THE STUDY OF THE ELECTORAL TRAJECTORY OF BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY IN INDIAN NATIONAL POLITICS FROM 2014 TO 2024

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SUPERVISOR

Dr. Nandini Puri
Assistant Professor

INVESTIGATOR

Pihu Bhardwaj
Roll No. 2209001
Sem. VIII

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This is to certify that **Ms. Pihu Bhardwaj** student of **Bachelor of Arts (Honours with Research) in Political Science Semester VIII, Session 2022-2026**, bearing **Roll No 2209001,** has worked under my supervision on her dissertation entitled**:**

"The study of the Electoral Trajectory of Bharatiya Janata Party in Indian National Politics from 2014 to 2024".

Her dissertation is fit for submission, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree in **Bachelor of Arts (Honours with Research) in Political Science.**

DATE:

(Dr. Nandini Puri)
SUPERVISOR

Head,
School of Social Sciences and Humanities

श्रेष्ठ

B.C. Road Jammu
180 001

Ph.: 0191-2546078,2565098
Fax:0191-2548239

Email:principal@miercollege.in
Website: www.miercollege.in

DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

I hereby declare that the work presented in the dissertation entitled:

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I further declare that the work embodied in the present dissertation:

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LIST OF ABBREVATIONS

BJP -	Bharatiya Janata Party
BJS -	Bharatiya Jana Sangh
RSS -	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
NDA -	National Democratic Alliance
UPA -	United Progressive Alliance
INC -	Indian National Congress
INDIA -	Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance
PM -	Prime Minister
PMJDY -	Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana
PMJJBY -	Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana
PMSBY -	Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana
JAM -	Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, Mobile
DBT -	Direct Benefit Transfer
MGNREGA -	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
NES -	National Election Studies
CSDS -	Centre for the Study of Developing Societies
ORF -	Observer Research Foundation
PRS -	PRS Legislative Research
CAG -	Comptroller and Auditor General
GDP -	Gross Domestic Product
VHP -	Vishwa Hindu Parishad

ABSTRACT

This dissertation critically examines the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) electoral trajectory in Indian national politics from 2014 to 2024, situating its rise within the broader transformation of India's party system. The study interrogates how the BJP evolved from a coalition-dependent actor into a dominant national force, fundamentally reshaping the contours of Indian democracy.

The research argues that the BJP's electoral ascent was not linear , but a product of a confluence of interacting factors: ideological consolidation rooted in Hindutva and Integral Humanism, organizational discipline nurtured through its deep institutional ties with the RSS, leader centric approach, adaptive electioneering techniques including pioneering use of digital technology and strategic sloganeering, welfare politics that forged direct linkages with marginalized voters, and socio-economic conditions that amplified aspirational nationalism.

Employing a qualitative methodology grounded in interpretative analysis of ideology, leadership and electioneering, the study traces the BJP's journey across three critical electoral moments-the watershed victory of 2014, the reinforced dominance of 2019, and the competitive challenge of 2024. Drawing on party system theory, leader-centric elections, and welfare politics it situated these developments within the emergence of what scholars identify as India's "Fourth Party System."

The dissertation further assesses the broader implications of BJP's dominance for Indian political culture while acknowledging the renewed political fragmentation signaled by the 2024 general elections. Ultimately, the study contributes an integrated analytical framework for understanding how organisational innovation, ideological mobilization, and sloganeering and electioneering interact to sustain electoral dominance in the world's largest democracy.

Keywords: Electioneering, Sloganeering, Political Culture, Coalition Politics, Fourth Party System.

Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The period between 2014 to 2024 marks a transformative era in the political landscape of India, characterized by the meteoric rise of and consolidation of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Elections and electoral systems form the foundation of democratic governance, shaping how political parties compete, consolidate power, and represent diverse social interests. In India's complex socio-political environment, electoral outcomes often reflect deeper shifts in ideology, leadership, and voter alignment, making the study of the Bharatiya Janata Party's trajectory both timely and essential. This period witnessed the BJP's evolution from a party on the cusp of national power to a formidable political force that has fundamentally reshaped the contours of Indian Democracy. Its electoral ascent has neither been linear nor attributable to a single cause; rather, it results from the ideological consolidation (notably Hindutva) , organisational strength and networks (especially its ties with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh RSS), charismatic and strategic leadership, adaptive electoral strategies (coalition politics and social engineering), changing socio-economic conditions, communication innovations, and institutional opportunity structures within India's federal polity.

The BJP presents itself as a party grounded in cultural nationalism, economic development, social welfare, and national security with a vision to shape India's future as a strong, unified, and globally influential nation. The party's journey reflects India's complex political evolution. The BJP's journey from its Jana Sangh origins to a dominant national powerhouse is a story of ideological conviction, organizational strength, political resilience, and evolving voter alliances, making it one of the most influential in political discourse of India. This study critically examines the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) electoral trajectory in India's national politics from 2014 to 2024. The BJP's rise from a regional political actor to a dominant national party marks a significant shift in India's political landscape. This period encompasses its coalition-building phase, the Modi-led alteration, and recent electoral challenges.

Understanding this trajectory is crucial to analysing changes in party dynamics, voter base, and the broader implications on Indian democracy.

The rise of BJP is a manifestation of the flexible nature of the Indian political system , the epoch of 1950-60s is described as the “Congress system” by Rajni Kothari which was dominated by a single political force after the end of Congress system regional parties rose with growing regional aspirations leading to the culmination of coalition politics from 1989-2014 but the 2014 general elections outcome with BJP winning 282 seats securing an absolute majority marked a major recalibration in India’s electoral and party system dynamics. Modi’s charismatic leadership significantly altered patterns of political mobilisation and voter perception.The rise and flourishing of BJP is not concentrated on a single factor; it has made its stern place in the Indian political framework with the help of multi-dimensional factors that have strengthened its foundations and its upsurge. The factors are;

1.1.1 Antithesis of the Congress Model

The BJP’s ascent was catalyzed by the decline of the Congress party, depicted as corrupt, elitist, and out of touch. Philosophically, this phase represents a dialectical moment: the BJP’s rise constitutes the antithesis to the Congress thesis, generating a new synthesis-an alternative national vision that strives for the amalgamation of every aspiration, development of every sect with the objective of “Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikaas”

1.1.2 Ideological Resonance: Hindu Nationalism and Integral Humanism

Hindu nationalism, articulated through the philosophy of “Hindutva,” became the BJP’s driving force. Unlike merely religious identification, Hindutva constructs an expansive cultural nationalism, proposing that the Indian nation’s soul lies in Hindu civilization. Deendayal Upadhyaya’s “Integral Humanism” further deepened this ethos, envisioning society as a spiritual organism-one in which holistic development aligns the individual, society, and nation within an indigenous value framework.

The BJP's organisational foundation lies in its relationship with the RSS, which provided disciplined cadres, ideological training and an extensive nationwide network (Anderson & Damle , 2018), The RSS's social service organisations and affiliate groups enabled the BJP to translate ideological sympathy into electoral participation. Local shakas and affiliated organisations worked to consolidate votes through social influence, ensuring consistent presence in constituencies even during periods of electoral defeat.

It emerged as the main opposition to the Congress, becoming the largest party in Parliament by 1996. The BJP formed the government under Vajpayee's leadership multiple times, culminating in the full-term National Democratic Alliance (NDA) rule from 1999 to 2004.Narendra Modi's rise as a national leader marked a new era of BJP domination, leading the party to historic landslide victories in 2014 and 2019.

1.1.3 Charismatic Leadership

The rise of charismatic leaders, especially Narendra Modi, represented the fusion of personal mythology with national aspiration. Modi's narrative-emblematic of self-sacrifice, humble origins, and unwavering resolve-fostered mass identification with the leader as both redeemer and transformer. This was not mere populism; it was projected by supporters as embodying national aspirations. Modi's aura is philosophically situated in the ancient Indian archetype of the righteous, transformative leader-revitalising Rousseau's idea that the great leader "reshapes" the general will in the people's image. Under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee , the party disseminated moderation and inclusiveness, enabling coalition-building during the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) era (Palshikar & Deshpande, 2014). L.K. Advani's leadership ,on the other hand , intensified the party's Hindutva orientation during the Ram Janmabhoomi movement.

Narendra Modi's ascent in 2014 marked a new phase : a charismatic ,centralised, and performance-oriented style that homogenized nationalism with governance promises (Chhibber&Verma, 2018)

1.1.4 Organizational Discipline and Praxeological Action

The BJP's disciplined, cadre-based organisation-nurtured through the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)-exemplifies Max Weber's "routinisation of charisma." The party operationalizes ideology into action with remarkable efficiency, leveraging booth-level micro-management, data-driven campaigning, and grassroots mobilisation. This reflects a genuine fusion of theory and actualisation, wherein abstract political ideas are translated into tangible, lived experience. Through this movement from concept to practice, ideological frameworks become embedded in everyday life, gradually influencing political attitudes and ideological orientations.

1.1.5 Embrace of Economic Modernity

Turning from mere cultural revivalism, the BJP embraced governance reforms, privatization, and development-a modernizing vision tying economic growth to national pride. This "India Rising" narrative infused with optimism, efficacy, and global ambition-resonates with modern political philosophy, where the progress of the nation becomes the ethical imperative, and economic recalibration is equated with collective emancipation.

1.1.6 Saffronisation of The Public Sphere

Through strategic interventions in education, cultural policy, and public rhetoric, the BJP advanced what scholars call "saffronization," recasting India's secular narrative toward one privileging Hindu values, history, and contributions. This was not mere rhetoric; it was the reshaping public discourse and cultural narratives..

1.2 Review of Literature

The related studies have been reviewed under:

1.2.1 Historical Evolution and Ideological Foundations

Association for Asian Studies. (2023) explores the BJP's ideological exportation's philosophical and strategic impact on India's diplomacy, diaspora, and regional politics, highlighting the recalibration of India's global political role.

Sitapati, V. (2021) provides a detailed historical account of the BJP's journey to national power, tracing Hindu nationalism from the 1920s, the founding of the BJP in 1980, and its first national government (1998-2004). Based on newspapers, party documents, private papers, and over 200 interviews, Sitapati unveils the party ideologies, electoral strategies, and pioneering figures shaping India's political landscape before Narendra Modi.

Jaffrelot, C. (2019) theorizes the BJP's shift towards a majoritarian ethnic democracy driven by the RSS and Sangh Parivar, tracing roots to Jan Sangh and the Ram Janmabhoomi movement as crucial for understanding BJP's appeal and organizational strength.

Carnegie Endowment (2019) critiques BJP governance under religious nationalism, analysing policy decisions, institutional shifts, and the challenge to India's secular fabric, reflecting on democratic erosion and the construction of new political hegemonies.

Hansen, T., &Jaffrelot, C. (Eds.). (1998) examines how the BJP systemized Hindu majoritarian thought, amalgamating conservative convictions into a coherent political narrative, linking electoral success to cultural nationalism and identity politics.

1.2.2. Transformative Elections and Shifting Political Systems: The Fourth Party System

Building upon this framework, Vaishnav & Mallory (2024) examine India's post-2014 political trajectory, focusing on the transition from a coalition-based system to a dominant-party configuration. Their analysis suggests that despite the BJP's diminished dominance in 2024, many features of the fourth party system persist. These include the BJP's role as the central organizing force in Indian politics, increasing political centralization, nationalized electioneering, heightened voter mobilization. While the 2024 results point to renewed political fragmentation and regional competition, the BJP remains India's largest party at both national and state levels. The authors contrast this era with the preceding "Third Party System" (1989-2014), which was marked by coalition governments, decentralized politics, and regional party influence. Vaishnav & Mallory (2024) conclude that although the

BJP's dominance has weakened, the party continues to define the contours of India's current political order.

The Modi era (2014-present) has received extensive scholarly attention for its highly personalized leadership style, innovative digital campaigning, and symbolic politics that redefined the BJP's public image. Vaishnav & Mallory (2024) emphasize how these strategies broadened the party's appeal among urban and middle-class voters. Amit Shah's role as the BJP's organizational architect is highlighted as central to the party's sustained electoral success. Recent analyses of the 2019-2024 period note growing governance challenges, rural discontent, unemployment pressures, and the revival of opposition alliances such as the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA). Contemporary media reports, including those by Reuters (2024) and The Guardian (2024), provide valuable context regarding the BJP's regional setbacks and the evolving dynamics of India's political competition.

Sardesai, R. (2014) articulated a comprehensive and engaging account of the landmark 2014 Indian general elections. This election witnessed the dramatic decline of the ruling Indian National Congress and the unprecedented rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which secured a majority on its own for the first time since 1984. Sardesai chronicles the roles of key figures-Narendra Modi, Rahul Gandhi, and Manmohan Singh-and major political developments between 2012 and 2014, including Modi's ascent from Gujarat's leadership, the corruption scandals that weakened the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, and the strategic maneuvers of Modi's campaign team. In his later work Sardesai analyzes the 2024 general elections, highlighting the resurgence of coalition politics after a decade of single-party dominance. He underscores how, despite Prime Minister Modi's successful bid for a third term, the BJP failed to achieve a standalone majority, signaling a significant shift in India's political landscape.

1.2.3 Transformation of the Political Culture

Jaffrelot, C. (2021) highlights the rise of Hindu nationalism situates Hindu nationalism's ascent within India's socio-political evolution, emphasizing the BJP's mobilization of cultural narratives around victimhood, resilience, and renaissance. It discusses the ideological mainstreaming of Hindu conservatism ("banal Hindutva")

impacting secularism, social cohesion, and political contestation in contemporary India.

Chhibber, P. K., & Verma, R. (2018) provides a comprehensive academic analysis of the 2014 landslide election that gave the BJP a decisive majority, marking a shift from coalition to dominant party politics in India. It traces the evolution of leadership from Jawaharlal Nehru's consensus-building approach focused on inclusivity and communal harmony, to Narendra Modi's personalized, centralized governance model employing populist and divisive rhetoric. The study highlights how Indian electoral politics shifted from party-based to leader-centric campaigning, with Modi's persona nearly inseparable from the BJP's identity.

Palshikar, S. (2015) highlighted the shift toward presidential-style campaigns focusing on individual leadership over collective party identity. Chhibber, P., & Verma, R. (2018) demonstrate the BJP's effective nationalization of state elections, disrupting traditional regional political autonomy.

Chakravartty, P., & Roy, S. (2015) explored that Modi's 2014 campaign marked a paradigm shift with over 400 rallies and the personalized slogan "Ab ki baar, Modi sarkar," effectively rebranding the party. This approach rebranded the BJP with Modi as the face of development, good governance, and anti-corruption. Utilizing advanced technology, social media, and innovative communication strategies, the campaign reached millions across demographics, particularly engaging young and first-time voters. Modi's image as a strong, credible, and incorruptible leader was amplified through professional marketing and meticulously planned rallies, ultimately securing a historic electoral victory for the BJP.

Hansen (1999) explains the BJP's evolution from the Jan Sangh's early cultural nationalism focusing on Hindu identity to a broader ideology blending Hindu nationalism with development rhetoric. Founded in 1951, the Jan Sangh emphasized cultural nationalism and Indigenous values. Over time, the BJP incorporated economic development and governance themes to widen its appeal. This ideological shift allowed the BJP to transition from a narrow identity-based party to a major political force by combining cultural pride with promises of economic progress,

enabling it to effectively mobilize diverse voter bases and emerge as a dominant player in Indian politics.

1.2.4. Electioneering Techniques - Technology, Sloganeering and Organization

1.2.4.1 Technology

Pal, S., Chandra, Y., &Vydiswaran, V. G. (2017) documents BJP's pioneering role in using digital technology to transform Indian political communication, creating a "social media election" model. BJP's IT cell emerged as a blueprint for effective digital campaign management, leveraging social media for voter mobilization and branding

Chadha, K., & Guha, P. (2016) provide a nuanced analysis of BJP's dual messaging strategy -positive development-focused messaging personified by Modi contrasted with aggressive negative campaigning by party machinery against opposition leaders. This approach enabled BJP to maintain a polished leader image while conducting fierce political battles through digital channels.

1.2.4.2 Sloganeering

Udupa, S. (2019) states that contemporary political sloganeering in India must also be understood within the broader context of digital communication technologies that have amplified the reach and persuasive capacity of campaign messaging across social media platforms.

Jaffrelot, C. (2015) states that the emergence of Narendra Modi as the central figure in the electoral campaigns of the Bharatiya Janata Party marked a significant transformation in the nature of sloganeering in India, with campaign slogans such as *"Abki Baar Modi Sarkar"* functioning as instruments of leader-centric mobilisation.

Kaviraj, S. (2010) states that political communication in India has historically relied on simplified symbolic expressions that translate complex ideological commitments into accessible narratives for a socially diverse electorate. In this context, slogans have functioned not merely as rhetorical devices but as strategic instruments through which political actors construct legitimacy and mobilise voters across linguistic, regional, and class divisions.

Hasan, Z. (2009) states that the campaign messaging strategies adopted during the period of the United Progressive Alliance governments emphasised inclusive development and welfare-based legitimacy through the symbolic category of the "aamaadmi." Palshikar (2017) similarly argues that the Congress party attempted to reconstruct broad electoral coalitions through slogans that fore grounded rights-based welfare programmes such as employment guarantees and food security initiatives. Chhibber & Verma(2018) further state that such campaign messaging represented a programmatic strategy aimed at reinforcing redistributive governance narratives rather than relying primarily on personalised leadership appeals.

Guha, R. (2007) argues that early political sloganeering in India reflected the priorities of a developmental state seeking to mobilise citizens around nation-building objectives in the decades following independence. Khilnani (1997) similarly suggests that campaign messaging during the early post-independence period helped construct a symbolic relationship between the state and citizens by embedding governance priorities within emotionally resonant national narratives. The slogan *"Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan,"* articulated by Lal Bahadur Shastri, therefore represented a developmental-nationalist framework linking agricultural productivity with national security and citizen participation in state-led transformation.

Brass, P. (1994) states that the electoral slogan *"GaribiHatao"* introduced under the leadership of Indira Gandhi marked a turning point in Indian electoral communication by shifting the focus of political mobilisation toward leadership-centred appeals directed at economically marginalised groups. Guha (2007) further argues that this slogan strengthened the direct communicative relationship between the central leadership and disadvantaged voters, thereby recalibration electoral alignments during the 1971 general election and reinforcing the role of personalised campaign messaging in Indian politics.

1.2.4.3 Organisation

Jaffrelot, C., & Verniers, G. (2020) posited distinct features of BJP's campaigns including personalization around Modi, nationalist themes post-Pulwama, unprecedented campaign spending, and sophisticated grassroots election machinery.

