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The Rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party: Ideology, Organisation, Social Coalition and the Reconfiguration of India's Party System, 1980-2024

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Abstract: This paper examines the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) from a marginal national force to India's principal governing party and asks whether its post-2014 dominance should be understood as a durable transformation of the party system or as a contingent phase of electoral predominance. Drawing on major scholarship on Hindu nationalism, ideology, party-system change, social coalitions and welfare politics, and using Election Commission of India electoral data, the paper develops a multi-dimensional explanation of BJP expansion. It argues that no single factor—Hindutva, the decline of the Congress, Narendra Modi's leadership, welfare politics, or social engineering—adequately explains the BJP's trajectory. Rather, the party's rise resulted from the interaction of ideological mobilisation, organisational continuity, expansion across social groups, and the restructuring of political competition following the decline of Congress-centered politics. The analysis also distinguishes electoral dominance from autonomous parliamentary majority. The BJP increased its Lok Sabha representation from 161 seats in 1996 to 282 in 2014 and 303 in 2019, but fell to 240 seats in 2024 when party was expecting more than 400 seat by raising the slogan of 'Abki bar 400 par' despite retaining a vote share of 36.56 percent. This divergence suggests that the BJP's national predominance remains substantial but is not synonymous with uninterrupted single-party majoritarian control. The paper therefore interprets 2024 not as the end of BJP dominance, but as evidence of its institutional and electoral limits.

Keywords: Bharatiya Janata Party; BJP; Hindu nationalism; Hindutva; party system; electoral politics; Narendra Modi; social coalition; Congress decline; India.

Introduction - The rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) constitutes one of the most consequential transformations in the history of post-independence Indian politics. For much of the early postcolonial period, national electoral competition was structured around the dominance of the Indian National Congress. The subsequent fragmentation of the party system, the growth of regional parties, the decline of Congress and the expansion of Hindu nationalist politics gradually altered this configuration. By the 1990s, the BJP had emerged as a major national contender; by 2014, it had secured an independent parliamentary majority; and in 2019 it strengthened that position. The 2024 Lok Sabha election, however, produced a more complicated result: the BJP remained the largest individual party but won substantially fewer seats than in 2019 and no longer possessed an independent majority.

These developments raise a fundamental analytical question: What explains the BJP's transformation from a relatively marginal political force into the central pole of national electoral competition, and what does the 2024 election tell us about the limits of that transformation?

Existing scholarship offers several powerful but partially competing explanations. One strand places Hindu nationalism and the politics of identity at the centre of the BJP's emergence (Hansen, 1999; Jaffrelot, 1996). Another interprets the transformation through changes in ideology and the structure of party competition (Chhibber & Verma, 2018). A further strand stresses the decline of Congress, the expansion of regional competition and the restructuring of the Indian party system (Diwakar, 2017; Schakel et al., 2019). More recent scholarship draws attention to the BJP's changing social coalition, organisational advantage, nationalism and welfare politics (Chhibber & Verma, 2019; Deshpande et al., 2019). Suri (2021), meanwhile, considers the emergence and durability of BJP dominance as a broader transformation of Indian political competition.

These explanations should not be treated as mutually exclusive. The central argument of this paper is that the BJP's rise is best understood as a cumulative process in which ideological mobilisation, organisational continuity, social coalition-building and the restructuring of political competition reinforced one another. Hindutva supplied an important ideological framework, but ideology alone does not explain the BJP's ability to expand beyond its earlier

social base. Congress's decline created political space, but political opportunity alone cannot explain why the BJP rather than another opposition formation captured that space. Narendra Modi strengthened the party's electoral appeal, but the durability of BJP victories cannot be reduced to individual charisma. Similarly, welfare politics contributed to the construction of a broader electoral coalition, but welfare cannot independently account for the BJP's ideological and organisational transformation.

The 2024 election provides a particularly useful test of this argument. According to ECI data, the BJP won 282 seats in 2014 and 303 in 2019, but 240 in 2024. Its vote share, however, moved from 31.34 percent in 2014 to 37.70 percent in 2019 and remained high at 36.56 percent in 2024. The reduction in seats alongside a comparatively modest reduction in vote share demonstrates why electoral dominance and parliamentary autonomy should not be treated as identical concepts.

This paper therefore asks not simply why the BJP rose, but how different mechanisms combined to produce its rise and where the limits of that dominance became visible.

