

NATIONAL PARTIES

Out of seven national parties, two parties – the Congress and the BJP have had support base in maximum states in India at different points of time since Independence. For the first two decades after Independence, the Congress was the single dominant party in India. Indeed, on account of its having support base in most parts of India, Rajni Kothari described the period from the 1950s-1960s as the period of one party dominance, i.e., the dominance of the Congress. Since 2010s, the BJP has emerged as the single dominant national party like the Congress was in the first decade after Independence.

2.3.1 The Indian National Congress (I) or The Congress (I)

Established in 1885, India's oldest party, the Indian National Congress was born out of India's freedom struggle. As stated in unit 1, it is generally believed that the Congress was a movement during the Indian national movement. It eventually became a political party after Independence. Its main purpose became to contest elections in Independent democratic India. During the period of its dominance, the Congress drew support from social groups including all castes groups and religious minorities. The Congress-led governments introduced several welfare policies aiming at social change. Most important among them included land reforms, reservations of SCs and STs, community development programmes. Although these policies faced several challenges, they made the Congress popular

among the large sections of Society. The Congress's popularity could not remain

intact for long. In the 1960s, dissatisfaction brewed among people in several states

against the Congress-led governments policies. As a result, the Congress lost in

1967 assembly elections in eight states leading to the formation of non-Congress

governments. This ended the dominance of the Congress in India's party system.

In 1969, the Congress was divided into two parties: Indian National Congress

(Organisation) or Congress (O) led by Kamraj and Indian National Congress

(Requisition) or Congress (R) led by Indira Gandhi. The Congress led by Indira

Gandhi again emerged as the largest winning party in 1971 General Election

getting 352 out of 518 seats in Lok Sabha. As you have read in unit 1, while the

Congress's dominance was challenged by the emergent regional parties and

leaders since the late 1960s in several states. And it was challenged by the Janata Party at the level of centre in the late 1970s. The Congress remained a

strong political force during 1980s. But in the coming decades, though Congress

remained a national party, it lost the status of a single dominant party. It retains

its influence through coalition with regional and other national parties known as

United Progressive Alliance (UPA).

Bharatiya Janata Party

The roots of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) can be traced to the Bharatiya Jana

Sangh. The Bharatiya Jana Sangha (BJS) was established in 1951 as the political wing of the Hindu nationalist organisation, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

The BJS was founded by a renowned advocate, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee. The

BJS gained substantial support in the Hindi speaking regions in India in the 1960s. As mentioned in unit 1, in 1977, it got merged with Janata Party along

with four other parties. Following the disintegration of the Janata Party, its segment, the BJS emerged as a party with a different name the Bharatiya Janata

Party (BJP) on April 5, 1980. Atal Bihari Vajpayee was its first president. From

its marginal position in the 1980s, when the BJP was a small localized party with

a political presence restricted to just a few states in the Hindi heartland, the acquisition of new territory and new allies has transformed it into being the main

political force in India with a mass national following. The expansion of the BJP

occurred along with the decline of the Congress as the dominant party. At the

national level in the Lok Sabha, it increased its seats from 2 seats in 1984 to 303

seats in 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Its growth has been more spectacular since

2014 Lok Sabha election in which it had won 282 seats. It mobilised popular

support through mobilization on issues such as movement for construction of

Ram temple at Ayodhya, abolition of Article 370, abolition of triple talaq, etc.

The BJP as a major member of the NDA (National Democratic Alliance) has

been heading central governments in India since 2014, and the NDA runs

government in most states which expanded from 8 states in 2014 to 20 states in 2018. In 2019, 11 state governments were headed by the BJP chief ministers.