Prabhu, N. (2020) explores how the post-liberalization middle class became central to India's electoral politics through synchronization with BJP's pro-growth and pro-Hindu narrative, with Modi's media management transforming them into an enthusiastic voter base reflecting their aspirations and anxieties.

Suri, K. C. (2019) articulates a political science perspective on the decisive 2019 election, highlighting BJP's expansion into new regions through charismatic leadership, strategic alliances, effective caste arithmetic, and mobilization of new voter groups such as women, the poor, and youth. It details BJP's rise from regional to pan-Indian dominance and the emergence of a one-party dominant system.

Naqvi, S. (2018) offers an insider account of the BJP's evolution from a politically isolated party to India's dominant force, highlighting the role of the RSS cadre, ideology calibration, political finance, and personality cults around Vajpayee and Modi through two decades of reporting.

1.2.5 Welfare Politics

Sharma, S., & Kanojia, A. (2022) explains how Modi's government implemented 'new welfarism' programs creating direct links between the central government and marginalized voters. This approach helped BJP gain electoral advantage despite earlier criticisms of welfare "handouts" under the previous UPA regime.

Deshpande, R., Tillin, L., & Kailash, K. K. (2019) used data from the 2019 National Election Studies (NES) to assess how welfare schemes influenced voting behaviour. It shows a marked shift in voters crediting the central government, particularly BJP's new schemes like Ujjwala and Jan Dhan Yojana. Even older Congress-era schemes such as MGNREGA and Awas Yojana became associated with the central government under BJP's leadership. Beneficiaries of Ujjwala, Jan Dhan, and Awas were more likely to vote BJP, while recipients of pensions or MGNREGA were less likely to do so.

1.3 Research Gap

Despite the expanding scholarship on the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party, several important analytical gaps remain insufficiently addressed, particularly in relation to its transformation between 2014 and 2024.

Existing literature has examined the historical evolution of the BJP largely through ideological or organisational lenses, but relatively fewer studies provide an integrated framework linking its early electoral trajectory with its transition into a dominant national party after 2014. Much of the scholarship treats the pre-2014 and post-2014 phases separately rather than analysing them as part of a continuous structural transformation within India's party system.

Although scholars such as Christophe Jaffrelot and Milan Vaishnav have examined ideological mobilisation and organisational expansion, fewer studies analyse how leadership centric approach interacted simultaneously with the use of innovative electioneering including sloganeering and employment of welfare politics sustained electoral advantage across multiple election cycles between 2014 and 2024.

Existing research on the BJP's rise has primarily focused on electoral performance and ideological expansion, but comparatively less attention has been paid to the broader implications of this dominance for India's political culture.

Finally, the electoral outcome of 2024 has only recently begun to be analysed in academic literature, and there remains a limited scholarly assessment of how emerging coalition adjustments and competitive pressures may reshape the trajectory of BJP dominance in the coming decade. This study addresses this gap by situating the 2024 election within the longer arc of the party's transformation since 2014.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in an integrated theoretical framework drawing on four bodies of scholarship: party system theory, the presidentialisation theory, mediatization theory, and models of welfare-based political legitimacy. Each framework is applied to a specific dimension of the BJP's electoral trajectory rather than invoked decoratively.

Party system theory, developed by Giovanni Sartori (1976) and extended by Peter Mair (1997), provides the structural scaffolding for this study. Sartori's distinction between competitive multiparty systems and dominant-party configurations - in which one party consistently outperforms all others without suppressing competition - is directly applicable to India's post-2014 political order. His observation that dominant parties sustain themselves through organisational depth, ideological coherence, and strategic alliance management allows this study to analyse the BJP as a systemic actor reshaping the rules of party competition, not merely an electoral winner. Yogendra Yadav's periodisation of Indian electoral history, extended by Milan Vaishnav's identification of a "Fourth Party System" after 2014, operationalises this framework for the Indian context.

The presidentialisation theory, articulated by Poguntke and Webb (2005), argues that parliamentary democracies have undergone a structural shift in which executive power concentrates around party leaders who campaign as personalised brands and govern through centralised authority. This framework explains the BJP's decisive move from coalition-era bargaining under Vajpayee toward the leader-centric electoral machine Modi built after 2014 -and why that mode of campaigning permanently altered voter expectations, forcing opposition parties by 2019 to replicate the presidential logic rather than contest it.

Media driven politics, as applied to South Asia by Udupa (2019), holds that the logic of digital platforms progressively shapes political communication, rewarding leader-centric, emotionally calibrated, and intermediary-bypassing forms of messaging. This framework is used to analyse the BJP's digital infrastructure not merely as a campaigning tool but as a structural reconfiguration of the political communication environment that widened the party's competitive advantage between 2014 and 2024.

Welfare legitimacy models, drawing on Tillin (2020), Sircar (2022), and Deshpande, Kailash (2019), distinguish between entitlement-based welfare - which generates diffuse political credit - and targeted, branded, directly transferred welfare, which creates traceable linkages between specific beneficiaries and a named political actor. This distinction is central to understanding why BJP-era schemes generated stronger electoral returns than their UPA predecessors, and why those returns began eroding by 2024 when voter expectations shifted from access to economic mobility.

Together, these frameworks are applied in combination rather than sequence across the analytical chapters: party system theory at the macro level, presidentialisation for the leadership dimension, mediatization for communication strategy, and welfare legitimacy for the mobilisation of new voter constituencies. Their integration enables the study to treat BJP dominance as a multidimensional phenomenon rather than reducing it to any single cause.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study of the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) electoral trajectory from 2014 to 2024 is significant because it captures a transformative period in Indian democracy, marked by the party's transition from a coalition partner to a dominant national force. This period witnessed the consolidation of Hindu nationalist ideology, the rise of leader centric elections, and the innovative use of sloganeering and welfare politics, all of which have reshaped the contours of Indian politics. Understanding this trajectory provides critical insights into the evolving nature of party systems and the broader implications for the political culture of India. The research addresses an analytical gap by integrating descriptive electoral data with qualitative interpretation of leadership, welfare politics and electioneering particularly sloganeering offering a holistic analysis of the BJP's rise and the challenges visible by 2024.

1.6 Research Objectives

The research objectives of the study are as follows,

1. To facilitate a comprehensive framework to study the electoral trajectory of BJP.
2. To outline the historical trajectory of BJP from its early electoral performance to its emergence as the dominant national party.
3. To examine the transition from coalition politics to the majoritarian era, particularly after 2014 and 2019 elections
4. To study the use of electioneering techniques, particularly sloganeering & employing welfare politics to gain political leverage by the BJP.

1.7 Research Questions

1. How can the electoral trajectory of the BJP be explained through its historical evolution from its early parliamentary performance to its emergence as the dominant national party after 2014?

2. How has the rise of the BJP changed the political culture of India?

3. How do the electioneering techniques of the BJP, particularly sloganeering and employing welfare politics, provide it political leverage over other political parties?

1.8 Research Methodology

This study follows a qualitative research methodology with interpretative analysis that has been applied to secondary sources - books, journal articles, and research reports. This method involves identifying key recurring themes across the academic literature and using them to structure the analysis. The main themes identified in this study are: leader centric elections,welfare politics and innovative electioneering techniques These themes form the backbone of the analysis across all chapters. Descriptive Data Interpretation has also been used to analyse electoral statistics drawn from the Election Commission of India. Figures such as seat counts in Lok Sabha elections vote share percentagesare used throughout the dissertation to support arguments and illustrate trends. However, the study does not perform any statistical calculations - the numbers are used descriptively, to give factual grounding to the qualitative arguments being made.

Primary Sources

The primary sources of this study include Election Commission of India reports, BJP manifestos (2014, 2019, and 2024), campaign speeches of Narendra Modi and senior BJP leaders, digital campaign material, official policy documents, welfare scheme announcements, and NITI Aayog (2024) reports. These sources are used to analyse electoral performance, ideological framing, welfare politics, leadership centric approach andsloganeering across successive election cycles.

Secondary Sources

Secondary sources comprise books, journal articles on Indian party politics, , and the BJP's electioneering techniques. The study explores reports and policy briefs from different research institutions such as CSDS, ORF, PRS, and Carnegie Endowment, etc.These materials contextualise the BJP's transformation within broader political, technological, and cultural shifts.

1.9 Delimitation of the Study

This study is delimited to an examination of the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party within the context of Indian national politics from 2004 to 2024, with particular emphasis on the Lok Sabha elections of 2014, 2019, and 2024. The research primarily focuses on the BJP's electoral strategies, leadership projection, ideological positioning, welfare politics, electioneering techniques.

The study is further delimited to the analysis of national-level electoral politics and does not undertake an extensive examination of state assembly elections, regional party dynamics, or constituency-specific variations except where they directly contribute to understanding the BJP's national electoral consolidation. While other political parties such as the Indian National Congress and select opposition formations are discussed, they are examined primarily in relation to their responses to the BJP's political strategies rather than as independent subjects of analysis.

The research predominantly relies on secondary sources, including scholarly literature, election reports, party manifestos, policy documents and academic analyses. It does not include primary fieldwork, interviews, or survey-based empirical investigation. Additionally, the study focuses primarily on political and electoral dimensions of the BJP's rise and does not provide an exhaustive socio-economic or anthropological analysis of Indian society.

Finally, the study confines itself to analysing the BJP's rise within the democratic and electoral framework of contemporary India and does not attempt a comparative analysis with political parties or party systems in other countries.

1.10 Chapterisation

Chapter 1- Introduction

This chapter introduces the research topic, objectives, and questions, and explains the significance of studying the BJP's electoral trajectory. It reviews existing literature on ideology, leadership, and digital politics, and outlines the qualitative and interpretive research design, data sources, and analytical framework guiding the study.

Chapter 2 - Winds of Change: The BJP's Rise andthe Spirit of 2014

This chapter examines the 2014 general elections, analysing factors behind the BJP's historic rise and its strategic manoeuvring in the complex political scenario of 2014, It explores how it leveraged through personalisation of politics ,ideological consolidation , welfare narratives and electioneering techniques - (organisation and campaigns) and became a dominant political player in the Indian political landscape and how the deployment of these techniques transformed the political culture of India.

Chapter 3-Echoes Of Continuity: The BJP's Rejuvenationand the Spirit of 2019

This chapter studies the 2019 general elections, focusing on continuity in messaging, welfare expansion, and emotional mobilisation. It analyses how transformed electioneering techniques and welfare politics strengthened the BJP's dominance despite challenges and opposition alliances, reinforcing its position as India's central political force .It also delves into improvised use of sloganeering and technology by BJP.

Chapter 4 - Challenge of 2024

This chapter examines the 2024 general elections as a moment of recalibration in the Bharatiya Janata Party's decade long dominance . It analyzes the reduced parliamentary seat share of the party , the resurgence of opposition coordination through the INDIA alliance , economic and agrarian challenges , and the limits of leadership-centred and ideologically driven campaign strategies. The chapter also assesses the implications of these developments for Indian democracy , including the

presidentialisation of elections , the centralisation of power and digitization of political discourse.

Chapter 5 - Electoral Trajectory and Emerging Directions

This chapter summarises the key findings of the study on the electoral journey of the Bharatiya Janata Party from 2014 to 2024 in India. It highlights the role of leadership, welfare politics, ideology, and digital communication in shaping the party's electoral performance . It also briefly discusses the challenges visible in the 2024 general elections and the return of stronger political competition. Finally, the chapter suggests directions for future research on digital politics and changing voter behaviour in contemporary India.

1.11 Implications and Conclusion

This study offers a comprehensive understanding of the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) electoral trajectory from 2014 to 2024, a period that has redefined India's political landscape. By integrating descriptive electoral data with qualitative analysis of ideology, leadership, and communication strategies, the research examines how the BJP transformed from a coalition-era political contender into a ruling force shaping India's democratic ethos. The study assesses how technological innovations, welfare politics, and cultural narratives contributed to the BJP's consolidation of power and the partial resurgence of the multi-party system in 2024. Ultimately, this research contributes to the academic understanding of how electoral strategies and ideological frameworks interact to shape political culture, democratic behaviour, and governance in contemporary India.

Chapter II

Winds of Change: The BJP's Rise and the Spirit of 2014

2.1 Introduction

The BJP's historic election triumph in 2014 put a decisive end to the coalition period by securing the first parliamentary single-party majority in three decades, winning 282 seats and a total of 335 with NDA(National Democratic Alliance). No party had achieved such a milestone since 1984, when the Congress Party won a landslide victory in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination. The BJP's subsequent general election victory in 2019 only bolstered its numbers, cementing it as the new dominant party (Vaishnav and Mallory, 2024). It brought Indian politics into the epoch of the "Fourth party System' drawing upon the framework devised by Yogendra Yadav to periodize India's electoral history into distinct phases-first (Congress dominance, 1952-1967), second (coalition era, 1967-1989), and third (post-Mandal multipolarity, 1989-2014)-arguing each shift reflects new patterns in outcomes and determinants. His 1999 paper *"Electoral Politics in the Time of Change: India's Third Electoral System, 1989-99"* formalized this framework, which later scholars like Milan Vaishnav extended to a "fourth" system post-2014 shaped by BJP dominance. The Fourth Party system with BJP as its defining force. It was markedly distinct from its predecessors it introduced new characteristics that redefined power dynamics within of Indian electoralpolitics its superior party machinery, funding, digital outreach, and messaging blend Hindu nationalism with 'new developmentalism', Prime Minister's leadership centralised this appeal by combining developmental nationalism with cultural collectivism, positioning the BJP in contrast to the Congress Party's historically secular-pluralist framework.

2.1.1. Historical Foundations of BJP and its Expansion

The BJP evolved from the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), established in 1951 by Syama Prasad Mookerjee as the political wing of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).(Bipan Chandra , 2000).

The political upheavals of the 1970s, particularly the Emergency imposed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi from 1975 to 1977, galvanized opposition forces

leading to the formation of the Janata Party, a coalition that included the Jana Sangh. The Janata Party successfully defeated Congress in 1977, marking a significant democratic moment. However, internal strife arose, especially concerning the dual membership of some leaders with the RSS, which led to the disintegration of the Janata coalition. In 1980, veterans of the Jana Sangh, including Atal Bihari Vajpayee and L.K. Advani, formed the Bharatiya Janata Party to revive and rebrand the nationalist cause, retaining the RSS ideological links but also adopting Gandhian socialism frameworks to expand electoral appeal.

The historical trajectory of the BJP's rise must be situated within the broader evolution of post-Congress-system party competition in India, struggling to expand its support base beyond its traditional urban, upper-caste Hindu base between 1951 and 1971 (Mitra,2007). The reconstitution of the Jana Sangh as the BJP in 1980 marked the beginning of a long journey toward electoral prominence. Initially, the party faced significant challenges in establishing itself as a credible alternative to Congress dominance, securing only two seats in the 1984 Lok Sabha elections. However, the late 1980s witnessed a dramatic shift in the BJP's electoral fortunes, as the party thrived on changing social dynamics, religious mobilization, and the weakening of Congress hegemony due to leadership vacuum (Hill , 2019).

The period between 1989 and 1991 represented a critical juncture in the BJP's electoral development. The party's vote share increased dramatically, rising from 7.74% in 1984 and 11.36% in 1989 to 20.1% in 1991, establishing it as a major force in national politics. This electoral breakthrough was closely linked to the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, the pivotal socio-political movement that is closely associated with the rise of BJP centered around the construction of Temple of Lord Rama at Ayodhya which is believed to be his birthplace, this movement spurred Hindu Nationalist sentiments. The movement gathered significant momentum in the late 1980s, gradually transforming from a primarily religious mobilisation into a powerful political force that foregrounded issues of Hindu identity and national pride, thereby exerting a profound influence on India's electoral politics (Jaffrelot , 1996; Hansen , 1999). This transformation also strengthened the BJP's capacity to construct new and durable social coalitions by mobilising Hindu nationalist sentiments across diverse social groups. In particular, the party adopted a strategy of strategic fragmentation within the broader framework of Indian party politics, which enabled it

to expand its electoral base beyond its traditional upper-caste support and incorporate backward castes and other marginalised communities into its political fold (Kohli & Singh, 2013). The 1990s marked the BJP's transition from an opposition party to a governing force, culminating in its first national government in 1996, although briefly, followed by a more stable coalition government from 1998 to 2004 winning 182 seats in the 1999 general elections emerging as the single largest majority party culminating to Atal Bihari Vajpayee's reign .This era of coalition politics demonstrated the BJP's ability to moderate its ideological positions and work within India's federal structure, even as it continued to pursue its core agenda of Hindu nationalism (Pai,2007). The party's electoral performance during this period reflected both its growing acceptance as a mainstream political force and the fragmentation of India's party system into a more competitive, multi-polar configuration.

2.1.2 The Debacle of 2004

Despite widespread expectations of re-election, the Bharatiya Janata Party suffered a significant setback in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, securing only 138 seats and thereby weakening its position at the national level under Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The party entered the elections with considerable confidence, largely driven by the "India Shining" campaign, which emphasised economic growth, infrastructure development, and India's rising international profile. However, this growth-centric narrative failed to resonate with large sections of rural and economically disadvantaged voters, many of whom experienced limited material improvement despite broader claims of national prosperity (Jaffrelot, 2003).

In contrast, the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance successfully consolidated regional alliances and framed the electoral discourse around welfare and access-oriented governance. This broader coalition-building strategy enabled the opposition to mobilise discontent against the ruling National Democratic Alliance across diverse voter groups (Roy &Sopariwala, 2019). Consequently, the 2004 electoral outcome exposed the limitations of a narrowly growth-oriented campaign that appeared disconnected from the everyday socio-economic realities of a substantial section of the electorate.

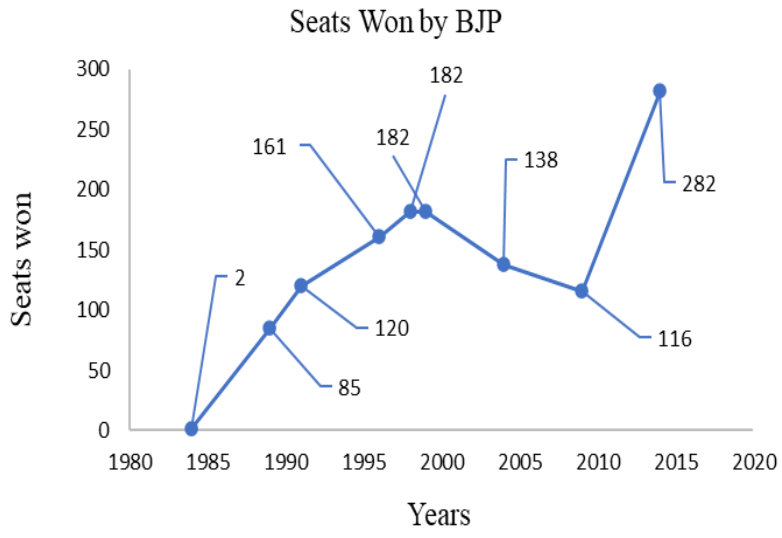
As scholars such as Jaffrelot (2007) and Kohli (2013) suggest, the 2004 defeat compelled the BJP to rethink its electoral messaging and organisational strategy,

ultimately shaping the conditions that made the leadership-centred campaign of 2014 possible. Ramachandra Guha (2017) similarly posits that the electoral loss of 2004 paved the way for a significant realignment of the BJP's electoral strategies. These recalibrated and rejuvenated strategies eventually contributed to the unprecedented rise of the BJP in subsequent electoral cycles.

