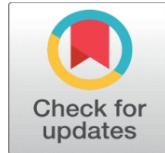
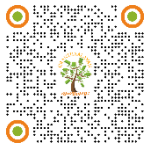


# CHANGING NATURE OF STATE POLITICS OF RAJASTHAN

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## ABSTRACT

The state politics of Rajasthan is unique in that after every Assembly election, the government changes in an alternative manner of political parties. For the last three decades, the incumbent government has never succeeded in retaining the power. However, the core competitors for political power are the INC and BJP. The current paper will explore why Rajasthan has developed such a unique trend of the Bi-party system, its smooth shift to a dominant party system following the national trend between 2014 and 2023, and its further transition from dominant party to Bipolar competition. The 2014 election led to a return to a dominant party era, with BJP replacing Congress nationally. However, at the level of State Assembly elections, the power keeps oscillating between Congress and BJP. Still, at the Lok Sabha level from 2014 to 2019, the BJP has had massive domination over all of the parliamentary seats in Rajasthan. Interestingly, even at the Assembly level, power oscillated, but the total vote share percentages of Congress reduced drastically along with the reduction of seats won in every Assembly election. These trends show that the BJP has successfully maintained a dominant Party system in Rajasthan. However, the verdict of the 2024 Lok Sabha election has created a break in this decadal trend and restructured the party competition of Rajasthan back to its pre-2014 Bipolar competition

**Keywords:** Rajasthan, Congress, BJP, Party System, Bipolar, Dominant Party System

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Rajasthan is India's second-largest state, covering 342,274 square kilometers and home to around 6.86 Crores people, or about 5.66 per cent of the national population. With a strategic 1,200-kilometer border with Pakistan, it plays a crucial role in regional security. Its geographical proximity to Delhi profoundly impacts the functioning of political institutions. Since the last decade of the 20th century, Rajasthan's political landscape has largely been governed by a two-party system dominated by the Congress (INC) and Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). The presence of two national political parties has almost left no room for the growth of any regional political party. The regional aspirations are settled in the political structure created by the national political parties. Rajasthan's bi-party system is observed in the adjacent states such as Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. However, Rajasthan is unique

compared to its neighbouring states in the sense that after every Assembly election, the government changes in an alternative manner of political parties. For the last three decades, the incumbent government has never succeeded in retaining the power. However, the core competitors for political power are the INC and BJP. The current paper will explore why Rajasthan has developed such a unique trend of the Bi-party system, its smooth shift to a dominant party system following the national trend between 2014 and 2023, and its further transition from dominant party to Bipolar competition. To understand the current political system of Rajasthan, we require a quick review of the inception of its unique kind of politics.

## 2. NATURE OF POLITY IN RAJASTHAN

The political awakening in Rajasthan was a gradual process resulting from a prolonged struggle against invading forces. After the British subjugation of the princely states of the erstwhile Rajputana, administrative, social, and economic reforms were introduced, fostering political consciousness among the populace residents of states such as Jaipur, Jodhpur, Udaipur, and others which actively demanded the establishment of "responsible government" [Saxena \(1994\)](#). National movements such as the Civil Disobedience Movement and the Quit India Movement also significantly impacted the politics of Rajasthan, leading to the formation of political institutions like the Praja Mandals and the Praja Parishads, which spearheaded movements against both autocratic rulers and British authorities. The nation attained independence on 15 August 1947, leading to the accession of 22 princely states from Rajputana to the Dominion of India and the formation of the State of Rajasthan. Almost a decade later, in 1956, Ajmer was incorporated into the state following the recommendations of the States Reorganization Commission. Subhas C. Kashyap termed the politics of Rajasthan as the 'homeland of defection politics', where the political loyalties shift too frequently [Kashyap & Institute of Constitutional and Parliamentary Studies. \(1969\)](#). He cites three phases of defection with different trends in each one of these phases. 1952 to 1967-1968, another phase was 1968 to 1977-1978 and the phase of post 1985. Kashyap believes that the defectors have given stability to the political order in Rajasthan. For instance, in the first general election of 1952, in a house of 160 of the Rajasthan Assembly, Congress got 81, a majority of just one vote. However, the defection of leaders from other parties achieved the strength of 90 seats.