Research Objectives:

1. To examine the historical and ideological processes underlying the rise of the BJP.
2. To analyse the relationship between Hindu nationalism, organisational development and electoral mobilisation.
3. To examine how Congress decline, social coalition-building and welfare politics contributed to BJP expansion.
4. To assess the extent and limits of BJP dominance through the 2014, 2019 and 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Research Questions:

1. How did the BJP transform from a relatively marginal political force into a major national party?
2. What role did Hindu nationalism and ideological mobilisation play in the BJP's electoral expansion?
3. How did the decline of Congress and the restructuring of India's party system create opportunities for BJP expansion?
4. How did the BJP broaden its social coalition beyond its earlier electoral constituencies?
5. What roles did Narendra Modi, organisational capacity and welfare politics play in sustaining BJP electoral success?
6. What does the 2024 Lok Sabha election reveal about the durability and limits of BJP dominance?

Methodology: This study employs a qualitative historical-institutional and interpretive approach, supplemented by descriptive analysis of national electoral data.

The analysis draws on eight major academic sources covering different dimensions of BJP politics: Jaffrelot's historical study of Hindu nationalism; Hansen's analysis of Hindu nationalism and democratic transformation; Chhibber and Verma's work on ideology and party systems; Diwakar's account of India's party-system evolution; Schakel, Sharma and Swenden's analysis of BJP dominance after 2014; Chhibber and Verma's study of the BJP's 2019 social coalition; Deshpande, Tillin and Kailash's study of welfare politics; and Suri's analysis of BJP dominance and durability. These works are treated as interpretive perspectives rather than interchangeable statements of fact.

Electoral evidence is drawn primarily from the Election Commission of India. The ECI's electoral-statistics publications provide time-series information on Lok Sabha outcomes, while its 2024 statistical reports provide the electoral data necessary to assess the BJP's most recent national performance.

The paper uses electoral outcomes descriptively rather than claiming that seat changes alone establish causal relationships. The purpose is to connect electoral patterns with explanations developed in the scholarly literature.

Literature Review

1. Hindu Nationalism and the Historical Formation of the BJP: Christophe Jaffrelot's The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics provides a foundational account of the historical development of Hindu nationalism and its political institutionalisation. The significance of this work for the present study lies not simply in its treatment of Hindu nationalism as an ideology, but in its emphasis on identity-building, organisational implantation and mobilisation. The BJP's emergence therefore cannot be understood as an electoral phenomenon detached from the institutional history of the broader Hindu nationalist movement (Jaffrelot, 1996).

Thomas Hansen's The Saffron Wave complicates an exclusively ideological explanation. Rather than reducing Hindu nationalism to a purely religious phenomenon, Hansen places it within wider transformations in democratic governance and political mobilisation. His analysis also draws attention to the capacity of Hindu nationalism to articulate concerns among socially heterogeneous groups, including sections of the middle class and economically disadvantaged groups (Hansen, 1999).

Taken together, these works suggest that the BJP's ideological foundation was important, but they also caution against treating electoral mobilisation as a simple mechanical consequence of Hindu identity. The BJP's political success required ideological claims to be translated into organisational and electoral forms.

2. Ideology, Identity and Party-System Change: Chhibber and Verma (2018) challenge interpretations of Indian politics that minimise ideology. Their analysis of the 2014 election identifies an ideological divide between competing political visions and argues that Narendra Modi's personal appeal reinforced the BJP's electoral success. Their broader framework distinguishes between questions of statism and recognition, thereby placing party competition within a wider ideological structure rather than interpreting elections primarily through patronage or short-term electoral transactions.

This perspective is especially useful because it allows the BJP's rise to be interpreted as more than an organisational success. The BJP did not merely occupy an electoral vacuum; it increasingly became a carrier of a distinctive political orientation. Chhibber and Verma's discussion of an ideological consolidation of the right further suggests that BJP success was connected to the broader accommodation of conservative and majoritarian political currents within the party system.

Yet ideology cannot independently explain the geographical and social unevenness of BJP expansion. This limitation points toward the importance of party-system transformation and social coalition-building.

3. Congress Decline and the Transformation of the Party System: Rekha Diwakar's account of the Indian party system places the BJP's rise within a longer sequence: Congress dominance, Congress decline, regional-party expansion, coalition politics and the subsequent movement toward a BJP-centred national party system. Importantly, Diwakar emphasises the interaction of sociological, institutional and contextual factors rather than attributing party-system change to a single variable (Diwakar, 2017).