2.2 The Spirit of 2014

The 2014 general elections marked a watershed moment in Indian electoral history, as the BJP secured an outright majority of 282 seats in the Lok Sabha for the first time, ending three decades of coalition governments. This electoral victory signaled the emergence of what scholars have termed India's "Fourth Party System", characterized by BJP dominance and the marginalization of the Congress party (Schakel et al., 2019). The magnitude of this transformation became even more apparent in 2019, when the BJP not only retained power but increased its majority, leading analysts to suggest the formation of a "second dominant party system" centered around the BJP's new social coalition (Chhibber & Verma, 2019).

Figure 2.1: Seats Won by the Bharatiya Janata Party in Lok Sabha Elections (1984-2014)



Source: Data compiled from Election Commission of India statistical reports (1984-2014).

The figure illustrates the trajectory of the Bharatiya Janata Party's parliamentary performance across successive Lok Sabha elections. From a marginal presence in 1984, the party steadily expanded its electoral base during the 1990s before emerging as the dominant national political force after 2014.

2.2.1 The Political Scenario of 2014

This epoch of the Indian politics was engulfed by several challenges that leveraged the rise of Bharatiya Janata Party as a major political player , these factors are;

2.2.1.1 Anti-Incumbency Wave

Anti-incumbency represents a structural dynamic in Indian politics where voters punish ruling parties through their electoral choices. Lee (2020) highlights the Centralization of Political Parties, Anti-Defection Rules, Weak Legislative Institutions, Leadership-Centered Power Structures and Lack of Visible Performance or Position-Taking are factors contributing to negative incumbency effects in India. The electoral transformation of 2014 was fundamentally driven by a powerful anti-incumbency wave against the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government.

By 2012-2013, India's GDP growth had fallen to approximately 4.5%, the lowest rate in a decade, earning the unfortunate moniker of being part of the "Fragile Five" emerging economies. Multiple factors contributed to this slowdown, including the lingering effects of the 2008 global financial crisis, rising global commodity prices, domestic policy uncertainties, and structural bottlenecks in infrastructure and manufacturing. Inflation remained persistently high, with the Consumer Price Index averaging around 10% during 2012-2013, severely eroding the purchasing power of ordinary citizens, particularly the poor and lower-middle class who spent disproportionate shares of their income on food and fuel (Mohaddes & Raissi, 2014).

Mitra & Verick (2013) highlight unemployment and youth disillusionment; perhaps most politically consequential was the employment crisis, particularly among educated youth. Despite India's demographic dividend-with more than half the

population under 25-the economy was failing to generate sufficient quality employment opportunities.

Corruption scandals during the second United Progressive Alliance (UPA) term (2009-2014) played a decisive role in intensifying anti-incumbency sentiment and delegitimizing the Congress-led government, thereby creating favourable political conditions for the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) electoral ascent in 2014. These scandals not only exposed systemic weaknesses in governance but also reshaped public perceptions of political accountability and leadership credibility.

The 2G spectrum allocation scandal (2010) emerged as the most emblematic case. The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) estimated that the allocation of spectrum licenses at outdated prices, instead of through competitive bidding, resulted in a presumptive loss of ₹1.76 lakh crore (Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2010).

The coal block allocation controversy (Coalgate) further deepened the crisis of credibility. The CAG's 2012 report estimated losses of ₹1.86 lakh crore arising from discretionary allocation of coal blocks between 2004 and 2009.

Anna Hazare-led the anti-corruption movement (2011-2012) crystallized public anger and brought corruption to the centre of national political discourse (Sitapati , 2011)

As Chhibber & Verma (2018) argue, anti-incumbency alone cannot explain the 2014 outcome; rather, it interacted with leadership projection and organisational consolidation to produce a structural electoral shift.

All these incidents interacted with other potent factors that led to the rise of BJP as a dominant political party in the Indian political landscape.

2.3 The Strategic Positioning of the Bharatiya Janata Party

BJP strategically maneuvered the ambiguities to electoral opportunity, it channelised its electoral potential and posed itself as the most suitable alternative to Congress.

2.3.1 Leader-centric approach

The positioning of leader as the central component of politics -defined as the increasing concentration of political authority, electoral appeal, and public legitimacy in the figure of a single leader rather than the party or its ideology-has been extensively theorised in comparative politics. Thomas Poguntke and Paul Webb (2005) argue that parliamentary democracies across the world have undergone a structural 'presidentialisation' in which executive power becomes concentrated in party leaders who increasingly bypass collective party structures. This framework, originally developed for Western European democracies, has been productively applied to post-liberalisation India, where the rise of televisual media, professionalised campaign management, and weakened party organisations have all reinforced leader-centric politics.

Mukhopadhyay (2023) extensively highlights the tendency of the BJP's decision to project Narendra Modi as its prime ministerial candidate well before the elections was a strategic move. Modi brought several advantages:

a) a reputation as an administrator and development-focused leader from his tenure as Gujarat Chief Minister since 2001

b) an image of decisive leadership that contrasted with UPA's perceived weakness, humble origins that connected him with common voters, exceptional oratorical skills, and high energy for intensive campaigning

Narendra Modi's campaign systematically built his image as a strong, development-oriented leader who could transform India. His personal narrative-from humble origins as a tea-seller's son to chief minister and then prime ministerial candidate-reinforced themes of aspiration and meritocracy. His reputation for hard work, simple living, and total dedication to public service contrasted with perceptions of dynastic entitlement in the Gandhi family and corruption in the political class generally (Jaffrelot, 2021)

Weber (2009) conceptualized the routinization of charismatic authority the "Modi Wave" in Indian Politics demonstrates how personal charisma, when effectively mobilized through modern campaign techniques and aligned with

favorable political conditions, can fundamentally reshape democratic outcomes in contemporary India (Jaffrelot , 2015). He further elaborates three reasons that led to the "Modi Wave"

1. Between 2004 and 2014, he came under intense public scrutiny during the UPA era, yet he managed to withstand multiple legal challenges. This perceived political targeting sparked widespread sympathy, as many viewed the UPA leadership as corrupt and desperate to retain power.

2. His humble roots helped craft a larger-than-life persona. Coming from an ordinary family and outside elite circles, he connected emotionally with people who saw in him their own struggles and aspirations.

3. Modi's political rise shows how he began as a grassroots messenger of ideas, steadily shaping a vision that he could claim as uniquely his own.

Narendra Modi's charisma strengthened perceptions of electoral winnability and reshaped voter expectations regarding leadership effectiveness. Chhibber and Ostermann (2014) elaborate the "Modi effect'' as a candidate-centric phenomenon in India's 2014 elections, where Narendra Modi's projected winnability drew disproportionate "vote mobilizers"-non-partisan influencers who persuade undecided voters-resulting in the BJP's landslide despite stagnant core party loyalty.

2.3.2 Ideological Consolidation

The central component of BJP's ideology was Hindutva but ideology alone has not defined BJP's electoral success, its ability to maneuver it strategically to contextual realities has given it a leverage over other political parties. The BJP's ideological and strategic trajectory is identified as a pattern of "strategic oscillation" between ideological militancy and pragmatic moderation (Jaffrelot,1996).

The relationship between the BJP and the broader Sangh Parivar-the family of Hindu nationalist organizations led by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)-has been fundamental in understanding of the party's ideological consistency and organizational strength. The RSS, established in 1925, functions as the ideological and organizational backbone of Hindu nationalism, providing the BJP with a

disciplined cadre base, definite organisational structure and a coherent worldview that galvanizes electoral politics (Jaffrelot, 1998). This organizational ecosystem, which includes the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Bajrang Dal, and educational networks that has enabled the BJP to maintain ideological continuity and validity while adapting its political strategies to changing circumstances.

The philosophical articulation of the party's worldview was most comprehensively developed by Deendayal Upadhyaya through his concept of "Integral Humanism", which proposed an alternative to both Western capitalism and socialism by emphasizing dharma-based governance and organic conceptions of society entrenched in Hindu civilization .This ideological framework provided the BJP with a distinct political identity, differentiating it from the secular nationalism of the Indian National Congress and positioning it as the political voice of Hindu cultural nationalism. The Ramjanambhoomi movement played a pivotal role catalyzing the electoral journey of the BJP. The movement was backed by ideology and a vision of evoking Hindu nationalist sentiments, as discussed earlier.

The Ram Janmabhoomi movement exemplifies the BJP's strategic use of what Hansen (1999) posits is the "vernacularization of Hindutva" the ability to translate abstract ideological principles into locally resonant symbols, narratives, and practices.

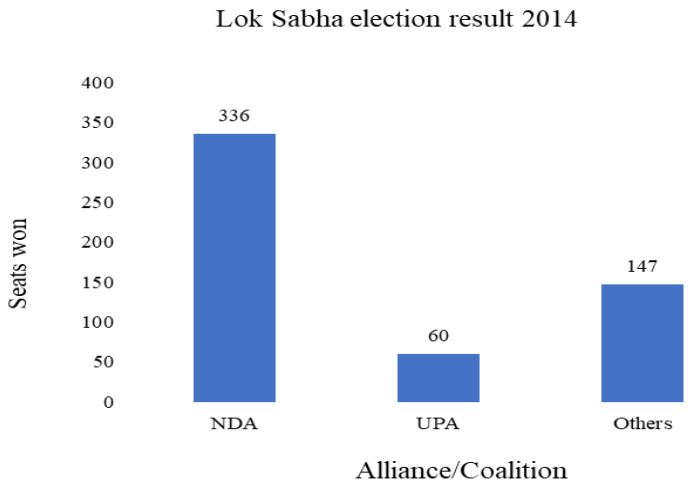
The period of coalition politics from 1996 to 2004 tested the BJP's capacity for ideological flexibility without renouncing its core commitments. When the party first came to power in 1996 and later formed a stable government from 1998 to 2004 under Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, it demonstrated what scholars have termed "inclusion-moderation," wherein participation in government and coalition-building necessitated behavioural moderation even as core ideological commitments remained intact. This approach concentrated its support to upper-caste delineating it from a broader electoral base. As a result, The BJP leadership adopted a more watered-down version of Hindu nationalism Kumar (2020) highlights the five commitments that BJP adopted to adapt to the contextual realities ; (1) nationalism; (2) national integration, (3) democracy, (4) positive secularism, and (5) value-based politics. The important point here is that the BJP leadership molded their principles and strategies for maximum electoral effect, which includes heretofore neglected non-

Hindus. The BJP was born as a result of electoral politics and not as a result of ideology.

This ideological factor that acted as a catalyst for the rise of BJP , that gradually ended its dormancy and made it a dominant political party in the landscape of Indian Politics.

The turning point is 2014 which paved the way for a new party system in the Indian political system

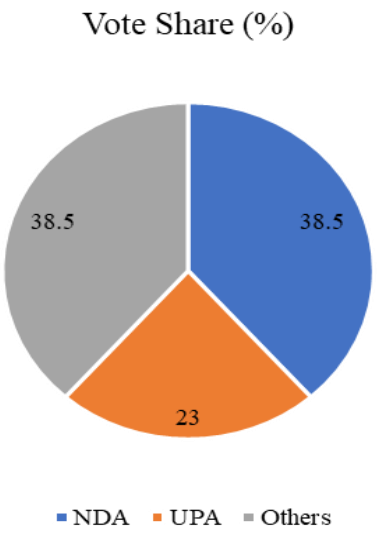
Figure 2.2: Seats won by Alliance/Coalitions in the 2014 General Elections



Source :Election Commission of India, Statistical Report on General Elections to the Lok Sabha, 2014

The seat distribution in the 2014 Lok Sabha election reflects the decisive parliamentary majority secured by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), marking a significant shift in India's electoral politics after a decade of coalition-led governance under the United Progressive Alliance (UPA).

Figure 2.3: Coalition-wise Vote Share in the 2014 Lok Sabha Election (Percentage)



Source :. Election Commission of India, Statistical Report on General Elections to the Lok Sabha, 2014

The coalition-wise vote share in the 2014 Lok Sabha election reflects the emergence of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) as the dominant electoral bloc with over thirty-eight percent of the national vote share. In contrast, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) experienced a significant decline compared to previous elections, indicating a shift in voter preferences toward the NDA. At the same time, the continued presence of regional and non-aligned parties with a substantial share of votes demonstrates that India's party system retained its multi-party character despite the decisive mandate received by the NDA.

2.3.3 Welfare Politics

The BJP government's approach to welfare politics after 2014 has been characterised by a distinctive model of 'scheme politics'- the deliberate design and branding of welfare programmesas Narendra Modi's personal gifts to the poor.

The phenomena popularly described as the "Modi wave" of 2014 marked a pivotal expansion of the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) voter base beyond its traditional upper-caste, urban Hindu constituency, thrusted by Narendra Modi's charismatic fusion of development rhetoric.

The BJP capitalised on widespread perceptions of corruption and inefficiency in welfare delivery under the UPA government, particularly in the aftermath of high-profile scandals such as the 2G spectrum and coal allocation cases. This contributed to a shift in voter sentiment toward governance-oriented and market-friendly preferences (Devesh Kapur & Milan Vaishnav, 2018). Narendra Modi's projection of the "Gujarat model" as a symbol of administrative efficiency and development appealed strongly to aspirational voters disillusioned with entitlement-based welfare policies (Jaffrelot, 2015).

The recalibration of the welfare politics can be studied through the JAM trinity framework.

2.3.3.1 The Jam Trinity and Public Service Delivery

Kapur & Vaishnav (2018) note that the BJP's post-2014 welfare strategy represents a significant transformation in India's political economy of redistribution. Rather than relying primarily on entitlement-based provisioning mediated through local bureaucracies and party networks, the Modi government reorganized welfare around technology-enabled, targeted delivery. At the core of this restructuring lay the JAM Trinity-Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, and Mobile-which together created the institutional infrastructure for Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT). By integrating financial inclusion, biometric identification, and digital connectivity, the state strengthened its "infrastructural power," enabling direct engagement with citizens while bypassing intermediaries historically associated with patronage and leakage. Through JAM, over ₹43 lakh crore has been transferred, while nearly ₹3.5 lakh crore in leakages were reportedly curtailed, indicating enhanced fiscal and administrative capacity in welfare governance. The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) institutionalized financial inclusion as a political-economic tool. Launched in August 2014, it rapidly expanded banking access by opening more than 17 crore accounts within a year, largely in rural areas. Importantly, women accounted for about 56 per cent of account holders, shifting control of welfare resources within households. In political economy terms, PMJDY did not merely extend services; it reorganized the channels through which state resources circulate, integrating marginalized populations into formal financial systems and enabling cash-based redistribution that is legible, traceable, and politically visible (Muralidharan et al., 2016).

While DBT originated under the UPA, its consolidation under BJP marked a qualitative shift in welfare administration. The reported rise in the Welfare Efficiency Index from 0.32 to 0.91 reflects the expansion of state capacity in identifying and monitoring beneficiaries (NITI Aayog, 2019). Aadhaar authentication reduced invalid beneficiaries, while SMS alerts and digital records enhanced accountability. This transformed welfare from a negotiated local process into a centralized, data-driven system, strengthening vertical state-citizen linkages while weakening horizontal broker-mediated networks thereby enhancing public credibility and change in the means of governance (Khera, 2019)

These shifts reflect a move toward what scholars describe as "financialized welfare," where inclusion is mediated through bank accounts and digital infrastructure.

Beyond transfers, the BJP government expanded welfare through social insurance and credit mechanisms. Schemes such as PMJJBY, PMSBY, Atal Pension Yojana, and Mudra Yojana represent a reorientation from redistributive guarantees toward risk management and market participation.

Digital India further consolidated this governance architecture. Common Service Centers extended digital access into rural areas, while platforms like Digi Locker and Jeevan Pramaan reduced bureaucratic mediation and transaction costs (Bhatnagar, 2014).

Ideologically, BJP revised the concept of welfare from entitlement to empowerment. This aligns with a centre-right vision of development emphasizing aspiration, self-reliance, and individual agency.

Taken together, the JAM-DBT framework represents a restructuring of India's welfare political economy. By disintermediating delivery and targeting individuals directly, the state weakened traditional patron-client networks and reshaped vote-bank politics. Welfare became a site of political legitimation through performance, where governance capacity itself becomes electorally valuable (Tillin,2020). The shift from public distribution toward cash transfers, and from entitlement toward insurance and credit, marks a deeper transformation in development thinking. Whether this

constitutes sustainable progress depends on balancing technological efficiency with social inclusion, institutional accountability, and fiscal commitment (Khera, 2019).

At the same time, scholars argue that rather than abandoning welfare, the BJP under Modi reconfigured it. Tillin (2020) and Yadav (2019) note that welfare delivery has increasingly been centralised and personalised, with schemes framed around direct benefits and visible material goods such as housing, sanitation, and cooking gas whereas Sircar (2022) highlights shift has been accompanied by the strategic rebranding of programmes with "Prime Minister" prefixes, reinforcing a direct leader-beneficiary linkage and sustaining political support despite uneven economic outcomes (Vaishnav &Hinston , 2019).

In theoretical terms, BJP's welfare reforms are not merely administrative innovations but a reconfiguration of state-society indicating a shift from patronage-based welfare to performance-based political legitimacy.

2.3.4 Electioneering Techniques: Campaigning and Organisation

2.3.4.1 Campaigning

The transformation of Indian electoral campaigning in the BJP era has attracted significant scholarly attention. Prior to 2014, Indian election campaigns were primarily organised around local party machines, caste intermediaries, and the distribution of material inducements. BJP's 2014 campaign represented a qualitative break from this model, introducing what several analysts have described as 'corporate-style' electioneering characterised by centralised messaging, sophisticated market research, and unprecedented deployment of digital and social media platforms.

