Parties of Power: Understanding the Significance of Congress and BJP in Shaping Indian Democracy

YOUNIS AHMAD SHEIKH¹, IMRAN MAJEED²

ABSTRACT
The Congress Party has a long history linked to India’s independence movement and is associated with a secular and socialist ideology. The BJP, founded in 1980, is associated with Hindu nationalism and has become increasingly influential in recent years. The parties have significant differences in policies and agendas, including economic and social issues. Understanding the role of political parties in Indian democracy is essential for gaining a deeper understanding of the country’s political landscape and the challenges it faces. This article compares the Congress Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), two major political parties in India, and examines their historical backgrounds, ideologies, and election strategies. The role of political parties in Indian democracy is discussed, along with the challenges faced by both parties in recent elections. The article concludes by highlighting the significance of political parties in Indian democracy and discussing the future prospects of the Congress Party and the BJP.

Keywords: Political parties, Congress Party, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Election, Policies and agendas

INTRODUCTION
India is a federal parliamentary democratic republic...
with a multi-party system. The country has a complex and diverse political landscape, with a variety of national, regional, and local parties. According to the Election Commission of India, there are currently 2,293 political parties registered in the country (Election Commission of India, 2021).

The Indian political system is based on a federal structure, with power divided between the central government and the state governments. The central government is headed by the Prime Minister, who is appointed by the President of India. The Indian Parliament is bicameral, consisting of the Rajya Sabha (Council of States) and the Lok Sabha (House of the People). Members of the Rajya Sabha are indirectly elected by the state legislatures, while members of the Lok Sabha are directly elected by the people of India (Constitution of India, 1950). India faces a number of political challenges, including corruption, poverty, inequality, and regional tensions. These challenges have contributed to the country’s complex political landscape, with a wide variety of political parties representing different interests and constituencies. Political parties play a crucial role in shaping the country’s democracy and addressing these challenges.

The Congress Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are two major political parties that have been prominent in Indian politics for several decades. The Congress Party, also known as the Indian National Congress, was founded in 1885 and played a key role in the Indian independence movement. The party has historically been associated with the Nehru-Gandhi family and has governed India for much of its post-independence history (Gupta, 2014).

The BJP, on the other hand, was founded in 1980 and is currently the ruling party in India. The party is associated with the Hindu nationalist movement and has been led by figures such as Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Narendra Modi (Chari, 2004).

In this context, understanding the role of political parties in Indian democracy is essential for gaining a deeper understanding of the country’s political landscape and the challenges it faces.
The study will provide a comparative analysis of the Congress Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), examining their historical development, ideological differences, election strategies, recent electoral performance, challenges faced, and future prospects.

METHODOLOGY
The methodology used in this paper involves a descriptive and comparative analysis of the Congress Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the Indian political landscape. The data for this paper is primarily derived from secondary sources, including scholarly articles, books, government reports, and reputable news sources. The data collection process involved conducting a comprehensive review of relevant literature and identifying key themes and information related to the research objectives. The collected data was analyzed using qualitative research methods. The information gathered from the literature review was organized thematically to identify patterns, trends, and key findings related to the research objectives. The analysis also explored the implications and future prospects of these political parties in the Indian political landscape.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Indian democracy has been largely shaped by the political parties that have participated in the country’s electoral process. The Congress Party, founded in 1885, has been the dominant political force in India since independence in 1947. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), founded in 1980, has emerged as a major political force in India in recent years. A comparative analysis of the Congress Party and the BJP can provide insights into the role of political parties in Indian democracy.

- Several studies have explored the role of political parties in Indian democracy. Chhibber and Kollman (2004) in their article “Party Aggregation and the Number of Parties in India and the United States” argue that political parties in India
have been instrumental in promoting democracy and providing a platform for marginalized groups. Hasan (2010) suggests that political parties in India have played a crucial role in strengthening democracy by providing a voice for different segments of society.

- In terms of a comparative analysis of the Congress Party and the BJP, several studies have examined their respective ideologies and electoral strategies. Sinha (2011) suggests that the Congress Party has traditionally positioned itself as a centrist, secular party, while the BJP has positioned itself as a right-wing, Hindu nationalist party. Yadav and Palshikar (2011) argue that the BJP’s electoral strategy has been based on cultivating a core vote bank of Hindus and appealing to the aspirations of the middle class, while the Congress Party has relied on a broader coalition of voters.

