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Chapter 4

**Critical realignment and democratic deepening:
The Parliamentary elections of 2014 and 2019 in India**

Subrata K. Mitra, Jivanta Schottli and Markus Pauli

Abstract

'Watershed', 'historic' 'epochal' were used to describe India's 2014 General Elections. The Bharatiya Janata Party secured the first single party majority in three decades, forming the Government, as the National Democratic Alliance. We argue that the sixteenth Lok Sabha elections and its aftermath constitute a re-alignment, not a clean break with the past, and that this is confirmed by the 2019 General Elections.

Keywords parliamentary elections, Bharatiya Janata Party, BJP, Indian National Congress, Congress Party, Narendra Modi, re-alignment, party competition, democracy, Lok Sabha, National Democratic Alliance, India, election, critical election, majority, elections campaign, turnout, vote share, vote swing, good governance, Hindutva, constituencies

India's sixteenth general elections in 2014 resulted in the decimation of the Indian National Congress (INC), the country's Grand Old Party, and a resounding victory for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Only one polling agency, Chanakya, correctly predicted the scale of the BJP's victory, with the party crossing 280 Lok Sabha seats on its own. The election results were significant for several reasons. In the history of India's Lok Sabha – the powerful lower house of the Parliament – no political party other than the INC has managed to win a majority on its own (excluding the Janata Party, which was more an agglomeration of disparate parts than a cohesive political party). For the BJP, the sixteenth general elections marked its emergence as a genuinely national party (making gains and breakthroughs across the country). The elections delivered a mandate for a strong, unified government based on a clear majority. This marked a break with the trend since 1984 of coalition governments formed based on unwieldy alliances, either the INC-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) or the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

This chapter analyses the 2014 elections, applying the concept of 'critical elections' across almost every indicator, the trends observed in 2014 had been extended in 2019. Drawing on the concept of 'critical re-alignment', we argue that this highlights the importance of elections, electoral behaviour, and provides a distinctive analysis of enduring political change and deepening of democracy in India. The second part examines the BJP's campaign, and in the third section we discuss how durable the re-alignment looks, given the results of the 2019 national elections.

In terms of the campaign, the 2014 election was unusual, with both BJP and INC fielding high-profile personalities – Narendra Modi, the BJP's declared Prime Ministerial candidate, and Rahul Gandhi, son of Sonia and Rajiv Gandhi, a scion of the Nehru dynasty, and leader-designate of the INC. Narendra

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Modi was not only the first sitting Chief Minister[1] to become Prime Minister but one of India's first leaders to come up from an underprivileged background. Many analysts and observers of Indian politics predicted that the INC was likely to be thrown out of power. Most observed that pre-election India was poised for change. As one scholar put it, though rather mildly, India was at 'an interesting juncture' (Wyatt 2014, 164). In the aftermath of results, which defied most expectations, the efforts to dissect and diagnose followed, drawing upon the detailed post-election survey data released by the New Delhi–based Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) (See, for example, Economic and Political Weekly 2014; Lokniti 26-Jul-21).

India's 2014 elections were labelled a watershed vote (Journal of Democracy 2014), and many other adjectives have been applied, such as landslide, historical, and epochal. These terms imply a break or disjuncture, but in this chapter, we explore the idea that this election was not a structural shift but a *re-alignment* in Indian politics. For our analysis of the elections, including their importance, impact, and implications for political change in India, we apply the concept of 'critical elections'. Introduced and utilised by the veteran American political scientist V. O. Key. He emphasized in a seminal 1955 article the importance of comparing elections because of the variation in 'the intensity of attitudes associated with campaign cleavages, in the nature of expectations about the consequences of the voting, in the impact of objective events relevant to individual political choice…' (Key 1955, 4). The 'critical election' was one 'in which the depth and intensity of electoral involvement are high, in which more or less profound readjustments occur in the relations of power within the community, and in which new and durable electoral groupings are formed'. (Key 1955, 3) Furthermore, the critical election marks fundamental and enduring re-alignments of voters' partisan affiliations.

To follow Key's criteria for comparing elections, we put India's 2014 general elections in context and in a continuum. We consider previous general elections and examine the processes that have been at

work, shaping, adjusting, and gradually recasting the institutional framework of Indian politics. Next, we turn to the BJP and explore the success of their campaign to argue that they were innovative and strategic in recasting power relations within the party and in reinventing their message for the electorate. In the third part, we examine the last criteria for labelling 2014 as a 'critical election': The durability of its impact and draw upon the data from the 2019 elections to illustrate these assertions. Looking back, we posit that 2014 denotes a transformation of voter allegiances at the *national* level, not only due to the novelty and numbers surrounding the elections but also because of substantive issues that characterised the election.

In terms of the significance of the BJP's rise as a national force, many analysts have proclaimed that the BJP – literally, the Indian People's Party, but with a substantial allegiance to Hindu values and a strong commitment to nationalism – has engineered a pronounced shift to the right on the economy (Chhibber and Verma 2014), in social and foreign policy (Ganguly 2015), causing India's democracy to backslide, endangering peace on the subcontinent and dismantling its social fabric of pluralism and secularism. Others have remarked how little has changed since the BJP took the reins of power and that they appear to be continuing in the mould of the previous government[2]. However, others might point to subsequent developments such as the defeat of the BJP during the February 2015 Delhi State Assembly Elections at the hands of the Aam Admi Party (AAP) as the beginning of the end of the 'Modi wave' that had marked the Lok Sabha elections. The BJP won only three of the seventy seats in the State legislature, whereas it had taken all seven seats in the Lok Sabha elections. However, while the BJP surge may have been dampened, it was the Congress party which drew a blank.

In 2019, and counter to most expectations, the BJP won with an even more substantial majority, extending its vote share and presence across the country. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA), the Alliance around the BJP, won a total of 353 seats (303 of which were won by the BJP). The seat

projections for the NDA of seven (out of eight) major (pre-election) opinion polls, conducted in March and April 2019, ranged from 264 to 285, with a median of 275.[3] The outlier, an opinion poll conducted between 1 Feb Feb and 4 Apr Apr by *Jan Ki Baat* and the *Republic Media Network,* predicted a range between 304 to 316 seats for the NDA and hence came closest to the actual result of 353 seats. (Jan Ki Baat 26-Jul-21). Even the exit polls, conducted at the exits of polling stations after people had voted, were quite varied, and most of them still underestimating the election victory of the NDA. The seat projections for the NDA by 12 (out of 14) major exit polls ranged from 242 to 336, with a median of 302.5.[4] The two exit polls, which came closest to the actual result of 353 seats for the NDA, were conducted by India Today-Axis – with a prediction of 339 to 368 (Business Today 2019) and by News24-Today's Chanakya – with a prediction of 350 ± 14.

To understand why a second BJP election 'wave' occurred, Rai (2019, p. 253) urges analysts to go beyond the 'excessive focus on religion and saffron elements'. He finds that 'determined focus on transformational agenda in terms of socio-economic development seems to be rated as evidence of charismatic leadership and is treated as more important by the electorate in India than simply certain 'religious' or ideational visions'. (Rai 2019, 267). Contrary to this, Hall (2019) has argued that after the development and jobs focus of the 2014 BJP campaign (*acche din* –'good days' ahead) contrasted by a 'lacklustre growth' the BJP changed its core campaign theme in 2019 to – security. He argues that Modi and his political allies portrayed themselves as *chowkidars* ('watchmen') best suited to keep India safe, set against the backdrop of a terrorist attack in Kashmir (earlier in the election year) and Indian retaliatory airstrikes on terrorist camps in areas controlled by Pakistan.

In our conclusion, we identify the indicators of political change that were highlighted by the 2014 elections. We then link these to the underlying structural dynamics in the economy and society that

were drawn out during the 2019 elections and discuss why the stakes remain so high for the BJP to chart a moderate course.

Locating the 2014 and the 2019 Elections

Voter Turnout

India, as the world's largest democracy, had an electorate of 912 million people in 2019. (See Table 4.1.) Accordingly, the number of polling stations set up all over the vast territory is impressive – more than one million in 2019. Moreover, a total of 8054 candidates competed for the 543 seats in the Lok Sabha, the lower house of the Indian Parliament.

Figure 4.1 shows the female, male and total turnout in per cent for all Indian Parliamentary Elections from 1967 to 2019, as earlier statistical reports by the Election Commission of India did not include this breakdown by gender. While there was a persistent and significant gender gap in voter turnout, it shrank remarkably in 2009 and was even smaller in 2014 (with 1.8 % points) and 2019 (with merely 0.3 % points).

