

Comparative Analysis of Political Systems: Assessing the Effectiveness, Stability and Strength of the Congress and BJP in India

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Abstract: *After World War II, the field of political science experienced a major shift, spearheaded by scholars like David Easton who introduced a systematic and empirical approach to political study. This approach, known as systems theory, was further developed by Gabriel Almond and Bingham Powell into the structural-functional approach, which focused on analysing the roles and functions of political institutions. Rajni Kothari applied these frameworks to Indian political science, offering in-depth analyses of the Indian National Congress and its strategies for maintaining political dominance. Recently, the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party BJP under Narendra Modi has been examined through Kothari's lens, highlighting the BJP's broad social base, central leadership, and effective regional management. The BJP's success demonstrates a stronger, more stable system than the Congress, reflecting a significant evolution in India's political landscape. This abstract underscores the dynamic and evolving nature of political dominance in India, showcasing how contemporary forces build upon and surpass historical precedents.*

Keywords: Political System, Consensus, Alliances, Hindutva, Clientelism, Adaptability, Electoral Hegemony, Resilience

1. Introduction

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC) are the two dominant political parties in India, each with its unique strengths, strategies, and organisational structures. This essay aims to provide a comparative analysis of why the BJP system might be seen as more effective, stable, and strong compared to the Congress system in recent times. After the Second World War, a significant paradigm shift occurred in the field of political science, driven by scholars who sought to transcend the limitations of traditional political study systems. Among these scholars, ¹David Easton emerged as a pioneering figure, advocating for a novel approach to the study of political systems. Easton rejected the conventional methodologies that dominated the pre-war era, which were largely normative and descriptive in nature, and instead emphasised a systematic, empirical, and scientific analysis of political phenomena. His work laid the foundation for what would become known as systems theory in political science. Building upon Easton's groundbreaking work, scholars Gabriel Almond and Bingham Powell further advanced the study of political systems through the development of the structural-functional approach. This approach integrated Easton's systems theory with a detailed examination of the structures and functions of political institutions. Almond and Powell posited that political systems could be understood by analysing the roles and interactions of various political structures (such as parties, legislatures, and bureaucracies) and their functions (such as interest articulation, interest aggregation, policy-making, and policy implementation). The structural-functional approach provided a robust framework for comparative

political analysis, enabling scholars to systematically study political systems across different cultural and national contexts. By focusing on the functions performed by political institutions and the structures that carried out these functions, Almond and Powell's approach facilitated a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences among political systems worldwide. This approach significantly strengthened the behavioural study of political systems, fostering a more scientific and comparative orientation in the field.

In the initial phase of applying these new theoretical frameworks to the study of political systems, ²Rajni Kothari emerged as a key figure in the context of Indian political science. Kothari adopted and adapted the structural-functional approach to examine Indian political institutions and systems. His seminal work provided a nuanced analysis of the Indian National Congress, its internal dynamics, and its role in maintaining political stability and hegemony in post-independence India. Kothari's studies highlighted the importance of inclusiveness, factionalism, coalition-building, and patronage networks within the Congress System, offering insights into the complexities of managing a diverse and multi-ethnic democracy. By employing the structural-functional approach, Kothari was able to elucidate the intricate mechanisms through which the Indian National Congress managed to ³incorporate diverse social, economic, and regional interests, thereby sustaining its dominance in the early decades of independent India. His work exemplified the application of behavioural and systems theory methodologies to a specific national context, contributing significantly to the comparative study of political systems and enhancing the understanding of

¹ Easton, D. (1957). The political system. *World Politics*, 9(3), 383-400.

² Kothari, R. (1964). The Congress' System In India. *Asian survey*, 1161-1173.

³ Kothari, R. (1988). Integration and exclusion in Indian politics. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2223-2227.

political dynamics in newly decolonized and developing countries. Rajni Kothari's concept of the Congress System provides a sophisticated framework for understanding the mechanisms through which the Indian National Congress (INC) maintained its dominance in the early decades following India's independence. This dominance was achieved through a combination of inclusiveness, internal factionalism, electoral strategy, and patronage networks. The inclusiveness of the Congress allowed it to act as a broad-based coalition that incorporated diverse social, economic, and regional interests, thus ensuring a wide support base. Internal factionalism within the Congress, rather than weakening the party, contributed to its strength by fostering internal democracy and managing competing interests within a single organisational structure. The electoral strategy of the Congress was characterised by the formation of strategic alliances and the ability to adapt to changing political landscapes, which further consolidated its hegemonic position. Additionally, the use of patronage networks helped the Congress secure loyalty and support from various constituencies through the distribution of government resources and favours.

In the context of this framework, an attempt has been made to understand the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Indian politics under the leadership of Narendra Modi after 2014. When analysed through the lens of Kothari's concept, it becomes evident that the BJP system exhibits characteristics that can be seen as stronger and more stable than those of the Congress System. The BJP has built a robust social base and ensured ⁴broad social participation, which has significantly enhanced its electoral appeal and stability. Centralised and strong leadership under Modi has provided the BJP with clear direction and decisiveness, contributing to a perception of stability and strength. Furthermore, the BJP's approach to handling regional issues through smaller allied parties has allowed it to manage regional diversity effectively while maintaining a cohesive national strategy. This ability to integrate regional interests without diluting its central authority has reinforced the BJP's position as a dominant political force in contemporary Indian politics. Thus, when viewed through Kothari's framework, the BJP system demonstrates a level of strength and stability that surpasses the Congress System in key aspects, reflecting a significant evolution in India's political landscape.