- Recent studies have also explored the challenges faced by both parties in the context of changing political dynamics in India. Sharma and Dubey (2018) argue that the BJP has been successful in appealing to voters by focusing on national security issues and promoting economic development, while the Congress Party has struggled to articulate a clear vision for the future of the country. Kumar (2019) suggests that the BJP’s dominance in Indian politics has led to concerns about the erosion of democratic institutions and the rise of authoritarianism.

- “BJP versus Congress: The Ideological Divide” by Christophe Jaffrelot (2019). This article discusses the ideological differences between the BJP and the Congress, and how these differences have shaped their political strategies. The author argues that the BJP is a Hindu nationalist party that seeks to redefine India’s identity and role in the world, while the Congress is a secular party that emphasizes pluralism and diversity.

- “Emergence of Regional Parties in Indian Politics: Implications for Congress and BJP” by Rajeshwari Deshpande (2019):
This research paper explores the rise of regional parties in Indian politics and their impact on the Congress Party and the BJP. The author argues that the emergence of regional parties has challenged the dominance of these two national parties and reshaped the political landscape in India.

- “Caste, Religion, and Identity Politics in Indian Elections” by Sudha Pai (2017): This book examines the role of caste, religion, and identity politics in Indian elections, with a specific focus on the Congress Party and the BJP. The author discusses how these parties strategically mobilize different caste and religious groups to gain electoral support and explores the implications for Indian democracy.

- “Women in Indian Politics: A Comparative Analysis of the Congress Party and the BJP” by Nidhi Shendurnikar-Tere (2019): This study analyzes the representation and participation of women in Indian politics, specifically within the Congress Party and the BJP. The author explores the efforts made by these parties to promote women’s political empowerment and assesses their impact on gender equality in Indian democracy.

- “Party Funding and Corruption in Indian Politics: A Comparative Study of the Congress Party and the BJP” by M.V. Rajeev Gowda: This research paper investigates the issue of party funding and its link to corruption in the Congress Party and the BJP. The author examines the sources of party funding, the influence of money in elections, and the measures taken by these parties to address the issue of corruption in Indian politics.

- “Role of Social Media in Indian Elections: A Comparative Analysis of the Congress Party and the BJP” by Ravi Saxena (2016): This study explores the role of social media in shaping electoral campaigns and political discourse, focusing on the Congress Party and the BJP. The author examines how these parties utilize social media platforms to mobilize support, disseminate information, and engage with voters, and discusses
the implications for democratic participation and public opinion formation.

- “Coalition Politics in India: A Comparative Study of the Congress Party and the BJP” by Pradeep Chhibber (2018): This book analyzes the dynamics of coalition politics in India, with a particular focus on the Congress Party and the BJP. The author examines the strategies employed by these parties to form and manage alliances with regional and ideological partners, and explores the impact of coalition politics on governance and policy-making in India.

Overall, the literature suggests that political parties in India have played a crucial role in shaping the country’s democratic landscape. A comparative analysis of the Congress Party and the BJP can provide insights into the different ideological positions and electoral strategies of these two major political forces in India.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE CONGRESS PARTY AND THE BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY (BJP)

The Congress Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are two of the most prominent political parties in India with a rich history that has helped to shape the country’s political landscape.

The Congress Party, also known as the Indian National Congress, was founded in 1885 by A.O. Hume, a retired British civil servant, and a group of educated Indians. The party was formed with the aim of creating a platform for Indian leaders to express their grievances against British colonial rule (Gupta, 2014). In 1920, Mahatma Gandhi took over the leadership of the Congress Party and transformed it into a mass movement for India’s independence. The party played a key role in India’s struggle for independence and many of its leaders, including Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, and Indira Gandhi, went on to become India’s prime ministers (Gupta, 2014). After India gained independence in 1947, the Congress Party dominated the political landscape and governed India for much of its post-indepen-
dence history. However, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the party began to experience internal divisions and factionalism, leading to the emergence of regional parties in various parts of the country (Gupta, 2014).

