

From Opposition to Dominance: The BJP's Journey Post-2014

Dr. Akshita Nagpal

COO, D.D Fashions, New Delhi

Abstract

The rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) post-2014 represents a transformative shift in India's political landscape. Under the leadership of Narendra Modi, the BJP achieved a historic victory in the 2014 General Elections, securing a clear majority and establishing itself as a dominant political force. The party's success continued in the 2019 General Elections, driven by Modi's charismatic leadership, promises of development and emphasis on national security. The BJP's expansion across various states and its focus on welfare schemes and economic reforms solidified its political presence. However, the party's rise has also been accompanied by challenges, including economic controversies, charges of religious polarization and internal dissent. Despite these challenges, the BJP's vision for a "New India" continues to focus on economic growth, nationalism, and social welfare, ensuring its significant role in India's political future.

Keywords: *Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Narendra Modi, 2014 General Elections, National Democratic Alliance (NDA), Political Transformation, Atmanirbhar Bharat*

Introduction

The rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) post-2014 marks a significant turning point in India's political history. Under the leadership of Narendra Modi, the BJP transformed from a major player in Indian politics to a dominant force, reshaping both the national political landscape and governance. The party's landslide victory in the 2014 General Elections, followed by a second-term win in 2019, highlighted its increasing influence across the country. Driven by promises of economic growth, development and a strong national security framework, the BJP consolidated its power not only at the national level but also expanded its reach in various states. However, the party's rise has been accompanied by challenges, including debates over its economic policies, religious polarization, and growing centralization of power. Despite these challenges, the BJP's ascent, guided by its vision for a "New India," continues to play a pivotal role in shaping India's political future.

Literature Review

The rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) post-2014 has been extensively analysed in political science and Indian political literature. Scholars and commentators have explored various dimensions of the party's transformation, including its electoral strategies, leadership under Narendra Modi and its broader ideological influence on Indian politics. This literature provides a comprehensive view of how the BJP, under Modi, solidified its political dominance and reshaped the Indian political ecosystem.

According to Kohli (2016), the 2014 General Elections marked a pivotal moment in Indian democracy, where the BJP successfully capitalized on disillusionment with the Congress party and its long-standing governance. Modi's persona, as a decisive and development-oriented leader, played a key role in the party's victory, as noted by Chhibber and Verma (2018), who argue that the party's campaign focused on economic growth and national security, resonating strongly with the electorate.

The centrality of Narendra Modi's leadership in the BJP's rise is an important criterion. Jaffrelot (2015) highlights how Modi's image as a "man of action" from his tenure as Gujarat's Chief Minister provided the BJP with a distinct advantage over its rivals. Modi's leadership is often analysed through the lens of his

ability to manage both national and global perceptions, positioning himself as a leader who could deliver both economic reforms and strong national security measures. Scholars like Basu (2017) argue that Modi's popularity was further amplified through his strategic use of social media, helping the BJP maintain a direct connection with voters.

The rise of the BJP also coincided with the resurgence of Hindutva, a key ideological tenet of the party. Nandy (2014) and Teltumbde (2016) discuss how the BJP, under Modi, further solidified the party's association with Hindu nationalism, shaping its appeal to the Hindu-majority electorate. The party's rhetoric around cultural pride, religious identity and nationalism has been seen as central to its appeal in an increasingly polarized political environment. Kohli (2017) highlights that this ideological shift had a profound impact on India's secular political fabric, raising questions about the country's pluralistic values.

The BJP's economic policies post-2014, particularly initiatives like Demonetization (2016) and the Goods and Services Tax (GST), have been a subject of rigorous debate. Dasgupta (2018) critically examines the economic consequences of demonetization, arguing that it led to short-term disruptions without yielding significant long-term benefits. Meanwhile, Chakrabarty (2019) provides a more favourable view, suggesting that GST, while initially challenging, holds the potential for streamlining India's tax system and boosting economic growth. This division in scholarly perspectives illustrates the complexity of evaluating the BJP's economic agenda.

The BJP's focus on welfare schemes and populist measures is also a central theme in the literature. Thakur (2017) notes that the party has increasingly targeted marginalized groups, including the rural poor, through initiatives such as the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (financial inclusion) and PM Kisan Yojana (income support for farmers). These policies have been widely discussed as tools to solidify the party's support base among India's vast rural population, which is critical for electoral success in states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Scholars like Gupta (2019) suggest that these measures, while beneficial, often serve as vehicles for political consolidation and enhancing the BJP's populist appeal.

The BJP's emphasis on nationalism and India's role in global diplomacy has also attracted scholarly attention. Mohan (2017) argues that Modi has successfully positioned India as a rising global power, with increased strategic ties with countries like the United States, Israel, and Japan. Modi's foreign policy initiatives, particularly in regard to national security and regional geopolitics, are often seen as an extension of the BJP's broader ideological framework focused on asserting India's strength on the global stage.