Udupa (2019) argued that BJP under Modi mastered the grammar of television politics, particularly through Modi's extraordinary comfort in one-on-one interviews, town halls, and the theatrics of large rallies. The 3D hologram rallies deployed in 2014, in which Narendra Modi appeared simultaneously at hundreds of locations across India, signified a fundamental shift in campaign technology that leveraged the personalisation of the Modi brand at massive scale (Vaishnav , 2019)

2.3.4.2 Digital Media

The role of digital media-particularly WhatsApp and BJP's own NaMo app-in shaping political narratives and mobilising supporters has been documented by Chaturvedi (2016) . Chaturvedi's investigative account reveals the organised structure of BJP's social media operations, including networks of paid and voluntary trolls who amplify the party's messaging, target critics, and spread narratives favourable to Modi across digital platforms.

Mehta (2022) argues that the BJP's electoral advantage in the Modi era stems partly from its ability to construct a centralised digital communication ecosystem that bypasses traditional media gatekeepers and enables coordinated, leader-centric narrative Collective activation across organisational levels. BJP harnessed the potential of this time of transformation thereby building a digital infrastructure and secured the first mover advantage , getting all essential leverages from social media ultimately leading to the digital mobilization of voters as (Udupa , 2019) state that the the key driver behind the BJP's initial and sustained dedication to building this digital infrastructure was a strategic necessity: the ability to circumvent traditional news media.

BJP deviated from traditional methods of ideological dissemination , it has brought social media into the realm of electoral support and mass appeal as Rodrigues and Niemann (2017) assert that Prime Minister Narendra Modi successfully transformed social media platforms like Twitter into an apparatus for "incessant political communication".

Usage of technology enabled the political executive to transcend traditional news media and directly engage citizens, thereby unilaterally setting the national policy agenda which led to campaign success relied heavily on the mobilization of non-governmental groups, individuals, and online influencers who proactively advocated for the mission, ultimately demonstrating the role of digital communication in fundamentally shifting the dynamics of political outreach and agenda-setting in India.

2.3.4.3 Sloganeering

Political sloganeering has long been an integral component of electoral mobilisation in India, serving as a powerful communicative bridge between political leadership and mass publics in a linguistically and socially diverse democracy. One of the earliest and most influential examples of slogan-based political messaging and mobilization emerged under Lal Bahadur Shastri, whose formulation of the slogan *"Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan"* during the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965 symbolically connected national security with agricultural self-sufficiency.

From an analytical perspective, slogans are most effective when they align with broader political strategies, reinforcing ideological positioning while resonating with voter experiences. They function not only as communicative shortcuts but also as mechanisms of agenda-setting, emotional mobilisation, and narrative consolidation, shaping how political issues are perceived and prioritised.

Guha (2007) noted that the slogan articulated a developmental-nationalist vision that linked state priorities with citizen participation, thereby reinforcing the legitimacy of the postcolonial state during a period of crisis (Khilnani, 1997). It demonstrated how slogans could condense complex policy objectives into emotionally resonant appeals capable of mobilising broad segments of the population.

The use of slogans as instruments of political mobilisation reached a new level during the leadership of Indira Gandhi with the landmark campaign phrase *"GaribiHatao"* in the 1971 general elections. Unlike earlier developmental slogans, this message directly targeted socio-economic inequality and projected the Congress Party as the principal vehicle of redistributive justice. According to political scientists such as Brass (1994), *"GaribiHatao"* marked a turning point in Indian electoral politics by shifting campaign communication towards personalised appeals centred on leadership authority and welfare-oriented promises, Guha (2007) argue that the slogan helped formulate a direct relationship between leadership and marginalised voters, bypassing traditional party intermediaries.

In subsequent decades, slogan-based political communication continued to shape electoral narratives across parties and coalitions. The slogan *"India Shining"* under Atal Bihari Vajpayee during the 2004 general elections reflected an attempt to

project economic liberalisation and national confidence as central themes of governance, although scholars note that its limited resonance among rural voters revealed the risks associated with overly aspirational messaging disconnected from lived socio-economic realities (Chhibber & Verma, 2018). Similarly, Congress campaign messaging such as *"Aam Aadmi ke Saath"* during the United Progressive Alliance era sought to emphasise welfare-oriented governance and inclusive development, reflecting the continued importance of slogans as tools for constructing electoral legitimacy (Palshikar & Yadav,2009).

The 2014 Indian general election witnessed unprecedented use of campaign slogans that fundamentally transformed political communication. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP deployed carefully crafted slogans that resonated across diverse demographics. Slogan appealed to masses in ways that changed the political landscape and projected BJP as the most viable source of representation of people's interest

"Achhe Din Aane Wale Hain" (Good Days Are Coming)

Rodrigues and Nieman (2017) highlight that Narendra Modi derived this signature slogan from Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's statement at Pravasi Bharatiya Divas on January 8, 2014, when Manmohan Singh quoted "Yes, we are facing bad days now but the good days will be coming soon. "He tactically appropriated this admission of difficulties into a campaign promise, transforming the government's defensive acknowledgement into a positive vision.

The strategic appeal of the slogan lay in its deliberate ambiguity. By promising "good days" without specifying their content, the phrase invited each constituency to populate it with their own aspirations-employment for the youth, reform for businesses, agricultural support for farmers, efficient governance for the middle class. This semantic openness, far from being a weakness, was a calculated feature (Kumar, 2014). The future tense construction - "aane wale hain"- created a sense of inevitability and a visionary orientation, implying that the transformation was already in motion and required only the right leadership to complete it.

The phrase used simple, everyday Hindi accessible to masses, avoiding English or Sanskrit-derived terms. The future tense "aane wale hain" (are coming)

created inevitability and momentum, suggesting change was certain if voters chose Narendra Modi. Psychologically, the slogan tapped into loss aversion and hope motivation, acknowledging and navigating current difficulties while offering optimism. The slogan was considered decisive for BJP's victory, though critics argued it inflated expectations that the new government could quickly transform the economy (Kumar, 2014).

"Ab Ki Baar, Modi Sarkar" (This Time, Modi Government)

This slogan was modified from BJP's 1998-99 slogan "Abkibaari, Atal Bihari," demonstrating how the party adapted successful historical messaging. The rhyming structure made it memorable and easily chantable at rallies, with "Ab ki baar" meaning "this time" and "Modi sarkar" meaning "Modi's government" (BJP) . The slogan's innovation lay in its complete identification of party, government, and leader, creating a presidential-style campaign unusual in India's parliamentary democracy (Pal et al., 2016).

The slogan's analytical significance lies in what it accomplished structurally: it normalised leader-centric electoral shaping in a parliamentary democracy where party identity had historically been the primary unit of voter identification. In doing so, it contributed to the presidentialisation of Indian electoral culture that Poguntke and Webb (2005) theorise as a global democratic trend, while simultaneously making the BJP's electoral fortunes and vision inseparable from leader's personal approval.

"Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas" (With All, Development for All)

This slogan addressed a critical vulnerability-concerns about Modi's Hindu nationalist credentials and the 2002 Gujarat riots. By promising development "for all" regardless of caste, religion, or class, Modi positioned himself as an inclusive leader focused on economic progress rather than communal divisions. The phrase was in line with Modi's assertion that his government would be devoted to the poor and work for collective development (Palshikar, 2015).

Jaffrelot (2015) offers a critical reading of this repositioning, arguing that the developmental framing functioned as a deliberate discursive strategy to make Hindutva electorally safe by subordinating its more divisive elements beneath the

language of economic progress. In this interpretation, “Sabka Vikas” did not abandon Hindu nationalism but rather mainstreamed it-rendering it politically palatable to voters who sought development and stability rather than cultural confrontation. The tension between the slogan’s inclusive promise and the BJP’s continued ideological commitments was never fully resolved, and would resurface as a site of political contestation in subsequent electoral cycles.

In contrast, the Indian National Congress campaigned with slogans such as “Har Haath Shakti, Har Haath Tarakki” and “Main Nahi, Hum,” emphasising inclusive growth, welfare, and collective governance(Mathew & Anuja, 2014)

Slogans have always played a pivotal role in shaping the ethos and atmosphere of Indian politics; they have shaped the indent and orientation of a political party and embarked their electoral trajectories. The Indian masses are sentimental and slogans do establish an emotional connection between the leader and them, slogans validate their aspirations and using them strategically can determine the graph of a political party.

2.3.4.4 Organisation

This organizational depth of BJP contrasted sharply with the Congress party’s declining organizational capacity. Congress had historically relied on governmental resources and local power brokers for electoral mobilization, but years of organizational neglect meant it lacked motivated cadres and effective ground-level structures. The BJP's ability to identify potential voters, ensure they registered, provide transportation to polls, and monitor voting patterns reflected superior organizational capability (Spary, 2019).

The BJP also developed sophisticated communication channels that targetedvoters based on caste, class, and local issues. Rather than one-size-fits-all messaging, the campaign developed differentiated strategies for different constituencies, combining Modi’s national appeal with local candidate selection and issue positioning. This localized and granular approach maximized electoral efficiency (Palshikar et al., 2014).

2.4 Transformation of Political Culture in India: The 2014 Turning Point

One of the most consequential, and least fully examined, dimensions of the BJP's 2014 electoral victory is its impact on India's political culture - the shared norms, values, orientations, and behavioural expectations through which citizens and political actors relate to power, institutions, and each other.

The 2014 election did not merely change the government; it initiated a structural transformation in how politics is conducted, understood, and experienced in India. This transformation can be assessed across four interconnected dimensions: the personalisation of political authority, the nationalisation of electoral competition, the transformation of political communication, and the reconfiguration of India's ideological landscape.

2.4.1 Personalisation of Political Authority

Prior to 2014, Indian political culture was organised largely around collective institutions-parties, coalitions, caste alignments, and regional formations-as the primary units of electoral mobilisation and governance legitimacy. The Nehruvian model emphasised institutional process and consensus-building (Kothari, 1964) .The coalition era that followed reinforced the centrality of negotiated inter-party bargaining (Palshikar, 2015). The BJP's 2014 campaign, centred as it was on the singular figure of Narendra Modi, represented a decisive departure from this collective model.

As Palshikar (2015) demonstrates, the 2014 contest functioned as a de facto presidential election in which voter assessments of national leadership performance displaced party identification, local candidate evaluation, and issue-based voting as the primary determinants of electoral choice.

This shift has had durable consequences for Indian political culture. When a single leader becomes the primary vehicle of political legitimacy, accountability structures change: citizens evaluate governance through the lens of leadership rather than institutional performance and credibility making personalised approval more politically consequential than parliamentary legitimacy or policy outcomes. Poguntke

and Webb (2005) identify this dynamic as the "presidentialisation" of parliamentary politics-a structural tendency that, once embedded in voter expectations, reshapes the behaviour of all political actors, including opposition parties forced to respond with their own leadership-centric counter-strategies.

2.4.2 Nationalisation of Electoral Competition

The 2014 election also accelerated the nationalisation of India's electoral competition- the process by which state-level contests are increasingly structured by national narratives, leadership images, and ideological frameworks rather than local issues and regional party dynamics.

Chhibber and Verma (2018) document how the BJP's campaign systematically subordinated local candidate-level politics to a unified national message organised around the leader's persona and the BJP's developmental narrative. The result was a significant disruption of the regional political economies that had shaped India's "third party system" between 1989 and 2014, as national swing factors increasingly overrode subnational variation in constituency-level outcomes.

This nationalisation reshaped the normative expectations surrounding electoral competition. Regional parties, previously able to translate local grievances and social coalitions into parliamentary representation independent of national political scenario, found their leverage eroding in an electoral environment where national narrative dominance could override and even reshape strong local incumbency. The implications for India's federal democratic culture are significant: as Ziegfeld (2016) argues, the vitality of India's democratic pluralism has historically depended on the capacity of regional formations to act as institutional counterweights to national dominance - a capacity that the BJP's nationalisation strategy structurally constrained.

2.4.3 Transformation of Political Communication

The BJP's 2014 campaign introduced what Pal et al. (2017) describe as a new grammar of Indian political communication-one organised around digital platforms, professionalised messaging, and direct leader-to-citizen engagement that bypassed the

traditional intermediaries of print journalism, local party workers, and civil society organisations.

This transformation was not merely technological; it altered the established standards by which political communication is evaluated.

As highlighted by Udupa (2019) in the post-2014 environment, emotional resonance, visual spectacle, and digital virality became primary metrics of communicative success, partially displacing factual accuracy, representational balance, institutional accountability - that characterise democratic political discourse at its most functional.

The consequences for political culture have been dual.

- On the one hand, digital communication democratised political participation, enabling citizens previously excluded from formal political networks to engage directly with national leadership narratives and mobilise around shared political identities.

- On the other, it created conditions for the systematic circulation of misinformation, the formation of ideological echo chambers, and the erosion of shared informational ground on which meaningful democratic deliberation depends (Bradshaw and Howard, 2019).

The BJP's institutional investment in this communicative infrastructure established a competitive standard that subsequent elections have only intensified.

2.5 Why was 2014 Different from Earlier BJP Governments-A Critical Juncture

The 2014 general election marked a decisive structural shift in the evolution of the Bharatiya Janata Party within India's party system when compared to its earlier experience in power between 1998 and 2004. During the late 1990s, although the party emerged as the leading force within the National Democratic Alliance government under Atal Bihari Vajpayee, it remained dependent on coalition partners and was therefore constrained by the compulsions of alliance politics and consensus-based governance (Palshikar, 2015). This phase corresponded broadly with what

Kothari (1964) described earlier as a competitive but accommodation-oriented party system structure emerging after the decline of the Congress system, in which no single party could exercise autonomous national dominance.

By contrast, the 2014 general election represented a structural break in India's electoral history as the BJP, under the leadership of Narendra Modi, secured a clear parliamentary majority on its own-the first such majority achieved by any single party since 1984. This transition marked the movement of India's party system into what Yadav (1999) has conceptualised as a new phase beyond the fragmented coalition era associated with the "third electoral system," characterised by multi-party competition and social fragmentation.

The 2014 mandate enabled the BJP to move beyond coalition dependence toward centralised leadership authority, programmatic ideological articulation, and nationwide organisational consolidation (Chhibber & Verma, 2018; Jaffrelot, 2021).

Unlike the coalition-led victories of 1998 and 1999, the 2014 election marked the restoration of single-party parliamentary majority at the national level, signalling a structural transformation in India's party system (Chhibber & Ostermann, 2014).

In this sense, the 2014 election represented not merely a change in government but a transition from coalition-era constraints to majority-enabled political centralisation, marking the beginning of a new phase in India's evolving party system.

2.6 Conclusion

The findings of this chapter address Research Question 1 directly. The BJP's transformation into a dominant national party after 2014 cannot be explained by ideological consolidation alone but with the interaction of different factors.

It emerged from the interaction of four mutually reinforcing dynamics:

The structural opportunity created by Congress's governance failures and organisational decline; the organisational depth provided by the RSS cadre network;

The strategic personalisation of the campaign around Narendra Modi; and the welfare delivery model that translated aspiration into tangible material benefit for previously marginalised constituencies. Together, these dynamics produced not merely an electoral majority but a critical juncture in India's party system - a structural shift from which the preceding coalition-era has yet to fully recover.

Research Question 2 is addressed through the section on political culture transformation: the BJP's 2014 victory did not just change the government; it altered the normative standards of Indian electoral competition - making leader-centric mobilisation, nationalised campaign narratives, and digital political communication the new baseline expectations against which all subsequent parties, including the opposition, oriented themselves.

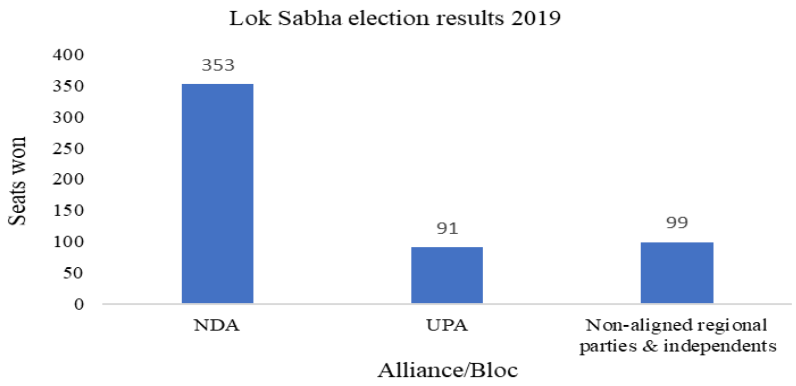
Chapter III

Echoes of Continuity: The BJP's Rejuvenation and The Spirit of 2019

3.1 Introduction

The 2019 general elections marked a significant consolidation of the Bharatiya Janata Party's electoral dominance, with the party securing 303 seats independently and the National Democratic Alliance collectively winning 353 seats in the Lok Sabha. This outcome represented not merely a repetition of the 2014 mandate but its reinforcement, signalling the entrenchment of what scholars have described as India's "Fourth Party System," characterised by centralised leadership authority, ideological consolidation, and the progressive nationalisation of electoral competition (Vaishnav & Mallory, 2024). The BJP's second consecutive parliamentary majority marked a rare achievement in post-independence Indian politics, demonstrating the institutionalisation of a dominant-party configuration that had displaced the coalition-era dynamics prevailing between 1989 and 2014 (Chhibber & Verma, 2018).The 2019 result therefore reflects a complex interaction between national leadership mobilisation and subnational political realities, wherein centralising electoral tendencies coexist with the enduring plurality of India's socio-political landscape (Palshikar, 2015)

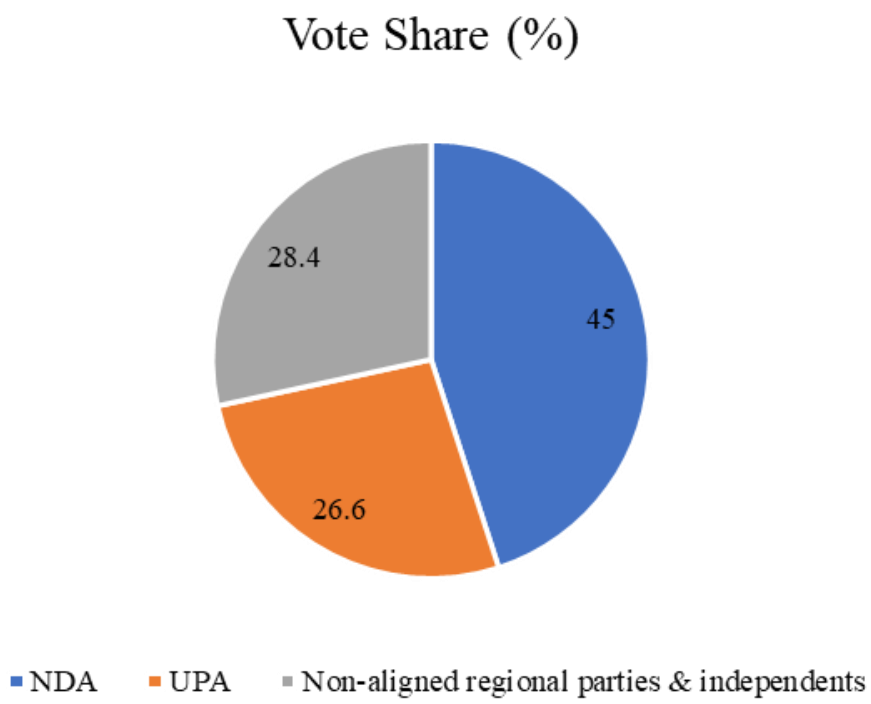
Figure 3.1: Seats won by National Parties in 2019 General elections



Source :Election Commission of India, Statistical Report on General Elections to the Lok Sabha, 2019

Figure 3.1 illustrates the distribution of seats won by major political alliances in the 2019 Lok Sabha election. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) secured a decisive parliamentary majority, significantly outperforming the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and other parties. The relatively limited presence of the Left Front and regional formations reflects the consolidation of electoral competition around major national alliances. The figure highlights the dominance of the NDA in shaping the parliamentary outcome of the 2019 general election.

