

Conceptualizing Political Dominance in India: A Multidimensional Framework

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Abstract

This study seeks to conceptualize the phenomenon of political dominance within a competitive party system, advancing a multidimensional analytical framework rooted in Indian experience. Existing literature on party system developed by scholars like Maurice Duverger and Giovanni Sartori, primarily conceptualises dominant party systems in terms of electoral superiority. Even though Duverger has already pointed towards the sociological element of dominance too, but this insight remains underdeveloped and insufficiently integrated with the general analytical framework, rendering the existing approaches inadequate to explain dominance in socially heterogeneous and postcolonial democracies. The study carefully examines evolution of the Indian party system from the period of Congress dominance to the contemporary dominance of the Bharatiya Janata Party and argues that political dominance extends beyond mere electoral success. Therefore, to understand dominance in a holistic manner, a four-dimensional framework is proposed which comprises of electoral pre-eminence, ideological hegemony, organizational depth, and discursive control as the key variables. The study employs comparative historical analysis to understand how dominant party affects political competition, structure the behaviour of opposition forces and define the normative boundaries for the democratic discourse. It finally indicates that dominance is a relational and dynamic process that is maintained by an active interplay between institutional, sociological, and strategic variables instead of mere recurring electoral wins. By offering a theoretically refined and empirically grounded model, the paper contributes to the comparative study of party systems and provides a framework applicable to other democracies in the Global South.

Keywords: Dominant Party Systems, Ideology, Electoral Outcomes, Discursive Control, Organizational Penetration, Comparative Politics

1. Introduction

Political parties and party systems have remained central themes in the study of comparative politics to provide a significant framework for understanding democratic competition, representation, and governance. Within this domain, the phenomenon of one party dominance has emerged as an interesting case where a single party sustains electoral and systemic pre-eminence over a considerably long period of time despite a political setup which is open and competitive in nature. The dominant party system does not formally rules out the presence of opposition forces, but despite a free and fair electoral system, the opposition parties are not in a position to alternate the dominant player from power due to certain factors acting in its favour. Although the phenomenon of one party dominance is witnessed across diverse political contexts, the concept remains theoretically under-specified and analytically constrained.

Classical literature of scholars on party system, especially the works of Duverger (1954) and Sartori (1976), theorize dominant party system as an outcome of **electoral superiority**, which is characterized by recurrent electoral triumphs and prolonged control of government. Such approaches do provide a certain conceptual clarity, but are constrained by the fact that they rely heavily on electoral aspect alone and fails to sufficiently address the broader mechanisms which constitute, reproduce and sustain dominance. Subsequently, other researchers have further attempted to generalize these formulations with institutional and strategic aspects. Bogaards (2004) distinguishes between simple and complex dominance while Cox (1997) focuses on the importance of the electoral systems and strategic coordination. Nevertheless, these strategies are more institutional in nature and they provide little access to ideational and organizational foundations of political power.

These constraints are more pronounced in socially heterogeneous democracies of the postcolonial world, as party systems are evolving in a context marked by deep social cleavages and state formation that is historically contingent. Indian presents quite a compelling example in this regard. The political dominance of Congress during the initial decades of post-independence India and contemporary return of dominance under the Bharatiya Janata Party indicates that dominance in India is not merely an electoral phenomenon and encompasses a host of other variables shaping the political arena. The initial phase of Congress dominance was theorized by Rajni Kothari (1964) and labelled as the “Congress System” owing to the centrality of Congress party into the system. The Congress with its catch all ideology acted as an umbrella party and shaped the political consensus of the era. The opposition parties were weak and marginalized and rather than confronting Congress on major policy issues, they operated on the margins of its consensus and appealed to the like minded sections within the Congress party to influence the policies. The subsequent studies by scholars like Yadav (1999) highlight the transformations in Indian party system conditioned by the changes in social coalitions, institutional configurations and political strategies. Building on these foundational contributions, subsequent scholarship in early 2000s worked out broader theoretical frameworks. The significance of social cleavages and coalition building to sustain dominance was heavily stressed by Zoya Hasan (2000) while Kanchan Chandra (2004) focuses on patronage politics and ethnic bargaining, showing how dominance could be sustained through micro-level political exchanges.

