

Ideology and Electoral Dynamics: Reconfiguring the Party System in Contemporary India

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Abstract: The political party system in India is experiencing a profound transformation, marked by a renewed emphasis on ideology as a key determinant of electoral behavior and party alignment. For decades, Indian politics was shaped by the hegemony of the Indian National Congress, whose centrist and inclusive platform blurred ideological distinctions in favor of pragmatic governance and populist welfare. However, the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the growing prominence of regional parties have ushered in a new era of political competition defined increasingly by clear ideological demarcations. This research explores the ways in which ideological narratives—rooted in nationalism, secularism, economic liberalism, and identity politics—have come to shape party strategies, manifestos, and voter behavior. Using a mixed-method approach that integrates quantitative data from the Election Commission of India and CSDS-Lokniti voter surveys with qualitative analysis of party manifestos and public discourse, the study examines elections from 2004 to 2024. The findings reveal a pattern of ideological consolidation, particularly by the BJP, whose sustained electoral success is attributed to its consistent promotion of Hindutva and pro-market economic policies. Meanwhile, the Congress party's ideological ambiguity and organizational decline have undermined its ability to effectively counter the BJP's narrative. Regional parties, once focused primarily on caste and linguistic identities, are now engaging more strategically with broader ideological frameworks to maintain relevance in an increasingly polarized environment. The paper argues that Indian democracy is transitioning from a fragmented, coalition-driven model dominated by identity politics to a more ideologically structured party system. This transformation reflects both a shift in voter consciousness and a deliberate reconfiguration of party strategies in response to socio-economic changes and media influence. Ultimately, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how ideology functions in a non-Western, postcolonial electoral context, challenging the notion that Indian voters are driven solely by clientelism or ethnic loyalties. It also highlights the emerging risks of ideological polarization and majoritarianism, suggesting the need for renewed scholarly and civic engagement with the normative foundations of India's democratic institutions.

Keywords: Ideology, Indian party system, electoral politics, political realignment, voter behaviour, BJP, Congress, Hindutva, secularism, electoral strategy.

Introduction

India's democratic polity, the world's largest and most diverse, has historically defied conventional political categorizations. For much of the post-independence period, Indian politics was dominated by the Indian National Congress, whose catch-all nature, rooted in nationalism, secularism, and socialism, masked ideological cleavages under a broad umbrella of consensus. During this phase, political competition was less about ideological differentiation and more

about access to state resources, social engineering, and regional representation. However, the turn of the 21st century—especially post-2004—has witnessed a significant reconfiguration in India’s party system, marked by the emergence of sharper ideological distinctions and increasingly polarized electoral choices.

This ideological reconfiguration has been most evident in the rise and consolidation of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which has succeeded in mainstreaming its ideological project centered on Hindutva, cultural nationalism, and economic liberalization. The BJP’s ascendancy is not merely a function of electoral arithmetic or organizational efficiency; rather, it reflects a coherent ideological narrative that has resonated with a significant segment of the electorate across states and social groups. Conversely, the Congress party, once the ideological center of Indian politics, has struggled to offer a compelling counter-narrative, leading to a crisis of identity and credibility.

Simultaneously, regional parties that once prioritized caste, ethnicity, or local developmental issues are now increasingly aligning themselves with national ideological discourses—either adopting a soft Hindutva approach to remain electorally competitive or reasserting sub-nationalist and secular identities to distinguish themselves. This interplay between ideology and electoral dynamics marks a departure from earlier models of Indian political behavior that emphasized identity politics, patronage, or anti-incumbency as the dominant factors influencing voter choices.

The resurgence of ideology in electoral politics is particularly noteworthy in a post-liberalization India, where globalization, rising aspirations, and digital media have dramatically altered the political landscape. Today’s voters are not merely passive recipients of patronage but active participants in ideological debates on nationalism, development, secularism, and welfare. Political parties, in response, have recalibrated their strategies—crafting manifestos, slogans, and digital campaigns that emphasize ideological clarity, emotional resonance, and cultural symbolism.

This study seeks to analyze how these emerging ideological trends are reshaping India’s party system. It explores how major national and regional parties have repositioned themselves ideologically over the past two decades, and how these shifts are reflected in electoral behavior, voter alignment, and coalition formations. Through a detailed examination of election data, voter surveys, and party documents from 2004 to 2024, the research aims to assess whether India’s political system is moving toward a more ideologically driven structure, and what this means for the health and future of its democracy.