Figure 3.2 : Coalition-wise Vote Share in the 2019 Lok Sabha Election (Percentage)



Source : Election Commission of India, Statistical Report on General Elections to the Lok Sabha, 2019

BJP's 2014 surge relied on disciplined outreach and online tools - ending years of coalition rule. Five years later, victory came again, even broader can be depicted through Figure 5. The NDA secured the maximum vote share among other coalitions the 2019 elections verdict somehow restores the coalition back in the Indian political landscape

The BJP's 2019 manifesto differed from its 2014 counterpart by shifting from aspirational developmental rhetoric toward performance-based governance claims,

emphasising welfare delivery, infrastructure expansion, national security, and economic modernisation as evidence of policy continuity.

3.2 The Continuation of the Electoral Consolidation

Five reasons behind BJP's overwhelming win in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections are highlighted by Jaffrelot and Verniers (2020). Although not always obvious, leadership appeal played a pivotal role. One factor - widespread use of technology in narrative dissemination - shaped voter perception differently . Economic promises drew support from rural areas where income concerns dominated. Meanwhile, nationalist sentiment gained strength through specific policy strategies . Security issues, especially after border tensions, further shifted public discourse . Because of these combined elements, the party secured an unmatched majority.

A consistent stream of campaign messaging emphasised themes of personal simplicity, resistance to entrenched elite interests, and the protection of Hindu cultural identity. These narrative elements were not confined to election periods alone but were embedded within routine communication methods and everyday political message dissemination. Alongside these themes, representations of visionary leadership, narratives of personal social mobility, and claims of moral integrity were repeatedly foregrounded. Taken together, these recurring patterns reflected a carefully constructed political communication strategy designed to reinforce a coherent leadership image and sustain long-term voter identification rather than emerging as incidental features of campaign rhetoric.

3.2.1 Leader – centric elections

The personalisation of electoral politics around Narendra Modi evolved significantly between the 2014 and 2019 general elections, reflecting a transition from promise-based leadership legitimacy to performance-based leadership consolidation. In 2014, the campaign strategy of the Bharatiya Janata Party centred on projected Narendra Modi as a transformative outsider capable of delivering decisive governance, development, and political stability after a decade of incumbency under the United Progressive Alliance. Shastri (2019) interpret this shift as signalling the growing presidentialisation of parliamentary electoral competition in

India, where leadership identity increasingly structured voter choice and behaviour (Poguntke&Webb , 2005)

The 2019 election represented the consolidation of leadership centralisation through performance legitimacy rather than anticipatory expectations .As Jaffrelot (2021) argues, the BJP's second consecutive majority demonstrated the institutionalisation of a centralised leadership model in which Modi's political authority functioned as the principal axis of electoral mobilisation. Similarly, Chhibber & Verma(2018) show that leadership-centred appeals increasingly combined welfare delivery, ideological consolidation, and national security narratives to stabilise voter alignment around the party.

The projection of decisive executive leadership following the Pulwama crisis and the subsequent Balakot airstrike contributed significantly to reinforcing leadership-centred electoral mobilisation around Narendra Modi during the 2019 general election, as national security narratives increasingly structured campaign discourse and voter perceptions of strong leadership (Hall, 2019)

Outcomes

Kazmi (2024) points out survey results showing shifts in public opinion after Pulwama. Following the crisis, Modi's net approval jumped - starting at around 32% before January and reaching close to 60% post-Balakot. A rise occurred in his individual appeal too, moving from roughly 47% up past 62%. Emotions were used carefully here, tied closely to winning voter backing.

Voter attention moved quickly. Unemployment had been central before Pulwama; following the incident, security concerns surged instead. This shift suggests the event acted like a trigger, reshaping how people voted - tilting outcomes toward Modi. The episode redirected focus without warning

3.2.2 Welfare Politics

The 2019 campaign increasingly foregrounded demonstrable policy delivery and governance outcomes, transforming welfare into a central instrument of electoral mobilisation. Instead of relying primarily on developmental promises, initiatives such

as Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Saubhagya, and Ayushman Bharat helped construct a direct interface between the state and beneficiaries through Aadhaar-enabled Direct Benefit Transfer mechanisms that reduced intermediary leakages while strengthening the visibility of executive action (Tillin, 2020).

Rather than being framed merely as distributive assistance, these schemes were increasingly presented as instruments of social empowerment that reframed beneficiaries as active participants in a broader narrative of developmental citizenship.

Over time BJP's 2019 approach to welfare transformed how closely benefits were tied to the Prime Minister himself. Nearly all key programs bore the title "Pradhan Mantri," linking aid directly to his name (Jaffrelot, 2021)

Yadav (2019) reflects that this shift enabled the Bharatiya Janata Party to extend its electoral reach beyond its earlier urban middle-class support base and consolidate support among economically vulnerable social groups previously located outside its core constituency.The integration of material welfare provision with narratives of national duty and developmental citizenship further strengthened the political resonance of these programmes (Chhibber & Verma, 2018). In this context, the systematic use of the "Pradhan Mantri" prefix across major welfare schemes contributed to the upward flow of political credit toward the Prime Minister's leadership rather than toward administrative institutions, reinforcing the personalisation of governance and reshaping the relationship between welfare provision and executive authority (Vaishnav , 2019)

India's voter turnout increased from approximately 66.4% in 2014 to 67.4% in 2019, marking one of the highest levels of electoral participation in the country's history (Election Commission of India, 2014, 2019). While turnout is shaped by multiple factors, existing scholarship suggests that targeted state interventions can significantly influence political participation. Beneficiary-oriented policies, for instance, have been shown to enhance electoral engagement, as groups receiving state support often display higher levels of participation (Banerjee et al., 2011). This relationship is further reinforced by Krishna (2011), who argues that improved access

to public services strengthens citizens' interaction with formal political institutions. In the Indian context, Khosla and Kapur (2019) contend that the expansion of state capacity and welfare delivery reshapes citizen-state relations, thereby influencing patterns of democratic participation, while voter behaviour remains responsive to broader contextual and engagement dynamics (Khalil et al., 2019).

Empirical patterns from post-poll surveys by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies further support this linkage. At the state level, regions with high welfare penetration illustrate this dynamic:

1. In Uttar Pradesh, which has received over 1.4 crore LPG connections under the Ujjwala scheme, the BJP secured 62 out of 80 seats in 2019, coinciding with strong electoral consolidation alongside welfare outreach;

2. Similarly, in Bihar, where millions of households benefited from DBT-linked schemes, the National Democratic Alliance won 39 out of 40 seats, indicating sustained support in welfare-intensive regions.

3. In Madhya Pradesh, with extensive coverage under Ujjwala and rural housing schemes, the BJP won 28 out of 29 seats, suggesting high levels of electoral mobilisation.

The gender dimension is particularly notable, as female voter turnout rose from approximately 65.5% in 2014 to 67.2% in 2019, nearly equalling that of men, with states such as Odisha and West Bengal recording female turnout rates that exceeded male participation (Election Commission of India, 2019). As scholars such as Vaishnav (2019) argue, welfare schemes that directly target household needs have contributed to enhancing women's political agency.

However, scholars caution that welfare alone does not determine electoral outcomes, as factors such as caste alignments, regional dynamics, and leadership appeal continue to play a significant role in shaping voter behaviour (Vaishnav, 2019).

In this light, welfare mechanisms enabled through the JAM Trinity can be interpreted as contributing to increased political engagement among previously

marginalised groups, thereby reinforcing electoral participation and supporting broader processes of political mobilisation.

In this sense, welfare delivery functioned not only as a mechanism of redistribution but also as a political strategy of electoral mobilisation that strengthened performance-based personalisation and consolidated the leadership oriented character of the Bharatiya Janata Party's electoral appeal in 2019.

3.3 The Challengesof 2019 and their Navigation

That 2019 national vote in India marked a clear turning point since independence. Though growth slowed, public dissatisfaction lingered, and rivals aligned more closely, BJP still secured its win - securing another outright majority in the Lok Sabha alone. Not once before had a ruling party outside Congress managed re-election after finishing a full term in 1947 (Vaishnav, 2019).

3.3.1 The Challenges

Difficulties still emerged alongside progress. As Max Weber noted, power needs grounding in consequence-aware duty rather than mere intent - accountability keeps governance alive. The BJP reshaped India's political scenario yet each shift brought complications. Kazmi(2024)) highlights the challenges faced by BJP.

- Expectation Fatigue

Though hopes rose on the back of 'ache din' pledges, real progress in jobs and expansion lagged behind. Unequal results widened the space where words diverged from reality. Over time, this divergence contributed to what may be described as expectation fatigue among sections of the electorate that anticipated rapid socio-economic transformation. As Kumar (2019) notes, while the BJP retained strong leadership credibility in 2019, voter evaluations increasingly reflected differentiated assessments of policy delivery rather than uniform approval based solely on campaign rhetoric.

- Jobless Growth and Uneven Expansion

Slower job creation failed to keep pace with population growth, eroding the BJP's once-strong image among young people and upwardly mobile groups. Though it promised progress, rising numbers needing work exposed limits in delivering opportunity. A gap opened between expectations and reality, quietly shifting how some viewed the party's role. Momentum faded when results mattered most - finding jobs for those entering the workforce. What had fueled support began losing force under unmet needs. As Chhibber &Verma (2018) observe, shifts in voter alignment in contemporary India increasingly reflect the interaction between developmental expectations. At the same time, Vaishnav (2019) suggested that employment concerns formed part of a broader pattern of uneven economic perception across social groups during the BJP's first term in office.

- Agrarian Distress

Falling crop values, flat earnings in farming areas, yet few jobs beyond agriculture threatened to weaken loyalty among voters within a system where rural frustration frequently led to unpredictable election results.Declining crop prices, stagnating rural incomes, and limited diversification into non-farm employment contributed to pressures within rural constituencies that historically play a decisive role in parliamentary elections. As Jaffrelot (2021) notes, fluctuations in rural economic conditions have long influenced electoral behaviour in India, making agrarian performance a critical component of political legitimacy.

- The Challenge of Holding Charismatic Leaders Responsible

Leadership shaped around Narendra Modi turned into an odd limitation despite its strength. As Vaishnav (2019) notes, highly personalised leadership structures can create expectations of direct responsibility for policy performance, particularly within parliamentary systems traditionally organised around party-based accountability. This trend is further reflected in analyses of the 2019 election, where leadership appeal played a decisive role in voter behaviour, while simultaneously intensifying scrutiny of governance outcomes (Shastri, 2019).

3.3.2 The Navigation

All the former challenges were strategically navigated by BJP through pragmatism and by maneuvering its electioneering techniques. Following are the strategies;

3.3.2.1 Hyper Nationalism

From the beginning what set the BJP apart was reshaping of elections. By 2019, economic outcomes - central in 2014 - carried risk amid rising joblessness, rural hardship, along with complications tied to tax reforms. Rather than confront such challenges directly, the party altered where attention landed. A shift emerged after violence in Pulwama and military responses over Balakot that month. Security concerns soon dominated discussion. This allowed space for Narendra Modi's imageto transform: less focused on growth delivery, more cast as guardian of national integrity (Hall, 2019).

Security concerns shaped voter judgment after Balakot, shifting attention away from economic indicators. Because of this shift, the BJP reframed public debate around national pride instead of financial outcomes.. Nationalist sentiment became the yardstick, masking dissatisfaction over livelihood issues. The moral weight of sovereignty diluted demands for economic accountability. Vaishnav (2020) notes that defense rhetoric absorbed critiques that might otherwise have targeted governance gaps.

3.3.2.2 Sloganeering

The BJP's electoral manoeuvring in 2014 and 2019 demonstrates a sophisticated use of sloganeering as an instrument of political mobilisation, where slogans functioned not as isolated rhetorical devices but as integral components of a broader communication strategy. In 2014, the slogan "Abki Baar Modi Sarkar" effectively personalised the electoral contest by centring leadership, transforming the election into a referendum on Narendra Modi (Chhibber &Verma , 2018)

The BJP's 2014 sloganeering strategy was architecturally aspirational - constructing a vision of transformation to come - the 2019 equivalent was

fundamentally retrospective, asking voters to evaluate what had been delivered rather than what was promised. This shift from anticipatory to performance-based electoral communication reflects a deeper transformation in the BJP's relationship with its own aspirational orientation;having set the benchmark of "Achhe Din' in 2014, the party now had to either validate it or strategically reframe the terms of evaluation (Palshikar, 2019). The 2019 slogans pursued both objectives simultaneously.

"Phir Ek Baar, Modi Sarkar" (Once Again, Modi's Government)

The deliberate structural replication of "Ab Ki Baar Modi Sarkar" was not accidental. By preserving the cadence and leader-centric framing of its 2014 predecessor while replacing "Ab ki baar" (this time) with "Phir ek baar" (once again), the slogan communicated continuity as a political virtue rather than a risk.

Where 2014 demanded change, 2019 demanded consolidation-and the linguistic derivation captured this distinction precisely.

As Chhibber and Verma (2018) argue, the BJP's capacity to sustain electoral mobilisation across two consecutive cycles rested significantly on its ability to reproduce leader-centric voter identification without allowing it to become stale. "Phir Ek Baar" achieved this by reactivating the emotional ethos of 2014 while updating its temporal logic: the election was now a ratification.

Critically, this continuity framing also performed a defensive function. By anchoring the 2019 campaign in the validated success of Modi's incumbency rather than in unfulfilled promises, the BJP pre-empted opposition attempts to hold the government accountable to "Achhe Din." The slogan effectively shifted the evaluative question from "did good days come?" to "do you trust the same leadership to continue the journey?" - a repositioning that proved electorally durable in constituencies where welfare delivery had generated visible beneficiary networks (Jaffrelot and Verniers, 2020).

"Modi Hai Toh Mumkin Hai''

The slogan *"Modi Hai Toh Mumkin Hai"* represented one of the most prominent expressions of leadership personalisation during the 2019 campaign. By

framing governance outcomes as directly dependent on Modi's leadership capacity, the slogan reinforced the perception that transformative policy delivery was contingent upon the continued presence of a decisive political leader. As Jaffrelot (2021) notes, the BJP's campaign strategy increasingly positioned Modi as the primary symbol of administrative effectiveness and national transformation, thereby shifting electoral competition toward leader-centric evaluation rather than party-based comparison.

The slogan's analytical significance extends beyond its electoral function. By making governance possibility itself dependent on individual leadership, it reinforced what scholars identify as a dangerous dimension of hyper-personalised democratic cultures: the erosion of institutional confidence in favour of leader-reliant political expectation (Chatterji et al., 2019). When leadership becomes the exclusive locus of political possibility, institutional structures-Parliament, the judiciary, the civil service-recede as objects of democratic investment, weakening the distributed accountability mechanisms on which parliamentary governance depends.

"Main Bhi Chowkidar"

The slogan *"Main Bhi Chowkidar"* further strengthened the personalised nature of the BJP's campaign by transforming the leader's protective political identity into a participatory collective narrative. Initially articulated as a defenceof Narendra Modi's integrity against opposition criticism, the slogan evolved into a mass mobilisation strategy that encouraged supporters to symbolically identify with the Prime Minister's image as a guardian of national interests and welfare.

Chhibber & Verma (2019) observe, such symbolic identification reflects broader transformations in Indian electoral politics in which voters increasingly engage with leadership narratives through identity-based political communication rather than traditional party-centred affiliation. The widespread circulation of the slogan across digital platforms further blurred distinctions between leader and supporter, reinforcing participatory personalisation within campaign discourse.

The slogan's underlying logic drew on a narrative of shared moral purpose: supporters were invited to see themselves not as passive voters but as co-guardians of national integrity alongside their leader. This participatory dimension distinguished it

from the earlier leader-centric slogans of 2014 and reinforced what scholars describe as affective polarisation -the deepening of emotional investment in political identity- which strengthened BJP supporters' sense of purpose while intensifying opposition resistance (Udupa, 2021).

"Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas"

The slogan *"Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas"* represented an attempt to broaden the social appeal of the BJP's electoral messaging by combining developmental governance with narratives of inclusivity and national cohesion. By linking welfare expansion with themes of trust and collective progress, the slogan helped reposition the BJP's developmental agenda as socially integrative rather than electorally sectional. As Tillin (2020) argues, welfare expansion during this period increasingly functioned as a mechanism through which the BJP sought to consolidate support beyond its traditional social base. Taken together, these slogans illustrate how the BJP's 2019 campaign integrated leadership personalisation with narratives of national development, welfare delivery, and political stability. By transforming campaign messaging into easily recognisable symbolic frames centred on Modi's leadership persona, the party successfully reinforced performance-based legitimacy while strengthening emotional identification between voters and the Prime Minister. This strategic use of slogan-based political communication therefore played a crucial role in sustaining electoral consolidation during the 2019 general election (Jaffrelot, 2021; Kumar, 2020).

Together, these slogans illustrate how the BJP's 2019 campaign integrated leadership personalisation with narratives of national development, welfare delivery, and political stability. By transforming campaign messaging into easily recognisable symbolic frames centred on the leadership persona, the party successfully reinforced performance-based legitimacy while strengthening emotional identification between voters and the Prime Minister.

In the 2019 general elections, opposition parties intensified their criticism of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party through slogan-based political mobilisation aimed at challenging the party's governance narrative and leadership image. The Indian National Congress prominently employed slogans such as "Chowkidar Chor Hai" and

"Ab Hoga Nyay," seeking to question the BJP's anti-corruption image and foreground issues of economic justice and welfare (Jaffrelot, 2021).