Schakel, Sharma and Swenden (2019) offer an important qualification. Their analysis of the period following the 2014 election finds significant BJP expansion but argues that the transformation of the Indian party system should not automatically be equated with the emergence of a completely consolidated new BJP-dominant system. They demonstrate that BJP expansion was territorially uneven and occurred substantially at the expense of Congress and some regional parties, while regionalist competition remained important in other areas.

This disagreement is analytically productive. It suggests that BJP dominance should be conceptualised as a process rather than an all-or-nothing condition. The BJP may be nationally dominant while remaining dependent on different electoral configurations across India's states.

4. Social Coalition and Electoral Expansion: Chhibber and Verma's (2019) analysis of the 2019 election identifies a major transformation in the BJP's electoral coalition. Their study points to increased support among lower castes, rural voters, poorer citizens and less educated groups. They connect this expansion to the interaction of Modi's popularity, organisational advantage, nationalism, welfare politics and ideological change.

This argument is significant because it challenges the assumption that the BJP's electoral expansion can be explained by the consolidation of a narrow upper-caste constituency. The party's ability to incorporate groups previously less firmly aligned with it transformed the scale of its electoral competitiveness.

The analytical implication is important: social engineering should not be understood simply as demographic arithmetic. It represents an organisational and ideological process through which a party attempts to convert heterogeneous social interests into a coherent electoral coalition.

5. Welfare Politics and the BJP's Electoral Coalition: Deshpande, Tillin and Kailash (2019) provide a more specific explanation of BJP expansion by examining welfare politics through the 2019 National Election Study. Their findings suggest that beneficiaries of programmes such as Ujjwala, Jan Dhan Yojana and Awas Yojana were, at the national level, more likely to support the BJP, while the attribution of welfare benefits increasingly shifted toward the central government.

However, this evidence should not be interpreted as demonstrating that welfare caused the BJP's national dominance. The study itself is concerned with the relationship between welfare receipt, attribution and voting behaviour rather than presenting welfare as a complete explanation of BJP support. The more defensible interpretation is that welfare politics became one mechanism through which the central government could connect policy delivery with national-level political identification.

6. BJP Dominance and Its Durability: Suri (2021) directly frames the question of BJP dominance and its durability. His contribution is particularly relevant because it shifts the analytical focus from explaining one election victory to asking whether the BJP's political position represents a more durable restructuring of Indian competition.

The limitation of much pre-2024 literature is temporal: analyses of dominance necessarily assess the evidence available before the 2024 election. The present study extends this debate by using 2024 as a test of the relationship between electoral durability and parliamentary independence.

Research Gap and Analytical Framework: The literature reviewed above provides sophisticated explanations of individual dimensions of BJP expansion. However, these explanations are often organised around particular mechanisms: Hindu nationalism, ideology, party-system transformation, social coalition, welfare or organisational advantage.

This paper identifies a specific gap: the need to examine these mechanisms together while distinguishing between electoral predominance and autonomous parliamentary majority.

The paper consequently proposes a four-part analytical framework:

1. Ideological capacity: The BJP developed a political identity capable of producing durable political identification around Hindu nationalism, cultural nationalism and a broader conservative ideological project.

2. Organisational capacity: Ideology alone does not produce repeated national victories. A durable political organisation enabled the BJP to convert political identification into electoral organisation.

3. **Coalition-building capacity :** The BJP expanded its support beyond its earlier social base by incorporating new caste and class constituencies and connecting ideological politics with nationalism, leadership and policy benefits.
4. **Systemic opportunity:** The decline of Congress and the fragmentation or weakening of alternative national formations created opportunities for BJP expansion. However, these opportunities were converted into dominance because the BJP possessed greater capacity to exploit them.
5. **Central Proposition:** The paper's central proposition can therefore be expressed as follows: BJP dominance emerged from the interaction of ideological mobilisation, organisational continuity, social coalition-building and systemic opportunity; its durability depends on the party's ability to maintain that interaction across India's socially and territorially differentiated political system.

From Marginality to National Competition: The BJP's national rise should be understood as a long process rather than a sudden transformation in 2014.

