

## Understanding the Rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party

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**ABSTRACT** In the last five years, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has undergone a massive transformation and is today the country's most formidable political force. The party won the 2014 general election with a convincing majority under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi who assumed power in May 2014. Today the BJP is in power in 20 states, either on its own or with its allies. This rise can be attributed to various factors, including the party leadership, organisational skills, and effective ground work. This brief analyses the journey of the BJP.

### INTRODUCTION

In five years since 2013, when Narendra Modi was declared its prime ministerial candidate, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has managed to widen its geographical reach and strengthen its electoral and political supremacy across the country. Today, the BJP is the richest, largest, and most dominant political party in India.

This expansion was made possible by the foundations that were laid following the party's first electoral defeat in the 1984 general polls. The party then decided to abandon the

ideals of “positive secularism and Gandhian socialism”<sup>1</sup> that it had adopted in its inception in 1980, under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee who would later serve as prime minister. In the late 1980s and the 1990s, the BJP went back to the Hindutva<sup>2</sup> ideology of its precursor, the Bharatiya Jan Sangh (BJS).<sup>3</sup>

In the 1984 elections, the BJP won only two Lok Sabha seats, provoking serious introspection within the party and its ideological parent, the Rashtriya Swyamsevak

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Sangh (RSS). The electoral failure was seen as proof that the moderate policy of Vajpayee would not work. Vajpayee was replaced as BJP president by Lal Krishna Advani, who promptly revived the BJS's hard-line Hindutva as the core ideology of the party.<sup>4</sup> Advani used the Hindutva rhetoric of “pseudo secularism” and “Muslim appeasement” to great effect in winning popular support among the Hindus, aided by the soft-Hindutva<sup>5</sup> politics the Indian National Congress played then.<sup>6</sup>

The next logical step was to join the RSS-backed Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) which was leading the Ramjanmabhoomi movement. Soon, Advani became the face of a country-wide campaign to build a Ramjanmabhoomi temple in Ayodhya where the Babri masjid once stood. The hardline Hindutva politics paid rich electoral dividends in the next general elections in 1989 when the BJP won 85 Lok Sabha seats.<sup>7</sup> In the 1991 general elections, it increased its strength to 120 and its vote share went up to 20.1 percent from 11.4 percent in 1989 and 7.4 percent in 1984.<sup>8</sup>

In the 1996 general elections, the BJP's seats in Lok Sabha went up to 161 and it staked claim to form the government as the single largest party, which was accepted. Thus, the first ever BJP-led government was formed under the leadership of Vajpayee but it lasted for only 13 days as it failed to garner the support of other non-Congress, non-Left political parties to muster a majority. Vajpayee resigned, rather than face a vote of confidence in Parliament.<sup>9</sup>

In the next general polls in 1998, the BJP obtained 182 seats in the Lok Sabha and formed a coalition government called the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), which

lasted 13 months from 19 March 1998 to 17 April 1999 when it lost a no-confidence motion by a single vote. Thereafter, in September-October 1999, the BJP-led NDA won 270 seats in the general elections, with the BJP once again getting 182 seats. Vajpayee became prime minister for the third time and his government lasted the full term until the next general polls in 2004.

## **THE BJP'S RISE: A CONFLUENCE OF FACTORS**

The BJP's rise to power can be attributed partly to Advani's organisational skills, as well as the party's return to the Hindutva agenda while keeping the liberal image of Vajpayee alive in popular memory. What further helped the party was the fact that the electorate wanted a change from the long years of Congress rule. Slogans like “Party with a difference” and an appeal to the electorate to give the BJP a chance captured the confidence of the electorate. A little over six years of the Vajpayee government, between 1998 and 2004, established the party as a credible alternative to the Congress. However, the BJP-led NDA lost the next two general elections due to various factors, making way for a Congress-led coalition, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), to run the government until a series of scams, high inflation and unemployment and policy paralysis grounded it in the 2014 elections. This time, the BJP was led by Modi, a four-time chief minister of Gujarat and the party's prime ministerial candidate. He managed to capitalise on the popular discontent against the UPA government and won the party a majority, on its own, in Lok Sabha. The last time a party had

won a majority on its own was when the Congress won 404 seats in the 1984 elections that followed the assassination of Indira Gandhi.