In doing so, the study not only interrogates the validity of older paradigms of Indian politics—such as the prevalence of non-ideological, clientelist mobilization—but also highlights the risks and possibilities inherent in a more ideologically polarized public sphere. As Indian democracy matures, the role of ideology is no longer peripheral; it is increasingly central to understanding how power is contested, how citizens engage, and how the very idea of the nation is articulated in electoral terms.

Ideology and Electoral Dynamics:

Ideology plays a foundational role in shaping the nature, trajectory, and stability of democratic political systems. It provides the normative frameworks within which political parties define their goals, mobilize support, and differentiate themselves from their opponents. In the Indian context, the historical interplay between ideology and electoral dynamics has been complex and often contradictory. While early post-independence politics was dominated by the centrist-nationalist consensus of the Indian National Congress, the contemporary political landscape is increasingly marked by sharper ideological divides—especially around religion, economic policy, and national identity.

Electoral dynamics refer to the patterns and mechanisms of voter behavior, party competition, campaign strategy, and coalition-building. When viewed through the lens of ideology, these

dynamics reveal significant transformations. Ideology is no longer a peripheral force obscured by caste arithmetic or regional populism—it has emerged as a central axis around which parties frame their narratives and voters organize their preferences.

A defining feature of recent Indian elections has been the ideological assertiveness of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Through sustained emphasis on Hindutva (cultural nationalism), market-oriented reforms, and muscular foreign policy, the BJP has successfully constructed a coherent ideological brand. This ideological coherence has allowed the party to maintain a stable and expanding electoral base across caste, class, and regional lines. The BJP's ideological project, far from being abstract, is operationalized through specific electoral strategies—ranging from manifesto promises and symbolic legislation (such as abrogating Article 370 or building the Ram Mandir) to targeted welfare schemes framed within nationalist discourses.

In contrast, the Congress Party has struggled with ideological ambiguity. Once the custodian of India's secular-socialist consensus, the Congress has increasingly oscillated between soft-Hindutva and center-left positions, diluting its ideological distinctiveness. This ambiguity has weakened its capacity to mobilize voters on ideological grounds and allowed the BJP to dominate the narrative space.

Regional parties present a more nuanced picture. Many of them, such as the Trinamool Congress (TMC), Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), or Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), have sought to balance local identity-based politics with broader ideological stances on federalism, secularism, and welfare governance. For instance, AAP positions itself ideologically around decentralization, governance efficiency, and public service delivery, while DMK foregrounds social justice and rationalism in opposition to cultural nationalism. These regional actors often serve as ideological counterweights to the national parties, while simultaneously adapting to the shifting ideological terrain.

Importantly, the voter landscape in India has also evolved. A new generation of voters—better educated, more digitally connected, and socially aspirational—is more responsive to ideological cues than older paradigms assumed. Issues such as nationalism, religious identity, economic development, and corruption are increasingly filtered through ideological lenses. Social media, television debates, and mass political mobilizations have further heightened ideological awareness and engagement among the electorate.

Moreover, electoral dynamics today are deeply influenced by how ideologies are communicated and perceived. Political branding, leader-centric campaigns, slogan engineering, and symbolic acts play a vital role in translating ideology into mass appeal. The BJP's "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas" or Congress's "Nyay" (justice) campaign are cases in point—where ideology is distilled into emotionally resonant and electorally effective messaging.

The reconfiguration of India's party system around ideological lines has several implications. On the one hand, it enriches democratic competition by fostering meaningful policy debates and clearer choices for voters. On the other, it risks deepening societal polarization, especially when ideology is wielded to exclude or marginalize dissenting voices. The communalization of political discourse, majoritarian rhetoric, and the erosion of secular norms are symptoms of this darker dimension of ideological mobilization.

In sum, the contemporary Indian political environment is witnessing an ideological renaissance—one that is fundamentally altering electoral dynamics. This shift signifies both a challenge and an opportunity: a challenge in terms of maintaining the pluralistic fabric of Indian democracy, and an opportunity to rejuvenate democratic engagement through principled, issue-based politics. Understanding this interplay between ideology and electoral dynamics is crucial for decoding the trajectory of India's democratic future.