3.3.3.3 The "Tina'' Factor

Their lack of cohesion became clear when even joint efforts could not forge a shared direction among rival groups. Though alliances were formed, no strong figure emerged capable of uniting differing beliefs into one framework. Without a common purpose, collective action weakened early on. A sense of inevitability settled in, reinforcing the idea that things could not be different.

Despite its national presence, Congress faced ongoing issues with structure and public trust, whereas regional groups stayed limited to specific areas.

According to Vaishnav & Kapur (2018), the lack of an alternative political vision made Modi's rise seem less like a choice and more like an unavoidable outcome.

Because opposition actors failed to build strong organisations or unified messaging, economic hardship did not turn into collective political pressure. Without coordinated infrastructure, discontent remained scattered rather than becoming a force for change.

3.4 Technological Leverage

What distinguished the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) 2019 campaign was the deep embedding of social media within its organisational strategy. Rather than functioning as a supplementary tool, digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp were integrated into a layered communication system alongside the NaMo application, effectively blurring the boundaries between online mobilisation and ground-level political operations. This hybrid structure enabled seamless coordination across hierarchical levels, where centrally generated narratives were disseminated through decentralised networks and reinforced through localised engagement.

The expansion of digital infrastructure facilitated this transformation. India's internet user base more than doubled from approximately 250 million in 2014 to over 500–600 million by 2019 (Internet and Mobile Association of India [IAMAI], 2019),

allowing political communication to penetrate deeper into semi-urban and rural constituencies. Within this evolving ecosystem, digital platforms functioned as networked infrastructures of political influence, enabling the BJP to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and establish direct engagement with voters (Banaji et al., 2019). The scale of digital campaigning expanded significantly, reflecting what scholars describe as the platformisation of politics (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019).

Platform transparency data from the Facebook Ad Library indicates that BJP-affiliated networks ran approximately 16,000-17,000 political advertisements, compared to roughly 3,000–4,000 by the Indian National Congress, highlighting a clear asymmetry in digital campaign capacity (Facebook Ad Library, 2019).

Organisationally, this strategy was sustained through a highly structured digital apparatus. As Udupa (2019) demonstrates, centrally coordinated messaging flowed from national leadership to regional and local units, where it was adapted and disseminated through extensive WhatsApp networks and social media channels. This system functioned as a "central nervous system" of political communication, enabling both top-down narrative control and bottom-up responsiveness. The BJP's advantage, therefore, lay not merely in access to technology but in its institutional capacity to deploy it in a coordinated and scalable manner.

From an analytical perspective, this transformation reflects the growing personalisation and mediation of political communication. As Jaffrelot (2021) and Vaishnav (2019) argue, digital platforms facilitated the amplification of leadership-centric narratives, strengthening voter identification with executive authority. This dynamic is further reflected in patterns of online engagement:

- Mehta (2022) notes that Narendra Modi's Facebook presence generated an average of approximately 49,589 interactions per day, compared to around 21,720 for the Indian National Congress and 13,307 for the Aam Aadmi Party, suggesting that differential levels of digital engagement not only reflected but also reinforced broader patterns of electoral support by amplifying visibility and narrative dominance.

In high-density information environments, repeated exposure, emotional resonance, and networked circulation play a critical role in shaping political attitudes and reinforcing voter preferences (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019).

The role of digital media extended beyond communication into the realm of narrative construction. Platforms enabled the rapid dissemination of politically charged content, including misinformation, which often circulated more effectively than factual corrections. Studies indicate that misleading or emotionally resonant content-particularly during critical events such as the Pulwama attack and the Balakot airstrikes-contributed to shaping public perception and reinforcing narratives of national security and strong leadership (Hall, 2019).

- The scale of such dissemination is reflected in findings that 96% of respondents reported exposure to misinformation via WhatsApp (Banaji et al., 2019), underscoring the platform's centrality in influencing political discourse.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this relationship, as the direct causal impact of misinformation on voting behaviour remains difficult to establish empirically. Nevertheless, asymmetries in digital communication capacity and narrative control are likely to influence electoral outcomes, particularly in competitive contexts.

In this light, the expansion of digital outreach coincided with the BJP's increase in vote share from approximately 31% in 2014 to over 37% in 2019 (Election Commission of India, 2014, 2019).

The BJP's electoral success in 2019, therefore, cannot be attributed solely to technological superiority, but rather to its ability to integrate digital infrastructure, organisational coordination, and narrative construction into a coherent strategy of political mobilisation. Social media platforms functioned not as peripheral tools but as central instruments through which political meaning was produced, circulated, and internalised, ultimately shaping how voters perceived leadership, national identity, and electoral choice.

3.5 Deepening of Political Culture Transformation: The 2019 Consolidation

If 2014 inaugurated a new political culture in India, 2019 institutionalised it. The BJP's second consecutive parliamentary majority demonstrated that the cultural transformations initiated in 2014 - the personalisation of authority, the nationalisation of competition, the platformisation of communication, and the mainstreaming of cultural nationalism were not temporary features of a transitional electoral moment but durable structural shifts in how Indian politics operates.

In this sense, 2019 is analytically significant not merely as a repeat victory but as evidence of political culture consolidation: the new norms introduced in 2014 had, by 2019, become the baseline expectations against which all electoral actors oriented themselves.

The most visible cultural consolidation in 2019 was the deepening of what Shastri (2019) terms the "Modi factor" as a permanent organisational principle of Indian electoral competition. By 2019, opposition parties were no longer attempting to challenge the presidential logic of the campaign but to replicate it - the Indian National Congress's elevation of Rahul Gandhi as a personalised counter-figure, and regional formations' attempts to construct their own charismatic leadership narratives, reflected an implicit acceptance that leader-centric mobilisation had become the dominant cultural grammar of Indian electoral politics (Vaishnav , 2019)

The presidentialisation that Poguntke and Webb (2005) identified as a structural tendency in parliamentary democracies had, within five years, become the unchallenged norm of Indian electoral culture.

The 2019 election also deepened the cultural embedding of digital political communication as the primary site of political meaning-making. As Udupa (2021) demonstrates, the BJP's WhatsApp and social media infrastructure by 2019 had created what she terms an "extreme speech ecosystem"-a digital environment in which partisan content, emotionally calibrated narratives, and coordinated messaging circulated at a scale and velocity that fundamentally altered the informational conditions under which citizens formed political judgements.

Perhaps most consequentially for India's long-term democratic culture, the 2019 election consolidated the mainstreaming of cultural nationalism within the operative norms of Indian political competition.

Jaffrelot (2021) argues that the Balakot narrative and the security-framed campaign demonstrated that Hindu nationalist political culture had, by 2019, moved beyond the register of mobilisation into the register of governance legitimation - national security, cultural pride, and civilisational identity were no longer supplementary campaign themes but central frameworks through which governmental authority was routinely justified and contested.

This consolidation has significant implications for democratic pluralism: when national security and cultural identity become the primary evaluative criteria for political legitimacy, the space available for redistributive economic demands, minority political claims, and institutional accountability narrows structurally, not just temporarily (Chatterji et al., 2019).

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter's findings address Research Question 3 by demonstrating how electioneering techniques - particularly sloganeering and welfare politics - provided the BJP with structural leverage over its opponents in 2019. The shift from aspirational to ratifying slogans ("Phir Ek Baar, Modi Sarkar"; "Modi Hai Toh Mumkin Hai") reflected a sophisticated recalibration of campaign communication to the BJP's position as an incumbent rather than a challenger. Welfare politics, through the systematic Pradhan Mantri branding of scheme delivery, transformed administrative provisioning into personalised political credit. And the digital campaign architecture, whose superiority over Congress's equivalent was measurable in advertisement volume, engagement metrics, and network reach, ensured that these messages circulated at a scale and velocity that structurally advantaged the BJP's narrative construction. The TINA factor-the absence of a credible, unified alternative - amplified each of these advantages by ensuring that accumulated economic resentment could not coalesce into effective electoral pressure.

Chapter IV

The Challenge of 2024

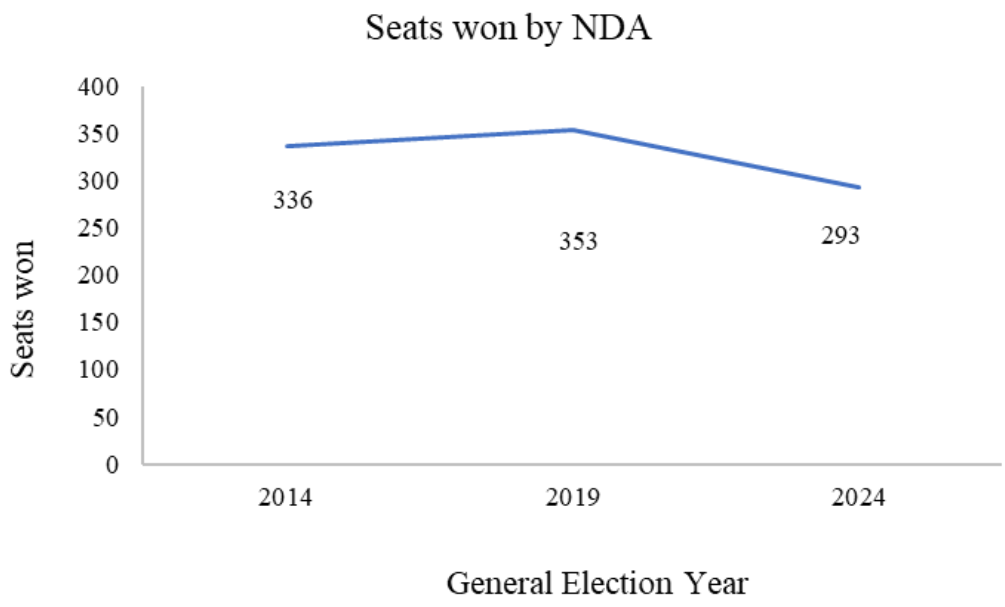
4.1 Introduction

The 2024 Indian general election constituted a moment of significant recalibration in the Bharatiya Janata Party's decade-long trajectory of electoral dominance. After securing independent parliamentary majorities of 282 seats in 2014 and 303 seats in 2019-marking the restoration of single-party dominance at the national level for the first time since 1984-the party's seat share fell to 240 in 2024, compelling it to govern in renewed dependence on National Democratic Alliance partners (Election Commission of India, 2024).

The NDA collectively secured 293 seats, a figure that, while sufficient for a third consecutive term under Narendra Modi's leadership, fell substantially short of the party's declared electoral target of 400 seats.

This outcome does not represent a collapse of the BJP's political authority. As Vaishnav (2024) argues, the party retained its position as India's largest national political formation, and its organisational infrastructure, welfare delivery mechanisms, and leadership-centred communication architecture remained structurally intact. Rather, the 2024 result reflects what Sartori (1976) identifies as a characteristic feature of dominant-party systems under competitive pressure: the erosion of electoral efficiency when national narrative strategies encounter renewed subnational resistance and a recalibrated opposition.

Figure 4.1: Seats Won by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in the Lok Sabha Elections (2014-2024)



Source :Data compiled from Election Commission of India Statistical Reports (2014, 2019, 2024).

The figure illustrates the NDA's parliamentary strength across three consecutive general elections, highlighting the consolidation of alliance dominance in 2014 and 2019 and the relative decline in 2024, reflecting the re-emergence of competitive coalition dynamics in Indian national politics

4.2 Analysis of BJP's Decade Long Trajectory: A Theoretical Perspective

This section analyses the BJP's decade-long electoral trajectory between 2014 and 2024 through three complementary theoretical lenses: Gramsci (1971) concept of cultural hegemony, Weber's (2009) theory of charismatic authority, and Sartori's (1976) model of dominant-party systems. Together, these frameworks illuminate how the BJP's rise represented not merely electoral success but a broader reconfiguration of political power-one that reshaped the norms of competition, the channels of communication, and the terms of democratic legitimacy in contemporary India.

From a Gramscian perspective, the BJP's consolidation between 2014 and 2019 can be understood as the construction of a new form of political hegemony-one in which consent was manufactured not through coercion but through the embedding of Hindu nationalist and developmental narratives within the everyday assumptions of political life. By weaving together discourses of economic aspiration, cultural pride, and strong governance, the BJP succeeded in building electoral support across social groups previously outside its traditional upper-caste urban base, blurring earlier party alignments and establishing itself as the common-sense political choice for a broad national coalition (Chhibber and Verma, 2018). This process of hegemonic construction was not simply imposed from above but required continuous communicative work - through slogans, welfare branding, digital mobilisation, and the cultivation of a leadership centralisation around Narendra Modi.

Weber (1978) theory of charismatic authority - and in particular his concept of the "routinisation of charisma," in which the extraordinary personal qualities attributed to a leader become institutionalised within organisational structures - provides the most direct theoretical lens for understanding the Modi factor across three election cycles.

In 2014, Modi embodied what Weber identifies as pure charismatic authority in a political context: a leader perceived as possessing extraordinary personal qualities - decisiveness, incorruptibility, self-sacrifice, transformative vision - that set him apart from the political class and justified the suspension of normal political judgements. This charismatic authority was not manufactured from nothing; it was constructed through years of reputation-building in Gujarat, disciplined personal branding, and the strategic contrast with a Congress leadership widely perceived as corrupt and directionless. But its electoral effects in 2014 had the character of a genuine charismatic moment: voters supportedNarendra Modi not primarily because of programmatic assessment but because of a diffuse sense that he represented something qualitatively different from what had come before.

By 2019, this charisma had undergone partial routinisation. Narendra Modi's authority was now grounded less in extraordinary personal qualities than in institutional performance: the welfare schemes bearing his name, the Balakot strike

demonstrating executive decisiveness, the systematic centralisation of the BJP's organisational apparatus around his leadership.

The 2024 election reveals both the durability and the structural limits of this routinised charisma. Modi's national leadership appeal remained a stabilising resource for the BJP even as the party lost 63 seats compared to 2019: the NDA's ability to form a government for a third consecutive term under his leadership is itself evidence that personalised authority, once institutionalised, is not easily dislodged. But routinised charisma has a fundamental vulnerability: when the institutions through which it operates - welfare delivery, economic management, national security - are perceived to have underperformed, the leader who claimed credit for their successes also absorbs the accountability for their failures.

4.2.1 Implication on Indian Democracy

The Bharatiya Janata Party's decade-long tenure between 2014 and 2024 produced consequences for Indian democratic governance that extended well beyond electoral outcomes. Its impact can be assessed across three interrelated dimensions: the reconfiguration of executive authority, the transformation of institutional relationships, and the deepening of participatory politics alongside growing concerns about democratic quality.

On the first dimension, the BJP's successive parliamentary majorities enabled a degree of executive consolidation unprecedented in the post-coalition era. With single-party control of the Lok Sabha secured in both 2014 and 2019, the government was able to legislate without the coalition negotiations and inter-party accommodations that had constrained executive authority between 1989 and 2014.

As Vaishnav (2024) observes, this concentration of authority accelerated policy delivery and governance visibility, but simultaneously reduced the deliberative character of parliamentary functioning. Opposition scrutiny within Parliament weakened as the numerical dominance of the ruling alliance limited the effectiveness of traditional accountability mechanisms, including question hour, select committee deliberations, and the passage of legislation through extended debate.

On the second dimension, the BJP's governance model raised significant questions about the autonomy of democratic institutions. Jaffrelot (2021) documents a pattern of executive pressure on regulatory bodies, investigative agencies, and media organisations during this period, arguing that the concentration of political authority within the Prime Minister's Office gradually eroded the functional independence of institutions whose credibility depends on insulation from electoral politics.

Mehta (2022) similarly identifies a structural shift in the relationship between the ruling party and civil society, whereby organisations that voiced critical perspectives encountered administrative and legal pressures that constrained their operational space. These developments do not indicate the dismantling of democratic structures, but they do reflect what scholars term democratic backsliding - a gradual narrowing of the pluralistic space within which democratic competition operates (Chatterji et al., 2019).

On the third dimension, however, the period also witnessed significant expansion in electoral participation and political engagement. Voter turnout in the 2019 general election reached 67.4 per cent, the highest recorded in Indian electoral history, reflecting the mobilising capacity of competitive political narratives and the BJP's investment in voter outreach (Election Commission of India, 2019).

The 2024 election, while the voter turnout remained 65.8 percent (Election Commission of India, 2024) produced a more fragmented outcome, similarly demonstrating the vibrancy of Indian electoral competition through heightened opposition mobilisation and the emergence of new coalitional arrangements. In this sense, the BJP era simultaneously produced conditions of democratic contraction at the institutional level and democratic expansion at the participatory level- a paradox that defines the complex character of India's democratic trajectory between 2014 and 2024.

4.2.2 Digitisationof Political Discourse and its Implications for Democratic Culture

The systematic deployment of digital communication technology by the Bharatiya Janata Party since 2014 did not merely transform electoral campaigning; it produced a structural shift in India's broader political culture-one that reshaped how political information circulates, how public opinion is formed, and how citizens relate

to political authority. By 2024, this transformation had become sufficiently embedded that its implications extended beyond any single election cycle, raising fundamental questions about the quality of democratic deliberation in a digitally saturated political environment.

The BJP's first-mover advantage in digital political communication, established through its IT Cell infrastructure, NaMo app ecosystem, and WhatsApp mobilisation networks between 2014 and 2019, created what Udupa (2021) describes as a new architecture of political communication in India - one organised around decentralisedamplification, coordinated narrative dissemination, and the systematic bypassing of traditional media gatekeepers. This architecture had two significant implications for democratic culture.

- First, it enabled an unprecedented directness in leader-to-citizen communication, reducing the role of intermediary institutions-journalists, local party workers, civil society organisations - in filtering or contextualising political messaging. Second, it created conditions for the proliferation of misinformation and partisan content at scale, as the same infrastructure that disseminated BJP's campaign messaging also circulated content designed to discredit opposition figures, exacerbate communal tensions, and reinforce

- Second, it created conditions for the proliferation of misinformation and partisan content at scale, as the same infrastructure that disseminated BJP's campaign messaging also circulated content designed to discredit opposition figures, exacerbate communal tensions, and reinforce ideological echo chambers (Udupa, 2021; Bradshaw & Howard, 2019).

By the 2024 electoral cycle, digital communication had also become a site of intensifying competition rather than BJP's exclusive domain. Opposition parties, particularly the Indian National Congress through its social media cells and the Samajwadi Party through ground-level WhatsApp networks in Uttar Pradesh, invested significantly in digital mobilisation infrastructure, narrowing the BJP's earlier structural advantage (Yadav, 2024). The result was an increasingly contested digital public sphere in which competing narratives -around economic performance, minority rights, constitutional integrity, and leadership credibility -circulated

simultaneously and at high velocity, making the management of political communication more complex and less predictable for any single party.