It is essential to understand that caste is an important factor in the politics of Rajasthan. The ruling communities dominated the scene for centuries, especially during British rule when they largely governed various princely states. The Jagirdari system, prevalent at the time of state integration, saw landholders known as Jagirdars; while these ruling communities have influenced Rajasthan's politics, they are not the majority in India. Like other regions, caste plays a crucial role in political mobilisation in Rajasthan. The political mobilisation is significantly shaped by caste considerations that influence alliances at various levels. Even the electoral political stability relies on balancing diverse caste groups. The electoral process is closely tied to caste dynamics, with candidates often selected based on their caste's strength in specific Assembly or Lok Sabha constituencies. Voters are mobilized through appeals to caste identities, uniting individuals from various backgrounds. A diverse range of caste groups are present despite being dispersed; in addition, the Scheduled Tribes form a significant part of the population. Scheduled Castes have a widespread presence, underscoring their vital role in ensuring their voices are represented in the political arena. Regional sentiments, historical communities, and leaders pursuing personal ambitions have created divisions within major political

rivalries. These tensions can lead to open revolts, threatening the state's stability. The stability within the political parties and the formation of new politics are relatively slow and weak processes in Rajasthan compared to its neighbouring states. The prime reason for such a situation is the deep-rooted feudal structure, lack of competitive elite groups, the absence of inter-connected political structures from the state to the village level, and limited opportunities for elite circulation at successive Assembly and local elections.

### 3. THE CONTEXT

Based on the theorization of the political party system in India by Prof. Yadav, India has the fourth party system since independence [Yadav \(1999\)](#). Until 1967, Congress dominated the first-party system, and the second-party system stretched from 1967 to 1989. In this phase, the Congress's status changed from dominant party to less popular choice amongst the electors, a phase of national emergency followed by the first non-Congress government in 1977 for a brief period of two years by the Janata Party. The third-party system ranged from 1989 to 2014, popularly known as the era of Coalition politics in India. The 2014 election leads to a return to a dominant party era, with BJP replacing Congress nationally. This second dominant party system phase can be seen as the Fourth-party system [Vaishnav & Mallory \(2024\)](#). The verdict of 2024 led to the resurgence of coalition politics in New Delhi, but the present coalition government might have dented the ruling party's dominance. To a large extent, the fourth-party system in India remains unaffected by the 2024 verdict.

The state politics of Rajasthan in the phase of the fourth system of parties has shown very different trends. Rajasthan has maintained the bipolar party competition at the Lok Sabha and state Assembly; the contestation of power has been between Congress and BJP since the 1990s. The BJP first came to power in Rajasthan in 1990, following a brief presidential rule in December 1992. The Shekhawat government completed its term in 1993, paving the way for the Congress Party in 1998. The BJP regained control in 2003 but lost again in 2008. This pattern of electoral competition has created a bipolar alternation in Rajasthan's politics, making a significant shift from the Congress's long dominance in Rajasthan. Except for a brief Janata Party government from 1977, Congress continue its rule from 1949 until 1990. The era of a political coalition around the 1990s was responsible for Congress's decline and the rise of the BJP as a serious competitor, resulting in a two-party competition that has reshaped the electoral spectrum of Rajasthan over the past decades.

Somehow, the state politics of Rajasthan also impact national politics; for instance, in 2008, while Congress struggled in most elections, it regained power in Rajasthan, boosting the party's morale. This electoral victory set the stage for a strong performance in the 2009 Parliamentary elections. This might mean that Congress could only manage to secure 13 Lok Sabha seats based on the state Assembly victory; it has won 20 out of 25 assembly constituencies, which defines its influence on national politics.

The current paper will discuss the two important trends in the state politics of Rajasthan, which are as follows:

- 1) The Phase from Bipolar contestation to Dominant party phase (1990 to 2023)
- 2) The Phase from Dominant Party to Bipolar Contestation (2024 onwards)

These phases reflect a structural shift in the state's political competition structure. However, in both these phases, the core competing political parties remained the Congress and BJP. Let us discuss these two phases in detail.