Ever since Modi became prime minister on 26 May 2014, the BJP has been working like a well-oiled electoral machine. It has won one state election after another and is dominating the national discourse like no other party has done in recent memory.

### **Modi-Shah Partnership**

The rise of Modi has also marked the rise of Amit Shah as BJP president. Rajnath Singh, who headed the party in the run-up to the 2014 electoral victory, reportedly wanted to continue in the post and stay out of the government. But this was not acceptable to Modi as that could have meant a dual power centre. Rajnath Singh had an excellent rapport with the RSS and that is why Modi did not want him to continue. The name of party General Secretary J P Nadda, a politician from Himachal Pradesh, was brought into contention and the RSS was agreeable to him. The move was made to juxtapose Shah against Nadda. Modi resolved it by inducting Singh and Nadda into his cabinet and appointing Shah, his old and trusted colleague from Gujarat, as party president.<sup>10</sup>

This was an exception to the long-held convention that the prime minister and the party president should come from different states. Shah has galvanised the party, bringing in a certain ruthlessness and unprecedented administrative acumen in the way the organisation is run. It is said that his party colleagues are more “in awe” of him than admiring.<sup>11</sup>

Upon taking charge, Shah introduced many changes in the party's administrative style and structure. He modernised the party set-up and developed a system that rewards individuals who deliver. He ushered in a corporate-style system of vertical heads for programmes, in contrast to the horizontal nature of the party under the previous presidents.<sup>12</sup>

For Shah and the party, elections are “nothing less than war”. His advice to party colleagues after taking charge was: Elections are to be fought with clarity of mind and with the single objective of victory.<sup>13</sup> He enjoys the total support of Modi, stands firm in his decisions and brooks no interference from any leader. By most accounts, he has a no-nonsense style of leadership, and keeps a tight schedule and long hours of work, inspiring his team to follow suit.<sup>14</sup> Shah has also developed closer working relations with the RSS, as a result of which the RSS leadership and functionaries are playing a bigger role in running the organisation.<sup>15</sup>

### **RECENT ELECTORAL PERFORMANCE: A SNAPSHOT**

In 2013, the BJP was in power in five states – Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Goa – and was sharing power with ally JD(U) in Bihar and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in Punjab. Its political fortunes have changed dramatically since then.

By May 2018, the BJP, either on its own strength or with its alliance partners, was ruling in 21 of the 31 states and union territories, expanding to the regions and states where it was never in power before. In 15 states, it has its own chief ministers and in the other six, it shares power with its allies (Bihar, Jammu and

**Table 1: BJP's Performance in 2014 General Elections**

States	Total Seats	Seats Won by BJP	Poll %
Andhra Pradesh	42	3	8.52
Arunachal Pradesh	2	1	46.62
Assam	14	7	36.86
Bihar	40	22	29.86
Goa	2	2	54.12
Gujarat	26	26	60.11
Haryana	10	7	34.84
Himachal Pradesh	4	4	53.85
Jammu and Kashmir	6	3	32.65
Karnataka	28	17	43.37
Kerala	20	0	10.45
Madhya Pradesh	29	27	54.76
Maharashtra	48	23	27.56
Manipur	2	0	11.98
Meghalaya	2	0	9.16
Mizoram	1	0	Did not contest
Nagaland	1	0	Did not contest
Odisha	21	1	21.88
Punjab	13	2	8.77
Rajasthan	25	25	55.61
Sikkim	1	0	2.39
Tamil Nadu	39	1	5.56
Tripura	2	0	5.77
Uttar Pradesh	80	71	42.63
West Bengal	42	2	17.02
Chhattisgarh	11	10	24.83
Jharkhand	14	12	40.71
Uttarakhand	5	5	55.93
Andman & Nikobar Islands	1	1	48.19
Chandigarh	1	1	42.49
Dadar & Nagar Haveli	1	1	49.77
Daman & Diu	1	1	54.66
NCT of Delhi	7	7	46.63
Lakshadweep	1	0	0.43
Puducherry	1	0	Did not contest
Total	543	282	31.3

Source: Election Commission of India.

Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Sikkim.) In five out of the 15 states where it has its own chief ministers, it does not have a majority of its own (Maharashtra, Assam, Jharkhand, Manipur

and Goa).<sup>16,17</sup> Since then, two states have fallen off the map – TDP pulled out of the NDA leading to break in partnership in Andhra Pradesh, and BJP pulled out of the coalition governments in Jammu and Kashmir.

In 2013, the BJP wrested power in Rajasthan, while retaining power in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. In Rajasthan, it won convincingly with 161 seats in the assembly of 200 and a vote share of 45.2 percent.<sup>18</sup> In Madhya Pradesh, it won 165 seats in a house of 230 with 44.88 percent votes.<sup>19</sup> In Chhattisgarh, it repeated its victory by winning 49 seats out of 90 with a vote share of 41.04 percent.<sup>20</sup> In Mizoram, which also went to vote at the same time, it did not win a single seat despite fielding 17 candidates and got 0.37 percent votes.<sup>21</sup>

Assembly elections for Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha and Sikkim were held along with the general elections in 2014. In Arunachal Pradesh's 60-member assembly, the BJP won 11 seats with 30.97 percent votes.<sup>22</sup> It joined the government two years later in October 2016 after the President's rule was imposed and the Congress, which had won a clear majority of 42 seats in 2014, was split.<sup>23</sup> In Sikkim, it did not win a seat and polled only 0.7 percent of the votes but became a part of the government since the ruling Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) is a coalition partner at the centre.<sup>24</sup> In Odisha, it won 10 seats in a 147-member assembly with 18 percent of popular votes.<sup>25</sup>

After the 2014 general elections, assembly elections were held in Maharashtra, Haryana, J&K and Jharkhand in the same year. In Maharashtra, the BJP won 122 seats in a 288-member assembly with 27.8 percent votes while its ally Shiv Sena won 63 seats and together they formed the government.<sup>26</sup> In Haryana, it won 47 of 90 seats with a 33.2 percent vote share and formed its first government in the state where it had been a junior alliance partner in two previous

governments.<sup>27</sup> In J&K, it won 25 of 87 seats (additionally, two members are nominated to the assembly), gaining the highest percentage of votes (23 percent), with a majority of the seats coming from the Jammu region.<sup>28</sup> It joined hands with the People's Democratic Party (PDP), which had won 28 seats, to form a coalition government. In June 2018, the BJP pulled out of the coalition and the Governor's rule was imposed.<sup>29</sup>

In Jharkhand, the BJP won 37 of 81 seats, falling a few seats short of the majority.<sup>30</sup> A coalition government was formed with the All Jharkhand Students Union (AJSU) and Raghubar Das, a party leader, became the first from a non-tribal community to head a government in the state.

In 2015, the BJP tasted defeat in the assembly elections of Delhi and Bihar. In Delhi, it could win only three of 70 seats, though polled 32.19 percent of votes.<sup>31</sup> In Bihar, it faced the united opposition from the RJD, JD (U) and Congress, winning only 53 of 243 seats with 23.42 percent votes.<sup>32</sup>

In 2016, the BJP won the Assam elections and formed its own government for the first time in the state, while failing to make much headway in Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. In Assam, it won 60 of 126 seats with 29.8 percent votes.<sup>33</sup> In Kerala, it won one seat, though it improved its vote share by winning 10.6 percent votes.<sup>34</sup> In the Union Territory of Puducherry, it failed to win any seat while polling 2.4 percent votes.<sup>35</sup> The West Bengal elections were disappointing too. It could win only three seats while polling 10.28 percent votes.<sup>36</sup>

In 2017, the assembly elections were held in Goa, Manipur, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Uttar

Pradesh, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh. The BJP formed the government in Goa and Manipur despite not being the single largest party and came to power in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh convincingly.