The last two General Elections saw the highest turnout of any national election since Independence, with 66.4% in 2014 and 67.1% in 2019, as seen in

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Figure 4.1. Only one previous election that of 1984 saw a comparable high voter turnout, at 64%. This is similar to the average turnout level in OECD countries at 65.2% in the late 2010s (down from 75.2% in the early 1990s), which also includes countries with compulsory voting, such as Turkey (with no sanctions in the case of non-voting), Belgium, or Australia (both with minimal sanctions). (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 2021; OECD 27-Jul-21) Two of the other democracies among the emerging markets share even higher turnout rates, namely Indonesia (75.1% and 72.6% in the last two parliamentary elections) and Brazil (80.6% and 79.8% in the last two parliamentary elections) – both also without compulsory voting. On the other hand, South Africa experienced a steady decline in voter turnout (down to 73.5% and 66% in the last two elections). (IDEA 2021)

Table 4.1 Indian Parliamentary Elections 1952-2019: Number of Seats, Candidates, Polling Stations, Electorate

Year	Seats	Candidates	Polling Stations	Electorate (in millions)
1952	489	1,874	NA	173.2
1957	494	1,519	NA	193.7
1962	494	1,985	238,031	216.4
1967	520	2,369	243,693	250.2
1971	518	2,784	342,918	274.2
1977	542	2,439	373,910	321.2
1980	542	4,629	436,813	356.2
1984	514	5,312	479,512	379.5
1989	529	6,160	580,798	498.9
1991	524	8,668	576,353	498.4
1996	543	13,952	767,462	592.6
1998	543	4,750	772,681	605.9
1999	543	4,648	774,651	619.5
2004	543	5,435	NA	671.5
2009	543	8,070	834,919	717.0
2014	543	8,251	927,553	834.1

2019	543	8,054	1,037,848	912.0

Authors' table. Data source: Election Commission of India (2021) Statistical Report, General Election, Various Years. Note: For 1951-52 and 1957 the number of polling stations was not provided in the Statistical Reports of the Election Commission; for 2004 no total number was provided.

Figure 4.1 Turnout (in %) – Female, Male, Total – at Indian Parliamentary Elections 1967-2019
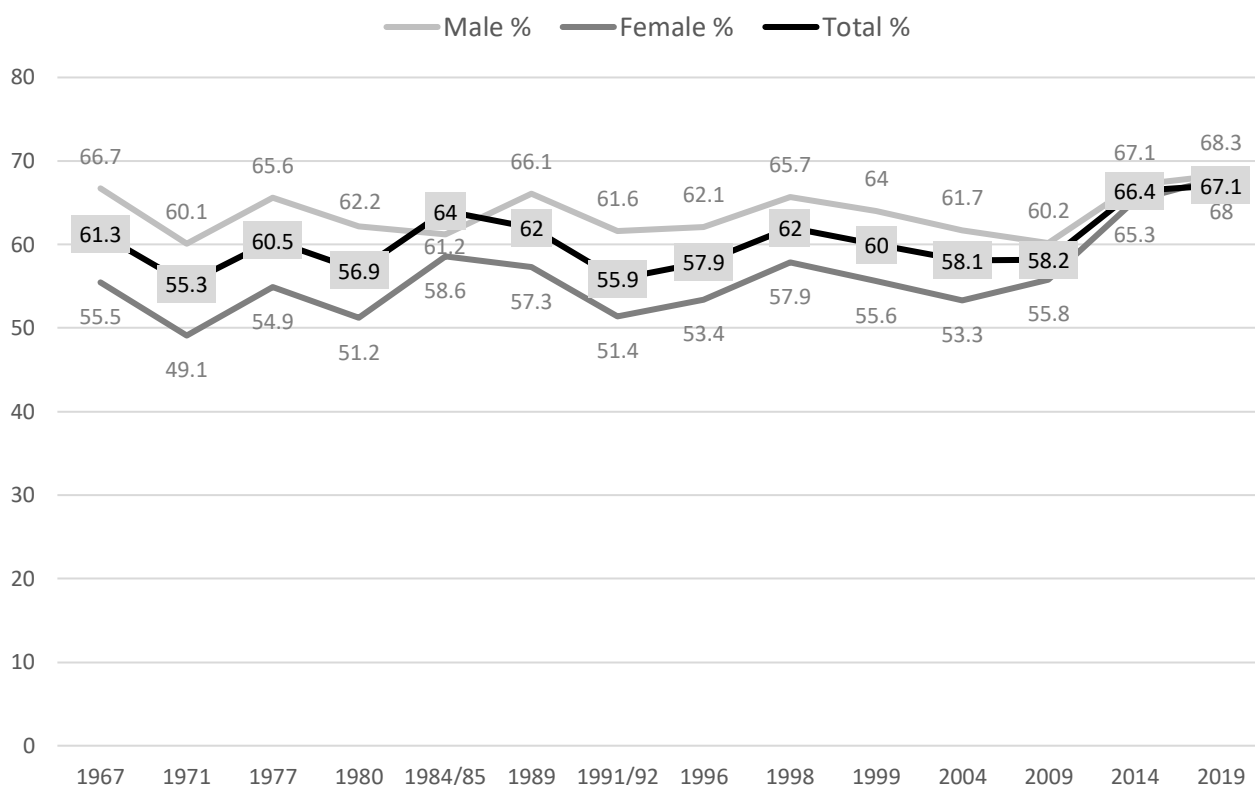
Authors' graph. Data Source: Election Commission of India (2021)

As stated above, 1984 marked the third highest peak (after 2019 and 2014) in the country's history, with a turnout of 64 per cent. When compared with the previous election of 1980, this was a jump of 7.1 per cent. In the recent Lok Sabha elections, the jump was even more significant at 8.2 per cent between 2009 and 2014. Thus, it suggests that in 1984 and 2014, the electorate felt more compelled than usual to vote. This can be explained as a consequence of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's assassination, which occurred on 31 Oct 1984, and the subsequent outpouring of sympathy for the Congress party and her son, Rajiv Gandhi, who led the Congress party in the 1984 elections held soon after that.

While the high 1984 turnout can be explained in terms of the context and contingency, the 2014 elections were unusual because it was a 'normal' election, taking place within the electoral cycle, but one which nonetheless elicited a mass response. Turnout in 2014 was significant according to various parameters including regions (with increases recorded across the country), gender (male and female turnout was recorded at a historic high)[5], age (the Election Commission noted that those States with the highest number of young voters registered, recorded the greatest increase in voter turnout). (Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Election Commission 26-Jul-21) Highly urban seats recorded the lowest turnout (61.1 per cent) as in previous elections. However, the Election Commission data highlights that the percentage point increase in turnout was much higher in urban seats than semi-urban and rural seats, suggesting that there was greater participation than usual by middle and upper-class voters in cities.[6]

These figures can be explained by the anti-incumbency effect, with voter outrage mounting in response to a series of corruption scandals that rocked the UPA government. Investigations revealed the misallocation and misuse of the nation's resources, exposed tainted ministers in the central government and within regional party governments that were part of the governing UPA, even leading to

allegations that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh could no longer claim, as he persistently had, to be like 'Caesar's wife, above suspicion,' since so many scandals had occurred under his watch. An economic downturn, with a slowing economy, a falling Rupee, skyrocketing inflation, and limited corrective action taken by the government in response to the scandals added to widespread dissatisfaction.

The 2014 parliamentary elections also represented the effect of a greater social and political awareness, raised in the wake of popular campaigns such as Anna Hazare's anti-corruption movement of 2011, the subsequent emergence of the activist, Aam Admi Party, as well as the massive public protests against the 2012 Delhi gang rape that shocked the country. These were crucial contextual factors that helped understand why the electorate voted so conclusively against the sitting government. However, this casts more emphasis on explaining why the Congress lost and does not help to understand how the BJP managed to win such a decisive victory, especially given that many observers expected regional parties to be the prime beneficiaries of the Congress' defeat (Wyatt 2014). To further strengthen this point, we turn to a short overview and comparison of the INC and BJP's election histories.

Vote Shares and Swings

Elections in India, based on first past the post electoral rules, operating in large, single-member constituencies with usually multi-caste and often multi-religious populations, have generally led to political moderation on the part of competing parties. The Congress party, which, as one can see in Figure 4. 2, was for a long time the dominant force in Indian politics and was able to transform a minority of votes to a majority of seats in the early elections – thanks to a divided opposition. However, that was no longer possible towards the end of the 1960s in State legislative elections and from 1977,

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in parliamentary elections because in the meantime, the idea of political coalitions – an efficient method of transforming votes to seats – had become common currency among parties opposed to the Congress party. Its inability to come to terms with this new development cost its electoral prospects dearly, as one can see from the electoral outcomes in the 1990s. The Congress party eventually learned to play the coalitional game and was rewarded for its efforts in the parliamentary elections of 2004 when Manmohan Singh became Prime Minister, leading the UPA coalition, consisting of thirteen parties. In 2009 the Congress significantly improved its seat share, leading to a second round of the UPA coalition government.