### **1) The Phase from Bipolar contestation to Dominant party phase (1990 to 2023)**

In the early decades of the politics of Rajasthan, especially the first four Assembly elections of 1952, 1957, 1962, and 1967, various regional parties such as the Ram Rajya Parishad, Krishikar Lok Parishad, Hindu Maha Sabha, and the Swatantra Party attempted to compete with the Congress. However, this early attempt at regionalisation of Rajasthan politics failed because the phase of the 1950s to 1970s was the phase of the 'Congress System' [Kothari \(1964\)](#), where Congress acted as the dominant party at the centre and the state level, too, under the leadership of Nehru. Further, after the 1972 elections, national-level political parties, particularly the Congress Party and the Communist parties, dominated the political landscape. The Congress Party was in power from 1952 to 1972, followed by the Janata Party for a short tenure from 1977 to 1980. After the Janata Party experiment, Congress came back to power in 1980. It continued to govern the state politics until the BJP took over in 1991-92, followed by President's rule until November 1993. The challenges for the political recruitment of both national political parties remained the same, including the influence of former royal families and a significant degree of factionalism. The political development of Rajasthan's princely states has also seen caste-based groups, in which the prominent ruling caste and class groups played prominent roles. Even the pressure groups in Rajasthan remain underdeveloped and have limited influence on the political scenario. While trade unions, business organisations, and student groups are affiliated with different political factions, all such pressure groups and organisations remain insignificant in front of the hegemony of the national political parties.

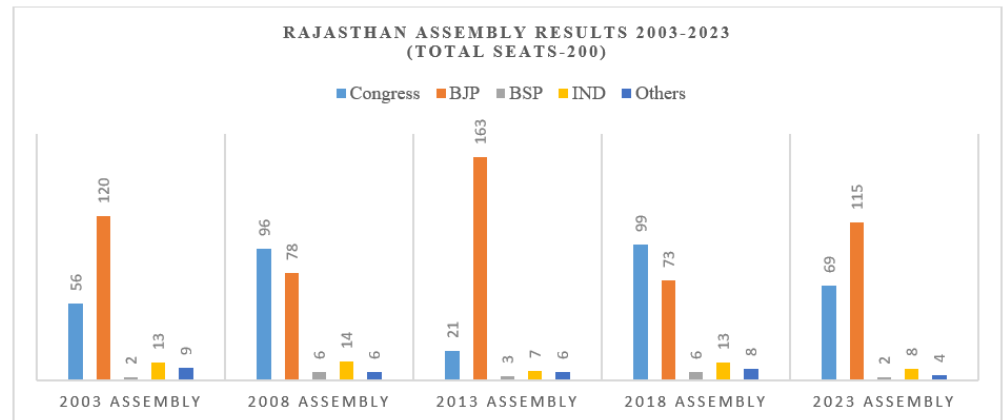
In the last five Assembly elections of Rajasthan from 2003 to 2023, the fundamental contestations continue to be Bipolar. The State of Rajasthan has 200 Assembly constituencies. As shown in [Figure 1](#), in the 2003 Assembly election of Rajasthan, the INC received 56 seats. In contrast, the BJP has formed the government with 120 seats, and other political parties, including Independent candidates, received the marginal seats. However, the vote share percentage between the two political parties does not differ much, as INC had 35.7 per cent versus 39.2 per cent of BJP. In the Assembly election of 2008, INC formed the government with 96 seats, whereas BJP won 78 seats; the vote share of Congress was 36.8 per cent, and BJP had 34.3 per cent of the vote share. BSP has 7.6 per cent of the vote share of 6 it received in the 2008 Assembly elections.

A year just before the starting of the phase of the dominant party, that is, in the 2013 Assembly election, the BJP formed the government in the state with a massive success of 163 seats. INC was reduced to just 21 seats, and a considerable margin of vote share was also reflected in this election, with Congress's vote share reduced to 33.7 per cent and BJP's vote share raised to 46 per cent. The vote share of other parties, such as BSP, remained very low, with just 3.4 per cent of the three seats it won in the election. In the 2018 Assembly election of Rajasthan, Congress formed the government with 100 seats and 39.30 per cent of the vote share, whereas BJP received 73 seats and its vote share was 38.77 per cent, which was very close to the number of votes of the party the government. In the 2023 Assembly election, BJP formed the government with 115 seats and INC with 69 seats. In this election, the newly formed Tribal political party Bharat Adivasi Party received three seats,

whereas BSP received two. The vote share of the BJP in this election was 41.69 per cent, and INC received 39.53 per cent. Sanjay Lodha and Nidhi Jain argued that in all four assembly elections of Rajasthan from 2003 to 2018, out of a total of 800 seats (200 seats in each election), the BJP had won 434 seats, which is 54.25 per cent of the vote share.