More recently, scholars like Tariq Thachil (2014) analysed how the cross-cutting coalitions between the elites and the poor voters can reinforce party dominance beyond traditional cleavages of caste, class and religion. Milan Vaishnav (2017) has further highlighted the contribution of criminality and money in politics and this brings an additional level to the institutionalization of parties. Scholars have also explored the role of ideological hegemony and discursive control in the post-2020 period. Gilles Verniers (2022) has studied the impact of discursive strategies on the construction of legitimacy in the public and Ankit Panda (2024) examines how the major parties use the state institutions to establish the limits of the discourse of democracy. These recent studies, while advancing our understanding, still tend to emphasize specific dimensions in isolation. This paper addresses the gap by integrating the electoral, ideological, organizational, and discursive dimension into a unified and dynamic framework, thereby extending the theoretical framework on dominant party system beyond its traditional focus on elections alone while situating the Indian experience within a broader comparative framework.

2. Methodology and Analytical Framework

The study applies a theoretical based qualitative and historical-comparative approach to analyse the phenomenon of one party dominance in Indian political system. Rather than attributing precedence to the quantitative measures of the vote share or seat share, the analysis takes the form of an interpretive approach that identifies the structural, ideational and organizational processes of producing and maintaining dominance. This methodological inclination conforms with the academic literature that considers party systems as historical and relational patterns, as opposed to aggregation of electoral results (Sartori, 1976; Panebianco, 1988).

The empirical analysis is based on the extensive use of secondary sources, such as scholarly works, party documents, and historical accounts, with the help of electoral data where possible. But the essence of the matter is not statistical generalization, but analytical abstraction that makes it possible to identify regularities through various phases of Indian party system. The historical-comparative lens is also rather suitable to the study. It also enables one to study various stages of dominance in a single political system, thus enabling comparison at the intra-system level, and also generalization of theory. Political dominance, here, is understood not as a fixed characteristic but as a relational state of systemic centrality, understood as the institutional and ideological ability of a political party to organize political contest, determine ideological discourse, and control institutional and societal alignments within a democratic setting. This definition shifts the focus of analysis away to the capabilities behind the observable consequences, thus overcoming the shortcomings of electoral reductionism that is found in the current literature (Duverger, 1954; Bogaards, 2004).

In order to operationalize this conceptualization, the paper creates a four-dimensional framework of analysis, which includes:

(i) **Electoral Pre-eminence**

The ability of a party to achieve recurring electoral victories and dominate a leading position in a series of electoral cycles visible by share of seats, share of votes, and geographic distribution. Although a necessity, this dimension is discussed as one of the pointers, and not a totally sufficient explanation of dominance (Sartori, 1976).

(ii) **Ideological Hegemony**

The capacity to formulate the normative and cognitive structure of political contest by dominating what is deemed as legitimate and politically possible. This dimension is based on the Gramscian insights and it is the degree to which the worldview of a party becomes integral to common sense political discourse (Gramsci, 1971).

(iii) **Organizational Depth**

The ability of a party to maintain itself at more than one tier of the political system. This encompasses cadre strength, leadership unity, territorial infiltration, and internal organization. The organizational depth allows the transformation of ideological appeal into a lasting political support (Panebianco, 1988; Michels, 1915).

(iv) Discursive Control

The capacity to influence political narratives, shape societal discourses, and affect communication channels. This aspect indicates the growing significance of media, symbolism, and strategic communication in modern democracies, where political legitimacy is negotiated via perception and narrative building. These dimensions though analytically independent are empirically dependent. They might not be sufficient to produce dominance in isolation but a systematic interaction between them results into conspicuous and sustained dominance. Ideological legitimacy is strengthened by electoral success, organizational coherence by ideological coherence, organizational networks by discursive penetration, and discursive control by electoral appeal. This reciprocally supporting dynamic creates a self-reproducing system of domination.