Figure 4. 2 visualizes the results of all Indian General Elections since 1952 – for the Lok Sabha, the lower house of India's bicameral Parliament. The numbers on the left axis indicate the total number of seats (out of 543) won by the respective parties. The right axis refers to the percentage of votes won.

In the first three elections, the Congress Party won more than 360 seats (of a total close to 500). Congress regularly won above 40% of all votes (with a high of 48% in 1984 and a low of 34.5% in 1977) till the mid-80s, when it started to decline in vote share and seats steadily. The Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), the predecessor of the BJP, stayed well below 10 per cent of the vote share and peaked at 35 seats. The BJP's jump from two to 86 seats when it competed for the second time in a National Election in 1989. While the vote share of the BJP regularly stayed above 20% in the 1990s and 2000s, it took the 'Modi-effect' to increase it to 31% and 37.4% in 2014 and 2019, respectively. The absolute number of seats won by a single party – namely 282 for the BJP in 2014 and 303 in 2019 – is at a level not seen in the last three decades.

Figure 4.2 Lok Sabha Elections, 1952-2019, Seats & Percentage of Votes
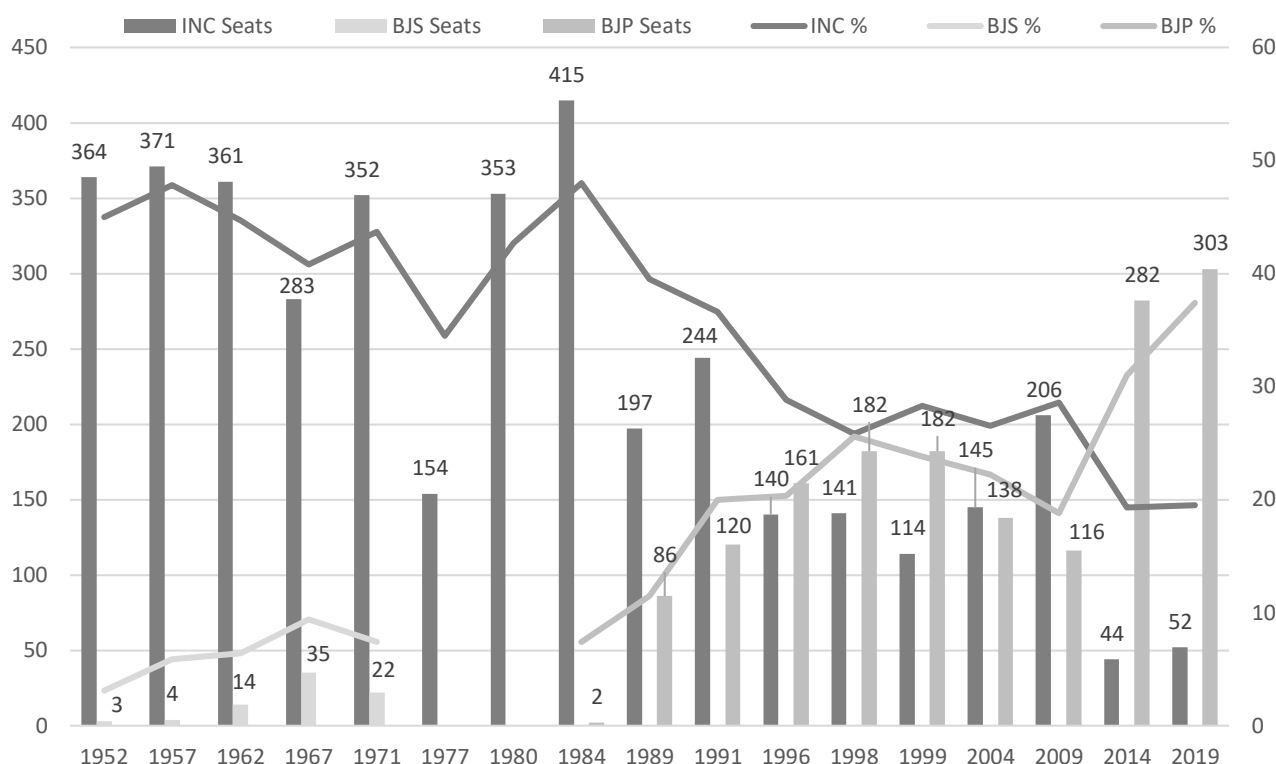
Authors' graph. Data source: Data Unit, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi and Election Commission of India (2021).

Traditionally, the social base of the Congress party cut across all social groups and cleavages of India, making it India's quintessential catch-all party. The Hindu nationalist BJP presented a sharp contrast. Initially, it was very much a party of the 'Hindu-Hindi-belt,' the north Indian Gangetic plains. During its rapid rise to power, the party drew on the desire of many Hindus to see a more prominent role for Hindu culture within the institutions of the secular State and to deny privileged treatment to minorities, such as a special status for the Muslim majority State of Jammu and Kashmir. The BJP came to power riding on the crest of Hindu nationalism and promising to build a temple for Lord Rama in the city of Ayodhya in the State of Uttar Pradesh on the same spot where the 16th century *Babri Masjid* (Mosque of Babur) stood.

For the BJP, 1989 is perhaps comparable to 2014 in the scale of victory and loss. As seen above in Table 4.2, the BJP was catapulted from just two seats in 1984 to 85 seats in 1989. The Congress was reduced to 197 seats from its whopping majority of 415 in 1984. In our opinion, 1989 marks the watershed, after which Congress found it increasingly difficult to translate votes into seats. After that, with an average vote share of 27.7 per cent over the next seven general elections, the Congress was unable to gain a majority. In contrast, in 2014, with 31% of the votes, the BJP managed to win almost 52% of the seats in the Lok Sabha. As has been pointed out, this meant that in technical terms, the BJP was highly efficient in translating seats into votes (Palshikar and Suri 2014). If one examines the table, between 1989 and 1998, the BJP got better at this, gaining seats despite relatively small changes in its vote share.

Following the downward swing in the vote/ seat ratio in 2004 and 2009, it is necessary to investigate whether in 2014 the BJP simply benefitted from blowback, the unintended consequence of the decline of the Congress Party or whether the BJP changed its electoral strategy in terms of contesting and winning seats. As Table 4.2 below shows, between the elections of 2009 and 2014, the BJP made significant inroads into several States, including Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Assam, going well beyond its traditional ambit. Furthermore, by gaining single seats in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Odisha, the BJP won an important symbolic victory, marking its presence in States where it previously had none. On the other hand, the Congress did not simply continue a gradual decline in vote and seat share in several States, but was decimated, for instance, in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan Gujarat, and Andhra Pradesh.

Table 4.2 shows the election results for all Indian states with more than five seats in the Lok Sabha. The total number of Lok Sabha seats for each State is shown in square brackets. Uttar Pradesh contributes by far the most seats – 80. For the last three Indian General elections (in 2009, 2014, and

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2019), the number of seats won by the BJP and the INC are shown in bold, with the vote share in round brackets. We included the vote swing in percentage for all states with a change of more than +/- 5%.

The largest vote swing – both in terms of percentage of votes and seats won – between 2009 and 2014 for the BJP occurred in Uttar Pradesh. The BJP gained additional 25.1 percentage points, which translated into a massive additional 61 seats. (See Table 4.2.) The BJP increased its vote share in Uttar Pradesh even further in the 2019 election (+7.4%). However, this translated to fewer seats (62 instead of 71 in 2014).

Vice versa, the most significant vote swings for the INC between 2009 and 2014 occurred in the opposite direction – minus 20 seats in Rajasthan (from 20 to 0) and minus 19 seats both in Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. The Congress suffered the largest losses between these two elections in percentage points in the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi (with – 41.9% points; taking away all 7 out of 7 available seats) and Andhra Pradesh (- 29.1 % points).