In contrast, INC has secured 273 and 34 per cent of the vote share. The remaining 93 seats were shared by the smaller parties and Independent candidates [Lodha & Jain \(2019\)](#). The gap margin is almost 20 per cent between the two competing parties in the State elections. The trend of Lok Sabha elections also has a unique story to share. Rajasthan has 25 parliamentary constituencies, and just like the State Assembly elections, the contestation for these 25 parliamentary seats oscillates between INC and BJP.

**Figure 1**



**Figure 1** Assembly Elections of Rajasthan

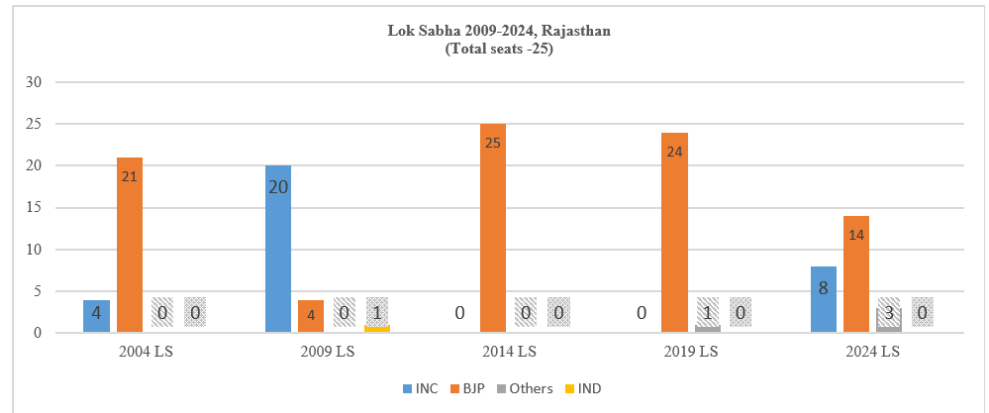
**Source:** Table Compiled by the Author from ECI Data, <https://election.rajasthan.gov.in/Election%20Results%20and%20Statistics.aspx>

As shown in [Figure 2](#), in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, BJP maintained its electoral victory in the 2003 Assembly elections and secured 21 parliamentary seats with a 49 per cent vote share. In contrast, Congress had received 04 seats with a vote share of 41.4 per cent. In the next Lok Sabha election of 2009, the result was just the opposite and followed the trend of the 2008 Assembly victory of Congress. In this 2009 election, Congress received 20 seats with a 47.2 per cent vote share, whereas BJP received four seats with a 36.6 per cent vote share. The end of the UPA regime and BJP's massive success at the centre in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections has complimented with all 25 seats won by the BJP in Rajasthan, with a vote share of 55.6 per cent, whereas the Congress's vote share reduced to 30.7 per cent. The trend continued in the 2019 election, and the impact of the second dominant party system became visible in Rajasthan as BJP repeated its massive success in the 2014 Lok Sabha election in 2019, winning overall 25 seats with a massive vote share of 59 per cent, whereas has Congress vote share had a 4 per cent increase than the 2014 elections and had reached to 34.24 per cent in 2019 Lok Sabha seats from Rajasthan. However, in the very recent 2024 Lok Sabha elections, after a decade, the political scenario of Lok Sabha seats in Rajasthan has changed, with Congress receiving eight seats and BJP 14, CPI(M) one seat, Rashtriya Loktantrik Party (RLTP) one seat and Bharat Adivasi Party also received one seat. The vote share of BJP is 49.24 per cent, CPI(M) 1.97 per cent, INC 37.91 per cent, and RLTP 1.80 per cent.



In Lok Sabha elections from 2004 to 2019, the gap in seats between BJP and Congress has become very one-sided. Out of 100 (25 seats each election of Lok Sabha) seats in 4 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP has received 75 seats in Congress, just 24 seats, in percentage, the gap around 51 per cent. To summarize the votes for the Assembly and Lok elections in Rajasthan from 2003 to 2019, BJP got roughly 45 per cent of the votes. In contrast, Congress received 37 per cent of the votes, as Sanjay Lodha and Nidhi Jain concluded that Rajasthan's system of party system has moved towards the domination of the party that is BJP [Lodha & Seth \(2014\)](#).