While the Congress system relied on upper castes (mostly Brahmins), Muslims and Dalits in the name of mass base, the BJP has built a strong social base by incorporating other backward castes (OBCs) and ensuring broad social participation, which has significantly increased its electoral appeal and sustainability. The party's ability to organise various sections of society, including the urban middle class, rural voters and youth, has broadened its support base, strengthening its position as a major political force. ⁵The inclusion of Other Backward Class (OBC) leadership has further strengthened its connection with diverse social groups. Exploiting the flaws of the Congress system has

allowed the BJP to secure a broad and diverse electorate, ensuring its electoral success. The leadership and centralised decision-making under Modi have provided the BJP with clear direction and decisiveness, contributing to a perception of stability and strength. Modi's leadership style, marked by strong personal authority and charismatic appeal, has consolidated the party's internal coherence and projected an image of stability and strong governance to the electorate. This contrasts with the often-factionalized leadership seen in the Congress System, where internal disputes sometimes undermined the party's coherence and public image. A cadre-based all-India organisation has also been a significant strength of the BJP. The party's disciplined and dedicated cadre system ensures effective grassroots mobilisation and outreach, facilitating a robust organisational presence across the country. This extensive network supports the party's electoral strategy and enhances its ability to implement policies and programs effectively. The BJP's consistent ideological position and ideological clarity have further bolstered its appeal. Unlike the Congress, which has often been criticised for ideological ambiguity, the BJP's clear articulation of its principles and values has resonated with a broad section of the population. This ideological consistency has helped the BJP maintain a unified stance on key issues, reinforcing its credibility and appeal.

Electoral strategy and alliances have been crucial to the BJP's success. The party has adeptly formed alliances with regional parties, integrating regional interests without diluting its central authority. This strategic alliance-building has enabled the BJP to maintain strong central leadership while accommodating regional variations, preserving national unity and coherence. In contrast, the Congress System often struggled with balancing regional aspirations with central authority, leading to periodic tensions and instability. The effective use of technology and media has been another hallmark of the BJP's approach. The party has leveraged digital platforms and social media to communicate its messages, mobilise support, and engage with the electorate. This technological savvy has given the BJP a significant advantage in modern political campaigning and public outreach. Public perception and image have also played a critical role in the BJP's rise. Modi's personal image as a decisive and strong leader has significantly shaped public perception of the party. This cultivated image, supported by strategic media management, has enhanced the BJP's appeal and electoral prospects. Governance and policy implementation under the BJP have further reinforced its strength. The party's focus on delivering tangible benefits and implementing development programs has bolstered its credibility and public support. Effective governance and policy outcomes have underscored the BJP's commitment to addressing key issues and improving the lives of citizens. Crisis management has also highlighted the BJP's resilience and adaptability. The party's ability to navigate political and social crises, maintain internal cohesion, and respond effectively to challenges has strengthened its position and

⁴ McMillan, A. (2007). The BJP coalition: partisanship and power-sharing in government. In *Coalition Politics and Hindu Nationalism* (pp. 13-35). Routledge.

⁵ Mehta, N. The Caste Game: How the BJP Became the Most Socially Representative Party in UP (Barring Muslims). In *The New BJP* (pp. 24-61). Routledge.

demonstrated its capacity to govern effectively. The establishment of patronage networks has played a vital role in the BJP's political strategy, enabling the party to secure loyalty and support from various constituencies by distributing government resources and favors. Democratic leadership and internal party democracy within the BJP have further contributed to its stability. By promoting internal discussions and accommodating diverse viewpoints within the party, the BJP has managed to maintain unity and coherence. Inclusiveness remains a cornerstone of the BJP's strategy, mirroring the Congress System's approach but executed with greater efficiency. The party's ability to incorporate diverse social, economic, and regional interests has been pivotal in maintaining its dominance. The concept of the "Modian Consensus" has emerged, reflecting a broad-based agreement on Modi's leadership and policies across different segments of society.

2. Conclusion

The BJP's one-sided success in the 2014 and subsequent elections has proven that the BJP system is comparatively more effective, stable and robust than the Congress system. The BJP system exhibits a level of strength and stability that surpasses the Congress system in key aspects. The BJP's broad social base, centralised leadership, disciplined cadre organisation, coherent ideology, strategic alliances, effective use of technology, strong public image, effective governance, crisis management capabilities, patronage networks, democratic leadership, intra-party democracy and inclusiveness highlight its superior organisational coherence and strategic efficacy. These characteristics have enabled the BJP to not only replicate but also enhance mechanisms that once sustained the Congress system, marking a significant change in the nature of political dominance in India. This analysis underscores the dynamic and evolving nature of India's political landscape, demonstrating how contemporary political forces build on and surpass historical precedents.

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