Given the high vote share of the BJP in several states in 2014, it is no surprise that there were fewer and less dramatic vote swings between 2014 and 2019 for the BJP. That is why the significant increases in vote share in West Bengal (+ 23.6 % points), Haryana (+23.4; translating into a win of all ten seats), and Odisha (+17.0) stand out even more. Similarly, with Congress – given the massive losses in 2014, fewer negative vote swings occurred in 2019. However, some further significant losses in vote share are notable, namely in Odisha (- 12.4 % points) and Andhra Pradesh (- 10.3; translating into a loss of all 21 seats between 2009 and 2019). The Congress gained a few single-digit percentage points in vote share, including in Tamil Nadu, Punjab, and Delhi. However, this does not change the overall picture of a second historical defeat – with the second-lowest seat count for the Congress Party ever, with 52 seats – eight seats more than in 2014. (See Figure 4.2.)

Table 4.2 Indian General Elections 2009, 2014, 2019 – State-wise Seats Won, % of Votes, Vote Swings: Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) & the Indian National Congress (INC)

States	BJP					INC				
[Number of total Lok Sabha seats in 2019; States >5]	**2009** Seats won (% of vote)	**Vote Swing** 2009 - 2014 [>5% points]	**2014** Seats won (% of vote)	**Vote Swing** 2014 - 2019 [>5% points]	**2019** Seats won (% of vote)	**2009** Seats won (% of vote)	**Vote Swing** 2009 - 2014 [>5% points]	**2014** Seats won (% of vote)	**Vote Swing** 2014 - 2019 [>5% points]	**2019** Seats won (% of vote)
Uttar Pradesh [80]	**10** (17.5%)	+ 25.1 →	**71** (42.6%)	+ 7.4 →	**62** (50.0%)	**21** (18.3%)	- 10.8 →	**2** (7.5%)		**1** (6.4%)
Maharashtra [48]	**9** (18.2%)	+ 9.4 →	**23** (27.6%)		**23** (27.8%)	**17** (19.6%)		**2** (18.3%)		**1** (16.4%)
West Bengal [42]	**1** (6.1%)	+ 10.9 →	**2** (17.0%)	+ 23.6 →	**18** (40.6%)	**6** (13.5%)		**4** (9.7%)		**2** (5.7)
Bihar [40]	**12** (13.9%)	+ 16.0 →	**22** (29.9%)	- 5.8 →	**17** (24.1%)	**2** (10.3%)		**2** (8.6%)		**1** (7.9%)
Tamil Nadu [39]	**0** (na)		**1** (5.6%)		**0** (3.6%)	**8** (15.0%)	- 10.6 →	**0** (4.4%)	+ 8.2 →	**8** (12.6%)
Madhya Pradesh [29]	**16** (43.5%)	+ 11.3 →	**27** (54.8%)		**28** (58.5%)	**12** (40.1%)	- 4.7 →	**2** (35.4%)		**1** (34.8%)
Karnataka [28]	**19** (41.6%)		**17** (43.4%)	+ 8.4 →	**25** (51.8%)	**6** (37.7%)		**9** (41.2%)	- 9.1 →	**1** (32.1)
Gujarat [26]	**15** (46.5%)	+ 13.6 →	**26** (60.1%)		**26** (63.1%)	**11** (43.4%)	- 9.9 →	**0** (33.5%)		**0** (32.6%)
Andhra Pradesh [25]	**0** (na)	+ 7.0 →	**3** (8.5%)	- 7.5 →	**0** (1.0%)	**21** (40.7%)	- 29.1 →	**2** (11.6%)	- 10.3 →	**0** (1.3%)
Rajasthan [25]	**4** (36.6%)	+ 19.0 →	**25** (55.6%)		**24** (59.1%)	**20** (47.2%)	- 16.5 →	**0** (30.7%)		**0** (34.6%)
Odisha [21]	**0** (na)	+ 5.0 →	**1** (21.9%)	+ 17.0 →	**8** (38.9%)	**6** (32.8%)	- 6.4 →	**0** (26.4%)	- 12.4 →	**1** (14.0)
Kerala [20]	**0** (na)		**0** (10.5%)		**0** (13.0%)	**13** (40.1%)	- 8.6 →	**8** (31.5%)	+ 6.0 →	**15** (37.5%)
Telangana [17]	-	-	**-**	-	**4** (19.7%)	-	-	**-**	-	**3** (29.8%)
Assam [14]	**4** (16.2%)	+ 20.7 →	**7** (36.9%)		**9** (36.4%)	**7** (34.9%)	- 5.0 →	**3** (29.9%)	+ 5.9 →	**3** (35.8%)
Jharkhand [14]	**8** (27.5%)	+ 13.2 →	**12** (40.7%)	+ 10.9 →	**11** (51.6%)	**1** (15.0%)		**0** (13.5%)		**1** (15.8%)
Punjab [13]	**1** (10.1%)		**2** (8.8%)		**2** (9.7%)	**8** (45.2%)	-12.0 →	**3** (33.2%)	+ 7.4 →	**8** (40.6%)

Chhattisgarh [11]	**10**	**10**		**9**	**1**		**1**		**2**	
	(45.0%)	(49.7%)		(51.4%)	(37.3%)		(39.1%)		(41.5%)	
Haryana [10]	**0**	**7**		**10**	**9**		**7**		**0**	
	(na)	(34.8%)	+ 23.4 →	(58.2%)	(41.8%)	- 7.0 →	(34.8%)	- 6.3 →	(28.5%)	
NCT of Delhi [7]	**0**	**7**		**7**	**7**		**0**		**0**	
	(na)	(46.6%)	+ 10.3 →	(56.9%)	(57.1%)	-41.9 →	(15.2%)	+ 7.4 →	(22.6%)	

Authors' own. Data source: Indian Election Commission, Various Years.

If one further disaggregates survey data about voting behaviour among social groups (see Figures 4.3 and 4.4), the evidence for a critical shift becomes even stronger. Not only did the BJP strengthen its position amongst its traditional voter base of Upper and Middle Classes as well as the Upper Castes, but in 2014 it managed to dramatically increase its appeal amongst the lower classes, the poor, the Other Backward Castes, Scheduled Castes, and Tribes – key constituents of the Congress party's traditional social base.

The BJP managed to increase its vote share among all social classes, not only in 2014 but also in 2019. Its vote share among the upper class is the highest, with 44% in 2019 (up from 25% a decade earlier). (See Figure 4.3.) Yet, the highest increase was among the poor: From 16% in 2009 to 36% in 2019. In combination with the losses of the INC among the poor from 27% to 17% vote share (in one decade), it undermines former claims by the Congress Party that it is the party of the poor. This evidence of a critical realignment is a central element of the shift in India's party system.

A similar picture emerges regarding the BJP and INC's vote share among the Upper Caste, Other Backward Class (OBC), Scheduled Castes (SC), and Scheduled Tribes (ST) in the last three elections (See Figure 4.4). The BJP managed to consolidate and increase its massive gains from 2014. While there was a slight drop in the (anyhow low) vote share of the BJP among Muslims – from 9% to 8% – it is still double the vote share compared to the pre-Modi election of 2009. This contrasts with the Congress vote share among Muslims, with 33% in 2019 (down from 38%). On the other hand, the Congress vote share among the Upper Castes, OBC, SC, and ST does not differ substantially from the (generally low) level of 2015.

Three aspects are considered in the following section: The role of Narendra Modi, the BJP's electoral agenda, and the strategy behind the 2014 campaign. Each is used to explore and highlight the tactical decision-making that occurred within the BJP during the build-up to the elections and thus to shed light on the organisational capacities of the BJP as a political party