Jaffrelot's historical analysis demonstrates that Hindu nationalist politics developed organisational and ideological infrastructures well before the BJP became electorally dominant. Hansen similarly places the growth of Hindu nationalism within wider transformations in Indian democracy rather than treating it as an isolated religious phenomenon.

The political significance of this continuity is that the BJP entered later periods of political opportunity with an ideological identity and organisational inheritance already in place. This gave the party an advantage over purely opportunistic opposition formations.

The 1990s represented a major turning point. The BJP became the largest party in the 1996 Lok Sabha election, winning 161 seats with 20.29 percent of valid votes; it increased this to 182 seats and 25.59 percent in 1998 and retained 182 seats in 1999, when its vote share was 23.75 percent.

The importance of these elections is not simply numerical. They demonstrate that the BJP's transformation occurred through successive stages of political normalisation. A party once regarded as peripheral became a plausible governing alternative; subsequently, coalition politics provided a mechanism through which it could exercise national power.

Coalition Politics and the Transition from Opposition to Government: The BJP's movement into national government cannot be explained solely through ideological mobilisation. Coalition politics was critical to converting electoral strength into governing authority.

The 1990s demonstrated an important institutional constraint: the BJP could become the largest party without possessing sufficient parliamentary support to govern independently. This distinction is crucial. Electoral growth and governing capacity were related but not identical.

The literature on India's party system, particularly Diwakar's analysis, places the BJP's rise within the period of fragmentation and coalition politics. Hansen's analysis of the 1996 election similarly illustrates the tension between electoral success and coalition acceptability: the BJP could emerge as the largest party while still facing limitations in translating that position into stable government.

The subsequent consolidation of the National Democratic Alliance demonstrated that the BJP could adapt its governing strategy to India's federal and multi-party structure. This was more than an electoral convenience. Coalition-building enabled the party to transform national ideological appeal into institutional governing power.

Thus, one stage in the rise of the BJP was learning how to govern in a plural party system before eventually acquiring the capacity to govern without coalition dependence at the national level.

The 2004–2009 Interregnum and the Limits of Linear Rise: A simplistic narrative of BJP expansion would imply continuous upward movement. Electoral evidence contradicts this.

The BJP won 138 Lok Sabha seats in 2004 and 116 in 2009, a substantial decline from its 182 seats in 1999.

This period is analytically important because it demonstrates that the BJP's rise was not irreversible. Its subsequent success cannot therefore be interpreted simply as the inevitable consequence of demographic change or Hindu nationalist mobilisation.

The 2004 and 2009 setbacks indicate that political dominance requires continuous coalition maintenance. A party can possess ideological strength and organisational infrastructure while still losing national elections.

This observation supports a central argument of the present paper: BJP dominance should be understood as an achieved political equilibrium rather than as a permanent structural condition.

2014: From Major Party to Dominant National Force: The 2014 election represented a decisive transformation. The BJP won 282 of 543 Lok Sabha seats, equivalent to more than half of the elected chamber, while obtaining 31.34 percent of valid votes.

This result matters for two reasons. First, the BJP did not merely increase its vote share; it achieved a parliamentary majority under India's electoral system. Second, its victory represented a broader change in the structure of national competition.

Chhibber and Verma (2018) interpret 2014 as an ideological contest in which competing political visions were important to voter behaviour, while also emphasising Modi's personal appeal. Schakel et al. (2019), however, caution against treating the 2014 result alone as proof that a fully consolidated new party system had already emerged.

These interpretations can be reconciled. 2014 should be seen as the moment when the BJP achieved national electoral predominance, not necessarily the moment when

all forms of political competition became structurally subordinate to it.

That distinction becomes particularly important when examining the subsequent decade.

The BJP's New Social Coalition: The transformation after 2014 was not purely ideological. It was also social.

Chhibber and Verma's (2019) analysis demonstrates that the BJP's 2019 coalition included substantial support from lower castes, rural voters, poorer citizens and less educated groups. This represents a significant departure from explanations that associate the BJP primarily with an upper-caste or urban electoral base.

The political significance of this transformation lies in coalition breadth.

A national party in India cannot normally sustain dominance through a narrowly concentrated social constituency because electoral competition operates across highly differentiated state-level political systems. The BJP's expansion therefore required the creation of a coalition capable of linking distinct groups through a combination of identity, nationalism, leadership and policy benefits.