The study undertakes a comparative analysis of two significant periods in the history of Indian politics: the Congress System during the early post-independence years and the modern-day dominance of the BJP. The comparative analysis reflects how form of dominance may change, but the multidimensional structure supporting it will be the same. This framework offers a more holistic approach to the analysis of the political supremacy in complex democracies by incorporating the institutional, ideational, and organizational aspects into one analytical framework. It also makes it easier to identify areas of weakness, where imbalance in the dimensions can result in the weakening of dominance, despite the remaining electoral power.

3. Electoral Pre-eminence: Visibility Without Sufficiency

Traditional measure of political dominance within a system has been electoral pre-eminence. Classical works on party system, especially by scholars like Duverger (1954) and Sartori (1976) identify a party as dominant only when it conspicuously exhibits its capability to secure stable electoral victories repeatedly over a considerable period of time. This puts more emphasis on quantifiable electoral indicators like total number of votes bagged by a political party, its seat share in comparison to others and its electoral longevity, thus providing a convenient operational variable for the comparative analysis. Such an approach confuses electoral success with systemic dominance and other processes by which political authority is constituted and reproduced. Numerical superiority on its own does not represent the relational processes of party competition as Sartori (1976) himself warned. Though apparent, electoral results can be seen as mere reflectance of underlying structural correlations, such as ideological resonance, organizational capacity, and institutional advantage. The Indian example is an example of centrality as well as constraints of electoral pre-eminence. The Indian National Congress (INC) enjoyed massive electoral victories in the early post-independence period, which controlled national and state politics between 1952 and 1967.

This tendency not only showed the strength of electoral power but a larger set up of legitimacy, institutional extension, and fragmentation of opposition (Brass, 1994). This dominance was further enhanced by the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system of electoral rules which transformed pluralities of votes into large legislative majorities (Cox, 1997). However, the Congress system is not arithmetic of only electoral kind as Kothari (1964) would have argued. Its hegemony was based on the fact that it was a systemic centre, it organised a political competition and integrated various social forces in its organizational structure. In this regard, electoral success was not a cause but an effect of centrality within a system. The loss of Congress pre-eminence in 1967 is further evidence of the conditionality of electoral pre-eminence. The fall was not only due to the loss of elections but it was a representation of more fundamental changes, such as the politicization of caste identities, the ascent of regional parties, and the disintegration of the party system. These changes undermined the institutional bases of the Congress power, proving that electoral achievement is not enough to maintain long-term centrality. The re-emerging of electoral dominance by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) since 2014 has a different set up. The series of election victories of the BJP are a

mixture of strategic coalition-building, centralization of leadership, and institutional privileges. Like during the previous Congress period, the FPTP system has increased its electoral returns, allowing it to convert pluralities of votes into majorities in parliament. Yet, these results are directly linked to the wider processes, such as ideological unification and organizational growth, which go beyond electoral processes. This comparative viewpoint reveals a crucial theoretical point that electoral pre-eminence is a pre-condition but not a sufficient one of political domination. Although a long-term electoral victory can provide the means of controlling government, it is not by itself a determinant of the longevity and extensiveness of domination. The parties can win elections without developing systemic centrality, as they can maintain some aspects of influence despite electoral defeats. Analytically, electoral pre-eminence can best be seen as a symptom of domination and not the source of it. Its explanatory capacity relies on its correspondence with other dimensions, especially the ideological coherence, organizational capacity, and discursive influence. In the absence of such alignment, electoral success is fragile and can easily be overturned. In this regard, the Indian experience supports the necessity to get out of electoral reductionism and to place electoral results in the framework of multidimensionality. The visibility of dominance of course is highlighted by electoral pre-eminence but not its entire logic.

4. Ideological Hegemony: Structuring the Normative Field of Politics

In addition to the success in elections, political dominance is rooted deeply on the ability of a party to influence the normative and cognitive landscape in which political competition takes place. This is what here is theorized as ideological hegemony, or the capacity of a political actor to establish the limits of authorized discourse, as well as to make its worldview seem like politically common sense. Based on Gramscian thoughts, hegemony is not only based on coercion but also on the production of consent whereby dominant ideas are internalized in society (Gramsci, 1971). Regarding party systems, ideological hegemony is expressed in the ability of a powerful party to frame political debates in its own terms, develop legitimate standards and affect the tastes and demands of voters and rivals. This is a diffuse but long-term power that not only influences the election but also the circumstances in which political contestation occurs.

