

Rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party in 1996 parliamentary election

Kiran Bala

Department of Geography, Kishan Lal Public College, Rewari, Haryana, India

Abstract

The 1996 Lok Sabha election catapulted the BJP to a position of the largest political party in India. The present work has been focused on the electoral performance of the BJP in the 1996 Lok Sabha elections. The election has been analyzed in detail in terms of percent votes, seats won and seats contested by the BJP. An attempt also has been made to find the reasons behind the advancements made by the BJP in this election.

Keywords: Lok Sabha election, Bharatiya Janata Party

Introduction

In the Eleventh General Elections the BJP became the largest political party in India. The party had increased its share of representatives in the Lok Sabha from 120 in 1991 to 161 in 1996. With 140 seats, the Congress was shifted to second place. While the party had retained significant elements of its Hindu nationalist discourse, the electoral performance in this election was not linked directly to militant propagation of Hindutva as in the case of the 1991 elections. The party did it through a rather moderate Hindu mobilization campaign and limited alliances with regional parties. The party “formed an alliance with the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, the HVP in Haryana and the Samata Party in Bihar mainly in the hope of enhancing a “respectable image”” (Pai, Sudha, 2001) [6].

In the mid 1990s, the party had “gradually shifted from the ethno-religious mobilization of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement towards a softer policy. This change occurred partly because the party leaders feared that the Vishva Hindu Parishad would overshadow their organization and that they would lose control of the Hindu nationalist political agenda to more extremist forces, and partly as a reaction to the BJP’s defeat in several states of the Hindi belt in the 1993 state elections” (Hansen, T. B. and Jaffrelot, C., 1998) [9]. In September 1993, assembly elections were held in the states of Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi and Rajasthan. The BJP faced setbacks in Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. The party’s seats tally fell from 46 in 1990 to 8 seats in 1993 in Himachal Pradesh, 211 to 177 in Uttar Pradesh and 219 to 117 in Madhya Pradesh. However, the party retained power in Rajasthan and was able to gain power in Delhi.

Following the “exhaustion” of the Hindutva electoral platform after the demolition of the Babri Mosque, the BJP prior to the 1996 elections tried to distance itself from militant Hindu organizations and their programmes. Though, this was not a complete divorce from the Hindutva related issues but certainly the party had softened its policy regarding the Hindu mobilization campaign.

At a party conclave in April 1995, it identified five issues, for

the 1996 Lok Sabha elections: “Ayodhya Temple issue, Article 370, infiltration of foreigners, the uniform civil code and particularly, economic nationalism and *swadeshi*” (Pai, Sudha, 2001) [6]. The party hoped that its two fold strategy based upon cultural nationalism and economic nationalism would lead to solid gains in 1996 Lok Sabha elections.

On 1st January, 1996, the BJP launched its election campaign. The party had five major planks: *suchita* (cleanliness in public life), *suraksha* (national security), *swadeshi* (economic nationalism), *samrasta* (social equality) and the all encompassing *sanskritik rashtriyavad* (cultural nationalism). The BJP manifesto focused on Hindutva, construction of Ram Temple at Ayodhya, smaller states and clean public life. However, the party received blow when L.K. Advani’s name was included in ‘Hawala Scandal’ list by CBI, which put the BJP on the defensive. But as the election campaign proceeded it became clear that it would not damage the party as much as it was feared, because the CBI had not charge sheeted any body. The BJP and its ideological allies decided to focus their campaign on the issues, like: total ban on cow slaughter; uniform civil code; increasing Muslim population, appeasement of minorities and scrapping of the minority commission. The party “... planned to use Hindutva selectively in the Hindi belt. [It] also carefully kept its Ram Temple card handy. In the overall evaluation, it may be said that the 1996 election was fought largely on secular issues. The campaigning was also least communalized” (Ghosh, Partha S., 1999) [8]. Majority of the issues were secular- the effect of economic reforms, stability versus change and good governance versus scams and corruption.

