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## Upsurge of the Bharatiya Janata Party in India

### Abstract

This research paper examines the development of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India since its establishment and its governance inside the country. The BJP is influenced by the ideals of Hindu nationalism, and such ideals can be visible through the party's responses to critical issues, such as the ongoing Indo-Pakistani conflict over Kashmir and Jammu. This research paper reviews three issues that seem to be prominent in India and correlated to the influences of the BJP in the government: The Indo-Pakistani conflict, transformations of India's economy, and religious discriminations.

### Keywords

India, Bharatiya Janata Party, Indian People's Party

### Disciplines

Political Science | Religion | South and Southeast Asian Languages and Societies

### Comments

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### **History, Political Ideologies, and Party Platforms**

Various countries around the world have been facing changes in its governance over the years, along with growing tensions between political parties that have been establishing political factions in the issues that matter to the citizens of the country and its borders. Such transformations have been recognizable in India, specifically within a political party called Bharatiya Janata Party, or also known as BJP, which is currently a party that Prime Minister Narendra Modi affiliated with. Bharatiya Janata Party, or Indian People's Party, was constructed based upon a former political party called Bharatiya Jana Sangh, or simply BJS, in 1980 (Al Jazeera 2019). The BJP has transferred various political beliefs and stances from the BJS since its closing. The BJS presented and associated itself with Hindu nationalism and the "policy of secularism", which is one of the policies used as a way to show that every individual in the country is treated equally (Lahiry 2005, 835). The BJS utilized the idea of "Integral Humanism", a principle proposed by one of the Presidents that led the BJS, Deendayal Upadhaya, which affirms that individuals in the country are the structural component of the "society and [the] good system" and such system composed of people should respond to and provide "the needs of an individual, material and spiritual or non-material", along with the establishment of nationalism (Lahiry 2005, 835). These types of ideologies were later implemented by the BJP (Lahiry 2005).

The BJP was formed as a political party after the BJS faced “political bickering” that tore the party down apart, especially during Prime Minister Morarji Desai’s term, when he won the election in 1977 (Al Jazeera 2019). From there, the BJP was formed in 1980 (Al Jazeera 2019), to continue the legacy of the political ideologies left behind by the BJS.

The BJP is run as a right-wing party that adopts Hindu nationalism or *Hindutva* (Malik and Singh 1992). Despite its adoption of Hindu nationalism, the BJP supports democracy, where people can engage in the steps of decision-making process in the government (Lahiry 2005). However, the BJP’s style of governance could potentially heavily increase the debates and controversies. For example, their policy of secularism does not necessarily signify equality regardless of one’s religious or ethnic affiliation, because they intend to maintain Indian national identity by following the roots of Hindu civilization and its history (Malik and Singh 1992). Malik and Singh theorize that other religious and ethnic groups in India, especially the minority groups, would need to “reconcile themselves” to the cultural, nationalist beliefs expressed by the BJP (Malik and Singh 1992, 321). In regards to BJP’s stances on the economy, they intend to maintain Gandhian socialism as part of its economic beliefs (Seshia 1998), in which Mahatma Gandhi defines the system as an idea that there should be an equality between members of the society, because ““members of the individual body are equal”” (Koshal and Koshal 1973, 195). In the past, the activists that advocate for the BJP in India wish to push the government away from its involvement in international trade and privatize the industries, according to the study that was done in 1993 (Chhibber 1997). On top of the party’s economic approach, India’s foreign relations, especially with Pakistan, has also been significant and entered the so-called “intense turmoil”, since the BJP’s gain of power and establishment of its regime (Kr. H. M. 2007, 276).

### **The BJP's Current Affair #1: Indo-Pakistani Conflict**

Indo-Pakistani conflict had been ongoing since 1947, and it still seems to be one of the major concerns for India when it comes to shaping and transforming their foreign policies. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's (who is a part of the BJP) re-election in 2019 is deemed to be a determining factor in regards to how Indo-Pakistani conflict will be carried out in the future years. The CNBC reported an article in 2019, elaborating about how Prime Minister Modi's foreign policy toward countries like Pakistan could be impacted "if [Prime Minister Modi] comes back with a bigger mandate than what he had in the 2014 elections, [which] would be seen as an endorsement of his national security-focused campaign" (Choudhury 2019). Both India and Pakistan have been fighting to settle the question of which one of them is going to control the Kashmir region. Both countries firmly argued that they have the ownership of the entire Kashmir region, and as a result, there have been constant violence and confrontations over the years between the countries since about 3 decades ago (BBC 2019).