An early example of an ideological hegemony in the Indian context is the Congress system. Congress expressed a wide and embracing ideological paradigm based on secular nationalism, democratic constitutionalism, and development by the state. It was a system of political language which allowed the party to bridge various social classes and political inclinations under one organizational framework (Kothari, 1964). The ideological elasticity enabled it to internalize conflicting interests without sacrificing its status as the normative centre of the political system. More importantly, the hegemony of Congress was not only programmatic but it was historically rooted and had the validity of its leadership in the national movement. This historical association enabled it to define the terms of political legitimacy in the early decades of independence. Even when the opposition parties were critical, they tended to work within the conceptual frames set by the congress thus, strengthening the centrality of congress. Yet, it was also the ideological adaptability that made Congress dominant that led to its slow decline. When the competition among the political parties grew stronger, and the new social divisions appeared, the lack of a properly defined ideological core undermined its ability to exercise normative power. What previously served as inclusivity was slowly emerging as ideological ambiguity and this hampered the mobilization and differentiation of the party in an increasingly competitive environment (Yadav, 1999).

The emergence of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is a major shift in the kind of ideological hegemony in India. Unlike the Congress, the ideological project of the BJP is more coherent and consolidated, which revolves around the system of cultural nationalism. Such ideological coherence helps the party to formulate a more specific vision of political community and national identity, which is a source of constant mobilization (Jaffrelot, 2007). In contrast to the accommodative model of Congress, the ideological approach of the BJP is geared towards the organization of political competition towards an established normative center. This does not abolish pluralism but reforms it with a more definite ideological demarcation. This has led to the increasing political discussions being carried out in a discursive space constructed by the narrative of the ruling party, which forces oppositional actors to engage in the debate on its terms of existence. This ideological inclusivity to ideological structuring is a larger change of logic of political dominance. Whereas the Congress system internalized diversity into a fluid system, BJP model institutionalizes competition with a more aggressive and coherent ideological agenda.

This shift increases the mobilizational capacity but adds new polarization and contestation dynamics. Theoretically speaking, ideological hegemony highlights the constraints of the electoral-based approaches to dominance. It shows that the exercise of political power is not only based on institutional control but also on the ability to influence normative expectations and political imagination. In this case, the success of electorate processes can be highly dependent on the ideological consolidation in the past. In this regard, ideological hegemony should be conceived as a structural component of political hegemony, which bridges the connection between the electoral results and the wider systemic influence. Its endurance factor is determined by how well any party can transform its ideological construct to meet the evolving social circumstances without losing its coherence and appeal.

5. Organizational Depth: Institutional Foundations of Dominance

Electoral victory or ideological appeal cannot serve as the main drivers of political dominance, it must be accompanied by a long-term organizational framework that can convert support into enduring political domination. This dimension, which is conceptualized as organization depth, is the institutional ability of a party to sustain cohesion, territorial penetration, and operating continuity through electoral cycles. The classical theory of organizations emphasizes the importance of structure in political influence. In his definition of the iron law of oligarchy, Michels (1915) claimed that complicated organizations are bound to acquire hierarchical systems of leadership that improve efficiency and decision-making abilities. Although this type of centralization can make internal democracy limited, it enhances the capacity of parties to act as one and maintain influence. In a similar vein, Panebianco (1988) focuses more on institutionalization of the party, in which organizational stability and routinization helps in making politics long-lasting. In India, the Congress system has in the first place demonstrated a high level of organization based on the characteristics of its development as a mass movement on a national scale. It was also decentralized in leadership, factional in pluralism and expansive grassroots networks, which allowed it to integrate various social classes under one political system (Brass, 1994). This flexibility in the organization enabled the Congress as a kind of political integration mediating between the state and society and internalizing contrast within its own framework. Notably, intra-party factionalism did not always undermine Congress hegemony but instead, it was used as an alternative to inter-party rivalry as it strengthened party centrality (Kothari, 1964). Congress minimized the motivation to consolidate opposition by enabling competing interests to coexist

within the Congress. Organizational depth in this sense had a close relation to its role in the broader system.