In Goa, the BJP won 13 seats in a house of 40 while registering the highest percentage of votes at 32.5.<sup>37</sup> In Manipur, it won 21 of 60 seats with 36.3 percent votes.<sup>38</sup>

It wrested power from the Congress in Himachal Pradesh by winning 44 seats, out of 68, with a vote share of 48.8 percent.<sup>39</sup> In Uttarakhand, it won 57 of 70 seats with a 46.5 percent vote share.<sup>40</sup> In Uttar Pradesh, it registered an unprecedented victory by winning 312 of 403 seats and registered 39.67 percent of votes polled.<sup>41</sup>

In Punjab, where it was a junior partner of the SAD led government, it could win only three of 117 seats while polling 5.39 percent votes.<sup>42</sup> The party retained Gujarat but its tally was the lowest in the last two decades. It won 99 seats out of 182 though it polled 49.59 percent of votes.<sup>43</sup>

In 2018, the BJP registered a landmark victory in Tripura, ending 25 years of CPI(M) rule by winning 35 seats in a 60-member assembly and polling 43.0 percent votes.<sup>44</sup> In Meghalaya and Nagaland, however, its electoral performance was below expectations. It won two seats in a 60-member assembly in Meghalaya with 9.63 percent votes<sup>45</sup> and 12 of 60 seats in Nagaland with 15.3 percent votes.<sup>46</sup>

In Karnataka, it emerged as the single largest party with 104 seats in a 224-member assembly while polling 36.2 percent votes.<sup>47</sup> However, it failed to form the government as the Congress and JD(S) joined hands to claim a majority.

## BJP'S WINNING STRATEGIES

The BJP has been able to expand its political base in the country because of various factors including superior electoral strategies, planning, hard work, and a voter outreach programme that was far better than those of its rivals. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP president Amit Shah, the party devised electoral strategies taking into account micro details of caste, sub-castes, religious compositions and other specifics of the constituencies while selecting party candidates. Under them, electoral victory at any cost became the driving force of the BJP.<sup>48</sup>

Part of the strategy was to carefully identify ambitious or dissident leaders from rival parties. Those were then wooed and inducted into the party. This had begun in the run-up to the 2014 general elections when a host of Congress leaders like former UP Chief Minister Jagdamibka Pal, Satpal Maharaj and Purandeswari were admitted into the BJP. Many others like Chaudhary Birendra Singh joined the ruling party later. A Congress leader and prominent minister in the former Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi's cabinet in Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma, was admitted a year before the assembly elections<sup>49</sup> and proved critical in the BJP's win. In Uttarakhand, many Congress leaders, including ministers, were admitted to the party before the respective assembly elections.<sup>50</sup>

Another strategy was to identify castes and sub-castes which have not been part of the power structure and give tickets to their members. The party also reached out to the economically weaker and socially backward groups. In UP, the party roped in the non-Yadav

castes from other backward castes and non-Jatav Dalits among the Dalits; it would reap rich electoral dividends.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, it formed an alliance with tribal groups that have been demanding separate statehood in Tripura and won a landslide victory in 2018.<sup>52</sup>

There were many other important factors that helped the BJP achieve its electoral

dominance and geographical spread. Some of these are to be discussed in turn.

