

# RISE OF BHARTIYA JANTA PARTY IN NATIONAL POLITICS

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## ABSTRACT

*Indian national politics witnessed the emergence of one of the most promising and prominent national party of India, of current times, Bhartiya Janta Party. This paper attempts to trace the dynamics behind BJP's rise to its current stature. Data for this paper comes from Election Commission of India. Our analysis suggest that Bhartiya Janta Party has capitalized and thrived on the idea of anti-minorityism by developing strong foothold in the hindi speaking states (the cow-belt region of India) which were also the states with most number of seats being reserved for SCs and STs and also on its capability to manoeuvre coalitions.*

**KEY WORDS:** National Politics, Party System, BJP, Hinduism,

## INTRODUCTION

After having gained independence from the clutches of British administration, India was governed by Indian National Congress (hereafter, INC) for a very long period of time. INCs claim to power and government making in national and state assemblies went uncontested for nearly 20 years. However, in the state election of 1967, in the state of Tamil Nadu, it faced its first major defeat, that too from a regional state party, namely, Telugu Desam. This was not an end but a beginning in itself of the decline in stature that INC commanded for nearly two decades. Indian political arena has been changing, wherein it experienced a constant emergence of factions that were not satisfied with the way the country has been administered. These factions got stronger, particularly after the imposition of emergency in 1974, during the tenure of Indira Gandhi as the Prime Minister of India. In the national elections following immediately afterwards, i.e. in 1977, the party experienced its second major blow. It was dethroned and Janta Party was elected in power. In the subsequent elections of 1980 and 1984, it did bounce back, as Janta party soon fell apart in 1980, and the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984 led to a huge sympathy wave in favour of INC, owing to which INC came back with a gigantic mandate. However, once the wave fizzled out, INC started phasing out again. During the ups and downs that INC was facing, this period witnessed the emergence of one of the most promising and prominent national party of India, of current times, Bhartiya Janta Party (hereafter, BJP). It is basically a reformed version of Bhartiya Jan Sangh and draws its strength from right wing Hindu nationalist wing, namely Rashtriya Swayam Sevak (RSS). In this paper we attempt to

trace the recourse of two of the prominent national parties of India – INC and BJP, where in one's decline (INC) coincides with the rise of the other (BJP).

There are political as well as economic factors that led to the rise of BJP. Malik and Singh (1992) in their paper have reasoned the phenomenon of rise of Hindutva, Hindu Nationalism or anti-minorityism as one of the important theme of elections in India in the post 1989 period, represented by BJP. This can be attributed to the prominence gained by the Mandal Commission Report of 1980 during this period that proposed reservation for minorities in government jobs. Chibber (1997) have attributed the rise of BJP to its ability to manoeuvre successful coalitions among various religious groups. In light of these studies, our paper explores the trends accompanying the rise of BJP in national arena. Subsequent sections of the paper are organised as follows: Section 2 talks about the data that has been used in this paper. Section 3 highlights and describes some of the major trends. Section 4 analyses and discussed the decline of INC and finally, section 5 concludes the entire paper.

## DATA

This paper uses data on national elections available from Election Commission of India, for the period between 1977 and 2014. It provides state wise and constituency wise information on all the candidates and the respective political parties that they represent. This includes name of the candidates and their corresponding parties, number of registered voters and actual votes polled, absolute vote count that belongs to each party (candidate). Further, information on reservation status of the constituency was also provided. It is important to highlight at this point that the data has been

arranged and cleaned to overcome all sorts of internal inconsistencies, arising as a result of inconsistent spelling and use of honorifics of the names of the constituencies', parties' and candidates'.

With the help of this information and also by making use of supplementary information available in the public domain, other variables that are important for the analysis has been constructed. These include - relative vote share that belongs to each party, a dummy that defines the winning status of each party, a dummy that categorises each party into a regional and national party.

With the help of these variables, this paper now discusses some of the important and enlightening time trends and descriptive statistics.

