDP to enter Andhra Pradesh politics. The alliance eventually collapsed in 2018 over the issue of Special Category Status for the state. Similarly, the JDU under Nitish Kumar has oscillated in and out of the NDA, most recently returning in 2024 to bolster the BJP's Lok Sabha numbers. These alliances underscore the BJP's willingness to accommodate regional interests when electoral math demands it.

In conclusion, the BJP's approach to regional parties is characterized by a tactical contradiction. It embraces them to secure parliamentary majorities but undermines them to assert dominance in state politics. This duality reflects the party's ambition to centralize political power while navigating the realities of India's federal, multi-party system. Whether this strategy can sustain itself without alienating essential allies remains one of the most important questions in contemporary Indian politics.

Strategic Shifts and Silent Takeovers: BJP's Maharashtra Blueprint

The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP)'s political strategy in Maharashtra, particularly in relation to its long-standing alliance and eventual fallout with the Shiv Sena, was rooted in its larger goal of consolidating power in key states. Historically, the BJP and Shiv Sena were allies bound by Hindutva ideology, with their relationship dating back to the 1990s. However, cracks began to appear post the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, where the BJP emerged as the dominant partner and started demanding a larger share in seat distribution and leadership roles. Tensions reached a boiling point after the 2019 Maharashtra Assembly elections. Though the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance secured a majority (BJP won 105 seats, Shiv Sena 56), disagreements over the Chief Minister's post led to Shiv Sena breaking the alliance and forming the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government with the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and Indian National Congress (INC), installing Uddhav Thackeray as the Chief Minister (Election Commission of India, 2019; The Hindu, Nov 2019).



Picture: PM Modi with Uddhav Thackeray (The Hindu)

In response, the BJP shifted its focus to internal dissent within Shiv Sena. In 2022, Eknath Shinde, a senior Shiv Sena leader, led a rebellion with over 40 MLAs, opposing Thackeray's leadership and the party's alliance with Congress and NCP. The BJP strategically supported Shinde's faction, facilitating the collapse of the MVA government. Eventually, Eknath Shinde was sworn in as the Chief Minister with BJP's Devendra Fadnavis as Deputy CM (NDTV, June 2022; Indian Express, June 2022). This power shift effectively split Shiv Sena into two factions — one led by Uddhav Thackeray and the other by Eknath Shinde. In 2023, the Election Commission officially recognized Shinde's faction as the legitimate Shiv Sena and allotted it the iconic bow and arrow symbol (Election Commission of India, Feb 2023).



Picture: PM Modi with CM Eknath Shinde (Moneycontrol)

BJP's Maharashtra strategy reflects its national approach: leveraging internal rifts, forming post-poll alliances, and using institutional and electoral tools to gain influence. By engineering splits and supporting defectors, the BJP successfully returned to power in Maharashtra without direct confrontation in elections — a hallmark of its recent state-level expansions.

Party Wise Results			
Bharatiya Janata Party - BJP	132	0	132
Shiv Sena - SHS	57	0	57
Nationalist Congress Party - NCP	41	0	41
Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) - SHSUBT	20	0	20
Indian National Congress - INC	16	0	16
Nationalist Congress Party - Sharadchandra Pawar - NCPSP	10	0	10
Samajwadi Party - SP	2	0	2
Jan Surajya Shakti - JSS	2	0	2
Rashtriya Yuva Swabhimani Party - RSHYVSWBHM	1	0	1
Rashtriya Samaj Paksha - RSPS	1	0	1
All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimeen - AIMIM	1	0	1
Communist Party of India (Marxist) - CPI(M)	1	0	1
Peasants And Workers Party of India - PWPI	1	0	1
Rajarshi Shahu Vikas Aghadi - RSVA	1	0	1
Independent - IND	2	0	2

Picture: Maharashtra Assembly Election Result table (ECI)

"Regional Resistance: Why Jharkhand and J&K Bucked the BJP Trend"

In Jharkhand, the BJP faced challenges because of several reasons. The party was hit by anti-incumbency sentiment among tribal voters who make up a significant portion of the state's electorate. Issues of local nature like displacement in the wake of developmental projects, fears regarding modifications in the rights of tribal people over land, and charges of neglect of native people eroded BJP's reputation. The opposition alliance, especially spearheaded by Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), was able to rally support on local tribal identity and welfare concerns that struck a chord with voters.