By 2024, digitisation of political discourse had become a structural feature of Indian democracy- one that simultaneously expanded the reach of political communication and deepened the fragmentation of the shared informational environment upon which democratic accountability depends.

4.3 Reasons that Led to the Seat Dip of 2024

A drop in the BJP's parliamentary presence during India's 2024 general election - down from 303 seats to 240 - suggests layered causes, not just weakened influence.

4.3.1 Unity Among the Rival Parties and Units

Yadav and Palshikhar (2019) highlight the reasons behind the shift that was stronger coordination among rival parties through the INDIA alliance, limiting scattered voting outcomes while sharpening challenges toward ruling-party candidates.

Verma (2024) highlights that one of the most significant developments shaping constituency-level outcomes in the 2024 general election was the increased coordination among opposition parties, particularly across several Hindi-belt states. Unlike earlier elections where fragmented opposition allowed the Bharatiya Janata Party to benefit from divided vote shares, the emergence of coordinated arrangements under the broader opposition platform reduced vote splitting and enabled more effective aggregation of anti-incumbency sentiment. This shift was especially visible in closely contested constituencies where relatively small margins determined electoral outcomes. In analytical terms, opposition coordination did not necessarily weaken the BJP's national leadership appeal centred around the Prime Minister but it limited the electoral efficiency through which leadership mobilisation translated into parliamentary seats.

Nowhere was the shift more visible than in regions where local movements began reshaping political energy. Figures like Rahul Gandhi stepped forward,

drawing attention through journeys such as the *BHARAT JODO YATRA*, a foot march against divisive politics. It was a mass movement that orchestrated the journey from Kanyakumari to Kashmir covering 4,080 kilometres over approximately 150 days. The Bharat Jodo Yatra is being billed as Congress's biggest mass contact programme since independence and a "turning point" in India's political history. The Congress has also said it is a "transformational moment" for Indian politics and a "decisive moment" for the party's rejuvenation (Outlook India,2022)

In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the Indian National Congress attempted a strategic recalibration of its electoral discourse by foregrounding themes of social justice, welfare entitlements, and constitutional accountability in response to the dominant nationalist and leadership-centric narrative advanced by the Bharatiya Janata Party. The Congress campaign was structured around the "Nyay" framework and slogans such as "Nyay Ka Haq Milne Tak" articulated during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra (Indian National Congress , 2024) , alongside the broader "5 Nyay" agenda focusing on youth, women, farmers, workers, and marginalised communities (Rajan , 2025).

In this sense, the Bharat Jodo Yatra can be understood as part of a broader attempt to rebalance electoral contestation by strengthening opposition visibility within a political environment otherwise dominated by personalised national leadership narratives.

4.3.2 Economic Challenges

Economic worries mattered just as much when people decided how to vote. Joblessness, rising prices, and struggles in farming areas built up dissatisfaction at election time - especially among youth and rural population (Chhibber & Verma, 2018).

When benefits from government programs went unnoticeable, voters started aspiring for real financial progress instead.

Fueled by strong numbers, India's economic story during the tenure of BJP attracted global attention. During fiscal year 2023-24, output expanded at a pace of 8.2%. Over ten years, average income rose sharply - up 55% - and ranking rose,

shifting position from ninth to fifth among major economies. Alongside growth, physical networks saw upgrades; digital systems advanced just as quickly. Yet, as the Atlantic Council's expert panel noted following the election results, "most Indians have not adequately participated in the fruits of an economy with gaudy headline numbers. Growth is unequal, and jobs are few and far between.

Sen (2024) similarly observes that macroeconomic expansion did not translate evenly into employment generation leading to jobless growth.

Despite strong macroeconomic growth indicators during the later years of BJP's tenure, perceptions of uneven distribution of economic benefits shaped sections of voter sentiment prior to the 2024 general election. As reported by Al Jazeera (2024), survey evidence suggested that concerns relating to employment generation and rising living costs remained among the most frequently cited public priorities during the campaign period.

While India's aggregate growth performance remained internationally visible, the persistence of livelihood-related anxieties indicated that portrayed economic expansion did not uniformly translate into perceived improvement in everyday economic conditions. In this context, such concerns functioned less as independent determinants of electoral behaviour and more as background conditions that shaped the limits of leadership-centred campaign messaging during the 2024 election cycle

4.3.3 Campaign Ambiguities - The Inability to Incorporate Masses and Regional Aspirations

The consecration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya on 22 January 2024 was, by all accounts, the centerpiece of the BJP's re-election strategy. For the BJP, the construction of this temple on the site of the demolished sixteenth-century Babri Masjid represented the culmination of a decades-long political and civilisational project (Jaffrelot, 2021). The party incorporated the event into virtually every campaign rally during the seven-phase, six-week election.

The reasons for this counter-intuitive outcome were multiple and deeply instructive. The BJP's reformulation of Ayodhya as a 'Hindu Vatican City' had involved the demolition of houses, shops, temples, and displacement of local

residents. Residents who had been displaced and received inadequate compensation harboured profound resentment against the ruling party, even as they revered Lord Ram. As Kumar & Kumar (2024) observes, leadership-centred campaign narratives are effective in maintaining national-level coherence, but reduce responsiveness to constituency-level concerns, particularly where agrarian grievances, compensation disputes, or candidate-level dissatisfaction remain politically salient. Despite BJP's ongoing appeal, the campaign's rigid structure made it less attentive to regional concerns. The agricultural sector observed shrinking backing after the long shadow of the 2020-21 farm demonstrations, highlighting ambiguities in top-down governance.

Taken together, the BJP's reduced parliamentary seat share in 2024 therefore reflects not a collapse of national leadership legitimacy but an adjustment within an increasingly competitive electoral environment shaped by coalition coordination, constituency-level contestation, and the limits of symbolic mobilisation strategies. As Sartori (1976) suggests in his analysis of dominant-party systems, such recalibrations often occur when national narrative strategies encounter renewed local electoral resistance within parliamentary democracies.

4.3.4 Sloganeering 2024: The Overreach of Aspirational Messaging

Political slogans in the BJP's electoral playbook have historically functioned as instruments of agenda-setting, emotional condensation, and leadership legitimation (Jaffrelot , 2015). In 2014. "Achhe Din Aane Wale Hain" succeeded precisely because it was strategically vague -it invited every voter to project their own aspirations onto the promise of change . By 2024, 'Achhe Din" had become a tool of opposition critique rather than government celebration-a reminder that aspirational sloganeering sets evaluative benchmarks that future electoral communication must either meet or manage.

In 2019, "Mai Bhi Chowkidar" effectively channeled nationalist sentiment following the Pulwama crisis into a narrative of protective leadership. However , the central campaign slogan of 2024- "AbkiBaar , 400 Paar" (This time surpassing 400 seats) - departed fundamentally from this pattern, with significant electoral consequences .

Unlike its predecessor, “400 Paar” was not a promise directed at voters but was an anticipation of electoral dominance. Rather than mobilising emotional identification with a leader or cause, the slogan framed the elections as a forgone conclusion (Kaviraj , 2010) , “400 Paar” functioned as the latter; it galvansised supporters who anticipated an uncontested BJP majority as a threat to constitutional checks and balances, particularly to reservations and minority protections, concerns that circulated widely across opposition (Yadav, 2024).

The slogan’s failure was thus not merely a miscalculation of seat arithmetic. It reflected a deeper strategic misalignment between campaign communication and the lived concerns of the electorate.

As Kumar and Kumar (2024) observe, leadership-centred national narratives retain mobilising capacity when they connect to specific voter expectations; when disconnected from material concerns, they become organisationally counterproductive. The contrast with 2014’s “Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas” is instructive: where the latter constructed an inclusive aspirational frame that invited identificationacrossmasses , “400 Paar” reinforced perceptions of exclusion and overreach.

Taken together, the sloganeering strategy of 2024 illustrates a broader challenge facing dominant-party formations in competitive democracies: as incumbency extends, the symbolic narrative of transformative leadership depreciates, and the electoral risks of declaratory overconfidence correspondingly increase (Sartori, 1976).

4.3.5 Welfare Politics in 2024: From Consolidation to Credibility Gap

The BJP’s welfare model, developed systematically between 2014 and 2019 through the JAM trinity, Direct Benefit Transfers, and flagship schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, had by 2024 entered a structurally different phase. Where welfare delivery in 2014 represented a departure from the Congress model to rights-based provisioning , and where 2019 saw the consolidation of beneficiary-linked electoral credit claiming, the 2024 election confronted the BJP with a more demanding electorate-one that had absorbed

the initial material benefits of welfare expansion and now demanded sustained improvements in livelihood conditions.

Sircar (2022) notes that the personalisation of welfare schemes around the Prime Minister's identity-expressed through the "PM" prefix on programme names, the use of Prime Minister's image on beneficiary communications, and the direct-transfer architecture of the JAM framework-created durable credit-claiming linkages between beneficiaries and central leadership in earlier election cycles. However, this model has a structural limitation: it is most electorally effective when welfare represents a new and visible material improvement in citizens' lives. The 2024 election results suggest that this transition was underway among significant sections of the BJP'dwelfare-mobilised constituency.

Evidence from survey data and post-election analysis indicates that concerns relating to unemployment, particularly among educated youth, and the rising cost of essential goods, shaped voter behaviour in states where the BJP recorded its sharpest seat losses, including Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan (Al Jazeera, 2024; Sen, 2024). In analytical terms, these findings suggest that welfare legitimacy-the electoral credit generated by targeted redistribution-operates most powerfully when it coexists with broader economic optimism. Where macroeconomic growth fails to translate into perceptible improvements in household income and employment, welfare delivery alone cannot absorb accumulated livelihood grievances.

Furthermore, the 2024 campaign revealed an emerging tension within the BJP's welfare politics strategy: the concentration of welfare credit in the figure of the Prime Minister, while electorally efficient in prior cycles, also concentrated electoral accountability. Voters who attributed welfare gains to Modi's leadership in 2019 were correspondingly more likely to attribute economic disappointments-joblessness, price inflation, stagnant rural incomes-to the same figure in 2024 (Kumar & Kumar, 2024).

The 2024 outcome therefore demonstrates that welfare politics, while a durable pillar of the BJP's electoral coalition, requires continuous recalibration to remain electorally effective. As Tillin (2020) argues, sustainable welfare-based legitimacy depends not only on the delivery of targeted benefits but on the perceived alignment

between state welfare capacity and the broader economic aspirations of the voting public.

4.4 Navigation

Despite experiencing a reduced seat tally in the 2024 Indian general election, the Bharatiya Janata Party demonstrated a significant caliber for electoral adaptation by strategically recalibrating its leadership-centred campaign narrative while preserving its dominance within the national political arena. Rather than signalling a structural decline, the party's performance reflected what scholars describe as the resilience of a personalised yet institutionally supported dominant-party formation. As Jaffrelot (2021) argues, the BJP's strength lies not only in ideological mobilisation but also in its ability to combine centralised leadership authority with a highly disciplined organisational system that sustains electoral competitiveness even under adverse conditions.Vaishnav (2024) emphasises that the party's embedded grassroots networks, welfare-delivery mechanisms, and strategic alliance management enabled it to retain agenda-setting power despite constituency-level setbacks.

Equally important was the continued significance of leadership personalisation around Narendra Modi, which remained a stabilising electoral resource even as the electoral arena became more competitive. Palshikar (2018) and Kumar & Kumar (2024) note that Modi's leadership transformed the BJP into a presidentialised parliamentary campaign machine capable of sustaining national-level legitimacy independent of local anti-incumbency pressures.

At the same time, the party's ability to maintain cohesion within the National Democratic Alliance illustrates what Sartori (1976) identifies as a key feature of relevant parties operating in competitive multiparty systems: the strategic use of alliances to stabilise parliamentary authority when single-party dominance narrows.

Moreover, Yadav (2024) argues that the BJP's continued emphasis on targeted welfare delivery, leadership credibility, and ideological signalling enabled it to preserve a broad national vote base even where seat conversion became less efficient.

In this sense, the 2024 outcome represents not a weakening of leadership-centred legitimacy but a transition toward coalition-supported dominance within a more competitive electoral framework. The BJP's ability to navigate this shift underscores the durability of personalised leadership when combined with organisational depth, ideological coherence, and alliance flexibility in contemporary parliamentary democracies.

4.5 Conclusion

The 2024 general election represents a significant inflection point in the Bharatiya Janata Party's decade-long electoral trajectory, revealing both the durability and the structural limits of leadership-centred dominance within India's democratic framework. The party's reduced parliamentary seat share-from 303 in 2019 to 240 in 2024-does not signal organisational collapse or ideological exhaustion, but rather reflects the corrective dynamics of a competitive multiparty system responding to accumulated economic anxieties, effective opposition coordination, and the diminishing electoral returns of symbolic campaign mobilisation.

In terms of the study's research questions, Chapter IV's findings address Research Questions 2 and 3 at their limits. The implications for India's political culture (RQ2) revealed by 2024 are twofold and apparently contradictory:

The period of BJP dominance produced institutional centralisation and a narrowing of deliberative democratic norms, yet the 2024 outcome itself demonstrated that India's democratic culture retains a self-correcting capacity.

On electioneering techniques (RQ3), 2024 revealed the structural ceiling of symbolic mobilisation strategies when disconnected from material voter concerns: the failure of "400 Paar" illustrates that sloganeering must remain voter-facing rather than inward-facing, and that welfare legitimacy depreciates when economic aspirations overreach distributional delivery.

In this sense, the challenge of 2024 is not merely the BJPto address. It constitutes a clarifying moment for Indian democracy itself, demonstrating that even within a political environment shaped by leader centric approach,centralised welfare

delivery, and sophisticated electioneering techniques, voter agency still continues to function as the ultimate institutional check against political overreach.

At the same time, the 2024 outcome affirms the resilience of India's democratic framework. As Sartori (1976) notes, dominant-party systems within competitive democracies are self-correcting: when dominant formations overextend, pluralistic dynamics reassert themselves through alliance coordination, regional party consolidation, and voter agency. The re-emergence of a more competitive parliamentary arithmetic in 2024, and the BJP's consequent dependence on NDA partners, represents precisely such a corrective moment-one that reinforces, rather than undermines, the structural plurality of Indian electoral competition.

Chapter V

Electoral Trajectory and Emerging Directions

5.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter synthesises the key findings of the study on the Bharatiya Janata Party's electoral journey across three consecutive national election cycles-2014, 2019, and 2024. Over this decade, the BJP transformed from a party seeking its first outright parliamentary majority in thirty years into what scholars have described as the defining force of India's Fourth Party System (Chhibber and Verma, 2019). The chapter brings together the four central pillars that this study identified as shaping the BJP's electoral performance: the Modi leadership factor, the architecture of welfare politics, ideological consolidation, and the strategic deployment of digital communication. It then reflects on the implications of the BJP's decade-long trajectory for India's political culture, acknowledges the limitations of the study, and proposes directions for future research.

The central argument that emerges from across the preceding chapters is this: the BJP's rise between 2014 and 2024 was not the result of any single factor but of the sustained interaction between charismatic leadership, organisational strength, welfare-based legitimacy, ideological mobilisation, and technological innovation-all operating within, and shaping, India's evolving federal democratic framework. The 2024 election, while marking a moment of competitive recalibration, does not overturn this argument. Rather, it demonstrates that even well-institutionalised dominant-party formations encounter structural limits within pluralistic democracies, and that voter agency remains the ultimate corrective mechanism in India's electoral system.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

5.2.1 The Breakthrough: 2014 as a Critical Juncture

The 2014 general election constituted a decisive turning point in India's political history. This key finding answers Research Q1 & Q2. For the first time since 1984, a

single party-the BJP under Narendra Modi's leadership - secured a clear parliamentary majority, winning 282 seats independently while its National Democratic Alliance partners contributed a further 53 seats (Jaffrelot, 2015). This outcome ended nearly three decades of coalition governance and marked the beginning of what scholars describe as India's Fourth Party System, characterised by centralised leadership authority, ideological consolidation, and the nationwide penetration of a single party's organisational infrastructure (Vaishnav and Mallory, 2024).

This study found that the 2014 breakthrough was produced not by a single cause but by the convergence of several structural and strategic conditions. The electoral decline of the Indian National Congress, compounded by governance failures, corruption scandals, and organisational fatigue, created the political opportunity. The BJP's superior organisational machinery, its RSS-backed cadre network, its early investment in digital campaigning, and above all its decision to project Narendra Modi as a transformative national leader enabled the party to convert that opportunity into a historic mandate (Chhibber and Verma, 2018). The 2014 election therefore represented not merely a change of government but a structural shift in the rules and norms of Indian electoral competition-a critical juncture from which the party system has not returned to its earlier configuration, even after the more contested 2024 outcome.

5.2.2 The Leadership Factor: The Modi Phenomenon

Central to this study's explanation of BJP's - electoral dominance across all three cycles is the role of Narendra Modi as a personalised political brand and the primary axis of electoral mobilisation. As Shastri (2019) demonstrates, the BJP's campaigns in 2014, 2019, and 2024 were structured around Modi's leadership identity rather than around collective party programmes or local candidate profiles - a pattern that reflects the broader presidentialisation of parliamentary electoral competition identified by Poguntke and Webb (2005).

In 2014, Modi was projected as a transformative outsider offering decisive governance after a decade of perceived UPA drift. In 2019, his leadership was recast in terms of performance legitimacy and national security following the Pulwama-

Balakot sequence, shifting the campaign's evaluative frame from promise to delivery (Jaffrelot, 2021). In both cycles, this leader-centric strategy enabled the BJP to expand well beyond its traditional upper-caste urban base and construct a broad cross-class aspirational coalition. The centralisation of organisational authority around Modi - rewarding loyalists with leadership positions and unifying the party's messaging apparatus under a single command structure - further reinforced this dynamic (Jaffrelot, 2015).

However, the 2024 election revealed the structural limits of hyper-personalised electoral strategies. The BJP's fall to 240 seats demonstrated that leadership legitimacy, while necessary, is insufficient to sustain parliamentary dominance when accumulated economic grievances, regional political resistance, and effective opposition coordination interact to constrain vote-to-seat conversion efficiency. Leadership personalisation remains a durable electoral resource for the BJP, but 2024 confirmed that it cannot operate as a substitute for coalition management and responsive governance within India's federal democratic structure**.**

5.2.3 Welfare Politics

A second key finding addresses Research Q3 of this study . The BJP developed a distinctive and electorally effective model of welfare politics between 2014 and 2024 - one that departed significantly from the entitlement-based, intermediary-dependent welfare delivery of the preceding Congress era. Through the JAM trinity framework - integrating Jan Dhan bank accounts, Aadhaar biometric identification, and mobile connectivity-the Modi government restructured welfare delivery around direct, traceable, and visibly personalised transfers that bypassed local bureaucratic and political intermediaries (Kapur and Vaishnav, 2018).