This is why social engineering should be understood not simply as the addition of new voter categories. It is a form of political coalition construction.

The BJP's success was consequently not just that more groups voted for it. The deeper transformation was that the party increasingly became capable of presenting itself as the political vehicle through which multiple groups could participate in a shared national political project.

Welfare Politics and the Institutionalisation of Credit: Welfare politics added another layer to this coalition.

Deshpande, Tillin and Kailash (2019) show that beneficiaries of some BJP-associated welfare programmes were more likely to support the BJP and that voters increasingly attributed welfare delivery to the central government.

The significance of this finding extends beyond individual schemes. In a federal political system, attribution matters because voters must decide which level of government deserves credit for material benefits.

The BJP's national electoral strategy therefore operated partly through the centralisation of political credit. Welfare could strengthen the relationship between national leadership and individual voters by making government programmes politically legible at the national level.

Nevertheless, welfare should not be elevated into a monocausal explanation. The BJP's electoral coalition was simultaneously ideological, organisational and leadership-driven. Welfare was more plausibly a reinforcing mechanism than the foundation of the entire BJP project.

2019: Consolidation Rather Than Simple Repetition: The 2019 election provided stronger evidence of BJP consolidation.

The ECI records that the BJP increased its Lok Sabha representation from 282 seats in 2014 to 303 in 2019, while its vote share increased from 31.34 percent to 37.70 percent.

The significance of 2019 is therefore different from that of 2014. 2014 demonstrated that the BJP could win a majority. 2019 demonstrated that it could reproduce and deepen that majority.

This distinction matters for theories of dominant-party development. A one-time majority can result from a temporary electoral wave; repeated national success provides stronger evidence of organisational and coalition durability.

Chhibber and Verma (2019) associate the 2019 result with a combination of Modi's popularity, organisational advantage, nationalism, welfare politics and the emergence of a broader social coalition.

The paper's interpretation is that these factors should be viewed as mutually reinforcing rather than competing explanations. Modi's leadership could amplify ideological identification; welfare could broaden the social coalition; organisational capacity could convert identification into votes; and Congress weakness could reduce the effectiveness of opposition competition.

That interaction is more explanatory than any individual factor.

2024: Dominance Tested: The 2024 Lok Sabha election provides the strongest test of the BJP's trajectory.

The BJP won 240 seats, compared with 303 in 2019 and 282 in 2014. Its vote share was 36.56 percent, compared with 37.70 percent in 2019 and 31.34 percent in 2014.

The result produces an important analytical puzzle. Between 2019 and 2024, BJP vote share declined by approximately 1.14 percentage points, yet its seat total declined by 63 seats, or about 20.8 percent of its 2019 parliamentary strength.

This means that the 2024 result cannot reasonably be described simply as an electoral collapse.

At the same time, it cannot be treated as evidence of uninterrupted dominance in the same form as 2019.

The more precise conclusion is: The BJP retained substantial national electoral support while losing the parliamentary autonomy that had characterised its 2014 and 2019 victories.

This distinction is central to understanding the meaning of 2024.

Table 1.

Election	BJP seats	BJP vote share
1996	161	20.29%
1998	182	25.59%
1999	182	23.75%
2004	138	22.16%
2009	116	18.80%
2014	282	31.34%
2019	303	37.70%
2024	240	36.56%

Source: Election Commission of India electoral statistics and 2024 statistical reports. The table presents the national BJP seat and vote-share trajectory used in the analysis.

Electoral Dominance versus Parliamentary Dominance: The 2024 election requires greater conceptual precision in the use of the term dominance.

A party can dominate electoral competition without possessing an independent parliamentary majority. These conditions overlap but are not equivalent.

The BJP's 2024 result demonstrates this distinction clearly. Its 240 seats were fewer than the 272 required for a majority in a 543-member Lok Sabha. Yet the BJP remained the single largest party and retained more than one-third of the national vote.

Therefore, three concepts should be distinguished:

Electoral predominance: The party consistently receives a larger share of votes or seats than its principal national competitors like INC and other national parties.

Parliamentary majority: The party independently controls more than half of the elected chamber.

Party-system dominance: The party occupies such a central position in national competition that other parties must substantially structure their strategies around it.

The BJP clearly achieved the second condition in 2014 and 2019. In 2024, it did not.

The third condition, however, remains an open analytical question rather than something that can be settled by the seat count alone.