Table 1: Electoral Trends (2004–2024)

Election Year	Congress Vote Share (%)	BJP Vote Share (%)	Regional Parties Combined (%)	Voter Turnout (%)
2004	26.5	22.2	36.4	57.0
2009	28.5	18.8	34.6	58.2
2014	19.5	31.3	34.7	66.4
2019	19.5	37.4	29.3	67.4
2024 (Proj.)	17.8	39.2	29.8	68.0

Source: Election Commission of India, CSDS-Lokniti, Times Now Projections

The BJP's vote share has steadily risen, while Congress's has declined, reflecting a shift toward ideological polarization. Regional parties retain significant influence, though their ideological positions are increasingly fluid or strategically aligned with national narratives.

Literature Review

- **Chhibber, P., & Verma, R. (2018).** *Ideology and Identity: The Changing Party Systems of India*. Oxford University Press.

This landmark study introduces a two-dimensional ideological framework—statism versus market liberalism, and recognition versus denial of group identities. The authors argue that party competition in India is increasingly structured along these ideological axes. By analyzing voter surveys and party manifestos, they demonstrate how ideological cleavages have become central to the evolving party system. The BJP's rise is attributed to its alignment with market reform and cultural nationalism. This book is pivotal in situating ideology as a key analytical tool in Indian electoral studies.

- **Yadav, Y. (1999).** *Electoral Politics in the Time of Change: India's Third Electoral System, 1989–99*. *Economic and Political Weekly*.

Yadav identifies a critical shift from the Congress-dominated era to a third electoral system marked by fragmentation and competitive multipartyism. While emphasizing caste and regional cleavages, he notes the relative decline of ideological contestation during this phase. However, his framework sets the stage for understanding how recent ideological consolidation, especially by the BJP, contrasts with earlier fluidity. The article provides a foundation for evaluating how electoral dynamics evolve over decades. Yadav's work remains influential in deciphering voter behavior during the post-Congress hegemony.

- **Chatterjee, P. (2004).** *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*. Columbia University Press.

Chatterjee draws attention to the tension between formal state institutions and informal political practices in postcolonial societies like India. He introduces the concept of "political society" where ideological discourses interact with localized governance claims. The book offers a critical view of how ideology manifests outside elite institutions, influencing the political agency of marginalized populations. It challenges the assumption that Indian politics is purely clientelist. Chatterjee's framework is essential for understanding how ideological narratives operate beyond formal party platforms.

- **Jaffrelot, C. (2007).** *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader*. Princeton University Press.

This comprehensive volume traces the ideological evolution of Hindu nationalism, focusing on the intellectual and political trajectories of the RSS and BJP. Jaffrelot documents how Hindutva emerged as a counter-narrative to Nehruvian secularism and socialist statism. He analyzes key events and texts that shaped this ideological movement, emphasizing its growing mainstream

legitimacy. The work situates the BJP's success within a broader ideological genealogy. It is indispensable for understanding the ideological roots of contemporary electoral dominance.

- **Palshikar, S. (2015). *The BJP and Hindu Nationalism: Centrist Politics and Majoritarian Impulses*. *Journal of South Asian Studies*.**

Palshikar examines how the BJP integrates Hindu nationalist ideology with centrist electoral strategies. He argues that the party's success lies in balancing ideological rigidity with political pragmatism, appealing to both core and swing voters. The paper critiques the erosion of secularism and the normalization of majoritarianism. It also evaluates the ideological messaging in BJP's campaigns and governance. Palshikar's analysis highlights how ideological frameworks are adapted to suit mass electoral dynamics.

- **Varshney, A. (2002). *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*. Yale University Press.**

Although focused on ethnic conflict, Varshney's study illuminates how ideology influences inter-community relations and electoral alignments. He argues that civic engagement can mitigate communal violence, depending on local institutions and political leadership. The ideological postures of parties—secular or communal—are shown to affect communal peace and electoral outcomes. His comparative analysis across Indian cities provides empirical depth. The work underscores how ideology operates at the intersection of identity, politics, and violence.

- **Sridharan, E. (2012). *Coalition Politics in India: Selected Issues at the Centre and the States*. Academic Foundation.**

This volume explores how coalitions function ideologically, especially when disparate parties must reconcile differences to govern. Sridharan highlights the ideological compromises inherent in coalition politics, especially post-1996. He discusses how national and regional parties negotiate shared platforms on issues like secularism and liberalization. The analysis reveals that while ideology is often diluted in coalitions, it is never irrelevant. The work is crucial for understanding ideological adaptation in multiparty environments.