### **Financial Resources**

Money plays a big role in India's electoral politics and the BJP is aware of it. The party has managed to increase its financial resources

**Table 2: BJP Growth in Indian States and Union Territories, 2013-18**

Year	States	Total Seats	Results		
			Contested	Won	% of Votes Polled
2013	Rajasthan	200	200	163	45.2
2013	Madhya Pradesh	230	230	165	44.88
2013	Chhattisgarh	90	90	49	41.04
2013	Mizoram	40	17	0	0.37
2014	Andhra Pradesh	175	15	4	2.2
2014	Telangana	119	47	5	7
2014	Arunachal Pradesh	60	42	11	18
2014	Odisha	147	57	10	18
2014	Sikkim	32	13	0	0.7
2014	Maharashtra	288	280	122	27.8
2014	Haryana	90	90	47	33.2
2014	J & K	87	87	25	23.0
2014	Jharkhand	81	77	37	31.26
2015	Delhi	70	69	3	32.19
2015	Bihar	243	157	53	24.42
2016	Assam	126	89	60	29.5
2016	Kerala	140	98	1	10.6
2016	Puducherry	30	30	0	2.4
2016	Tamil Nadu	232	232	0	2.86
2016	West Bengal	294	291	3	5.6
2017	Goa	40	36	13	32.5
2017	Gujarat	182	182	99	49.1
2017	Himachal Pradesh	68	68	44	48.8
2017	Manipur	60	60	21	36.3
2017	Punjab	117	23	3	5.4
2017	Uttarakhand	70	70	57	46.5
2017	Uttar Pradesh	403	384	312	39.7
2018	Karnataka	224	224	104	36.2
2018	Meghalaya	60	47	2	9.6
2018	Nagaland	60	20	12	15.3
2018	Tripura	60	51	36	43.0

Source: Election Commission of India.

considerably in the years since Modi came to power at the centre.

A report of the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) said that the income of the BJP between 2013-14 and 2014-15, within one year of its coming to power at the centre, skyrocketed from INR 673.81 crore in 2013-14 to INR 970.43 crore in 2014-15 – a rise of 44.02 percent or by INR 296.62 crore, the highest for any political party. It topped the list of income, with the Congress coming a distant second, with an income of INR 598.06 crore in 2013-14, which went down to INR 593.31 crore in 2014-15. The gap between the incomes of the first two parties was INR 377.12 crore. In fact, the BJP's income of INR 970.43 crore was 51.92 percent of the combined incomes of the six national parties (BJP, Congress, BSP, NCP, CPI(M), CPI).<sup>53</sup>

Similarly, when it came to expenditure, in 2014-15, the BJP spent the most with INR 913.01 crore, followed by the Congress with INR 765.02 crore – a gap of INR 148 crore. The BJP spent most on advertisement and publicity (INR 471.89 crore or 51.9 percent), followed by travelling (INR 209.57 crore or 22.95 percent).<sup>54</sup> In 2016-17, the BJP spent INR 606.04 crore for election/general propaganda.<sup>55</sup>

ADR's report for 2016-17 showed that the income of the BJP increased by 81.18 percent from INR 570.86 crore in 2015-16 to INR 1034.27 crore in 2016-17. The BJP's income of INR 1034.27 crore was 66.33 percent of the total income of all seven national parties (BJP, Congress, BSP, NCP, CPI(M), CPI and Trinamool Congress) put together. During the same period, the income of the Congress decreased by 14 percent from INR 261.56 crore

in 2015-16 to INR 225.36 crore in 2016-17. As for expenditure, the BJP declared the maximum expenditure of INR 710.057 crore during 2016-17, while its nearest rival, the Congress, declared an expenditure of INR 321.66 crore – less than half of the BJP's.<sup>56</sup>

If donations (above INR 20,000) received by all the national political parties for 2016-17 are considered, the BJP received INR 532.27 crore coming from 1194 donations – which was more than nine times the aggregate declared by the other national parties<sup>57</sup> for the same period.

A substantially higher income, and bigger expenditure on publicity and electoral propaganda than its rivals, has helped the BJP in its outreach programmes. These financial resources have helped in the party's extensive outreach to the electorate.