In Jammu & Kashmir, BJP's struggles were different because of the special political context after the abrogation of Article 370. The party encountered strong opposition in the Kashmir Valley, where there was resentment against the 2019 alterations to J&K's status. Regional parties such as the National Conference and PDP had strong bases in various regions. The BJP's policy regarding security issues, local administration, and political representation following J&K's reorganization as a Union Territory posed difficulties in consolidating mass electoral support across the region's diversity.

In both states, local factors and regional sentiments appeared to trump national narratives. While BJP showed strength in many other state elections, these two states illustrate how India's electoral politics continue to be rooted in local contexts, regional identities, and particular governance concerns that may yield outcomes divergent from national trends.

"BJP's Ascendancy: Hindutva, Grassroots Power, and RSS Influence"

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has emerged as India's largest political party, boasting over 170 million members by 2022 and dominating national elections since 2014, due to a combination of ideological appeal, strong leadership, and organizational prowess. The BJP's Hindutva ideology, which emphasizes Hindu cultural nationalism, resonates with India's Hindu majority, particularly through campaigns like the Ram Janmabhoomi movement that elevated its national profile in the 1990s (Britannica, 2024). Narendra Modi's charismatic leadership has been pivotal, blending economic development promises, such as the "Gujarat model," with a nationalist narrative that broadened the party's appeal across diverse social groups (Carnegie Endowment, 2023). The BJP's organizational strength, modeled on the disciplined structure of its ideological mentor, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), enables effective voter mobilization through a hierarchical network spanning national to booth levels (BBC News,

2023). Strategic alliances under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and sophisticated campaign tactics, including social media and data analytics, have further solidified its electoral dominance, especially in 2014, 2019, and 2024 (Al Jazeera, 2024). The weakness of opposition parties, notably the Indian National Congress, plagued by scandals and leadership crises, has created a political vacuum that the BJP skillfully exploited (Dissent Magazine, 2023). At the grassroots, the BJP's booth-level management is a cornerstone of its electoral success, characterized by meticulous planning and RSS-inspired discipline. Each polling booth, serving 1,000–1,500 voters, is managed by dedicated workers called “panna pramukhs,” who handle small voter groups to ensure personalized outreach and high turnout (Zee News, 2024). The party's organizational structure, with Mandal and District Committees overseeing booth activities, facilitates coordination and local engagement (Wikipedia, 2024). Booth workers, trained in voter outreach and campaign messaging, leverage technology like mobile apps and WhatsApp to disseminate information and track preferences (Elections.in, 2024). The BJP's ability to navigate local caste and community dynamics, coupled with promoting welfare schemes like Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, converts beneficiaries into loyal voters, particularly in states like Uttar Pradesh (Institute, 2023). This micro-management ensures the party's message of development and Hindu unity resonates at the grassroots, driving electoral victories. The RSS, as the BJP's ideological and organizational backbone, plays a critical role in its electoral success, though tensions surfaced in 2024.



Picture: PM Modi in RSS shaka (Google)

Founded in 1925, the RSS provides the BJP with its Hindutva ideology and a vast network of over 50,000 shakhas, supplying disciplined volunteers for door-to-door canvassing and booth management (BJP.org, 2024). RSS swayamsevaks, trained in unity and discipline, adopt the organization's methods, influencing the BJP's cadre-based structure (The Hindu, 2024). The RSS also guides candidate selection and campaign strategies, often polarizing issues to consolidate Hindu votes, as seen in its affiliated organizations like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (Taylor & Francis, 2023). However, in the 2024 elections, the BJP's failure to secure a majority

(winning 240 seats) was partly attributed to reduced RSS support after BJP President J.P. Nadda's claim of self-sufficiency alienated volunteers, highlighting the delicate BJP-RSS relationship (Zee News, 2024). The phenomenon of grassroots workers "disappearing" after elections reflects the RSS's low-profile approach and the temporary nature of some BJP volunteers. RSS swayamsevaks, trained to work selflessly, engage intensely during campaigns but return to routine shakha activities post-election, creating an impression of "disappearance" (Carnegie Endowment, 2023). Similarly, the BJP mobilizes temporary local volunteers, such as youth and community leaders, who resume normal lives after elections (BBC News, 2023). The RSS's culture of prioritizing collective success over individual recognition, as noted by political scientist Vinay Sitapati, discourages volunteers from seeking prominence, reinforcing their low visibility (Dissent Magazine, 2023). Strategic discretion by the BJP and RSS also minimizes public attention to grassroots workers to avoid controversy, given the RSS's polarizing image (Al Jazeera, 2024). Post-election, many RSS volunteers shift to non-political Sangh Parivar activities, such as education or rural development, further contributing to this perception (Institute, 2023).