The BJP has a strong opposition to Article 370, which is a component of India's constitution that allows Kashmir to have its right to govern as an individual state and make laws that people can follow (BBC 2019). Possible objection on the Article 370 by the BJP could be resulted from their belief that having the parts of Kashmir being controlled by India is important, but it is also that they believe it is right for India to claim back the parts of Kashmir because some of the territories controlled by Pakistan are "illegally held by [them] for nearly five decades" (Kr. H. M. 2007, 282). Article 370 was taken off the India's constitution in 2019, transforming Kashmir and Jammu, in which both states are being heavily debated by India and Pakistan, into a union territory (Ward 2019). This could mean that India would now have much

more power to influence the Kashmir region, as a result of the BJP's dominance in the Parliament of India and its ability to put more effects in the legislative processes in the national government. With Prime Minister Narendra Modi in power in India as a member of the BJP, the Indo-Pakistani relations could continue to soar. Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan hinted such possible outcome by expressing his discontent towards Prime Minister Modi, making an accusation that Prime Minister Modi's actions taken in the Kashmir regions formulates an idea of having Hindus as people of religion that is superior to other religions, which then causes people of other religions to feel that they are repressed (Gettleman et al. 2019). This repression has been held true when Modi took over the seat as a Prime Minister, because hate crimes against the Muslims have been consistently increasing under his governance and his party (Gettleman et al. 2019). The Hindu nationalism is an ideology that has been directly and deeply planted under the BJP, and such expressions of that ideology have been visible under the influence of the BJP in the Parliament of India.

### **The BJP's Current Affair #2: Changes and Shifts in India's Economy**

The BJP was established under the idea that the economy should be self-reliant, only engage in fair trades, and maintain the "Gandhian ideals" (Swain 2001, 141). Economic growths under Prime Minister Modi and the lead of the BJP in the parliament have been significant, as the growth rate of the the gross domestic product, or so-called the GDP, in India under Modi's government has been above 7 percent and was almost nearly the same as the GDP growth rate of France and the United Kingdom in 2017 (Marlow et al. 2019). This could be the result of India's self-reliance when it comes to the economy by producing large quantities of resources domestically, rather than being majorly dependent on international aid or goods, which then

increases the GDP as a return. However, India's GDP growth rate under Prime Minister Modi's government did not necessarily result in better quality of life for many of the citizens. India's labor participation rate decreased from approximately 48 percent in 2016 to 42 percent in 2019 and the country lost approximately 11 million jobs in 2018 (Marlow et al. 2019). It also has to be acknowledged that India's GDP growth rate did not continually increase after 2018, but it rather started to decline, almost reaching below 5 percent GDP growth rate by time it reached fiscal year 2020 (Choudhury 2019).

Even though the BJP characterizes itself to be economically self-reliant, that was not always the case, because India, under Prime Minister Modi's governance, was involved in trade deals in the past with wealthy countries around the world, such as the United States. For example, India was in 12th and 10th place for having the largest number of exports and imports with the United States respectively in 2018 (Office of the U.S. Trade Representative). It is difficult to determine whether the BJP is always pushing the economy to be more self-reliant, given its records of trading with international hegemony around the world, like the United States. Moreover, the BJP's approach to India's economy raises another question: Will the BJP's beliefs and ideologies on the economy stay the same, even if the economy cannot meet the demands of the people when it comes to producing sufficient amounts of resources and necessities? One of the economic movements that did not meet the demands in India was called the "Make in India" movement. It was a movement introduced into the economy of India when Prime Minister Modi was elected, as an attempt to increase India's manufacturing sector; however, it has not been able to bring in any promising effects to India's economy, as the manufacturing sector's percentage of India's GDP decreased from 18.6 percent in 1995 to 15 percent in 2017 (Marlow et al. 2019).

India's economy cannot be determined as unstable or inconsistent despite its changes in the GDP growth, because India is placed at 5th in the world for having one of the largest economies in the world, standing below the United States, China, Japan, and Germany (Bajpai 2020). However, with the job losses that India faced in the past under the dominance of the BJP in the parliament, it is uncertain whether India having such an enormous economy helps the people in need or the poor to maintain comfortable lifestyle and financial stability.