### ***Expansion of Mass Base***

Under the Modi-Shah leadership, the party was turned into a mass-based party from a cadre-driven one.<sup>58</sup> The BJP launched its membership drive asking citizens interested in joining the party to give a missed call on a dedicated phone number; they were then registered as members and their personal and professional details were taken. By 2015, the BJP had become the biggest political party in the country and the world, surpassing the Communist Party of China in membership when it crossed 8.8-crore mark.<sup>59</sup> Soon the membership breached the 10-crore mark.<sup>60</sup>

The BJP also began to penetrate into the rural countryside, focusing on reaching the backward castes and the poor. The party paid attention to castes, sub-castes and social



groups that have been neglected by other parties. The BJP political strategists, for example, picked up non-Yadav backward castes and non-Jatav Dalits. Similarly, members of tribal communities were brought into its electoral strategy.<sup>61</sup> The BJP also reaped dividends from the sustained work of RSS-backed organisations in remote tribal areas over several decades. These organisations include the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, Ekal Vidyalays, Sewashram, and Sewa Baharti.<sup>62</sup> The prime minister, after the demonetisation policy that was announced in November 2016, said the move was designed to help the poor.<sup>63</sup> Earlier, the party was perceived as a party of the rich, urban middle-class.

### **Centralised Decision-Making**

The Modi-Shah partnership has also effected major changes in both the style of functioning as well as in the decision-making processes of the BJP.<sup>64</sup> Earlier, all major policy decisions of the party were taken after broad-based consultation among top leaders in what was described as the “core group concept”. Decision-making is now centralised, with all the important decisions being made at the level of Modi and Shah, which are then conveyed to the others at the appropriate party fora.<sup>65</sup> In the earlier system, over half-a-dozen central leaders were involved in deliberations and decision-making. In matters relating to particular states, important state leaders were taken into confidence; today decisions are merely conveyed to them.<sup>66</sup>

This marks an interesting change in the way leadership functions within the larger

Sangh Parivar to which the BJP belongs. The RSS, the parent ideological organisation of the Sangh Parivar, was established by KB Hedgewar on the principle of “*ek chalak anuvartitva* (follow one leader)”, which was continued by his successor MS Golwalkar. Later, the third RSS chief Balasaheb Deoras introduced the concept of “*sah chalak anuvartitva* (follow many leaders)” and “*sarv samaveshak* (inclusive leadership)”. Apparently, the Modi-Shah duo prefers the Hedgewar-Golwalkar model of leadership and decision-making.<sup>67</sup>

A couple of senior leaders, who have been part of the party and the party-led governments, told this author on condition of anonymity that earlier the party used to be a family (*parivar*)—“that feeling is gone now”. Workers and local leaders are feeling neglected. While earlier, the party took pride in saying that it is a “party of workers”, today it has become a “party of leaders”. The selection of Rajya Sabha candidates is one example. The state leaderships are not consulted nor are the names of candidates discussed in the party's Parliamentary Board, which used to be the norm. The practice of intense debates and discussions about various issues confronting the party or the party-led government at various party fora and meetings has been replaced with sermons from the top. Asking questions or raising doubts are strongly discouraged.

Former Finance and External Affairs Minister in the Vajpayee government Yashwant Sinha, who joined the BJP in 1993 and quit the party in early 2018, in an interview with this author said that while in the pre-Modi-Shah era discussion-based consensus shaped the party

policies on different issues, now these are determined at the level of the prime minister and the party chief. “Earlier the party's top leadership was surrounded by equals and now it is surrounded by vassals,” Sinha said. He added that today, BJP has become opulent; it is run in “corporate style”. Leaders were accessible to the cadre in the pre-Modi era but now it is virtually impossible to meet the party president. Shah operated a vast patronage system and that was how he ensured loyalty of the middle- and lower-ranking leaders of the party.