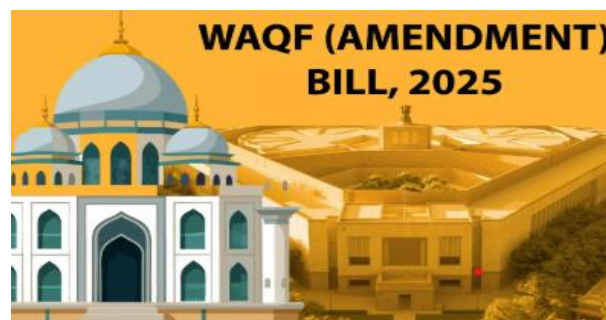
Picture: The unseen warrior of BJP (Pic-Lok Pahal)

In conclusion, the BJP's rise as India's largest party stems from its ideological resonance, Modi's leadership, and a robust organizational network bolstered by the RSS. Its booth-level management, driven by disciplined workers and tailored strategies, ensures electoral success, while the RSS's grassroots mobilization and ideological guidance remain indispensable, despite occasional tensions. The "disappearance" of workers reflects the RSS's selfless ethos and strategic discretion, underscoring the intricate dynamics of the BJP's electoral machinery. These insights, drawn from credible sources, provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding the BJP's dominance in Indian politics.

"Coalition Compromises: Regional Identity Politics in the Era of BJP led NDA Era"

The assertive rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as India's dominant political force has fundamentally transformed the operational environment for regional parties across the country. Since 2014, the BJP has expanded its electoral footprint, ideological influence, and governance model in ways that have forced regional political entities to recalibrate their strategies, alliances, and policy priorities. This research examines this transformation through the critical lens of coalition politics and religious identity, particularly focusing on how regional allies navigate the increasingly challenging terrain between national alliance imperatives and local electoral considerations.

The Waqf Amendment Act serves as a revealing case study of these dynamics. The legislation, which introduces significant changes to the governance and oversight of Waqf properties across India, passed through both houses of Parliament and received presidential assent despite controversy. For BJP's NDA alliance partners, particularly Janata Dal (United) in Bihar and Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh, the legislation created a profound strategic dilemma. Both parties have historically cultivated and depended upon Muslim voter support in their respective states - support that has been crucial to their electoral performance and regional dominance. Their political legitimacy rests partly on presenting themselves as inclusive alternatives to both Congress and BJP, particularly on issues of religious sensitivity.



Picture: Waqf Amendment Bill, 2025 (Verdictum website)

JDU under Nitish Kumar and TDP under Chandrababu Naidu have responded to this dilemma through sophisticated political maneuvering. Both leaders have employed calculated public ambiguity, offering tepid support for the alliance position while simultaneously signaling to their Muslim constituents through indirect channels that their support comes with reservations. This balancing act reflects a broader pattern observed among regional parties in the BJP era -

the development of dual positioning that attempts to extract benefits from alliance with the nationally dominant party while preserving distinct ideological and electoral identities at the state level.



Pic: CM Nitish kumar in Muslim Festival (The Hindu)

Electoral data analysis reveals the stakes for these regional parties. In Bihar, JDU's performance in Muslim-majority constituencies has historically outpaced its statewide averages, with similar patterns observable in TDP's coastal Andhra strongholds with significant Muslim populations. The potential erosion of this support threatens these parties' competitive position, particularly as they already face challenges from other regional and national competitors. This vulnerability explains their delicate navigation of contentious legislation like the Waqf Amendment Act, where outright opposition might jeopardize alliance benefits, while enthusiastic support could alienate a critical voter demographic



Picture: TDP Supremo with Muslim Leader (The Hindu)

The research further demonstrates how these regional parties have adapted their policy pronouncements, manifesto commitments, and campaign messaging to maintain this precarious balance. Rather than presenting a unified front on all issues with their national ally,

they have increasingly developed distinct state-specific narratives that emphasize regional identity, inclusive development, and administrative efficiency over ideological alignment with the BJP's broader cultural agenda. This strategic differentiation allows them to signal continued commitment to minority protection while benefiting from the electoral and governance advantages of the NDA alliance.