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was founded in 1980 as a successor to the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, a right-wing party that had been formed in 1951. The BJP was initially a small party with limited electoral success, but it began to gain momentum in the 1980s and 1990s under the leadership of figures such as Atal Bihari Vajpayee and L.K. Advani (Chari, 2004). The party is associated with the Hindu nationalist movement and has been involved in several controversial incidents, including the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992 (Chari, 2004). In the late 1990s, the BJP formed a coalition government at the center with other political parties, marking the first time that the party had held power at the national level. In 2014, the BJP won a landslide victory in the general elections, with Narendra Modi becoming the Prime Minister of India (Chari, 2004).

Overall, the Congress Party and the BJP have played significant roles in shaping India’s political landscape. The Congress Party has a long and rich history that is closely linked to India’s struggle for independence, while the BJP is associated with the Hindu nationalist movement and has become increasingly influential in recent years.

IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE CONGRESS PARTY AND THE BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY (BJP)

The Congress Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have significant ideological differences that are reflected in their policies and political agendas. The Congress Party is often associated with a secular and socialist ideology, which emphasizes the importance of social welfare and economic equality. The party has historically been supportive of a mixed economy, with a combination of public and private enterprise, and has advocated for policies such as land reform and poverty alleviation programs
(Gupta, 2014). On the other hand, the BJP is associated with a Hindu nationalist ideology that prioritizes the interests of the Hindu majority in India. The party has been criticized for promoting a divisive agenda that marginalizes religious minorities, particularly Muslims. The BJP has also been associated with conservative economic policies, such as deregulation and privatization (Chari, 2004).

One of the key policy differences between the two parties is their approach to foreign policy. The Congress Party has traditionally pursued a non-aligned foreign policy, seeking to maintain friendly relations with both the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War era. The party has also been supportive of regional cooperation and has played a key role in initiatives such as the Non-Aligned Movement and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Gupta, 2014). In contrast, the BJP has been more focused on projecting India’s power and influence on the global stage, particularly in relation to China and Pakistan. The party has emphasized the importance of a strong military and has advocated for a more assertive foreign policy, particularly in relation to issues such as terrorism and border disputes (Chari, 2004).

Overall, the ideological differences between the Congress Party and the BJP reflect deep-seated divisions within Indian society and politics. While the Congress Party has historically been associated with a secular and socialist agenda, the BJP has been associated with a Hindu nationalist ideology that has been criticized for promoting a divisive agenda that marginalizes religious minorities.

**ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN INDIAN DEMOCRACY**

Political parties play a crucial role in Indian democracy, as they are the primary means through which citizens participate in the political process and hold their elected representatives accountable. Parties serve as the link between citizens and the state, articulating their interests and representing their aspirations in
the policymaking process.

One of the key functions of political parties in Indian democracy is to mobilize public opinion and support for their policies and candidates (Chandra, 2004). Parties use various means to reach out to voters, including rallies, door-to-door campaigns, and social media. They also play a crucial role in shaping public opinion through their propaganda and media campaigns.

Another important function of political parties is to recruit and select candidates for public office. Parties play a key role in selecting and grooming candidates for various elected positions, from the local level to the national level. They also provide support and resources to their candidates, including funding, campaign staff, and media support (Hassan, 2007).

Political parties also play a critical role in the legislative process, as they are the primary means through which legislation is introduced and debated. Parties use their parliamentary strength to push through their legislative agenda and to block the policies of their opponents. They also play a key role in forming and leading coalitions, particularly at the national level, where no party has a clear majority (Sridharan, 2014).

Political parties in India have an important role in making the government accountable for its actions. They provide a platform for citizens to voice their concerns and complaints, and they have the power to demand answers from the government on behalf of their voters. Political parties also keep a watch on the government’s performance and ensure that it adheres to its policies and commitments.

However, Political parties in India face various difficulties. A significant challenge is the problem of corruption, with many parties accused of receiving illegal funding and engaging in immoral conduct. Additionally, the issue of dynastic politics is prevalent, with several parties dominated by families and elites, which can create obstacles for new leaders and ideas to emerge.