The Jana Sangh and later the Bharatiya Janata Party in fact have always oscillated between a militant and a moderate approach to politics. The former approach relied on “ethno-religious movements such as the 1966 cow-protection agitation and the recent mobilization around the Ayodhya issue; the latter relied on more broadly legitimate and patriotic themes concerning national unity and the defence of ‘the common man’, often with populist overtones. The militant variant was the natural choice of the RSS..., while the Jana

Sangh and then Bharatiya Janata Party leaders were more inclined to the moderate line which enabled them to make alliances with other parties” (Hansen, T. B. and Jaffrelot, C., 1998)^[9]. In March-April 1996, there was a debate between the leaders of the Sangh Parivar and the BJP on the policy to be followed in the ensuing election. The former advocated a radical policy, while, the latter were inclined to adopt moderate strategy. The latter succeeded in promoting a moderate agenda.

In this election, the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) had also decided to deploy its cadres to campaign for the Hindutva forces terming the polls as a ‘turning point in the national history’. Last time the RSS had actively taken part in the poll campaign of 1977 Lok Sabha elections. In a directive to the swayamsewaks of the RSS, the leadership had called for their “wholehearted, full time participation in the mass-awakening programme under the guidelines of Sangh teaching to bring the country out of the present eclipse caused by the anti-Hindutva forces” (Aggarwal, J.C. and Chowdhry, N. K. 1996)^[12]. The issues emphasized by the RSS were: Ayodhya temple, national security, the Purulia arms-drop, Bangladeshi infiltration, cow protection, clean public life, safeguarding Indian culture from alien influence and Pakistan’s hostility to India.

During the 1996 elections campaign, ‘Hawala issue’ was the most prominent. In the wake of Jain diary on the issue, president and the leading figure of the BJP, L.K. Advani resigned from the Parliament and resolved not to contest elections till cleared of the charge from the court. In another case, on 11 December, 1995, the Supreme Court absolved Murli Manohar Joshi (the then Maharashtra Chief Minister) from charges of misuse of religion in his 1990 Assembly Election campaign. The court held that use of ‘Hindutva’ and ‘Hinduism’ as a poll plank was not a corrupt practice under the election law. But, its misuse in the form of an appeal to vote for a candidate or not to vote for him on grounds of his religion would fall within the prohibition of the act.

The failure of the Congress in state assembly elections, particularly held in non-Hindi speaking states held prior to 1996 parliamentary elections also helped the BJP in projecting itself as an alternative to the Congress. The BJP performed well in the Congress governed states of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnataka, when elections to these state assemblies were held in 1994-95. It captured power on its own in Gujarat, in alliance with the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra and it polled 12.8 percent of the votes and won 65 seats in Karnataka. It also fared well in Andhra Pradesh (3.8 percent votes and three seats). With these successes the BJP showed a determination to present itself as the national alternative to the Congress party. A series of corruption charges were made against the Congress party such as “the sugar scam leading to the sacking of a cabinet minister in the Rao Govt., the Urea scandal and the bribing of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha MPs to manufacture a majority in the Lok Sabha had tarnished the image of the Congress to a great extent. Moreover, factional feuds within the Congress not only resulted in a bad selection of candidates for the 1996 Lok Sabha elections, they weakened the campaign as well” (Singh, V. B., 2004). In

contrast, the BJP made its campaign very effective, attacking the Rao government aggressively for its all- round failures including a wide range of corruption charges and for mortgaging the Swadeshi interests by allowing free trade to multinationals, carefully choose to underplay the Hindutva card.

After the elections, the President Shankar Dayal Sharma had invited the BJP leader, A.B. Vajpayee to form the ministry. Its electoral partners the Shiv Sena (15 seats), the Samata Party (8 seats), the Shiromani Akali Dal (8 seats) and the Haryana Vikas Party (3 seats) agreed to support it. Altogether it could command the loyalty of 195 MPs in a house of 543. In the situation, the “RSS urged BJP to push all controversial issues to the background to form majority but could not get support from other parties and so it could continue only for 13 days” (Appaiah, Parvathi, 2003)^[2].

The rise of BJP as the largest party in the 1996 Lok Sabha Elections “had led the socialist and communist parties to minimize their ideological differences and to form a loose anti-BJP coalition, ... While this front rejected Congress’s economic rationalism, their opposition to BJP cemented them together in a secular alliance. In 1996 election while the Congress gained the second largest number of seats, the combined National left front came third. Although the President asked the BJP to form a government, it failed to win the vote of confidence and was forced to resign after 13 days. In the ensuing political turmoil, the National/Left Front parties and some new regional parties formed the 13 party (later 14 party) United Front Coalition” (Abid, Mohammad, 2004)^[1]. With outside support from the Congress party, the United Front was able to form a minority Government under the leadership of Deve Gowda.