Yet, the ultimate undermining of the Congress dominance was preceded by a slow organizational weakening process. The growing centralization of leadership diminished the independence of the regional units and the deterioration of the grassroots networks undermined the ability of the party to reach out to emerging social constituencies. There was a loss of organizational flexibility in favour of fragmentation and factional pluralism produced more and more instability instead of integration. This caused the Congress to lose its capacity to have effective linkages between the society and political institutions thus weakening its structural foundation (Yadav, 1999).

Conversely, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has an organizational framework that depicts a divergent path, which entails institutional discipline, cadre mobilization, and structural coherence. The BJP built their organizational base as compared to Congress whose structure was influenced by their political dominance. Its strong linkage with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) gave it access to an already existing network of trained cadres, ideological infrastructure, which enabled it to grow steadily (Andersen and Damle, 1987). Such a cadre system allows the BJP to exercise extremely high standards of internal coordination and ideological uniformity, as well as provides efficient mobilization of the grassroots. In this case, the organizational depth is not just a size factor but a discipline and integration factor whereby the party can be integrated to become a core element in various political environments. In addition, the modern period of BJP leadership is an indication of hybrid organizational form which is a mix of traditional cadre system and centralized leadership and professionalized campaign management. This integration improves flexibility and control, allowing the party to respond to regional differences and to be strategically coherent at the national level. In terms of analysis, organizational depth is very essential in reproduction of political dominance. It gives the institutional processes by which the ideological discourses are spread, electoral policies are implemented and leadership power is maintained. Dominance becomes more sustainable in organizations that have strong capacity, and fragile in organizations that lack capacity, whether or not they perform well in elections. The relative experience of Congress and the BJP, therefore, highlights an important theoretical point that organizational depth mediates the correlation between the success in elections and centrality in the system. The durability of dominance is not a matter of electoral victory, but the capacity to institutionalize, in a political sense, the support. In this light, organization depth should be interpreted as an aspect of structure of political power, which is critical in the consolidation as well as the perpetuation of power in the democratic systems.

6. Discursive Control: Narrative Power and the Structuring of Political Competition

In modern democracies, political hegemony is increasingly functioning via the ability to influence both official discourses and symbolic values and communicative patterns. This dimension, which is theorized as discursive control, is the capacity of a political party to frame the issues of politics, determine the agenda of political discourse and shape the perceptions and interpretation of political reality. Although ideologically hegemony and discursive control are closely connected, discursive control is analytically distinct in that it is the process of the active production and circulation of political meaning in a mediated environment. The increased centrality of discourse is indicative of larger changes in political communication. The rise of mass media, which was then succeeded by the emergence of digital media and social media, has transformed the landscape of political contestation and rendered it more reliant on visibility, narrative salience, and symbolic appeal. Here, power is

also exerted not just by the institutions but by having the capacity to manipulate the interpretive schemata upon which citizens perceive political events (Mazzoleni, 2008). Discursive control is achieved in a number of ways such as, Agenda-setting regarding the issues to be publicized, influencing the way those issues are framed, narrative construction relating political events to larger identities and purpose narratives.

Symbolic communication, or the implementation of imagery, language, and leadership to elicit emotional and intellectual reactions. The combination of these processes allows the dominant parties to organize political competition, determining the content, as well as the terms of political discussion. In Indian context, the Congress system was quite exerting some kind of discursive power based on its historical validity and institutional location. State institutions and leadership discourse propagated a stream of political discourse that focused on nation-building, secularism, and planned development, especially during the tenure of Jawaharlal Nehru. Nevertheless, this type of discursive control was rather diffuse and uncoordinated and based more on inherited legitimacy than on strategic communication. With the spread and diversification of the media environment, Congress found it difficult to adapt and its narrative centrality began to be eroded over time. The modern period of BJP hegemony represents a qualitatively new model of discursive control, which is centralized and strategically coordinated with technological sophistication. The party has shown a very high level of competence in merging communication and political strategy and has been consistent in the leadership messages, media coverage, and the outreach to grassroots. This allows the building of consistent and reverberant narratives connecting governance, identity, and purpose of the nation. One of the main aspects of this model is the combination of ideology and communication. Other themes like nationalism, development, and leadership are not expressed in abstract terms but are entrenched in available narratives that resonate with various constituencies.