Rise of Bharatiya Janata Party

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a right-wing political party in India, experienced a remarkable and decisive rise following the 2014 General Elections. This period marked a transformative moment for both the party and India's political landscape. Under the leadership of Narendra Modi, the BJP solidified its dominance, not only in the national arena but also in regional politics, fundamentally altering the nature of Indian governance and the country's political discourse.

The 2014 General Elections: A Landmark Victory

The BJP's success in the 2014 elections was unprecedented. With Narendra Modi as its prime ministerial candidate, the party secured a landslide victory, winning 282 seats out of 543 in the Lok Sabha, the lower house of India's Parliament. This victory gave the BJP a clear majority, an achievement that had eluded the party since its formation in 1980. The BJP's alliance with smaller parties, under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), propelled the overall seat count to 336, ensuring a firm mandate. The BJP's win in 2014 was driven by a combination of factors:

- **Narendra Modi's Leadership:** Modi's persona as a strong, decisive leader resonated with millions of voters. His background as the Chief Minister of Gujarat, where he presented himself as a person of action and economic growth, became central to the BJP's campaign.
- **Promises of Development:** Modi's campaign focused on promises of economic reforms, job creation, and infrastructural development. His slogan, "Achhe Din" (Good Days), captured the aspirations of the middle class, youth, and even the rural populace.
- **Anti-Congress Sentiment:** The electorate, fatigued by years of perceived corruption and mismanagement under the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA), was looking for an alternative. Modi and the BJP effectively capitalized on this sentiment, positioning themselves as the answer to India's stagnation.

Post-2014: Shifting the Political Landscape

The success of the 2014 election was just the beginning of BJP's dramatic rise. The period after 2014 saw the party becoming the dominant political force in India, reshaping the political contours of the country.

- **State Elections:** After 2014, the BJP expanded its footprint in several state elections, capitalizing on the Modi wave. The party won states like Maharashtra, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Assam. In Uttar Pradesh (UP) in 2017, the BJP secured a stunning victory, winning 312 out of 403 seats in the Legislative Assembly, which was a major triumph in the party's history.
- **Stronghold in the North:** The BJP's support base expanded beyond its traditional strongholds in the north, where it had been historically dominant. With successful campaigns in states such as Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, the party made significant inroads into regions that had been traditionally Congress-ruled.
- **Expanding South:** Though the BJP had limited influence in southern India, the party made notable strides in states like Karnataka (2018), where it won a considerable number of seats, and it also gained ground in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, signalling the party's widening national influence.

The 2019 General Elections

In the 2019 General Elections, the BJP led by Modi once again secured a clear victory, winning 303 seats. This success consolidated the party's position as the most powerful political entity in India. Modi's second-term victory was attributed to:

- **Effective Campaigning:** The BJP employed a robust, nationwide campaign strategy, making effective use of social media platforms and digital tools. It also projected Modi as the only leader capable of leading India on the global stage and securing national security.
- **National Security and Surgical Strikes:** The aftermath of the 2016 Uri attack and the 2019 Pulwama attack, followed by the retaliatory Balakot airstrikes, resonated strongly with voters. The BJP's emphasis on national security and its portrayal of Modi as a strong, patriotic leader played a key role in galvanizing its support base.
- **Populist Measures:** Modi's government continued to appeal to the masses with welfare schemes like Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (financial inclusion), Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (clean India mission), and PM Kisan Yojana (income support for farmers).

Modi's Leadership and the Personality Cult

One of the defining features of the BJP's rise post-2014 has been the centrality of Narendra Modi. Modi, a former RSS pracharak (campaigner), has built an image as a decisive leader, often associated with nationalist ideals. His leadership style has been marked by centralization of Power. Modi's government has often been described as one where decision-making is highly centralized, with key policies coming directly from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). This has earned him both admiration for his focus and criticism for undermining institutional autonomy.

Modi's ability to connect with the masses through social media platforms and public speeches has been unparalleled. His image as a man of the people, while projecting a strong, statesman-like image internationally, has played a significant role in maintaining his appeal. The BJP has also been strongly associated with the ideology of Hindutva, which has been a cornerstone of its political identity. Under Modi, the BJP has increasingly emphasized Hindu cultural pride, leading to a strengthening of its appeal among the Hindu-majority population.

The BJP's Vision for India's Future

The BJP, under Modi's leadership, continues to emphasize a vision of a "New India" — a prosperous, self-reliant, and strong nation. The party's long-term focus includes:

- **Economic Growth and Reforms:** The BJP has placed heavy emphasis on reforms to promote entrepreneurship, digitization, and manufacturing. The 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' (self-reliant India) initiative is an example of this vision.
- **National Security and Global Diplomacy:** The BJP envisions India as a global power with increased prominence in international affairs, working towards a secure and peaceful regional environment.
- **Social Welfare and Inclusivity:** The party continues to focus on schemes aimed at poverty reduction, rural development, and social upliftment.