Figure 4.3 Vote Share (%): BJP and INC among Upper, Middle, Lower Class and Poor 2009, 2014, 2019
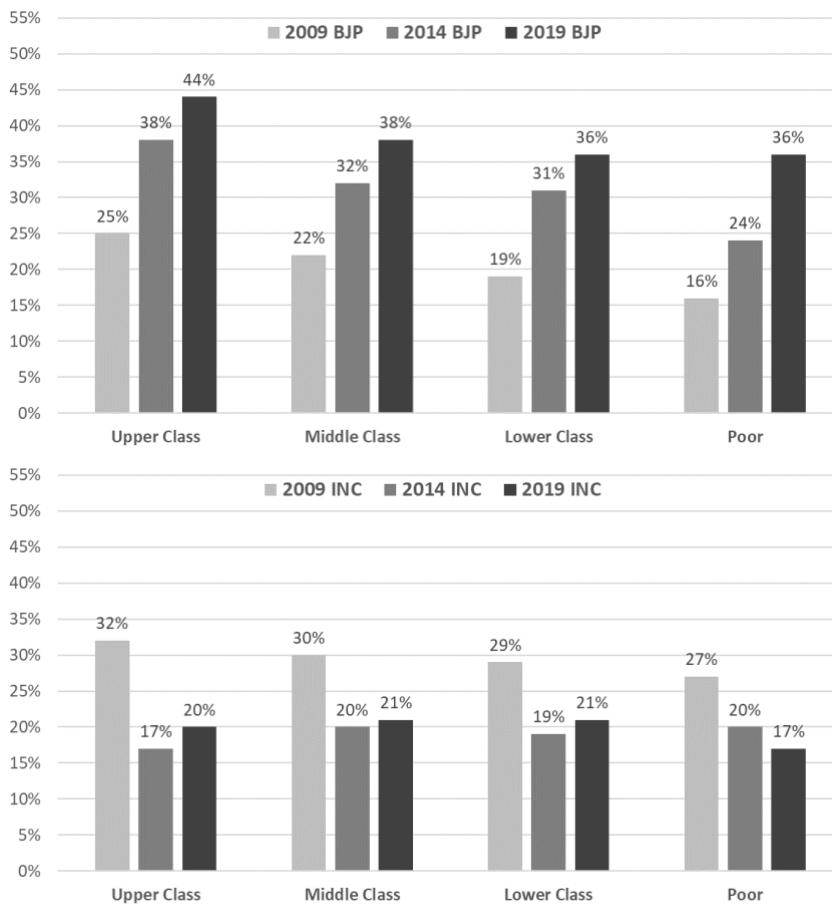
Authors' figures. Data Source: National Election Study (NES) 2009, 2014, 2019 Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS)

Figure 4.4 Vote Share (%): BJP and INC among Upper Caste, OBC, SC, ST, and Muslims 2009, 2014, 2019
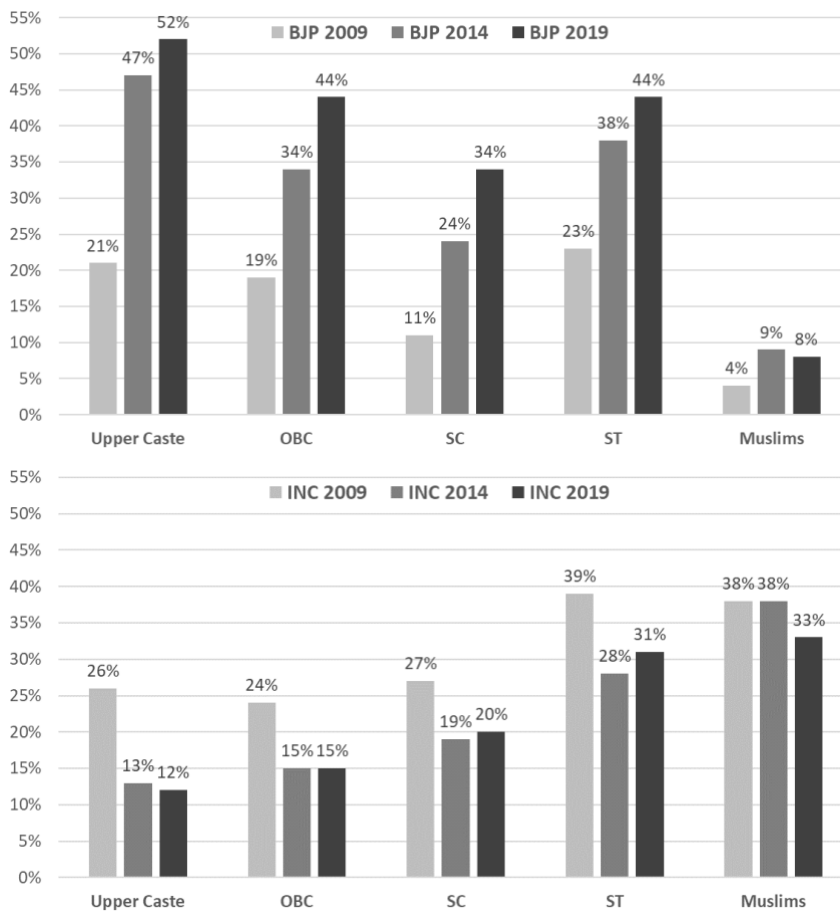
Authors' figures. Sources: National Election Study (NES) 2009, 2014, 2019 Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS)

The BJP: Readjustment and Reorientation

Unlike any other election before in India, 2014 marked a contest between two individuals. Both became emblems for their respective political parties and symbolised contrasting personal styles as well as political cultures. The media and political campaigns focused heavily on both personas to the extent that the election came to be seen as presidential in style. Rahul Gandhi, a scion of the Nehru-Gandhi family, tried to convey that he was following the noble tradition of his family in politics through choice and conviction, with a plan to rejuvenate the Congress party. However, ultimately, he failed to convince critics and voters and instead remained convincing evidence of how much parentage and privilege mattered in politics (French 2011). In contrast, Narendra Modi conveyed that ambition

and hard work can lead to success despite the odds. Having worked his way up through the party's hierarchy, Modi personified achievements based on merit. This role model resounded with the aspirational mentalities of young voters across the country and the expanding, emerging middle classes. Thus, the two candidates came to represent and were depicted as opposing contrasts, dynasty versus merit, one born into India's foremost political family[7], the other a son of a petty grocer's family who worked with his father, selling tea at a railway station in Gujarat[8].

During the campaign, Narendra Modi toured the width and breadth of the country. According to the BJP's records, he addressed 437 public rallies with other 1,000-plus rallies using 3D technology. Imitating a town hall-style of outreach, Modi invented and introduced the '*chai pe charcha*' ('chat over tea') during which people could interact with him directly. In contrast, Rahul Gandhi appeared much less frequently in public and was often filmed talking to particular groups of people, for example, the occasion in Varanasi where rickshaw-pullers and auto-rickshaw drivers were invited to question and contribute to the Congress party's election manifesto. While Modi appeared to reach out to the masses at large, Rahul Gandhi's targeted campaigning gave the impression of focusing on traditional, secure pro-Congress voting groups.

In a speech delivered to a mass rally in Uttar Pradesh in January 2014, Modi proclaimed that it would take a '56-inch chest', to convert UP into Gujarat, referring to his measurements and achievements as Gujarat Chief Minister and what it took to be an effective administrator (Srivastava 2014). Also, in January, Rahul Gandhi gave a rare, televised interview with the news anchor, Arnab Goswami, in which he constantly referred to himself in the third person (The Times of India 2014). Both leaders were mocked and criticised for their comments, but Narendra Modi managed to project himself as a strong leader. At the same time, Rahul Gandhi reinforced his image as distant, aloof, and far removed from the thick of Indian politics.

Nonetheless, the nomination of Narendra Modi as the BJP's prime ministerial candidate was not a foregone conclusion. Modi was a controversial candidate outside the party as well as within the BJP. On the one hand, Gujarat showcased the Chief Minister's achievements as a reformer and projected his ability to deliver on economic development promises. On the other hand, Modi's failure as Chief Minister of the State to stop the killing of Muslim citizens in his own State during the Godhra riots of 2002 made him a contested and divisive figure. As a candidate, he was likely to add fuel to the fire of critics who questioned the BJP's commitment to secular values underpinning the Constitution of India. Sceptics argued that Modi's 'model of development' illustrated the danger of focusing solely on economic growth without premising welfare on equality and communal harmony. After months of inner-party negotiations, it was only on 14 Sep 2013, that the announcement was made, naming Narendra Modi as the BJP's prime ministerial candidate for the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. L. K. Advani, the party's veteran leader, refused to endorse the decision and did not attend the BJP parliamentary board meeting at which the nomination was accepted, making public his protest against the selection of Modi. Advani's motivations are difficult to ascertain. He had himself been a long-time Prime Ministerial hopeful and perhaps felt that Modi's nomination over-ruled the principle of seniority.

Announcing a prime ministerial candidate as the BJP did in September 2013 was unusual in Indian politics, where prime ministers are usually declared *after* elections have been won. The move proved to be a strategic masterstroke for several reasons. In November, Modi campaigned in four State assembly elections (Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, and Delhi) where the BJP did very well, thus enhancing his popularity beyond that of his home State, Gujarat. Various opinion polls reported that with Modi's growing popularity, the election was turning into a plebiscite on him. It has been suggested that many people voted for the BJP due to the 'Modi factor' (Palshikar and Suri 2014,

42), partly based on the perceived success of 'Modi-nomics' (Schöttli and Pauli 2016). By late November, Modi had also made an impact on the international scene, as was evident with the Goldman Sachs report, 'Modi-fying our View: Raise India to Market-weight' (Financial Times 2013), which announced that it was revising its projections for the Indian economy based on the probability of a BJP-led alliance forming the next government. With stock markets rallying in December, further gains made in the wake of the March announcement of the upcoming poll dates and the rupee's recovery against the dollar (from a record low of 68.85 per dollar on 28 Aug 2013, to a high of 69.95 in March 2014) analysts and forecasters across the country began to speak of a 'Modi wave'.