This increases the scope as well as the longevity of the discursive impact of the party (Jaffrelet, 2007). The role of leadership-centred communication is also important, as the personalisation and symbolic mediation of political authority takes place. The leadership projection as a centre of political identity is a reinforcement of the narrative coherence and allows the unification of the mass's perception onto a single political message. This personalization does not substitute institutional politics but it supplements it by enhancing the affective aspect of political participation. The nature of political competition is also transformed through discursive control as it establishes unequal conditions of contestation. Even in instances where opposition parties are electorally viable, they tend to be in a discursive space that is set by the ruling party. This forces them to react to issues, frames and stories established by their rival, restricting their ability to express other political agendas. Consequently, competition is ongoing but structured, as opposed to being open-ended. Theoretically, discursive control emphasizes the changing face of political supremacy within the framework of mediated democracies. It implies that the sustainability of dominance is becoming more and more reliant on the capacity to match the communication strategies with the ideological discourses and organizational forms. In situations where this alignment is realized, discursive power solidifies electoral victory and ideological authority.

Accordingly, discursive control must be understood as a **constitutive dimension of political dominance**, rather than a supplementary factor. It provides the mechanisms through which dominance is communicated, normalized, and reproduced within the public sphere.

7. Comparative Synthesis: Modes of Political Dominance in India

The multidimensional model, which was developed in this paper, allows comparing two significant periods of political hegemony in India, i.e. the Congress regime during the early post-independent era and the modern political hegemony of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Instead of seeing them as discrete events, this section is a conceptualization of them as different forms of political pre-eminence, each of them being a specific arrangement of electoral, ideological, organizational, and discursive aspects. One of the initial points of convergent intersection is that both Congress and the BJP obtained systemic centrality, organizing the sphere of political struggle around itself. Electoral pre-eminence existed in both of these situations, but it was supported by more comprehensive alignments in ideological, organizational and discursive arenas. This supports the fact that dominance cannot be reduced to electoral results but is the result of the combination of many dimensions. But the character of these alignments in the two phases is very different.

The Congress system can be described as a paradigm of accommodative hegemony, which is based on ideological inclusivity, decentralization, and diffuse discursive power. Its power was the ability to unite various social layers and political trends under the one organizational structure. Congress ideologically had a loose and expansive story that focused on nationalism and development that allowed it to act as a normative centre of consensus (Kothari, 1964). Factional pluralism in an organizational context enabled the internalization of political competition thus minimizing the external resistance which was required. Its hegemony was maintained discursively by historical legitimacy and institutional authority instead of strategic communication. Conversely, the modern BJP dominance is a paradigm of organized hegemony, which is ideologically unified, disciplined organization, and discursively dominated. In contrast to Congress, the BJP has a more delineated ideological centre whereby cultural nationalism serves as its source of coherence and mobilization (Jaffrelot, 2007). It has a cadres-based structure and connection with the RSS, which allows it a high degree of coordination and territorial penetration (Andersen and Damle, 1987). The party holds a lot of power over the political narratives discursively, as it has centralized communication strategies and media interactions that help it to shape the agenda and interpretation.

Such opposition indicates a larger change in the logic of political primacy, the shift towards inclusivity to structuring, decentralization to coordination, and diffuse legitimacy to strategic narrative construction. Although the Congress system accommodates diversity in a more flexible structure, the BJP model plans competition in an ideological and communicative structure that is more clearly defined. Concurrently, both models show the dominance to be intrinsically relational and dynamic. It is maintained not by the power of any one dimension but by the correspondence between dimensions. Where there is no such coincidence, as in the instance of Congress as it decays, power is put at risk. On the other hand, the amalgamation of these dimensions as observed during the BJP phase makes it more durable and reachable. A significant conclusion of this analogy is that political hegemony in democratic societies does not kill competition but instead reinvents it. The opposition parties still exist but their tactics are controlled by the position of the dominant party in the system. During the Congress era, the opposition was diffused and found within the more comprehensive system of consensus, but during the BJP era, opposition is situated within a more systematic and ideologically marked system of contestation.