### DYNAMICS BEHIND THE RISE OF BJP

INC and BJP are amongst the most prominent national parties in India, especially in case of national elections. Here are few statistics to describe the changing stature of these parties in the Indian political paradigm. Table 1 depicts the number of seats that these parties have won in the corresponding years of election. In 1984, when BJP contested its first national election, it could secure only 2 seats for itself in the Lok-Sabha against the gigantic success of INC, who swoop in with 414 seats. However, in no time BJP has successfully been able to carve a niche for itself. In the very next election of 1989, the tally for BJP improved 42 times while for INC it stooped to less than half, at 197 seats. In all the subsequent election, we observe the tally of BJP improving with every succeeding election, with the exception of 2004 and 2009. And in the election of 2014, BJP managed a complete mandate, by securing more than 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of seats in the Lok-Sabha, while INC

has been reduced to a mere 44 seats, its worst tally so far in any election.

**Table 1**

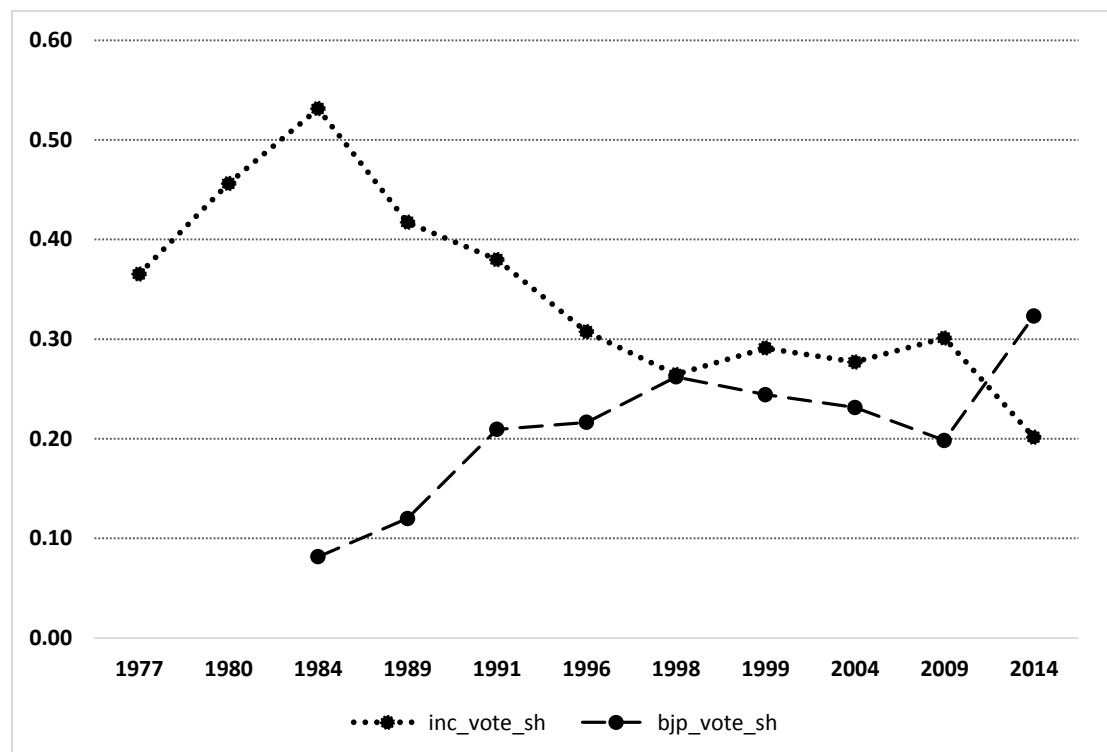
**Number of seats won by INC and BJP in the national elections**

Year	INC	BJP
1984	414	2
1989	197	85
1991	244	120
1996	140	161
1998	141	182
1999	114	182
2004	145	138
2009	206	116
2014	44	282

Correspondingly, the vote share of INC has been on a declining trend too, over the course of these elections. As can be observed from Figure 1 below, INC's vote share has been persistently declining, since 1984 while that of the BJP depicts an upward trend.