Picture: Muslim people casting their vote (The Indian Express)

The findings suggest significant theoretical implications for understanding coalition politics in dominant party systems, particularly how junior partners maintain agency and distinctive identity without triggering alliance breakdown. The research also raises important questions about the long-term sustainability of such dual-track strategies in an era of increasing political polarization and the potential for realignment as both national and regional forces adapt to changing electoral landscapes across India's diverse states.

Results and Findings

Over the last decade, Indian politics has undergone a profound transformation, particularly evident in the three general elections held in 2014, 2019, and 2024. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) emerged as a dominant force in 2014 with 282 seats and continued its upward trajectory in 2019 with 303 seats. However, the 2024 general election brought a significant shift. Although the BJP remained the single largest party with 240 seats, it fell short of a majority, signalling the resurgence of opposition forces. The Indian National Congress (INC) made a notable comeback, securing 99 seats, nearly doubling its 2019 count. Meanwhile, regional parties collectively held 204 seats, reclaiming substantial ground in the national narrative. The seat distribution clearly indicates a partial return to coalition politics, albeit with BJP still positioned as the central axis of Indian political discourse.

State-level case studies further illuminate the BJP's rise and regional parties' responses. In Odisha, the BJP ended the 24-year rule of the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) by winning 20 out of 21 Lok Sabha seats and forming the state government. Similarly, in Haryana, BJP transitioned from a coalition with the Jannayak Janta Party (JJP) in 2019 to securing a solo majority in 2024. Delhi, long a stronghold of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), witnessed a political upheaval as the BJP won 48 out of 70 assembly seats in the 2025 elections, ending AAP's decade-long dominance. Maharashtra exemplified BJP's strategy of internal disruption and realignment, where a split in the Shiv Sena enabled the party to return to power alongside the Shinde faction. Uttar Pradesh continued to showcase BJP's dominance, thanks to its successful appeal to non-Yadav OBCs and non-Jatav Dalits, while Bihar represented the volatility of alliance politics, where the BJP-JD(U) relationship oscillated between collaboration and conflict.

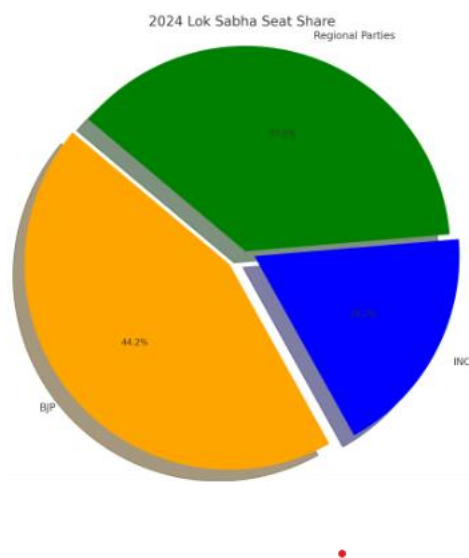
Caste-based voter behavior also shifted significantly during this period. BJP's voter base among non-Yadav OBCs and non-Jatav Dalits expanded notably. In 2014, around 33% of BJP's support came from OBCs and 15% from Dalits. By 2024, these numbers had risen to approximately 41% and 22%, respectively. This erosion of traditional caste-based vote banks significantly weakened parties like the SP, BSP, and RJD, who had historically relied on these communities.