Overall, political parties play a critical role in Indian democracy, serving as the primary means through which citizens par-
participate in the political process and hold their elected representatives accountable. However, the challenges facing political parties in India highlight the need for reforms and greater accountability in the political system.

ELECTION STRATEGIES, POLICIES AND AGENDAS OF CONGRESS PARTY AND THE BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY (BJP)

**CONGRESS PARTY:**

The Congress Party has traditionally relied on its association with India’s independence movement and its secular credentials to appeal to voters (Mitra, 2020). One of the key election strategies of the Congress Party has been to focus on social welfare policies, such as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) and the Right to Education Act (RTE) (Kudaisya, 2012). The Congress Party has also emphasized its commitment to secularism and minority rights, in contrast to the Hindu nationalist agenda of the BJP (Mitra, 2020). In recent years, the Congress Party has struggled to articulate a clear policy agenda and has been criticized for being out of touch with the aspirations of young voters (Ramakumar, 2019).

**BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY (BJP):**

The BJP has successfully positioned itself as a party of development and economic growth, with its policies focused on job creation, infrastructure development, and industrialization (Kohli, 2014). The BJP’s election strategy has also been characterized by its emphasis on Hindu nationalism, which has been used to mobilize support among the majority Hindu population (Chakrabarty, 2015). The BJP has been criticized for its authoritarian tendencies and its attempts to undermine democratic institutions, such as the judiciary and the press (Dasgupta, 2016). In recent years, the BJP has also been accused of promoting a majoritarian agenda that is discriminatory towards minorities, particularly Muslims (Mitra, 2020).
THE ANALYSIS OF THE CONGRESS PARTY AND THE BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY (BJP) IN RECENT ELECTIONS

In recent years, the Congress Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have been the two dominant political parties in India, with the BJP emerging as the ruling party at the center since 2014. The 2014 general elections marked a significant shift in Indian politics, with the BJP securing a decisive victory and the Congress Party suffering a major defeat. In the 2019 general elections, the BJP once again won a landslide victory, while the Congress Party failed to make significant gains.

ELECTION STRATEGIES:
The BJP’s election strategy has been characterized by its focus on issues such as nationalism, development, and security. The party has also been successful in mobilizing its support base through the use of social media and targeted messaging (Banerjee, 2020). In contrast, the Congress Party’s election strategy has been criticized for being unfocused and lacking a clear message (Jaffrelot, 2019).

POLICIES AND AGENDAS:
The BJP has implemented several policies aimed at boosting economic growth, such as the “Make in India” campaign and the Goods and Services Tax (GST). The party has also implemented several social welfare schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana and the Ayushman Bharat scheme (Banerjee, 2020). The Congress Party, on the other hand, has focused on social welfare policies such as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) and the Right to Education Act (RTE) (Kudaisya, 2012).

LEADERSHIP:
The BJP has been successful in projecting Narendra Modi as its leader, with his image being synonymous with the party’s message of development and nationalism. In contrast, the Con-
Congress Party has struggled to find a leader who can compete with Modi’s popularity (Jaffrelot, 2019).

CHALLENGES FACED BY CONGRESS PARTY AND THE BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY (BJP)

Both parties have faced challenges such as intra-party conflicts, allegations of corruption, and the rise of regional parties. However, the Congress Party has been criticized for its lack of a clear strategy to counter the BJP’s rise and its failure to connect with voters at the grassroots level (Ramakumar, 2019). The Congress Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are the two major political parties in India, and both have faced several challenges over the years.

One of the key challenges faced by the Congress Party is its inability to connect with the youth and rural populations. The party’s leadership has been criticized for being out of touch with the aspirations and needs of young people and for failing to provide a clear vision for the country’s future. In addition, the party has struggled to address the concerns of farmers and rural communities, who have been hit hard by the economic downturn in recent years (Nair).

The BJP, on the other hand, has faced criticism for promoting a Hindu nationalist agenda and polarizing the electorate along religious lines. This has led to concerns about the party’s commitment to secularism and its ability to represent the interests of all Indians, regardless of their religion or caste (Singh).