The political consequences of this restructuring were significant. By attaching the "Pradhan Mantri" prefix to major welfare schemes and integrating beneficiary communications with the Prime Minister's political identity, the BJP created durable credit-claiming linkages between welfare recipients and central leadership-transforming welfare from an administrative process into a mechanism of political legitimacy (Sircar, 2022; Jaffrelot, 2021). Survey data from the 2019 National Election Studies confirmed that beneficiaries of BJP-era schemes such as Ujjwala and

Jan Dhan were measurably more likely to vote for the BJP, particularly in states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh where welfare penetration was deepest (Deshpande, Tillin, and Kailash, 2019).

Yet the 2024 results indicate that welfare legitimacy has structural limits as an electoral resource. As beneficiary populations absorbed the initial material benefits of welfare expansion, their expectations shifted from access to economic mobility - from receiving a gas cylinder to securing stable employment and rising incomes. Where macroeconomic growth failed to translate into perceptible household-level improvement, welfare delivery alone could not absorb accumulated livelihood grievances. The 2024 outcome therefore suggests that sustained welfare-based legitimacy requires continuous alignment with broader economic performance, not merely the expansion of targeted scheme coverage.

5.2.4 Sloganeering as Electoral Communication: An Evolving Architecture

A third key finding of this study also addresses Research Question 3 - is that the BJP developed a sophisticated, iterative architecture of political sloganeering across the three election cycles that functioned as far more than rhetorical decoration. As Kaviraj (2010) argues, slogans in Indian electoral politics operate as condensed ideological instruments capable of translating complex political commitments into emotionally resonant, accessible appeals across a linguistically and socially diverse democracy. The BJP's systematic deployment of slogans between 2014 and 2024 exemplifies this function while also demonstrating how slogan-based communication evolves-and encounters limits-as a party transitions from challenger to dominant incumbent.

In 2014, the BJP’s sloganeering strategy was architecturally aspirational. “Achhe Din Aane Wale Hain” succeeded through deliberate semantic openness, inviting every voter to populate the promise of good days with their own aspirations - employment for youth, reform for businesses, agricultural relief for farmers, efficient governance for the middle class (Kumar, 2014). “Ab Ki Baar, Modi Sarkar’ simultaneously personalised the electoral contest by fusing party, government, and leader into a single phrase, normalising leader-centric electoral reasoning within India's parliamentary framework (Pal et al., 2016). “Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas”

performed a defensive ideological function, repositioning the BJP as an inclusive developmental party and making its Hindutva identity electorally safe by subordinating it beneath the language of universal progress (Jaffrelot, 2015). Taken together, the 2014 slogans operated as a tripartite communicative strategy-generating aspiration, consolidating personal leadership identification, and neutralising ideological anxieties simultaneously.

By 2019, the communicative logic of sloganeering had shifted from aspiration to ratification. “Phir Ek Baar, Modi Sarkar” preserved the cadence and leader-centric grammar of its 2014 predecessor while updating its temporal logic - the election was now a consolidation of proven governance rather than a gamble on promise. “Modi Hai Toh Mumkin Hai” articulated the most explicit claim of capability-based leadership legitimation in the BJP's electoral repertoire, framing governance outcomes as directly contingent on one leader's continued presence (Jaffrelot, 2021). Most innovatively, ‘Main Bhi Chowkidar’ transformed a defensive response to opposition criticism into a mass participatory identity, converting supporters from passive voters into symbolic co-guardians of national integrity and demonstrating the BJP’s capacity for communicative agility within the digital media environment (Chhibber and Verma, 2019).

The 2024 election, however, revealed the structural limits of the BJP's sloganeering model at a mature stage of incumbency. “Abki Baar, 400 Paar” departed fundamentally from the party’s established communicative pattern by functioning as a declaratory rather than a mobilising slogan -projecting anticipated dominance rather than directing a promise toward voters. Rather than generating participatory energy, the slogan provoked counter-mobilisation among opposition supporters who perceived an uncontested BJP supermajority as a threat to constitutional protections and minority rights (Yadav, 2024). In constituencies where unemployment, agrarian distress, and localised anti-incumbency shaped voter sentiment, a slogan centred on institutional dominance rather than material promise offered no meaningful resonance (Kumar and Kumar, 2024).

The comparative arc of BJP’s sloganeering across three election cycles therefore illustrates a broader analytical principle: the electoral effectiveness of political slogans is determined not by their linguistic creativity alone but by their

alignment with voter expectations at specific moments in a party's incumbency cycle. Aspirational slogans generate maximum mobilising energy when a party is a challenger constructing a vision of change. Performance-ratifying slogans consolidate support when incumbency has produced visible welfare gains and leadership credibility.

Declaratory slogans, by contrast, risk electoral damage when material anxieties emerge and voters seek responsive promises rather than projections of political inevitability. For the BJP, the lesson of 2024 is that sloganeering must continuously recalibrate to voter-facing realities rather than inward-facing assessments of political strength-a lesson with implications for how dominant parties manage electoral communication across extended periods of governance.

5.2.5 Ideological Consolidation and Strategic Flexibility

The third pillar identified in this study is the BJP's management of its ideological identity - rooted in Hindutva and cultural nationalism - across three election cycles. This study found that the BJP did not apply its ideology rigidly or uniformly but deployed it with what Jaffrelot (1996) describes as "strategic oscillation" - combining ideological commitment with pragmatic adaptation to shifting political contexts.

In 2014, the BJP strategically moderated its Hindutva messaging beneath the more inclusive language of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas," allowing it to broaden its social coalition beyond its traditional Hindu nationalist base. In 2019, ideological mobilisation was intensified through the Pulwama-Balakot national security narrative and the Ram Mandir campaign, which deepened the emotional identification of core supporters while framing the election around civilisational themes of protection and pride. The Ram Mandir consecration in January 2024 was intended to replicate this dynamic, but encountered the limits of purely symbolic mobilisation in constituencies where displacement grievances, agrarian distress, and economic anxiety overrode cultural nationalist appeals.

The broader implication is that Hindutva functioned across this period not as a fixed electoral programme but as a flexible ideological resource - capable of amplifying BJP's mobilisation when economic conditions were favourable and voter

aspirations were high, but insufficient to sustain dominance when material concerns displaced cultural identification as the primary driver of voter behaviour (Chhibber and Verma, 2018; Jaffrelot, 2021).

5.2.6 Digital Communication and the Transformation of Electoral Politics

The fourth pillar of this study's findings concerns the BJP's pioneering role in transforming Indian electoral communication through systematic investment in digital infrastructure. From the 3D hologram rallies of 2014 to the WhatsApp network mobilisation of 2019, the BJP consistently led its competitors in integrating digital platforms into a coordinated, scalable, and leader-centred communication architecture (Pal et al., 2017; Udupa, 2019).

This digital strategy served three distinct functions across the decade. First, it enabled the BJP to bypass traditional media gatekeepers - print journalists, regional broadcasters, and intermediary political networks and establish direct communication channels between national leadership and voters at the constituency level. Second, it allowed the centralised dissemination of emotionally calibrated campaign narratives-including slogans, welfare delivery claims, and nationalist messaging - across decentralised volunteer networks at a speed and scale impossible within traditional campaign structures. Third, it created what Udupa (2021) describes as ideological echo chambers that strengthened supporter identification while deepening political polarisation within the broader information environment.

By 2024, however, the BJP's first-mover advantage in digital campaigning had narrowed considerably, as opposition parties invested significantly in their own social media infrastructure. The increasingly contested digital public sphere meant that narrative control - previously a structural advantage for the BJP - required greater resources and offered diminishing electoral returns. Digital communication remains a permanent feature of Indian electoral competition, but it is no longer a BJP-exclusive advantage; it has become a competitive battleground where all major formations must operate.

5.3 Implications for India’s Political Culture

The BJP’s decade-long electoral trajectory has generated consequences that extend well beyond seat counts and vote shares. These findings addressed Research Q4

It has fundamentally altered the norms, values, and practices through which Indian politics is conducted - a transformation in political culture whose implications deserve careful examination.

The most visible cultural consequence is the entrenchment of leader-centred political mobilisation as the dominant grammar of Indian electoral competition. Before 2014, India’s political culture was organised around collective institutions-parties, coalitions, caste groups, and regional formations-as the primary units of electoral identity and accountability. The BJP’s campaigns systematically replaced this collective logic with a presidential one, in which a single leader's credibility, persona, and narrative became the primary frame through which voters evaluated political alternatives (Palshikar, 2015). By 2019, this presidentialisation had become the unchallenged norm: opposition parties were no longer contesting the leader-centric model but attempting to replicate it through their own personalised counter-figures.

The BJP’s decade also accelerated the nationalisation of electoral competition-the process by which state-level contests are increasingly structured by national narratives. Chhibber and Verma (2018) document how BJP’s campaigns systematically subordinated local political economies to a unified national message, disrupting the regional party autonomy that had defined India’s Third Party System. This nationalisation has reshaped democratic culture by reducing the leverage of regional formations within parliamentary competition-a development whose long-term implications for India’s pluralistic democracy remain actively debated.

At the same time, the 2024 election demonstrated that India’s political culture retains its self-correcting capacity. The re-emergence of competitive coalition dynamics, the strengthening of opposition coordination, and the BJP’s consequent dependence on NDA partners all reflect the enduring pluralism of India's federal

democratic system - a system in which no single party, however well-organised and ideologically coherent, can permanently override the diversity of interests and identities that define India's electorate.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

This study, while offering a structured analysis of the BJP's electoral trajectory between 2014 and 2024, is subject to several limitations that are important to acknowledge honestly.

The first limitation relates to the study's focus on national-level electoral competition. By concentrating primarily on Lok Sabha elections and national party dynamics, the study has limited engagement with state assembly elections and the subnational political economies that significantly shape India's electoral outcomes. State-level variation-including the BJP's strong performance in states like Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh alongside its losses in Kerala and Tamil Nadu - reflects dynamics that national-level analysis cannot fully capture. Future research incorporating state-level comparative analysis would provide a more complete picture of the BJP's electoral geography.

The second limitation concerns the absence of systematic comparative analysis with opposition parties. While this study acknowledges the role of Congress's organisational decline and the INDIA alliance's coordination in shaping the 2024 outcome, it does not conduct a thorough comparative examination of opposition party strategies, structures, and electioneering alongside the BJP. A more balanced comparative approach would help clarify whether the BJP's dominance reflects its own organisational and communicative strengths or, at least in part, the structural weaknesses of its competitors.

The third limitation involves the measurement of digital campaign effectiveness. Although this study identifies digital communication as a pivotal pillar of the BJP's electoral maneuvering, it relies on secondary documentation of digital activity rather than direct platform-level data. The precise electoral impact of social media mobilisation - the extent to which digital exposure translates into vote choice -

remains difficult to establish within a qualitative research framework, and this study makes no claim to have resolved that causal question.

Finally, the study acknowledges the difficulty of analytically separating the independent effects of leader centric approach, innovative electioneering and employment of welfare politics on electoral outcomes. These dimensions of the BJP's strategy are deeply intertwined in practice. Because they operate as mutually reinforcing components rather than independent variables, this study interprets them together rather than attempting to isolate their individual contributions.

5.5 Directions for Future Research

This study opens several important avenues for future academic inquiry that would deepen understanding of the BJP's electoral trajectory and its implications for Indian democracy.

- First, future research should examine the BJP's electoral performance at the state level in greater depth. A comparative study of the party's strategies across states with varying social compositions, regional party systems, and economic conditions would provide a more granular understanding of how national-level dominance interacts with subnational political realities. States such as West Bengal, where the BJP made significant inroads before facing setbacks, and Tamil Nadu, where it has consistently struggled, offer particularly instructive comparative cases.

- Second, the relationship between welfare targeting and long-term political behaviour deserves more systematic attention. This study has shown that welfare delivery generated measurable electoral credit in the 2019 cycle, but the 2024 results suggest that this credit has a shelf life - that beneficiary populations eventually shift their evaluative criteria from access to economic mobility. Future research using longitudinal survey data could track how welfare scheme exposure shapes political identification, party loyalty, and evaluations of government performance over time across different social groups, particularly women beneficiaries and rural youth.

- Third, the growing role of digital political communication in shaping democratic participation and voter behaviour among young and first-time voters warrants dedicated research. India’s electorate is among the youngest in the world, and the 2024 election saw significant youth voter engagement through digital platforms. Understanding how platform-mediated political information shapes political attitudes, party identification, and democratic engagement among this demographic is essential for anticipating the future trajectory of Indian electoral competition.

- Finally, the 2024 election’s revival of coalition dynamics raises important questions about how dominant parties adapt their organisational and communicative strategies when transitioning from majority governance to coalition dependence. Comparative research on how the BJP navigates this transition - and whether it represents a temporary correction or the beginning of a more enduring competitive equilibrium - would contribute significantly to broader scholarly understanding of dominant-party resilience in federal democratic systems.

5.6 Conclusion

The BJP’s electoral trajectory between 2014 and 2024 represents one of the most significant transformations in the history of Indian democracy. From its historic majority in 2014 through its consolidation in 2019 to the competitive recalibration of 2024, the party's journey reveals both the possibilities and the limits of dominant-party politics within a federal democratic framework as diverse and dynamic as India's.

This study has demonstrated that the BJP’s rise cannot be reduced to any single explanatory variable. It emerged from the sustained interaction of charismatic leadership, organisational depth, welfare-based legitimacy, ideological mobilisation, and technological innovation - each reinforcing the others across successive electoral cycles. Together, these factors enabled the party to construct a broad national electoral coalition that transcended its earlier social base and redefined the competitive norms of Indian politics.

At the same time, the 2024 election serves as an important reminder that electoral dominance in a pluralistic democracy is inherently conditional. Voter expectations evolve, economic anxieties accumulate, opposition formations learn and adapt, and regional political identities reassert themselves against nationalising electoral pressures. The BJP's reduced parliamentary majority in 2024 is not a verdict against its decade of governance but a reflection of these structural dynamics-a corrective moment within a system that, despite significant transformation, retains its essential democratic character.

India’s political future will be shaped by how these competing forces-centralising leadership, pluralising federalism, aspirational welfare politics, and digitally mediated democratic communication-continue to interact. What the BJP's trajectory between 2014 and 2024 ultimately demonstrates is that Indian democracy is neither fragile nor static. It is a living, adaptive, and deeply contested system-one in which power is perpetually earned, never permanently secured.

Summary

Brief Background

This dissertation examines the electoral trajectory of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) from 2014 to

2024, a period that marked a transformative phase in Indian politics. The study analyses how the BJP evolved from a coalition-era political party into the dominant national political force in India. It highlights the role of ideological consolidation through Hindutva, charismatic leadership under Narendra Modi, organisational discipline, welfare politics, and technologically driven electioneering in reshaping India's political culture and electoral system. The dissertation situates the BJP's rise within the broader transition from coalition politics to what scholars identify as India's "Fourth Party System," characterised by centralised leadership and dominant-party politics.

Statement of the Problem

The study addresses the transformation of the BJP from a marginal political force into a dominant national party and examines the factors responsible for this rise between 2014 and 2024. Although existing scholarship has analysed the BJP's ideology, organisational structure, and electoral expansion, there remains limited integrated research connecting leadership personalisation, welfare politics, digital campaigning, and ideological mobilisation within a continuous framework. The dissertation also investigates how the BJP's dominance has altered India's political culture, democratic practices, and electoral behaviour, particularly through the presidentialisation of politics, centralisation of power, and digitisation of political communication.

Objectives and Research Questions

Research Objectives

The dissertation outlines the following objectives:

1. To facilitate a comprehensive framework to study the electoral trajectory of the BJP.

2. To outline the historical trajectory of the BJP from its early electoral performance to its emergence as the dominant national party.
3. To examine the transition from coalition politics to the majoritarian era, particularly after the 2014 and 2019 elections.
4. To study the use of electioneering techniques, particularly sloganeering and welfare politics, by the BJP to gain political leverage.

Research Questions

1. How can the electoral trajectory of the BJP be explained through its historical evolution from its early parliamentary performance to its emergence as the dominant national party after 2014?
2. How has the rise of the BJP changed the political culture of India?
3. How do the electioneering techniques of the BJP, particularly sloganeering and welfare politics, provide it political leverage over other political parties?

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research methodology using interpretative analysis of secondary sources, including books, journal articles, policy reports, and academic literature. Major themes identified include leadership centric approach , ideological consolidation and innovative electioneering techniques . Descriptive interpretation of electoral statistics from the Election Commission of India was also employed to analyse trends in vote shares, seat distribution, and voter turnout.

Primary sources include Election Commission reports, BJP manifestos (2014, 2019, and 2024), welfare scheme documents, and campaign material. Secondary sources comprise scholarly books, journal articles, and reports from institutions such as CSDS, ORF, PRS, and Carnegie Endowment.

Key Findings

The dissertation finds that the BJP's electoral dominance between 2014 and 2024 was shaped by a combination of ideological mobilisation, charismatic leadership, welfare-based legitimacy, organisational discipline, and digital electioneering.

Key findings include:

- The BJP successfully transformed Indian politics from coalition-era multipolarity into a dominant-party system after 2014.
- Narendra Modi's personalised leader-centric campaigning significantly altered voter expectations and political communication.
- Welfare initiatives such as the JAM Trinity (Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, and Mobile) and Direct Benefit Transfers strengthened direct state-citizen linkages and enhanced the BJP's political legitimacy.
- Electioneering strategies involving welfare politics,, slogan-based mobilisation and innovative communication infrastructure provided the BJP with a significant electoral advantage.
- Slogans such as "Achhe Din Aane Wale Hain," "Ab Ki Baar Modi Sarkar," and "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas" played a crucial role in emotional mobilisation and narrative-building.
- Despite sustained dominance in 2014 and 2019, the 2024 elections reflected emerging electoral competition, economic dissatisfaction, and limits to leadership-centric campaigning, signalling the partial revival of coalition politics.

Conclusion

The dissertation concludes that the BJP's rise between 2014 and 2024 represents one of the most significant transformations in contemporary Indian democracy. The party's success was not attributable to a single factor but rather to the interaction of ideology, leadership, welfare politics, organisational strength, and technologically mediated political communication. The BJP reshaped India's electoral culture by centralising leadership, nationalising political narratives, and strengthening direct voter engagement through welfare and digital outreach.

At the same time, the 2024 election results suggest that dominant-party systems remain subject to democratic contestation and evolving voter expectations. The study ultimately argues that the BJP's electoral trajectory has fundamentally altered India's political culture, governance practices, and democratic competition, while also opening new avenues for future research on digital politics, voter behaviour, and the evolution of party systems in India.

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