The BJP's success can also be attributed to its integration of welfare populism, digital mobilisation, and narrative control. Schemes like Ujjwala Yojana, PM Kisan, and Jan Dhan provided tangible benefits to rural and marginalized populations, often with Modi's image prominently linked to these initiatives. The party's digital campaign strategies—centered

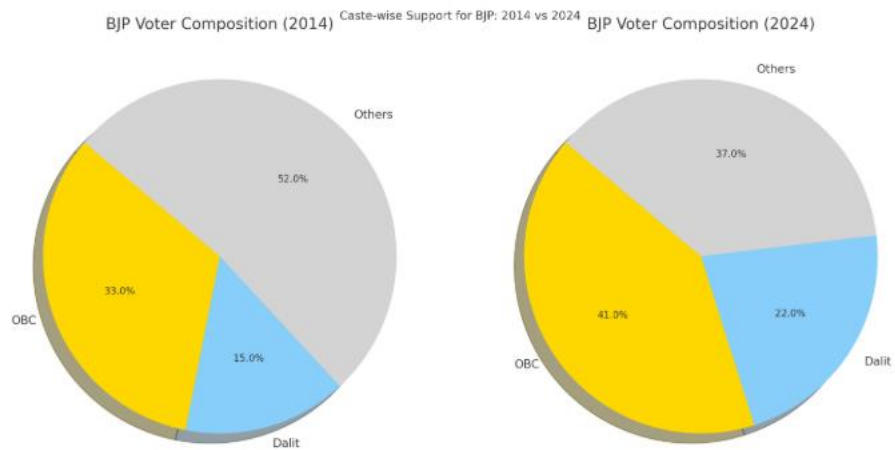
around WhatsApp groups, YouTube content, and targeted social media outreach—redefined political engagement, especially among the youth and first-time voters. A word cloud comparison between BJP's 2014 and 2024 campaigns shows a thematic evolution: from promises of "Ache Din" and "Corruption-free India" to assertive themes like "Viksit Bharat", "Modi ki Guarantee", and the religious-symbolic "Ram Mandir".

Regional parties responded in varied ways. While some, like the DMK in Tamil Nadu and TMC in West Bengal, managed to withstand the BJP wave through strong regional identity and robust welfare models, others like BJD, AAP, and the Shiv Sena splinter factions saw significant erosion. The BJP's strategy of using central schemes to overshadow state governments further strained federal norms. Its approach to federalism—especially in incidents like the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir—has been widely viewed as a centralising overreach.

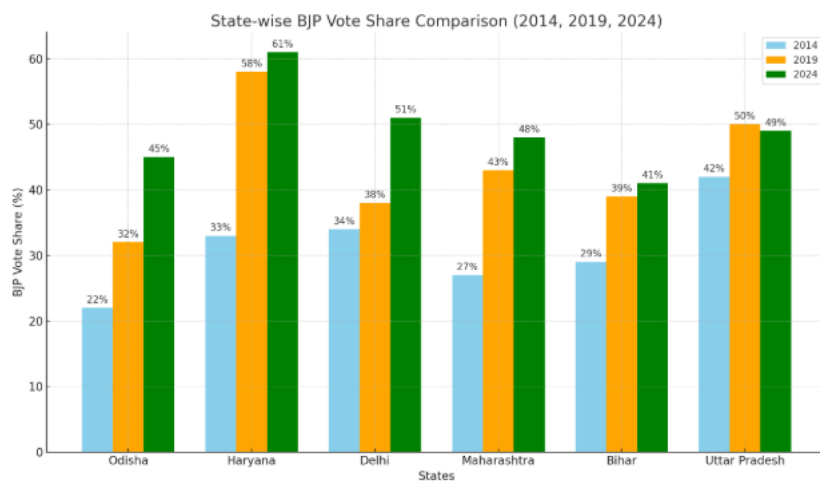
In summary, the results of this research highlight the emergence of a new electoral paradigm. While BJP no longer holds the sweeping majority of 2019, it remains central to national politics. Regional parties are recalibrating and realigning, reflecting a partial revival of coalition dynamics. The decade from 2014 to 2024 marks a period of voter realignment, institutional restructuring, and the creation of a digitally charged political landscape, wherein centralisation and populism define the new contours of Indian democracy.



Pie chart representing the 2024 Lok Sabha seat sharing



pie charts showing the caste-wise voter composition for the BJP. The charts highlight the significant growth in BJP's support among **OBC** and **Dalit** communities over the decade.



Bar graph comparing BJP's state-wise vote share across Odisha, Haryana, Delhi, Maharashtra, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh for the years **2014, 2019, and 2024**. It clearly visualizes the party's electoral growth and regional performance shifts over the last decade.

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