**Figure 1**

**Comparing vote share of INC and BJP**

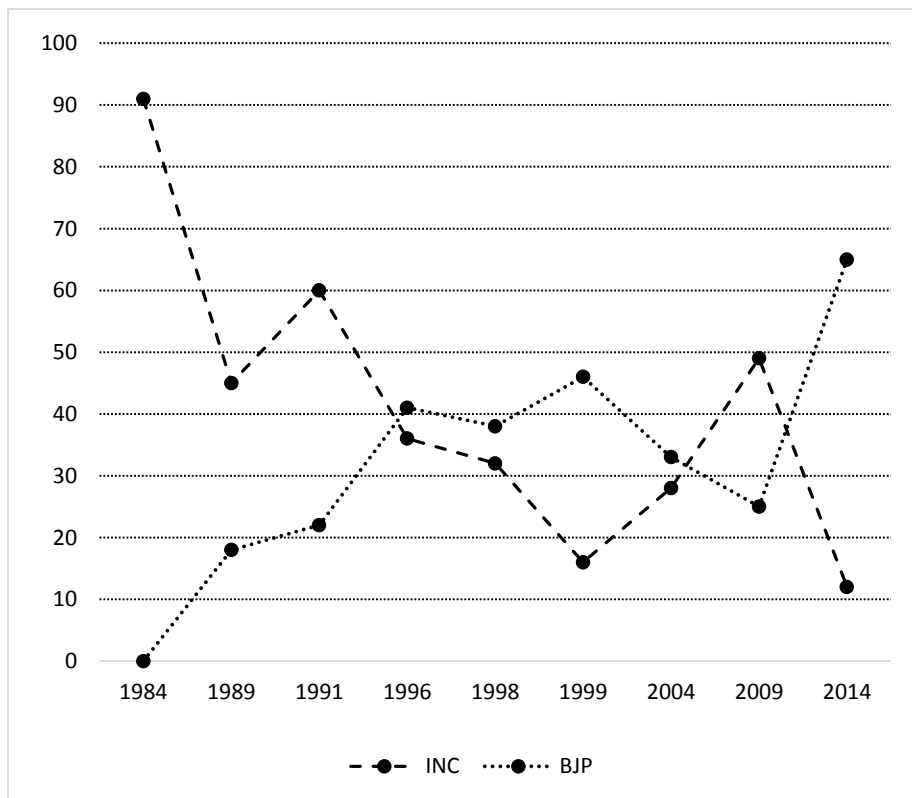


What is interesting to note, from Table 1 as well as from Figure 1, is the spike in the vote share received by BJP and its complete revival in national politics by securing a clear majority.

Further, across reserved constituencies, data suggest that BJP has been doing fairly well vis-à-vis INC, not only in terms of the vote share but also in terms of the number of seats secured. As can be seen from the figure below, we observe an ever declining trend of the number of seats won by INC and an upward trend for the number of seats won by BJP. Similar trends can also be observed for the vote shares of the two in reserved constituencies.

**Figure 2**

**Comparing number of seats won by INC and BJP in reserved constituencies**



Most of the support for BJP has been coming from the cow-belt region of India that is from the states like – Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar. BJP has secured most number of seats in any national assembly elections, in these states. Interestingly, these are also the states with the most number of seats being reserved for SC or ST candidates. And our analysis has already shown

that BJP has been performing better in reserved seats, as compared to INC. So it all adds up. But what is difficult to corroborate is the fact that BJP despite being a party that was branded as anti-minorityism, has been winning most seats in these reserved constituencies. A plausible argument is that the sentiment of anti-minorityism is all the stronger in reserved constituencies and hence, more and more voters vote for a party like BJP, placing higher faith in the image of the party than the candidate (because the candidate is from a reserved category only).

Further our data suggests that BJP has been the most successful party in forming alliances in the national elections than INC. In fact BJP was the one party that championed the use of external coalition politics in elections. According to our data, BJP has established 3846 successful internal and external coalitions as against 3713 by INC.

Capitalisation on anti-minorityism, strong presence in Hindi speaking states and coalition exercises have played an important role in the growth of BJP's nationwide outreach and making it a more successful national party.

## CONCLUSION

Our paper traces the ascent of Bharatiya Janta Party in national politics. We observe that the decline of INC has precisely coincided with its accession. BJP came in at a time when there was a dearth of parties to represent the interests of an ever growing 'middle class' which was under a huge turmoil because of the kind of policies that were being pursued by INC, especially after Mandal Commission. In wake of the growing lacuna in national politics, BJP capitalized on the idea of anti-

minorityism by developing strong foothold in the hindi speaking states (the cow-belt region of India) which were also the states with most number of seats being reserved for SCs and STs. Also, its ability to balance coalition partners have helped the party a lot in becoming a party that could be considered as a significant threat to the dominion of INC. Cut to the current scenario, BJP has now become the single largest national party and the only party other than INC who has been able to form government in the *Lok-Sabha* without

any external or internal support. Its reach has been growing, with it winning most of the state elections since 2014 and now being in power in majority number of states in the country.

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