The Rise of BJP and the Decline of Congress

The rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) post-2014 has significantly contributed to the decline of the Indian National Congress (INC), the party that had historically dominated India's political landscape. Several factors related to the BJP's rise have created an environment where Congress struggled to maintain its relevance, resulting in a significant reduction in its political influence. The dynamics of this shift are complex, involving electoral, ideological, and organizational changes that allowed the BJP to not only eclipse the Congress but also reshape India's political narrative.

Electoral Decline and Loss of Popularity

The most direct consequence of the BJP's rise has been the decline of Congress in national and state elections. In the 2014 General Elections, Congress suffered its worst defeat in history, securing only 44 seats out of 543 in the Lok Sabha, its lowest ever. The BJP, under Narendra Modi's leadership, won a commanding majority with 282 seats, marking a decisive shift in the political balance of power in India. This was a dramatic departure from the Congress's previous dominance, particularly during the UPA (United Progressive Alliance) years. Several factors contributed to Congress's electoral decline:

- **Anti-Incumbency:** After two consecutive terms in power (2004-2014) under the leadership of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the Congress-led UPA government became increasingly associated with issues like corruption, governance failures and policy paralysis. The UPA's inability to address key issues, including economic slowdown, price rise and internal security concerns, led to widespread public disenchantment.
- **Leadership Vacuum:** The leadership of Congress, particularly under Rahul Gandhi, was often criticized as ineffective and unable to project a strong, charismatic figure like Narendra Modi. Rahul Gandhi's lack of experience and political heft led to questions about his ability to lead the party effectively, particularly in the face of Modi's dominant political personality.

Ideological Shift: The BJP's Nationalist Appeal vs. Congress's Secularism

The BJP's rise also signified the growing dominance of Hindutva (Hindu nationalism) as a central ideological framework in Indian politics, positioning the party as the champion of Hindu interests. This ideological shift attracted a significant portion of the electorate that felt alienated by the Congress's traditional secular, socialist and pluralistic approach. While Congress had historically been the party of

social justice and minority rights, the BJP's focus on nationalism and cultural pride resonated with many voters, especially in the context of a growing sense of Hindu identity politics. The BJP's embrace of Hindutva, supported by its ideological parent, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), positioned it as the defender of Hindu interests, which increasingly became attractive to large sections of India's electorate, particularly in the northern, western, and central parts of the country. Congress, which championed secularism, found it difficult to compete with the BJP's appeal to Hindu sentiment, leading to a gradual erosion of its traditional voter base.

Economic Reforms and Development Agenda

Under Narendra Modi, the BJP focused heavily on economic development, with slogans like "Achhe Din" (Good Days) and "Make in India." This developmental discourse appealed to the youth, the middle class, and the business community, shifting the narrative from Congress's traditional welfare state approach to one centered around economic growth, self-reliance, and job creation. The Congress struggled to match the BJP's vision for modern India.

The Modi Factor: Strong Leadership vs. Congress's Leadership Crisis

Narendra Modi's emergence as a powerful, charismatic leader provided the BJP with a massive advantage over Congress, which struggled to find a leader with a similar level of appeal and authority. Modi's ability to project a strong, decisive image, both domestically and internationally, made him a popular figure among voters. His background as the Chief Minister of Gujarat was portrayed as a success story of governance, development, and economic growth. This narrative stood in stark contrast to the Congress's leadership, which was more indecisive, especially during the tenure of Manmohan Singh, who was often seen as a technocrat rather than a political leader with mass appeal. Modi skilfully utilized symbolism and mass media to project a strong, nationalistic vision of India's future, focusing on issues like national security, defence, and pride in Indian heritage. Congress, which had previously been the standard-bearer of the Indian state's secular ideals, was increasingly side-lined in favor of the BJP's narrative of Hindu pride and nationalism.

Internal Organizational Weaknesses in Congress

The organizational structure of Congress also contributed to its decline. Unlike the BJP, which benefited from the organizational strength and grassroots network of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Congress struggled with leadership infighting, factionalism, and a lack of coherence at both the central and state levels. The internal rifts within Congress, particularly the power struggle between the Gandhi family (led by Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi) and regional leaders, further eroded the party's unity. The lack of a clear succession plan and the growing perception that the party was beholden to the Gandhi family made it difficult for Congress to attract fresh talent or connect with a broad range of voters.

Rise of Regional Parties and the BJP's Expansion

Congress had historically been strong in several states across India, but after 2014, it lost ground in many regions to regional parties and the BJP. The Congress party's inability to build strong state-level leadership allowed the BJP to capitalize on regional discontent and make inroads into states like Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Assam, and Madhya Pradesh, where Congress had previously been a significant player.