This interpretation extends the debate raised by Schakel et al. (2019), who cautioned that BJP electoral expansion should not automatically be equated with the complete consolidation of a new party system. The 2024 result strengthens the importance of that caution while simultaneously demonstrating that the BJP's national position remains exceptionally strong.

Why the BJP Rose: An Integrated Explanation: The evidence suggests that the BJP's rise can be understood through four mutually reinforcing processes.

1. **Ideology created political identity:** Hindu nationalism gave the BJP a distinctive ideological identity and a mechanism for political mobilisation. Jaffrelot and Hansen demonstrate that this ideological project had deep organisational and historical roots rather than being an invention of the Modi period.

However, ideology alone cannot explain the entire trajectory because the BJP experienced electoral setbacks before 2014.

2. **Organisation converted identity into electoral capacity:** A durable political organisation enabled the BJP to exploit political opportunities when they emerged. This is implicit in the literature's repeated attention to organisational advantage and the long-term institutionalisation of Hindu nationalist politics.

The crucial point is that political opportunity does not automatically produce political dominance. Other opposition formations also benefited from Congress decline, yet the BJP was particularly successful in converting that opportunity into national electoral strength.

3. **Social coalition-building expanded the electorate:** The BJP's later success depended on reaching constituencies beyond its earlier support base. Chhibber and Verma's 2019 analysis demonstrates the importance of lower-caste, rural and poorer voters in the BJP's coalition. This expansion transformed the party from an ideological movement with a relatively concentrated support base into a broad national electoral coalition.

4. **Systemic opportunity allowed expansion:** The decline of Congress and the weakening or fragmentation of alternative national competition created space for the BJP. Diwakar and Schakel et al. place the BJP's rise within precisely this broader transformation of India's party system. The BJP therefore did not rise instead of a changing party system; it rose through that changing party system.

The BJP's Rise Is Not the Same as the End of Competition: One of the most important conclusions of this analysis is that BJP dominance should not be interpreted as the disappearance of political competition.

Schakel et al. demonstrated that regional parties retained significant importance even during the period of rapid BJP expansion. The 2024 election reinforces this point by showing that national electoral outcomes continue to depend heavily on state-level political configurations.

This is particularly important in a federal democracy as socially heterogeneous as India.

The BJP can be nationally dominant while facing highly different competitive environments across states. National vote share therefore cannot by itself explain the distribution of parliamentary seats.

The 2024 election illustrates the importance of this territorial dimension: a relatively small national movement in vote share can coexist with a much larger movement in seats.

Thus, the BJP's future dominance cannot be assessed solely through national vote share. It must also be assessed through geographical expansion, state-level competitiveness, social coalition stability, coalition dependence, opposition coordination and organisational resilience.

Discussion: The existing literature can now be reconsidered through the integrated framework proposed in this paper.

First, the Hindutva explanation is necessary but insufficient. Hindutva explains an important part of the BJP's ideological identity and mobilisation, but it cannot explain the party's entire social and geographical expansion. The BJP's ability to reach lower-caste, rural and poorer voters indicates that its electoral coalition became broader than a narrowly defined ideological constituency.

Second, Congress decline created opportunity but did not determine the outcome. If Congress decline alone

produced BJP dominance, alternative opposition formations could have occupied the same political space. The BJP's organisational and ideological capacities were necessary for converting systemic opportunity into durable electoral strength.

Third, Modi mattered, but the BJP is larger than Modi. The contributions of leaders such as Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Lal Krishna Advani, Amit Shah and several other were also substantial in building the BJP's organizational strength and electoral reach. The literature identifies Modi's personal appeal as important to both 2014 and 2019. Yet the party's institutional continuity and organisational infrastructure predate his national leadership. The more analytically defensible interpretation is therefore that Modi amplified an existing organisational and ideological structure rather than creating the BJP's political capacity from nothing.

Fourth, welfare strengthened the coalition but did not replace ideology. Welfare politics helped centralise political credit and may have strengthened support among beneficiaries. But welfare operates within a broader political narrative. Its electoral effect becomes more understandable when combined with leadership, nationalism, ideology and organisational mobilisation.

Fifth, 2024 modifies rather than destroys the dominance thesis. The decline from 303 to 240 seats is substantial. Yet the BJP's 36.56 percent vote share demonstrates that its national support base remains large. Therefore, the evidence does not justify either extreme conclusion: 'The BJP has lost its dominance' or 'Nothing changed in 2024.' Both are analytically inadequate.