The Manifesto: Good Governance and Hindutva

After much suspense, the BJP manifesto was released on 7 Apr, coming some hours *after* voting had started in the nine-phased 2014 election. Officially, the delay was attributed to the party leaders' tight campaign schedule. However, various analysts quoted sources that Narendra Modi had been dissatisfied with the manifesto drafted by the BJP stalwart and party ideologue, Murli Manohar Joshi (NDTV 2014). The original version, at 60 pages long, it was said, reflected the traditional BJP mix of *Hindutva* – an evocative term that blends Hindu values, identity, and community – and *Swadeshi* (self-sufficiency) ideology. In 2004 and 2009, this had been the case in both BJP manifestos, which contained substantial references to and discussions about Hindutva and its underlying philosophy of Integral Humanism. The 2009 BJP manifesto went as far as to pronounce a 'Hindu world view', openly extolled the Ayodhya movement, which, under the leadership of L. K. Advani, was depicted as 'the biggest mass movement in India since Independence and (which) initiated a powerful debate on cultural nationalism and the true meaning of secularism'. (Bharatiya Janata Party 2009).

The allegedly last-minute re-drafted manifesto in 2014 carried instead Modi's message and priorities of stimulating economic growth, agricultural development, and individual empowerment. At the National Executive Meeting, Modi had referred to a '5Ts' approach to create a 'Brand India' based on talent, tradition, tourism, trade, and technology. This was replicated in the 2014 manifesto and elaborated with specific goals envisioned and strategies and policies to be implemented. Thus, the central slogan 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas' ('Participation of all, Development for all') carried the day with more traditional BJP and Hindutva issues like the Ram Mandir, Article 370, and the Uniform Civil Code, relegated to a less prominent place or addressed in a less strident language in the manifesto.

Thus, on Article 370, which grants special rights and greater autonomy to the State of Jammu and Kashmir, the 2014 manifesto contained the following sentence: 'The BJP reiterates its stand on the Article 370, and will discuss this with all stakeholders and remains committed to the abrogation of this article'. (Bharatiya Janata Party 2014, 8) While the BJP has long argued for the abrogation of Article 370 in the name of greater national integration, the 2014 manifesto deviated from its previous position by mentioning the need for discussion and dialogue on the matter. On the subject of the Ram Mandir, which the BJP has in the past vowed to rebuild, the 2014 manifesto stated that the 'BJP reiterates its stand to explore all possibilities within the framework of the constitution to facilitate the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya'. (Bharatiya Janata Party 2014, 41) Placing the matter in the context of the constitution marks a change from past language and justifications used, a move away from transcendental references, such as in 2009, to 'the desire of the people in India and abroad to have a grand temple at the birthplace of Sri Ram in Ayodhya' (Bharatiya Janata Party 2009) and instead a rhetoric based on the transactional realities of politics. On the Uniform Civil Code, the only difference was the positioning of the topic, with its being moved down to the manifesto's last point. The statement remained the same as in 2009: 'Article 44 of the constitution of India lists Uniform Civil Code as one of the Directive Principles of state policy. BJP believes that there cannot be gender equality till such

time India adopts a Uniform Civil Code, which protects the rights of all women, and the BJP reiterates its stand to draft a Uniform Civil Code, drawing upon the best traditions and harmonizing them with the modern times'.

The Campaign, Candidates, and Constituencies

Aside from the role played by Modi, credit must be given to the organisational capacity and strategic calculation that was at work during the BJP's campaign. When discussing Lok Sabha elections, the State of Uttar Pradesh (UP) deserves particular attention given that it is the country's biggest State in terms of population and sends the largest number of lawmakers to the Lok Sabha. Although the BJP had already been successful in Uttar Pradesh during the 1998 and 1999 general elections, in 2014, it managed to garner a staggering 71 out of the total 80 seats. Once again, the scale of the BJP's victory is noteworthy, especially in a State where the election was a four-way contest between two entrenched, regional parties, the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), as well as the national parties, the Congress and the BJP.[9]

The role of Amit Shah is a crucial element in the UP story, given that he ultimately emerged as the State's campaign coordinator and was subsequently rewarded for his success by being appointed BJP party President in July 2014 and subsequently, Minister of Home Affairs in May 2019. A close ally and aide of Narendra Modi, Amit Shah was a Gujarat-based politician and not the BJP's immediate choice for campaign manager. In fact, BJP party president Rajnath Singh had appointed Ramapati Ram Tripathi as head of its election management committee. Nevertheless, by 12 June 2013, four days after the BJP's National Executive Meeting in Goa, Amit Shah took over the BJP's Uttar Pradesh campaign.

In a rare interview given to the Caravan magazine in January 2014, Shah revealed that he had studied closely and identified the main weaknesses in the State as 'voter disenchantment' with the reigning SP and 'multiplicity of authority' in the State government[10]. The SP patriarch, Mulayam Singh Yadav, wielding power through his son, sitting Chief Minister, Akhilesh Yadav, and numerous other competing party leaders were causing confusion and contradictions in policymaking. These weaknesses were to be exploited by highlighting the decisiveness and clarity in BJP leadership and showcasing the need for, and promise of, development. Focusing the party's organisational capacities at the booth level, in each of the 140,000 polling stations in UP's 80 parliamentary constituencies, Shah aimed at strengthening the BJP's election machinery. *Karyakartas* – booth -level workers – were identified as the crucial link, spreading Modi's message, collecting important information for the campaign, and mobilising ground forces for turnout on voting day and at election rallies. Shah also reportedly played a direct role in candidate selection, focusing entirely on the person's *ability* to win and the *likelihood* of winning.

The campaign in UP also illustrates the role of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which supported the BJP with organisational manpower and infrastructure. In the BJP's UP campaign, there were hardliner politicians like Kalyan Singh, Uma Bharti, and Yogi Adityanath[11], and communalism did become an issue, for instance, in the Muzaffarnagar and Shamli districts where the BJP officially fielded three candidates accused of fanning Hindu-Muslim riots in September 2013. However, it did not turn into the party's general UP campaign message or strategy.

Uttar Pradesh became an additional, attention-grabbing electoral battleground given that Rahul Gandhi was contesting from the 'family seat' of Amethi and Modi decided to stand from Varanasi (both in UP), in addition to his old constituency in Gujarat. This decision also brought Modi into direct confrontation with the BJP's sitting candidate, Murli Manohar Joshi, a powerful figure within the RSS.

Nonetheless, by late February 2014, members within the RSS were reportedly advising the RSS chief, Mohan Bhagwat, that Modi ought to contest the parliamentary seat, even though Joshi had started to distribute publicity material for himself in the city. Ultimately, Joshi did stand down, indicating another victory for the Modi camp over the old guard within the BJP. As a candidate from Varanasi, Modi galvanised the UP campaign further in addition to reaping the symbolic capital of contesting and ultimately winning from Hinduism's holiest city.

Despite projections that the BJP and Narendra Modi would rake-up communal tensions, expose and exploit deep societal cleavages as well as provoke a polarisation in Indian politics, the BJP held on to its 'development' theme, and the electorate delivered one of the most stable and encompassing mandates to date. Rather than caste, community, or creed, the message and promise of economic development resonated across the country, making it the first election in the history of Indian politics to be won on a primarily pro-growth agenda. As illustrated above, the BJP's decisions in the 2014 campaign indicate important changes in power relations within the party (a change of guard and generational shift amongst its leaders). Furthermore, as the UP campaign exemplified and the nationwide campaign confirmed, the BJP followed a strategy that focused less on highlighting social cleavages and more on expanding its voter base through the issues of governance and development.

The story of Uttar Pradesh highlights the gains made thanks to a multipolar contest, which split the votes to the benefit of the BJP and its allies (a similar pattern occurred in Bihar). In several states, multipolar contests gave way to a BJP majority thanks to tactical voting by voters who aimed for a stable government at the centre. At the same time, the BJP was also successful in bi-polar contests in the States of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, and Gujarat. To explain why and how the BJP appeared successfully to compete across a range of scenarios, it is helpful to return to strategy as an explanation. In an article analysing the fate of regional parties in the 16th Lok Sabha elections, K. K.