For example, there used to be lively interaction between the top leadership and the party MPs at the customary meeting every Tuesday during parliament sessions. This hardly happens today. Further, senior leaders such as former Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani and former party chief and union minister Murli Manohar Joshi have been sidelined from the decision-making processes and made members of a newly constituted committee, the 'Margdarshak Mandal', which has not even met.<sup>68</sup> Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee (now deceased) and Prime Minister Modi have also been part of this committee.

The new style of centralised decision-making is less time-consuming. The party's command structure has helped the party to implement its policies and programmes effectively, as loyalty can be commanded from the top.

### ***Emphasis on Young and Hindutva Hardliners***

The party's emphasis is on young leaders. In the states where the BJP has won assembly

elections, relatively unknown and low-profile leaders have been picked up as chief ministers.<sup>69</sup> Most of them were handpicked by the prime minister and are assumed to be loyal to him. Some examples are Manohar Lal Khattar in Haryana, Devendra Fadnavis in Maharashtra, Raghubar Das in Jharkhand, Biplab Dasgupta in Tripura—all of whom have an RSS background. All these new leaders, whether in the government or in the party, are Hindutva hardliners. All those from the non-RSS background, brought into the party during the Vajpayee-Advani era, have been neglected or pushed out. These include Yashwant Sinha, Arun Shourie, Varun Gandhi and Sunil Shastri.

By making Hindutva the motivational force of the party and bringing in its followers to key positions in the party as well as in the state governments, the party's top leadership is getting a harder grip on the party's organisation. Decisions being made at the top rungs of leadership are being effectively implemented. At the same time, the new leadership is proving useful in keeping alive the momentum of militant nationalism and the underlying narrative of upholding the majority community's core interests, thus helping the party in its electoral quests.

## **CONCLUSION**

There is hardly any doubt that the BJP has transformed itself in a period of five years, evolving into an almost unrecognisable political machine. The party's rapid expansion, resulting in its current pan-India presence, has also brought in a new set of challenges. A possible electoral defeat at the national level

can trigger questions about the present model that has helped the party to come to power at the Centre and in 20 states.

Similarly, the efficacy of the strategy to expand the party's support base among non-Jatav Dalits, non-Yadav backwards castes, tribal communities and other social groups may be questioned in case of a reversal of the party's electoral fortunes.

It remains to be seen whether changes brought in by the Modi-Shah leadership that have helped the party achieve its pan-India presence will continue to be the norm in the years to come. Or will it be replaced under an alternative set of circumstances? The BJP's success or defeat in the next general elections may offer some clues. [ORF](#)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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1. 'Positive secularism' was a concept that was against secularism that was being largely followed by the Left of centre parties including the Congress which, according to the BJP, was only favouring the minorities particularly the Muslims and was hurting the interests of Hindus. 'Gandhian socialism' was a band of socialism that sought to be different from socialism as followed by the Congress and other parties. It was claimed it meant to take developmental benefits to the poorest of the poor in the villages.
2. There is no agreed definition of 'Hindutva'. Broadly, the word was coined by Hindu Mahasabha ideologue, Viyank Damodar Savarkar in the early '20s of the last century. Hindutva sought to differentiate itself from Sanatan Dharm that was the way of life for the majority of inhabitants of India. Hindutva was adopted by the Rashtriya Swyamsevak Sangh when it was set up in 1925. It aimed at making Hindus strong and militant by asserting that Hindu interest is national interest. Hindutva seeks to unite Hindus and semitise the faith.
3. Asghar Ali Engineer, 'The BJP & its 20 years', *The Hindu*, 1 June 2000, <https://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/2000/06/01/stories/05012523.htm>.
4. Ibid.
5. 'Soft Hindutva' is a term used by media analysts and commentators which broadly means following Sanatan Dharm that allows every citizen to follow the faith according to their choice. While 'Soft Hindutva' has been popularly used to distinguish between the BJP that takes a hard Hindutva line and the Congress that follows a soft approach to religious issues, it is a far more complex issue.
6. Ibid.
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