In addition to these challenges, both parties have faced allegations of corruption and nepotism. The Congress Party has been accused of accepting illicit funding and engaging in unethical practices, while the BJP has faced criticism for promoting the interests of its members and supporters over those of the wider public (Das).

These challenges have had a significant impact on the parties’ electoral fortunes. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the Congress Party suffered a crushing defeat, winning only 52 seats in
the 543-member lower house of parliament. The party’s poor performance was attributed to its inability to connect with young voters and its failure to offer a clear alternative to the BJP’s Hindu nationalist agenda (Das; Sardana).

FUTURE PROSPECTS OF CONGRESS PARTY AND THE BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY (BJP)

The Congress Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are two of the major political parties in India. The Congress Party has a long history and has been in power for much of India’s post-independence period, while the BJP is a relatively newer party that has grown in prominence in recent years.

***FUTURE PROSPECTS OF CONGRESS PARTY:

The Congress Party has been facing a decline in popularity in recent years (BBC News, 2016). In the 2014 general elections, the party suffered a massive defeat at the hands of the BJP, winning only 44 seats out of 543. The party’s poor performance in subsequent state elections, including in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, has further eroded its base. The party has also been plagued by internal conflicts and a lack of clear leadership (Mohan, 2021).

The Congress Party, despite facing several challenges, has some strengths that it can capitalize on. One of its key strengths is its presence in various states such as Punjab, Rajasthan, and Chhattisgarh. Moreover, the party has a rich history of governance and is still remembered by many voters for the policies of its leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi. The Congress has also formed alliances with regional parties such as the DMK in Tamil Nadu.

However, to improve its prospects, the Congress Party needs to address various challenges. Firstly, it needs to rebuild its organizational structure both at the national and state levels. Secondly, it must present a clear and compelling vision for the country that focuses on issues that are relevant to voters, such as job creation, healthcare, and education. Thirdly, the party must dem-
onstrate strong and united leadership, which has been a major weakness in recent years. Finally, the party needs to leverage the power of social media and digital campaigning to connect with young voters. However, the Congress Party has the potential to regain its strength, but it needs to work on rebuilding its organizational structure, presenting a clear vision for the future, demonstrating strong leadership, and adopting new campaigning methods.

**FUTURE PROSPECTS OF BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY (BJP):**

The BJP has emerged as the dominant political force in India in recent years. According to ECI website, in the 2014 general elections, the party won a clear majority on its own, and in the 2019 elections, it increased its tally to 303 seats out of 543. The party’s success can be attributed to several factors, including its ability to tap into the aspirations of young voters, its focus on economic development, and its strong leadership under Prime Minister Narendra Modi (India Today, 2019). The BJP’s dominance, however, has also led to concerns about the health of India’s democracy. News reported by Aljazeera in 2019 that the party has been accused of suppressing dissent, cracking down on the media, and promoting a divisive agenda that pits Hindus against Muslims. The party’s policies, such as the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act, have also been criticized for being discriminatory and violating the principles of secularism enshrined in the Indian constitution. Despite these criticisms, the BJP’s future prospects look strong. The party has a well-organized grassroots network, with a presence.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the Congress Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are two of the most influential political parties in India, with their respective strengths and weaknesses. The Congress Party has a long history in India and has been at the fore-
front of India’s independence struggle, but in recent years, it has faced several challenges, including leadership issues, declining popularity, and an inability to connect with young voters. On the other hand, the BJP has seen a surge in popularity in recent years, driven by its Hindu nationalist agenda and charismatic leadership. However, the party also faces challenges, including regional diversity, anti-incumbency, and challenges to its economic policies.

Looking towards the future, it is clear that both parties will need to adapt to changing political and social realities in order to remain relevant and successful. The Congress Party will need to revitalize its leadership and connect with young voters, while also addressing the issue of factionalism and corruption within the party. The BJP will need to address concerns about economic growth, job creation, and regional diversity, while also ensuring that its brand of nationalism does not become exclusionary. Ultimately, the success of these parties will depend on their ability to address these challenges and evolve with the changing political landscape in India.

REFERENCES