- **Jenkins, R. (1999). *Democratic Politics and Economic Reform in India*. Cambridge University Press.**

Jenkins explores the interface between neoliberal economic reform and democratic accountability. He shows how parties use economic ideology to craft narratives around development, privatization, and growth. His analysis includes the Congress's market shift in the 1990s and the BJP's pro-reform agenda. The book highlights how economic policy becomes a terrain for ideological contest. Jenkins provides historical context for analyzing present-day electoral debates on development and inequality.

- **Sinha, A. (2005). *The Regional Roots of Developmental Politics in India*. Indiana University Press.**

Sinha investigates how regional parties have embedded developmental ideologies into their political strategies. He presents case studies where parties combine regional identity with programmatic governance and economic development. The book challenges the assumption that regional politics is devoid of ideology. Instead, it shows how local governance priorities reflect ideological commitments to equity, federalism, and welfare. This work offers important insights into sub-national ideological formations.

- **Hasan, Z. (2009). *Politics of Inclusion: Castes, Minorities and Affirmative Action*. Oxford University Press.**

Hasan critically assesses the role of ideologies of inclusion—such as social justice and secularism—in shaping electoral strategies. She focuses on how parties appeal to marginalized groups through affirmative action and identity-based recognition. Her work underscores the ideological importance of representation, equity, and minority rights in a pluralistic democracy.

The book illustrates how inclusive ideologies influence party manifestos and voter coalitions. It is essential for understanding recognition-based politics in contemporary India.

Research Gap

Despite extensive scholarship on Indian party politics, several critical gaps remain in understanding the intersection of ideology and electoral dynamics in the reconfiguration of the contemporary party system. While classic works by scholars such as Yadav (1999) and Chhibber & Verma (2018) have addressed shifts in voter alignments and ideological frameworks, much of this research has been confined to static categorizations of party ideologies or broad overviews of electoral trends. Few studies have empirically examined how ideological narratives actively shape voter behavior, party strategies, and coalition formations across successive elections—especially from 2004 to 2024, a period that has witnessed unprecedented polarization and consolidation.

Moreover, most existing literature tends to focus either on national-level party competition (such as BJP vs. Congress) or on regional identity politics in isolation, without systematically analyzing how ideology operates as a cohesive force across the national-regional spectrum. There is also limited academic engagement with the electronic and social media-driven dissemination of ideology, which has become a defining feature of contemporary Indian elections.

This study seeks to bridge these gaps by offering a comprehensive, data-driven analysis of how ideological positioning has redefined the party system in India. It explores not only ideological content but also the strategic deployment of ideology in electoral campaigns, coalition politics, and voter mobilisation—an area still underexplored in mainstream political science discourse.

Objectives

1. To examine the ideological evolution of major Indian political parties from 2004–2024.
2. To assess the impact of ideological narratives on electoral behavior and outcomes.
3. To analyze the shifting ideological alignments of regional parties.
4. To evaluate how voter preferences are influenced by ideological positioning in party manifestos.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-method research design to comprehensively analyze the evolving interplay between ideology and electoral dynamics in India. The methodological framework integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a nuanced understanding of how ideology has influenced party behavior and voter alignment over the last two decades.

Research Design: Mixed-Method Approach:

The research is structured around a mixed-method approach, which combines:

Quantitative analysis: This involves the collection and statistical examination of electoral outcomes, voting patterns, and voter survey data. It is used to track trends such as vote share changes, turnout variations, and shifts in demographic voting blocs over time.

Qualitative discourse analysis: This complements the quantitative data by analyzing the language, narratives, and ideological themes used by political parties in their manifestos, speeches, and campaign material. It helps decode how ideological messaging has evolved and influenced public perception and voter choices.

Data Sources:

To ensure validity and comprehensive coverage, data is drawn from multiple credible sources:

- **Election Commission of India (ECI):** Official election results, candidate affidavits, party-wise vote shares, and constituency-level statistics from 2004 to 2024.