**Figure 2**



**Figure 2** Rajasthan's Lok Sabha Elections

**Source:** Table Compiled by the Author based on ECI Data, <https://election.rajasthan.gov.in/Election%20Results%20and%20Statistics.aspx>

## 2) The Phase from Dominant Party to Bipolar Contestation (2024 onwards)

As per the verdict of the 2024 Lok Sabha Elections, BJP has received 240 seats with a 36.56 per cent vote share at the national level, which was declined by just one per cent in comparison to its 2019 massive victory (37.3 per cent vote share in 2019). However, its seats have dramatically declined from 303 in 2019 to 240 in 2024. Shows that even with the decline of the seats in the Lok Sabha, its popularity amongst the voters has not declined. This also indicates a significant change in its support base at the regional levels. While INC got 99 seats with 21.19 per cent of the vote share at the national level, this was roughly double the number of seats in its 2019 performance (52 seats with 19.49 per cent vote share). In terms of the overall vote share of both political parties, there is no drastic shift, but not just the number of seats has drastic changes, but the states where these seats have been received have shuffled significantly.

The BJP has a decline in vote share in its traditional support base regions, the Hindi heartland, whereas it has increased in the eastern and southern states areas. These are areas where it usually has weaker dominance [Vaishnav & Mallory \(2024\)](#). The performance of BJP in Rajasthan, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh (received 52 seats from all three states in 2024) has declined in these states of the Hindi heartland, wherein the 2019 elections it received 96 seats from these three states only. Nevertheless, it is also to be noted that it might be the ruling party or a dominant player in these states, but its vote has been reduced significantly. The trends of the 2014 party system at the national level have returned, but some elements of the fourth party system remain unchanged. For instance, in the coalition era of politics, the national election is usually influenced by state-level party contestations. If a

national election occurred earlier than state elections, the party ruling the state assembly also used to have an upper edge in the Lok Sabha elections.

On the other hand, if national elections occurred after the state elections, the state's ruling party performed poorly in national elections. These aspects of the honeymoon- period and the anti-incumbency factor had great significance in pre-2014 politics. Nevertheless, it did not continue after 2014. For instance, in the state assembly elections of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh, the BJP formed the government. However, the stronghold of the BJP did not continue in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections in these states [Goyal et al. \(2023\)](#).

The political context of Rajasthan followed the trend of national politics from the dominant party system to Bipolar competition. Congress struggled in the Assembly election of 2023 due to its internal party conflicts with the party's senior leaders. The situation has reached the level of defect to BJP, as per CSDS post-poll survey. Despite a high level of satisfaction with the performance of the state government, it lost the election in 2023 [Lodha et al. \(2023\)](#). Prof Lodha believes that the failure of Congress to alliance with newly developed multiple-third fronts such as CPI(M), Rashtriya Loktantrik Party (RLTP) and Bharat Adivasi Party (BAP) are also among the reasons for this defeat [Lodha et al. \(2023\)](#). Surprisingly, just a few months later, in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the political scenario of Rajasthan got completely changed. As discussed earlier, Congress and the alliance of smaller parties in Lok Sabha elections, such as BAP and RLTP, made significant gains. Its vote share increased by 4 per cent in 2024 compared to 2019, and its allies contributed an additional 7 per cent of vote share. The verdict of 2024 clearly shows that Rajasthan state has witnessed a significant shift in its electoral dynamics, while Congress is making inroads in northern and eastern parts of the state, while BJP held onto southern-eastern, central and western regions [Lodha et al. \(2024\)](#). Regarding changes in the social base of the parties in Rajasthan in the 2023 Assembly elections on seven reserved seats for ST and SC communities, the BJP has managed to win only two seats. In contrast, Congress and its allies won the remaining seats. BJP's edge maintained on urban-educated young voters, whereas Congress had stuck to its regular support base of rural-poor, less educated masses. Conclusively, the 2024 Lok Sabha verdict has broken the continuity of Rajasthan's dominant party system. It has back to its Bipolar political contestation.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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