Kailash has pointed out that the BJP adjusted its campaign in accordance with the regional/regionalist agenda of potential competitors in each State (Kailash 2014). Hence in Maharashtra, the BJP focused on a national agenda rather than the Shiv Sena's 'sons of the soil' programme, whilst in other States, such as Andhra Pradesh and Punjab, the BJP emphasized the legacy of local leaders and regional concerns about state-centre relations. As a result, 'the BJP party effectively used the strategy of blurring particular dimensions on the agenda of the regionalist party while highlighting the other aspects to gain tactical advantage'. (Kailash 2014, 69).

The Durability of Change

Anti-incumbency, economic mis-governance, policy paralysis, corruption scandals worked to the BJP's favour in highlighting the Congress government as inept, paralysed, and leader-less. As demonstrated above, the electorate turnout in 2014 was historically significant, as was the degree of gains and losses for the BJP and Congress, respectively. The BJP as a political party made noteworthy changes to its manifesto and electoral strategy and, in the process, allowed for the induction of new leaders. In this manner, the BJP incorporated two mechanisms of adaptation into its strategy and organisation. This final section turns to assess the durability of this reorientation.[12] We examine underlying structural dynamics of change in India's economy and society, what this means for political change, and assess whether the Congress party could stage a comeback.

Social, Economic, and Political Change

By focusing on an economic agenda, the BJP correctly assessed the mood and needs of a country where demography is a crucial fact. Using the charge that the Congress had ruled over 'ten years of jobless growth' (Bharatiya Janata Party 2014, 4), the BJP cleverly targeted a new voter base of 18- to

19-year-olds, first-time voters, entering the job market at a time when the unemployment rate for graduates was particularly high. Thus, the BJP and Narendra Modi's vision emphasised not only job creation but also the critical need for skills development. With millions of Indians moving out of agriculture and away from villages, urbanisation has been a central concern for some time. The BJP proposed new ideas such as the 'smart city' campaign aimed at re-developing and using technology to revitalise existing urban centres.[13] At the same time, the BJP's agenda recognised the need to improve agricultural productivity, infrastructure to enhance inter-state distribution, and introduction of the long-awaited Goods and Services Tax (GST) (BBC News 2014, 27) to further integrate the domestic market. In government, Modi also initiated a '*Rurban* Mission' to provide urban amenities in rural areas.

Modi and his team of advisors, secretaries, and analysts have argued for the need to 'change mindsets.' This was publicized during the launch in September 2014 of the 'Make in India' campaign, which strived to attract investment and boost the country's manufacturing sector. The change referred to the beliefs and perceptions of potential investors and manufacturers but, most importantly, to the government, which Modi often stressed needs to cut back on the red tape and lay out the red carpet. Apart from its relevance for the economic sector, the need to change attitudes and deeply held beliefs has been a social theme for Modi. In many of his public speeches, he has urged people to change their attitudes towards work (reminding people of the need to give dignity to labour), hygiene[14] and, even lamenting the way in which parents bring up their children, with a special emphasis on the girl child.[15] In each of these, it is Modi first and foremost, but also senior ministers in the past, such as the late Finance Minister, Arun Jaitley, who argued the need to address entrenched social and economic problems by invoking and applying a fresh *mentality*.

The Congress Party: A Spent Force?

Several analysts have pointed out that the Congress party has suffered defeats before and yet managed to make a comeback (Vaishnav 2014). After all, the Congress party demonstrated its resilience, transforming from an Independence movement into a successful political party. The years between 1950 and 1967 were a period of solid dominance of the Congress party, referred to as the 'Congress System,' a term used by the late political scientist Rajni Kothari. In his words, this was 'a system of patronage [within which] traditional institutions of kin and caste were accommodated, and a structure of pressures and compromises was developed'. (Kothari 1988, 164–65) Congress dominance was not a one-party system in the sense that opposition parties were not legally barred from competing for power. However, though the opposition parties did not alternate with the dominant party in controlling the government, their exclusion from the formation of public policy was more formal than real. In fact, they were vital for the functioning of the Congress system. These parties, which often had well-developed ideologies of the Left and the Right, were positioned on either side of the Congress party on the main cleavages of Indian politics like land reform and foreign policy. Situated in the middle, the Congress was the 'party of consensus',[16] pinned down to a dynamic equilibrium, which resembled a centrist position because of the pressure exerted on it by the opposition parties. The Congress was thus the fulcrum around which Indian politics revolved.

In 1967, the Congress lost a substantial number of seats in the Lok Sabha and lost control of six State governments in the same year. Suffering from the recent death of Jawaharlal Nehru in 1964, the ensuing power struggle, leadership vacuum and, a weak economy, the year 1967 is commonly depicted as a turning point in the Congress party's fortunes. While Indira Gandhi's sweeping victory in 1971 established her pre-dominance, she failed to restore the 'Congress System', ushering in a phase referred to as a process of 'de-institutionalisation' (Kohli and Sarkar 2001). Following the Emergency

of 1975 – 77, the electorate in 1977 sought to punish Indira Gandhi for suspending democracy, resulting in India's first coalition government and marking the first time the Congress was thrown out of power. Despite staging a comeback in 1980 and an even more dramatic victory in 1984, the Congress party has not been able to gain a majority since. The 16th Lok Sabha elections are the first since 1984 to deliver a clear victor with a clear and cohesive majority in the lower house of the Parliament

A Congress party comeback, along the lines of the 1980 and 1984 elections seems unlikely. Three main obstacles appear in the way of a Congress return: Leadership, ideas, and power. Most analysts and observers would agree that Rahul Gandhi has not proven to have the leadership skills, nor the capacity and, perhaps not even the will to lead. Nonetheless, no new generation of leaders has emerged, and in fact, party and family loyalists (for instance, senior Congress party leader Digvijay Singh) continue to call upon Rahul Gandhi to lead the way forward.

On ideas, the Congress party will have to find a way to reinvent its traditional pro-poor platform. Under the Congress' watch, the world's largest social security scheme NREGA, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was launched. Ambitious in scope and aims, NREGA (later renamed as the 'Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act' or MGNREGA) nevertheless did not win the Congress party enough votes amongst the poor or rural electorate. The BJP did not scrap such poverty-alleviation programmes but sought to re-jig its fundamentals. One of the earliest post-2014 election actions was the new government's announcement of a massive programme to open bank accounts across the country (the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana) to empower new account holders and to end what they termed 'financial untouchability' by providing access to credit and insurance. It also envisioned that welfare benefits could be paid directly into bank accounts to cut waste and corruption. With Modi occupying centre stage, his rhetoric, a compelling blend of populism,

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performance, and policy output orientation, it continues to be difficult for the Congress party to come up with convincing and captivating alternatives.

The third critical challenge involves the simple arithmetic of power. In the past, the Congress succeeded in establishing dominance essentially by a process of gradual expansion of its social base, emerging from short-term coalitions leading to a political majority – rather than a coherent and organic social base, a cadre-based party, wielding an ideology of social mobilization. Thanks to a fragmented opposition in the past, this could be transformed into a majority of seats in the legislature. With the Congress itself part of the fragmented opposition, deprived of its access to power, political resources, and opportunities to recoup its losses, will shrink.

Conclusion: Looking at the Long-Term

In the more than seven decades of Independence, political competition has spread throughout the country, and voters have become more conscious of their rights and interests, capable of participating politically through various means, including protests. Political parties have learned to combine solid support in a specific social base with variable support from other social groups, depending on the coalitional arrangement struck with other political parties. This led to the formation of large, stable coalitions of parties within broad ideological labels at the national level, while party competition at the local and regional levels was more volatile. Overall, the most important consequence of this configuration of party competition has been to induce a sense of policy moderation and structural evolution to Indian politics. Lloyd Rudolph and Susanne Rudolph (1987, 58) describe this as the 'centrist multi-party system' of Indian politics.

This chapter has argued that the 2014 General Elections was a critical election, which brought about a major re-alignment in Indian politics. The scale of the BJP's victory and voter turnout indicates that the elections were unusual in terms of the electorate's response, especially when viewed historically. By looking at the campaign of the BJP and various internal policy decisions, the party demonstrated its ability to adapt its core issues and adjust its hierarchies to tap into voter concerns and gain voter allegiance. This it did far more effectively than the Congress. The BJP may have only won 31 % of the national vote, but in a multi-party, federalised political system like India's, this was above the average that previous governments needed in the last 18 years. Furthermore, it has been pointed out that in those constituencies where the BJP did win, it did so comfortably. As a result of the campaign and its outcome, the changes in power relations within the BJP have also been cemented. A new generation of leaders (Cabinet Ministers, State Chief Ministers, Senior Bureaucrats, and defence officers) have been inducted, adding to the likelihood that new ideas will gain traction within the bureaucracy and amongst policymakers.