- **Lokniti–CSDS Voter Surveys:** Large-scale, nationally representative post-poll and pre-poll survey data that include insights into voter motivations, ideological leanings, and demographic breakdowns.
- **Political Party Manifestos (2004–2024):** Manifestos of major national and regional parties (e.g., BJP, INC, AAP, DMK, TMC) are analyzed to extract ideological commitments, promises, and shifts over time.
- **Secondary Literature:** Peer-reviewed academic publications, books, reports, and policy briefs that provide theoretical grounding and contextual analysis of ideology in Indian politics.

Analytical Tools and Techniques:

To operationalize both quantitative and qualitative elements of the study, the following analytical tools are used:

- **SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences):** Employed for statistical analysis of electoral trends, voter demographics, and correlation analysis between ideological shifts and voting behavior.
- **NVivo:** A qualitative data analysis software used to code, classify, and interpret textual data from party manifestos and speeches. NVivo allows for the identification of recurring ideological themes (e.g., nationalism, secularism, development, welfare) and how their frequency and framing change over time.

Period of Study:

The research focuses on the five general elections from 2004 to 2024, a transformative period in Indian politics marked by ideological consolidation, digital political communication, and growing voter polarization.

Units of Analysis:

- **At the party level:** Party platforms, ideological positions, and campaign strategies of major national and regional parties.
- **At the voter level:** Survey responses that reveal ideological identification, party preference, and issue-based concerns among various social and economic groups.
- **At the electoral level:** Constituency-wise and state-wise vote shares, turnout, and performance trends linked to ideological appeals.

Table 2: Ideological Themes in Party Manifestos (2014–2024)

Party	Economic Policy	Cultural Ideology	Welfare Focus	Secularism/Hindutva
BJP	Pro-market, privatization	Hindu nationalism	Selective welfare	Hindutva dominant
Congress	Mixed economy, subsidies	Secular nationalism	Universal welfare	Secularism
AAP	Public services, decentralization	Civic nationalism	Health, education	Pragmatic secularism
TMC	Populist welfare	Bengali sub-nationalism	Cash transfers	Soft secularism

Source: Party Manifestos, 2014, 2019, 2024

The BJP's manifestos consistently reflect a fusion of cultural nationalism and economic liberalism, while the Congress retains a centrist socialist legacy. Regional parties often blend welfare populism with cultural sub-nationalism, revealing hybrid ideological strategies.

Table 3: Voter Alignment by Ideological Preference (2024 CSDS Survey)

Ideological Leaning	BJP (%)	Congress (%)	AAP (%)	Others (%)
Conservative/Hindutva	78	10	4	8
Liberal/Secular	18	60	15	7
Economic Reform-Oriented	52	22	10	16
Pro-Welfare	28	40	22	10

Source: Lokniti-CSDS National Election Study 2024 (provisional data)

Ideological orientation clearly influences party support. BJP dominates among cultural conservatives and economic reformers, while Congress and AAP appeal to secular and welfare-oriented voters.

Scope for Further Study

While this research provides a detailed examination of ideological shifts and electoral dynamics over the past two decades, it also opens avenues for further academic exploration.

- 1. Comparative Analysis of Ideological Narratives in Regional versus National Parties:** One significant area that warrants deeper inquiry is the contrast in ideological positioning between regional and national political entities. While this study has addressed broad ideological trends, future research could specifically analyze how regional parties adapt or resist national ideological discourses based on local histories, socio-economic priorities, and identity concerns. A comparative framework could reveal how decentralised politics shape alternative or hybrid ideologies, particularly in culturally diverse states such as Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Telangana.
- 2. Longitudinal Study of Media's Role in Ideological Framing:** Another critical dimension deserving attention is the role of media—both traditional and digital—in shaping ideological narratives over time. With the rise of social media platforms, news algorithms, and political advertising, public exposure to ideological messages has become more curated and targeted. A longitudinal study tracing media content over several electoral cycles could reveal how ideological framings are constructed, amplified, or distorted, and how this influences voter perception and party branding.
- 3. Influence of Youth and First-Time Voters on Ideological Realignments:** India's rapidly growing youth demographic, including first-time voters, presents a dynamic and evolving segment of the electorate. Future studies could explore how younger voters engage with ideological themes, particularly through online political discourse, civic movements, or campus activism. Understanding whether their preferences align with traditional ideological categories or represent emerging post-ideological or issue-based politics could offer valuable insights into future party alignments and ideological repositioning.