Seats contested by the BJP in 1996

In this election the party had contested 471 parliamentary seats (out of total 543) and won 161 seats with 20.29 percent vote of the electorate. Despite a marginal increase (0.18 percent) in its vote share, the seat tally for the party increased by 41 seats than what it was in 1991. With this, the party had emerged as the single largest party in the parliament.

With the purpose of becoming a real all India configuration, the party in this election had contested 471 seats on its own and left 53 seats to its allies with whom it had reached seat sharing adjustments in some states. In this election, the party had contested all the seats in the states and union territories of Himachal Pradesh, Chandigarh, Delhi, Rajasthan, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura, West Bengal, Gujarat, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Goa, Daman & Diu, Karnataka, Pondicherry and Andaman & Nicobar Islands. It had also, contested 83 seats (out of 85) in Uttar Pradesh, 39 seats (out of 42) in Andhra Pradesh, 39 seats (out of 40) in Madhya Pradesh, 37 seats (out of 39) in Tamil Nadu, 32 seats (out of 54) in Bihar, 25 seats (out of 48) in Maharashtra, 20 seats (out of 21) in Orissa, 18 seats (out of 20) in Kerala, 6 seats (out of 13) in Punjab, 6 seats (out of 10) in Haryana and 5 seats (out of 6) in Jammu & Kashmir (Table 1).

The party had not fielded its candidates in the states and union territory of Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Lakshadweep.

The spatial patterns of seats contested by the BJP in 1996 elections and its comparison with 1991 election clearly highlights the following:

1. The party's journey towards fielding its candidates across the length and breadth of the country probably ends here. The party had candidates in almost every part of the country. The vacant spaces were basically those where the party had left the seats for its political allies. In Maharashtra the party had left 21 seats to its state's ruling partner Shiv Sena. In Bihar, it left 22 seats for its ally the Samata Party and 4 in Haryana for the Haryana Vikas Party.
2. Out of the total 471 seats contested by the party, as many as 423 were those seats contested by it in 1991 also. The remaining 48 were new seats of which 23 were alone from Tamil Nadu.
3. The party's spatial spread in this election was more explicit in South Indian States, where the party had fielded its candidates on as many as 124 seats (19 seats more than 1991). Almost similar change in the patterns is visible in North-Eastern States, where the party had contested on 22 seats (5 seats more than the preceding election).
4. The maximum change in number of seats contested by the party was in the states of Assam (8 to 14) and Tamil Nadu (15 to 37). The party had contested 5 and 6 seats in the states of Jammu & Kashmir and Punjab. In these states, elections were not held in 1991.
5. Interestingly, the party had contested less number of seats in the Hindi speaking states in 1996 election. As compared to the 1991 election, the party had fielded its candidates on 25 seats less in the 1996 election (197 seats) than 222 seats in 1991. Almost similar change is visible in Western

States, where the party had contested 6 seats less than 58 seats of 1991.

6. The decrease in number of seats contested by the party was mainly due to its alliance with regional parties and that in the states of Bihar (51 to 32) and Haryana (10 to 6) and Maharashtra (31 to 25).

Vote polled by the BJP in 1996

The BJP in this election had polled 20.29 percent vote. It was marginally (0.18 percent) higher than the 1991 elections. The maximum percent vote gain for the party in this election was in the states and union territories of Andaman & Nicobar Islands (+19.4), Arunachal Pradesh (+11.3), Chandigarh (+10.25), Haryana (+9.57), Delhi (+9.39), Daman & Diu (+8.57) and Dadra & Nagar Haveli (+7.03). Besides, the party faced major setbacks in percent vote in the states of West Bengal (-4.78%), Karnataka (-4.43%), Andhra Pradesh (-3.98%) and Himachal Pradesh (-3.17%) (Table 1).

Among all the national political parties, the BJP ranked second in terms of percent votes polled and first in terms of seats won (Table 2). It is interested to note that the BJP was the only national political party whose vote share had increased in this election. The Indian National Congress which was shifted rank number two in terms of seats won had experienced negative swing of 7.46 percent in the votes polled.