The more defensible conclusion is that 2024 exposed the limits of BJP dominance without eliminating its national centrality.

Major Findings

Finding 1: BJP rise was cumulative rather than sudden. The BJP's 2014 victory was the culmination of a longer process of ideological development, organisational consolidation and electoral experimentation.

Finding 2: Hindutva was an enabling ideological framework, supported by India's Hindu-majority demographic context, while its competitors were comparatively less successful in developing a similarly cohesive ideological framework capable of mobalising Hindu identity; however, the BJP's later success depended on mechanisms extending beyond ideology.

Finding 3: Congress decline created opportunity, but BJP organisation converted opportunity into dominance. The restructuring of political competition created space for the BJP, but the party's organisational and ideological capacities determined its ability to occupy that space.

Finding 4: BJP dominance required social expansion. The party's transformation into a broad national coalition was essential to its 2014 and 2019 victories. The 2019 evidence particularly highlights lower-caste, rural and poorer voters.

Finding 5: Welfare became a reinforcing component of BJP's electoral strategy. Welfare politics strengthened the party's relationship with voters and facilitated centralised attribution of government benefits, but it should not be treated as a sufficient explanation of BJP success.

Finding 6: 2024 demonstrates the difference between dominance and majority. The BJP's 240 seats in 2024, despite a 36.56 percent vote share, demonstrate that strong electoral support does not necessarily produce an independent parliamentary majority.

Limitations: This study has several limitations.

First, it is primarily a qualitative synthesis of existing scholarship and descriptive electoral data. It does not conduct constituency-level statistical modelling.

Second, the paper relies on national-level electoral outcomes. National figures can conceal substantial variation between states and social groups.

Third, several of the major scholarly works used in the study were published before the 2024 election. Their arguments therefore cannot directly incorporate the latest electoral evidence. The present paper addresses this limitation by using 2024 as a test of previously developed interpretations rather than attributing claims about 2024 to scholars who wrote before the election.

Fourth, the paper deliberately focuses on eight core scholarly works and ECI data. A journal submission could strengthen the literature base further by incorporating constituency-level studies, state-specific literature, survey datasets and scholarship published after 2024.

Conclusion: The rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party is one of the defining transformations of India's post-independence party system. Yet the explanation for this transformation cannot be reduced to a single cause.

The evidence examined in this paper suggests that the BJP's rise resulted from the interaction of ideological mobilisation, organisational continuity, social coalition-building and systemic political opportunity. Hindu nationalism supplied a powerful ideological framework, while organisational capacity allowed that framework to be translated into electoral mobilisation. The decline of Congress and the fragmentation of alternative national competition created opportunities, while the BJP's expansion into new social groups enabled it to transform those opportunities into repeated national victories. Modi's leadership and welfare politics subsequently reinforced this broader structure rather than independently creating it.

The electoral trajectory supports this interpretation. The BJP rose from 161 Lok Sabha seats in 1996 to 182 in 1998 and 1999, declined during the 2004 and 2009 elections, then experienced a dramatic transformation with 282 seats in 2014 and 303 in 2019. The 2024 election interrupted the upward movement, reducing the BJP to 240 seats while leaving it with a substantial 36.56 percent vote share.

The meaning of 2024 is therefore more complex than either a narrative of BJP decline or a narrative of uninterrupted dominance permits.

The election demonstrates that electoral predominance is not equivalent to parliamentary autonomy. The BJP remains the largest national political party, but its inability to secure an independent majority in 2024 indicates that its earlier form of single-party parliamentary dominance is not guaranteed to reproduce itself indefinitely.

This distinction leads to the broader conclusion of the paper: the BJP's rise should be understood as the emergence of a powerful national political centre within a still-competitive and territorially differentiated party system, rather than as the permanent disappearance of political competition.

The BJP's future dominance will therefore depend not merely on preserving its national vote share, but on maintaining the organisational, ideological and social coalition that has historically allowed it to convert votes into parliamentary power. The 2024 election suggests that this conversion mechanism has become more contested. In this sense, 2024 does not mark the end of the BJP's rise; it marks a transition from unquestioned electoral ascendancy to a more competitive phase in which the durability of its dominance must once again be demonstrated rather than assumed.

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