The historical contingency of dominant party systems is also highlighted in this analysis. The shift in Congress to the BJP predominance is indicative of changes in the social formation, the institutional formations, and the communicative spaces. It puts emphasis on the fact that dominance is not something fixed in political systems but a recurring state, depending on the

capacity of parties to adjust on various fronts. Theoretically, the comparative synthesis shows the usefulness of a multidimensional framework in explaining the difference in dominance forms. It demonstrates that the dominant party systems may vary not merely in degree, but in mode, based on the ways in which the electoral, ideological, organizational, and discursive factors are organized. Based on this, the Indian case cannot be considered an exception, but rather a critical location where a theoretical development can occur, providing information on the working of political dominance in heterogeneous, complicated democracies.

8. Conclusion: Rethinking Political Dominance in Democratic Systems

The paper has attempted to reconceptualize the concept of political dominance moving beyond the conventional emphasis on electoral superiority alone. It advances a **multidimensional analytical framework** grounded in the Indian experience, to expand the study of one party dominance. It starts by critically engaging with existing theories while applying a historical-comparative approach to demonstrate that political dominance is best understood not as an electoral outcome but as a **relational condition of systemic centrality** constituted through the active interaction of electoral, ideological, organizational, and discursive dimensions.

A comprehensive study of Indian party system clearly shows that political dominance is neither a uniform nor a static phenomenon. The early dominance under Congress was a style of accommodative dominance, which was maintained by ideological inclusiveness, decentralization, and legitimacy that was historically entrenched. On the contrary, the modern day centrality of the Bharatiya Janata Party is indicative of a form of structured dominance, which is ideologically coherent, organizationally disciplined and strategically controlling the narrative building. In spite of their differences, both the cases provide one consistent theoretical point of view that the dominance can only be maintained when there is a correspondence in various dimensions of political power. One of the major implications of this study is that, while **electoral success is necessary precondition for asserting dominance, it is not sufficient to explain it in its entirety**. Dominant parties do not just win elections, they shape the complete landscape of political competition by defining normative frameworks, structuring opposition behaviour, and influencing the terms of public discourse. In this sense, dominance operates through the capacity to **organize political possibility**, rather than simply through institutional control.

The paper also highlights the **dynamic and contingent nature of dominance**. The decline of Congress and the rise of the BJP demonstrate that shifts in ideological resonance, organizational capacity, and communicative strategies can fundamentally reconfigure party systems. Dominance is therefore not a permanent condition but a **reproducible outcome**, dependent on the continuous alignment of its constituent dimensions. By integrating ideological hegemony, organizational depth, and discursive control into the analysis, this study contributes to the **theoretical refinement of dominant party system theory**, addressing its longstanding electoral bias. It also underscores the importance of examining political dominance within the context of **mediated democracies**, where communication and narrative construction play an increasingly central role. In a broader context, the Indian case defies the fact that dominance is always incompatible with democracy. Rather, it shows that the dominating party systems might co-exist with competitive elections and work under different systems of power. This requires a more subtle perception of the democratic politics, but one that does not see dominance as a distortion of democratic standards but as a variant of political organization.

Lastly, the framework formulated in this paper provides research opportunities in the future. It can be generalised in comparison with other democracies that have predominant tendencies of a party and more research can be carried out to operationalise its dimensions with empirical indicators. These would help form a more internationally applicable and analytically strong theory of party systems. To sum up it may be safely stated that the phenomenon of political dominance is most effectively viewed as a multidimensional, dynamic and context-sensitive one, the analysis of which cannot be done without leaving the polling numbers and touching upon the wider frameworks and processes that support political power.

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