The national average vote for the party in this election was 25.64 percent. There were eight states (Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana) and four union territories (Delhi, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu and Chandigarh) where the party had polled above the national average.

Table 1: Electoral Performance of BJP, 1996 Indian Parliamentary Elections

Sr. No.	State / U.T.	Seats			Percent Votes (%)	Swing in Votes Polled (%)
		Total	Contested	Won		
1	Jammu & Kashmir	6	5	1	19.04	-
2	Himachal Pradesh	4	4	-	39.62	-3.17
3	Punjab	13	6	-	6.48	-
4	Chandigarh	1	1	1	39.05	10.25
5	Haryana	10	6	4	19.74	9.57
6	Delhi	7	7	5	49.6	9.39
7	Uttar Pradesh	85	83	52	33.44	0.62
8	Madhya Pradesh	40	39	27	41.32	-0.56
9	Bihar	54	32	18	20.54	4.59
10	Orissa	21	20	-	13.42	3.92
11	West Bengal	42	42	-	6.88	-4.78
12	Sikkim	1	-	-	-	-
13	Arunachal Pradesh	2	2	-	17.41	11.3
14	Assam	14	14	1	15.92	6.32
15	Meghalaya	2	2	-	9.13	2.24
16	Nagaland	1	-	-	0	-
17	Manipur	2	2	-	5.25	-2.85
18	Mizoram	1	-	-	0	-
19	Tripura	2	2	-	6.5	3.51
20	Rajasthan	25	25	12	42.36	1.48
21	Gujarat	26	26	16	48.52	-1.85
22	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	1	1	-	42.42	7.03
23	Maharashtra	48	25	18	21.81	1.61
24	Goa	2	2	-	13.7	-1.91
25	Daman & Diu	1	1	-	40.45	8.57

26	Karnataka	28	28	6	24.85	-4.43
27	Andhra Pradesh	42	39	-	5.65	-3.98
28	Kerala	20	18	-	5.61	1
29	Tamil Nadu	39	37	-	2.93	1.28
30	Pondicherry	1	1	-	4.42	2.45
31	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	1	1	-	24.25	19.4
32	Lakshadweep	1	-	-	-	-
	All India	543	471	161	20.29	0.18

Table 2: Performance of National Parties in 1996 Parliamentary Elections

Party	Seats		Votes polled (%)
	Contested	Won	
BJP	471	161	20.29
INC	529	140	28.8
JD	196	46	8.08
CPM	75	32	6.12
CPI	43	12	1.97
SAP	81	8	2.17
AICC(T)	321	4	1.46
JP	101	0	0.19

The state-wise percent vote data also indicates that the BJP continues to be a prominent political party in the North Indian States, viz. Delhi (49.6%), Gujarat (48.52%), Rajasthan (42.36%), Madhya Pradesh (41.32%), Daman & Diu (40.45%), Himachal Pradesh (39.62%), Chandigarh (39.05%) and Uttar Pradesh (33.44%).

However, the party remained a marginal force (polling below 10 percent vote) in North-Eastern States (barring Arunachal Pradesh and Assam), South Indian States (barring Karnataka), Punjab and West Bengal (Figure 1). The swing against the party in this election was maximum in West Bengal, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh.

Another noteworthy aspect of the BJP's performance was the strengthening of its vote share in various states. For example, in Arunachal Pradesh the party polled an impressive 17.4 percent of the votes over only 6 percent that it had received in the previous election. It also made impressive gains in Assam and Orissa where it polled 15.92% and 13.42% over its 1991 share of 9.6 percent and 9.5 percent, respectively.

The BJP maintained its regional core of support "in the "Hindi-belt", but it failed to expand its electoral base in the south. Its support was also demographically concentrated, coming from upper caste, urban, male Hindus" (Seshia, Shaila 1998) [10]. "Exit polls for the 1996 parliamentary elections showed that although it had succeeded in fracturing the Other Backward Classes (OBC) vote, only 11 percent of the Scheduled Castes supported the BJP, compared to the 31 percent for the Congress, 21 percent for the National Front and 16 percent who supported their own new party, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)" (Basu, Amrita, 2000). The BJP's failure to win support "across regions' caste and on another level, potential coalition allies indicates that the depth of crosscutting cleavages and strength of cross-pressures remains substantial enough to limit the size of a unified Hindu vote bank" (Seshia, Shaila 1998) [10].