The central factor, however, determining a critical re-alignment, remains durability. How resilient and sustainable is the BJP's dominant position in national politics? Here, it is important to note that the BJP is deeply susceptible to dynamics that could undermine it. For example, in the 2014 elections in Haryana, the BJP won a momentous victory, leading it to form the State government on its own for the first time. However, in Maharashtra, the same year, it fell short of an absolute majority and opted to rely on outside support rather than go with its traditional ally, the Shiv Sena, a move that surprised many. The delicate game being played by the BJP to secure maximum influence in the country's most prosperous State was a crucial one, testing the capabilities of a young and relatively inexperienced Chief Minister, Devendra Fadnavis. Furthermore, and even more significantly, the decision not to align with the Shiv Sena could provide the BJP with greater manoeuvrability in managing the Right flank of extremists and activists, within the party and outside its formal structure (for instance, with the

Vishva Hindu Parishad, an organization that acts primarily as the voice of Hindu opinion in the Indian Diaspora). (See Mitra 2013) Finally, the electoral defeats of the BJP in Delhi (2015) and Bihar (2015) elections showed the potential power of anti-BJP coalitions to force the Hindu nationalist party to a corner of the playing field and face the logic of the first past the post electoral system in terms of resounding defeat.

In the Upper House, the Rajya Sabha, the BJP was in the minority with 49 seats as opposed to the Congress party's 65 seats. This changed after the 2019 election, with the NDA achieving a 'working majority' in the Rajya Sabha, an important institution to pass crucial legislation, such as the much-disputed land acquisition bill. Contesting State elections and a careful calibration of campaign strategy and topics, therefore, remain a top priority for the BJP. In this regard, alliance politics and the NDA continue to play an important role in the BJP's long-term strategic planning and manoeuvring to ensure continuity of their pole position. In addition, allies retain their leverage over the BJP given the government's contentious and ambitious agenda on legislative issues such as the land acquisition bill and the goods and services tax. That said, in the end, politics is a zero-sum game of power, and current allies can grow only at each other's expense. So, no firm conclusions can be drawn about 'ever-lasting alliances' (a case in point being the Shiromani Akali Dal in Punjab, which has parted company with the BJP on the issue of the Farmers' legislation.).

The greatest challenge for the BJP in 2021 as in the aftermath of the 2014 elections is the need to deliver economic results combined with social harmony and political unity. The 2014 campaign promised to fight corruption, improve governance, and ensure development. Despite concerns over the economy, the electorate entrusted the sitting government with a second term in 2019, marking the first time since 1971 that a Prime Minister was re-elected to office with an outright majority. The focus will be on tangible results, and the media especially does not miss an opportunity to expose empty or failed

promises. At the same time, economic development alone is not enough, as was demonstrated in the 2004 elections when the BJP campaigned with the slogan 'India Shining' and was thrown out of office.[17]

In Key's original 1955 paper in which a 'critical election' was defined and applied to the case of America, he admitted that he had not identified the 'mechanisms for the maintenance of a new alignment once it is formed'. Various potential mechanisms have appeared in the first years of the Modi government. Contrary to expectations, Narendra Modi has given considerable attention to foreign policy and international politics, travelling extensively and widely, hosting and meeting world leaders, taking a tough stance on World Trade Organisation negotiations, and making unusual public speeches to euphoric audiences amongst the Indian diaspora (in New York and Sydney for example). It has been speculated that this unforeseen penchant for foreign policy could be a mechanism to rally bipartisan support. Another mechanism is the institutional framework of State-Centre relations. Modi had already announced in pre-election speeches that he would give much greater attention to the States, given their crucial role in the actual implementation of policies. With his background as Chief Minister, Modi is probably well suited to understanding the advantages, potential, and obstacles in India's federal system.[18]

A crucial question remains whether the Congress party will be able to act as an effective opposition party, coordinating the effort of several regional parties present in the Parliament. No political party was recognized as the official opposition in the 16th Lok Sabha, given that no party secured at least ten per cent of the seats (a situation repeated in 2019). The ten per cent principle has been used in the past and was drawn from the British parliamentary system where the leader of the opposition must be able to reach the quorum needed to be recognized as the official opposition and, if necessary, to form an alternative government. However, it is worth recalling that this is not an unprecedented situation.

Between 1952 and 1969 and again 1980 to 1989, no opposition party had the requisite strength, and as a result, there was no officially recognised leader of the opposition.

With several competing parties in the opposition, the BJP is faced with pressures from multiple fronts. This is a difficult challenge to manage but also an incentive for the party to learn to cope with the countervailing forces of Indian politics, and with this goal in view, to cultivate, build and consolidate a moderate and centrist government. That said, despite the defeats of the BJP in the Delhi and Bihar elections and the capacity of anti-BJP forces to manoeuvre the parliamentary system into a stalemate on important legislative initiatives by the government, the economy appears to be regaining its pace after being ravaged by COVID 19, and no inter-community riots of any consequence have taken place. The strength and resilience of India's democracy appear to continue seamlessly, despite regime change. The next parliamentary election of 2024 will be an opportunity to test the durability of the political realignment that one took note of in 2014 which was reinforced in the 2019 parliamentary election.

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Notes

[1] Narendra Modi had been elected for the fourth time as Chief Minister of Gujarat in 2012 and resigned from this post in May 2014 to contest the general elections.

[2] On foreign policy see for example, Rajesh Basrur 'Modi's foreign policy fundamentals: a trajectory unchanged', *International Affairs,* Volume 93, Issue 1, 1 January 2017, Pages 7–26.

[3] These (pre-election) opinion polls were conducted by India TV-CNX, Jan Ki Baat, News Nation, Republic-CVoter, Times Now-VMR, and Zee 24 Taas.

[4] These exit polls were conducted by ABP-CSDS, CNN-IBN-IPSOS, India News-Polstrat, India TV-CNX, News Nation, News18-IPSOS, NewsX-Neta, Republic-CVoter, Republic-Jan Ki Baat, Sudarshan News, Suvarna News, Times Now-VMR, VDP Associates.

[5] According to Election Commission data, the highest male turnout was reported in Nagaland (88.15%) while the highest female turnout was reported in Lakshadweep (88.42%). Female voter turnout (in percentage) was higher than male turnout in 16 States and UTs.

[6] According to Election Commission data, semi-urban seats recorded the highest turnout (68.7 per cent) followed by rural seats (66.5 per cent).

[7] Rahul Gandhi is the great grandson of Jawaharlal Nehru, first Prime Minister of India, whose daughter, Indira, married Feroze Gandhi (no relative of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi) and thus became Indira Gandhi.

[8] Senior Congress leader, Mani Shankar Aiyer's infamous and derogatory 'chaiwalla' or 'tea boy' comment directed at Modi and his background, served to further highlight the gulf between the two candidates.

[9] For a visualization of the gains see the maps in BBC News (2014).

[10] For the full text of the interview see Joshi (2021).

[11] Each was associated with the Ram Mandir issue and the campaign to destroy the Babri Masjid.

[12] Durability has not been a common theme in post-election analyses and publications. See for instance, the book by prominent journalist Rajdeep Sardesai (2015)..

[13] See (Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India 26-Jul-21) for details on these campaigns.

[14] The *Swachh Bharat* (Clean India) Campaign, see (Prime Minister of India, Government of India 26-Jul-21)).

[15] This was mentioned in Prime Minister Modi's first Independence Day Speech, 2014 ((India Today 17-Sep-16)), when he spoke about the rape incidents that had shocked the nation and the need for parents to educate their sons.

[16] On the 'Congress system', see the two iconic essays: (Kothari 1964; Kothari 1974). See Mitra (1978, 1980) for a spatial analysis of the one-dominant party system and its reconfiguration.

[17] The 'majoritarian' tag, as one could see in the recent assembly elections in West Bengal, cost the BJP dearly in terms of the shift of the Muslim voters from the Left Front to the TMC. A possible way forward for the party might be to moderate its stance on social issues, and move closer to the median, while focusing on the economy and law and order.

[18] One can already see a re-calibration of the BJP strategy regarding the federal units. Excessive campaigning by Modi and Amit Shah, in the Bihar assembly elections led to the opprobrium 'Bihari vs. Bahari' ('sons of the soil of Bihar against outsiders') which hurt the BJP's prospects. In recent assembly elections one sees much greater autonomy of BJP's State units and a relatively less prominent role of the national leadership.