### **The BJP's Current Affair #3: Discriminations in India**

When the BJP was first established, they believed that every citizen is equal in the "eyes of law", strongly opposing the idea of providing "special preferential treatment" (Lahiry 2005, 837). The BJP expressed this view by opposing 1986 Muslim Women's Bill, which included proposal of providing financial support for Muslim women (Lahiry 2005). Even though they wanted equality among the people, they still continued to push their Hindu nationalist agenda as a party. However, the idea that the BJP wants to maintain equality among the people regardless of their identities is beginning to be rejected in modern India; for example, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is the member of the BJP, has begun to put more emphasis on issues that could attract Hindu nationalists when he entered his second term, rather than continuing to engage in the issues that he focused during his first term, such as economic reforms (Abi-habib 2020). Along with this, in December of 2019, the Indian government decided to pass a citizenship law "that would expedite citizenship for every major religion in the [Kashmir region] *except* Islam" (Abi-habib 2020). The majority of members in Indian government in 2019 were associated with the BJP, along with Prime Minister Modi in power; however, they still decided

to push the law that would separate the members of Islam from other religions, despite the party's aim to treat every citizen equally.

Part of this issue regarding to discriminations on the minorities ties back to the Indo-Pakistani conflict, but it all relates back to the process of policymaking by the government, which can be heavily influenced by the BJP and current Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi.

### **The BJP's Path to Democracy and its Imperfections**

The BJP runs under a parliamentary system in India's government. In correlation, Patrick O'Neil, the author of *Essentials of Comparative Politics*, has suggested in the book that "parliamentary systems can be found in most of the democracies around the world" (O'Neil 2015, 152). Despite the BJP's ability to heavily influence politics in the current government in India, author O'Neil's words stay true, because people are still able to vote for the members of the legislature and engage in indirect democracy. The Election Commission in India has been able to complete such duties by restoring the idea of "free and fair voting" and gathering support from people that wish to solve issues regarding corruption in the government (Rudolph and Rudolph 2002, 63). However, the citizenship law that was passed in December 2019, which leaves out the people of Islam in Kashmir region from the expedited citizenship process (Abi-habib 2020), puts the BJP and India's government away from democracy, because it prioritizes certain religious groups over the other. The BJP is beginning to move away from their intent to treat every citizen equally, as the discriminations against the minorities, such as Muslims, continues to increase through their governance.

### **The BJP of India vs. The Workers' Party of North Korea**

The current BJP in India is able to influence the government and legislative process, because the majority of citizens voted for the members of the legislatures who were part of the BJP. However, in the case of the Workers' Party of North Korea, they have been the major party in the North Korean government, because *nepotism and personality cults* played a role in maintaining a leader like Kim Jong Il to stay in office for a long term in the past (Lankov 2008). The way that the Workers' Party rules in North Korea ensures that the officials of the party are the ones that create the future of the civilians, such as choosing schools for them to attend and leading civilians to certain careers or jobs; in other words, they "dominate everything" (Madden 2016). On the other hand, in the BJP of India, people vote for the members of the legislature, then those elected members influence the process of policymaking. When people are governed under the BJP, the party does not necessarily "dominate" people's lives like the Workers' Party.

When it comes to economic aspects of both parties, they are noticeable distinctions. First, the North Korean government, under the power of the Workers' Party, controlled and enforced the private markets up to the early 1990s (Lankov 2008), whereas the BJP advocated for industries to be privatized and less government interventions on those industries when it got established in 1980 (Chhibber 1997). Also, the GDP per capita in India is significantly higher than the GDP per capita in North Korea, meaning that people in North Korea will generate less income when they work, compared to those who are working in India. North Korea's GDP per capita was \$1,700 USD in 2015, whereas India's GDP per capita in 2015 was \$6,500 USD (Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)). North Korea was still being led under the Workers' Party in 2015, whereas India was being led under the Prime Minister at the time, who is linked with the BJP. In 2017, India, which was led under the BJP at the time, had industrial production growth

rate at 5.5 percent, whereas North Korea, which was led under the Workers' Party at the time, had a lower growth rate at 1 percent (CIA).

The quality of life under India led by the BJP and North Korea led by the Workers' Party could potentially be different. For example, in North Korea, the citizens are able to vote by the time they reach the age of 17 and they *must* vote (CIA). Moreover, the citizens only have one option when it comes to voting for a leader and all they can do is simply take the ballot paper and put it into the ballot box to be counted; however, if you decide to cross out the name on the ballot and submit the ballot as it is, it is possible that could you be in danger and may be caught under North Korea's secret police (BBC 2019). In India, even when it's led under the BJP, the citizens are able to vote by the time they reach the age of 18 and it is their choice to decide whether to vote or not (CIA). This means that people in North Korea are forced to comply with and "like" the policies that the government proposes, as a result of the government not giving any options to the people when voting on a ballot. However, in India, people have *chosen* to vote for the BJP to lead the national government, and as a result, they can indirectly engage with the government's decision-making process and policy implementations.

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