This scope highlights the dynamic and evolving nature of ideological politics in India and underscores the importance of continued interdisciplinary inquiry involving political science, media studies, sociology, and youth studies.

Findings:

- **Ideology is re-emerging as a significant axis of political competition in India.** Contrary to the long-held view that Indian electoral politics is primarily driven by caste, region, or identity, recent trends suggest a renewed emphasis on ideological commitments, particularly around nationalism, development, and governance models. Parties are increasingly competing not just on welfare delivery, but on how they frame these through ideological lenses.
- **BJP's consolidation is tied to its coherent ideological messaging.** The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has achieved electoral success in large part due to its consistently articulated ideological stance, centered on cultural nationalism, Hindu identity politics, and economic

self-reliance. Its clear messaging has helped mobilize a diverse voter base, often cutting across caste and regional boundaries.

- **Congress's ideological ambiguity weakens its electoral appeal.** In contrast, the Indian National Congress has struggled with internal contradictions and a lack of ideological clarity. Its shifting positions on key national issues—such as secularism, nationalism, and economic policy—have eroded its credibility, especially among young and urban voters who seek principled stances rather than opportunistic alliances.
- **Regional parties are ideologically fluid but increasingly aligning with national narratives.** Many regional parties that once focused purely on local or linguistic issues are now recalibrating their positions to align with broader national ideologies, either through coalitions or electoral compulsions. This has led to an erosion of purely regional identities and the emergence of hybrid political ideologies.
- **Voters respond to ideological clarity, especially in polarised settings.** In highly polarised environments—marked by religious, ethnic, or economic tension—voters show a marked preference for parties that provide firm ideological commitments, even if controversial. Ambiguity or political centrism is often viewed as indecisiveness, pushing voters toward ideologically assertive options.

Recommendations

- **Political parties should clarify ideological positions in manifestos and public engagement.** Parties must move beyond vague rhetoric and provide explicit, consistent ideological positions in their election manifestos, policy proposals, and speeches. This will help voters make informed choices and increase democratic transparency.
- **The Election Commission should promote ideological literacy through civic education.** To ensure a healthy democratic culture, the Election Commission of India should incorporate ideological literacy into voter education programs. Educating citizens about different political ideologies can empower them to vote based on long-term policy visions rather than short-term populism or identity politics.
- **Scholars should integrate ideological analysis into mainstream electoral studies.** Academic research in India often focuses on caste, class, and coalition dynamics. There is a need to deepen ideological analysis within political science scholarship, including how ideological shifts influence voting behaviour, party alignments, and policy outcomes.
- **Voter awareness programs must go beyond caste/community narratives to encourage ideological evaluation.** Non-governmental organisations, media outlets, and civil society must design voter awareness initiatives that promote critical thinking. Instead of merely explaining caste equations or local issues, these programs should encourage voters to evaluate parties based on their ideological commitments, governance records, and constitutional values.

Conclusion:

The interplay between ideology and electoral dynamics in India reflects a complex and evolving relationship that challenges the long-standing assumption of Indian politics as being solely identity- or patronage-driven. This study highlights that while caste, region, and religion remain influential, ideological narratives are gaining renewed significance in shaping party systems and voter behavior. The rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party has exemplified how a clear, consistent ideological vision—centered on cultural nationalism and developmental assertiveness—can consolidate political dominance. Conversely, the Indian National Congress's electoral decline underscores the risks of ideological ambiguity in a climate increasingly defined by polarisation and value-driven choices. Regional parties, traditionally driven by sub-national identities and local issues, are gradually aligning with broader national ideologies, indicating a restructuring of the federal political space. Voters, especially in politically charged atmospheres, are

demonstrating a preference for clarity and ideological conviction, signalling a move towards more programmatic politics.

These shifts suggest that Indian democracy is undergoing a recalibration where ideological coherence, rather than just populist appeasement or identity arithmetic, may become central to political viability. However, this reconfiguration also brings challenges—particularly the risk of ideological dogmatism, democratic backsliding, and polarised public discourse. The findings underscore the urgent need for political parties, institutions, and civil society to foster ideological literacy and democratic pluralism. In essence, this study offers a nuanced understanding of how ideology is no longer peripheral but increasingly pivotal to electoral strategies, political realignments, and democratic engagement in India. Future research must continue to examine this transformation, particularly in the context of youth political participation, digital media influence, and regional-national ideological integrations.

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