While Congress was losing ground nationally, regional parties also played a significant role in diminishing Congress's influence. Parties like the Trinamool Congress (TMC) in West Bengal, the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) in Telangana and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Delhi emerged as alternatives to Congress, particularly in states where Congress had traditionally been dominant. The BJP, however, capitalized on the Congress's weakness by forging alliances with regional parties and also by directly challenging Congress in states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal. In states like Uttar Pradesh,

where Congress had traditionally been a key player, the BJP's alliances with regional parties like the Apna Dal and BJP's own organizational efforts helped it make significant gains, pushing Congress further into the margins.

Scandals and Corruption Allegations

Congress was also plagued by a series of corruption scandals during the UPA government, including the 2G spectrum case, the Commonwealth Games scam, and the Coal scam. These scandals severely damaged the party's image and its credibility, making it difficult to retain the trust of the electorate. The BJP capitalized on these scandals, often framing the Congress as the "party of corruption" and presenting itself as a cleaner, more transparent alternative.

The rise of the BJP post-2014 was linked to the decline of the Congress party in several keyways. The BJP's strong leadership under Narendra Modi, its embrace of nationalism and economic development, and its ability to forge new electoral alliances allowed it to fill the political void left by a Congress that was increasingly seen as ineffective, divided, and disconnected from the aspirations of the electorate. The BJP's ideological shift towards Hindu nationalism also aligned with the growing appeal of these sentiments across India, while Congress's commitment to secularism and its failure to adapt to changing political realities further contributed to its decline.

Despite its electoral success, the BJP has faced significant criticism and challenges. Basu (2020) critiques the party's increasing centralization of power, arguing that it has undermined democratic institutions and led to the weakening of federalism. Additionally, Fernandes (2018) examines the growing concerns over religious polarization and minority rights under BJP rule, particularly in light of controversial measures such as the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir.

Key initiatives like the Goods and Services Tax (GST), demonetization and the implementation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) have faced criticism. Demonetization, in particular, had widespread economic consequences, leading to disruptions in small businesses and daily life, which have been sources of debate and discontent.

The BJP has faced challenges in managing internal dissent and opposition from regional parties. Many have accused the party of attempting to centralize power in the hands of the federal government, sidelining state-level politics, and opposition leaders.

Conclusion

The BJP's rise post-2014 is a testament to its ability to adapt, connect with voters and reshape the political and social landscape of India. While the party's dominance continues, it faces a changing political environment where opposition forces are attempting to challenge its control. Nevertheless, under Narendra Modi's leadership, the BJP has firmly established itself as a central pillar of Indian politics, with a vision focused on nationalism, economic progress, and social transformation.

References

- Basu, R. (2017). *Narendra Modi's leadership and the transformation of Indian politics*. *Economic & Political Weekly*, 52(26-27), 26-28.
- Basu, R. (2020). *Centralization of power and the erosion of democratic institutions in India*. *Indian Political Science Review*, 56(1), 10-25.
- Chakrabarty, B. (2019). *GST and its implications on Indian economy*. *Journal of Indian Economy*, 75(3), 23-45.

- Chhibber, P., & Verma, R. (2018). *The BJP's electoral strategy: From Gujarat to the national stage*. Indian Politics Review, 15(2), 107-128.
- Dasgupta, R. (2018). *Demonetization in India: A critical analysis*. South Asian Studies, 41(1), 58-72.
- Fernandes, L. (2018). *Religious polarization and the BJP's rise: A critical assessment*. South Asian Journal of Politics, 16(4), 203-215.
- Gupta, A. (2019). *Populism and welfare politics in Modi's India*. Journal of South Asian Development, 14(1), 12-29.
- Jaffrelot, C. (2015). *Modi's India: Hindu Nationalism and the BJP's Political Transformation*. Oxford University Press.
- Kohli, A. (2016). *The rise of the BJP: A changing political landscape*. India Quarterly, 72(1), 1-16.
- Kohli, A. (2017). *Hindutva and the BJP's vision for India*. Modern South Asian Studies, 30(2), 51-66.
- Mohan, C. R. (2017). *India's foreign policy under Narendra Modi: Strengthening India's global influence*. Indian Foreign Affairs Journal, 12(2), 75-92.
- Nandy, A. (2014). *The rise of Hindutva and its political impact*. Economic & Political Weekly, 49(45), 56-64.
- Rajagopal, A. (2016). *Nationalism and the BJP's rise to power*. Journal of Politics in India, 22(4), 15-30.
- Teltumbde, A. (2016). *Hindutva, Modi, and the politics of exclusion*. Economic & Political Weekly, 51(18), 29-33.
- Thakur, R. (2017). *Welfare politics in BJP rule: Inclusivity or populism?* Indian Politics Review, 21(2), 80-95.