The electoral analysis also reveals that the BJP despite making inroads among the rural electorate (at least in some states), the party still garners more vote from urban electorate. As

remarked by Hansen and Jaffrelot "The BJP remained urban party since 32 percent of the urban electorate voted for it as against 19 percent of the rural electorate as a whole" (Hansen, T.B. and Jaffrelot, C. (eds.) 1998) [9].

The constituency-wise analysis of the BJP percent vote clearly depicts that there were 35 constituencies, where the party had polled 50 percent and above votes (Table 5.7). Majority of these constituencies were from Gujarat (12) –barring south Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh (09) –Madhya Bharat region. In the 82 constituencies, the party candidates had recorded 40 to 50 percent votes. Majority of these constituencies belong to southern parts of Chhattisgarh and Mahakoshal regions of Madhya Pradesh, western Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan (barring central parts), north Maharashtra, north and south Gujarat and southern Bihar (Figure 5.6). There were other 109 constituencies ranging in between 30 to 40 percent vote for the party. Of these constituencies majority were from central Uttar Pradesh (41), southern Bihar (17), coastal and northern Karnataka (9), Madhya Pradesh (8), northern Rajasthan (7) and east Saurashtra and southern Gujarat (7). In the 53 constituencies, the range of vote for the party was from 20 to 30 percent. It included majority of the constituencies from Rohilkhand and Poorvanchal regions of UP (18), southern and east-central Karnataka (8) and Vindhya Pradesh of Madhya Pradesh (5).

Among the 48 constituencies where the party had polled between 10 to 20 percent, 8 were from Orissa, 6 from Karnataka, 5 each from Uttar Pradesh, Assam and West Bengal, 3 each from Punjab and Andhra Pradesh, 2 each from Jammu & Kashmir, Bihar, Goa and Kerala and one each from Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. There were 144 constituencies where the party's vote share was less than 10 percent (Table 3). The states where such constituencies were more than 50 percent of the state's total constituencies included Tamil Nadu (89.74%), West Bengal (88%), Kerala (80%) and Andhra Pradesh (78.57%).

The overall conclusion from the map showing the patterns of the BJP vote percentage in 1996 is that the vote strength areas for the party were basically restricted to central and western parts of the country. The number of constituencies where the party had polled 40 percent and above vote increased from 98 in 1991 to 117 in 1996. The spatial patterns clearly indicates that broadly majority of the constituencies where the BJP had polled 40 percent and more vote in 1996 elections remained consistent to the party's vote percent pattern of 1991.

Seats won by the BJP in 1996

In this parliamentary election, the party had marked its victory on 161 seats out of the total contested 471 seats with 20.29 percent vote of the electorate. The party recorded a gain of 41

seats in this election than the preceding election. In terms of seats won, emergence of the BJP as the single largest party in the Lok Sabha shifted the Congress party to second spot. The Congress seats tally in the house came down to 140 from 232

in the 1991 elections. The spatial patterns of the party's victories reveal that in this election also, the party continued to dominate the Hindi-speaking heartland, its traditional area of electoral strength (Figure 2).

Table 3: Frequency Distribution of the BJP Vote, 1996 Parliamentary Elections

Sr. No.	State / U.T.	Percent Vote and no. of constituencies						Total Seats
		Below 10	10-20	20-30	30-40	40-50	50 & Above	
1	Jammu & Kashmir	1	2	1	1	-	-	5
2	Himachal Pradesh	-	-	-	2	2	-	4
3	Punjab	2	3	1	-	-	-	6
4	Chandigarh	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
5	Haryana	-	-	2	3	1	-	6
6	Delhi	-	-	-	2	2	3	7
7	Uttar Pradesh	-	5	18	41	16	3	83
8	Madhya Pradesh	-	-	5	8	17	9	39
9	Bihar	-	2	4	17	7	2	32
10	Orissa	7	8	4	1	-	-	20
11	West Bengal	37	5	-	-	-	-	42
12	Sikkim	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
13	Arunachal Pradesh	-	1	1	-	-	-	2
14	Assam	5	5	2	2	-	-	14
15	Meghalaya	1	1	-	-	-	-	2
16	Nagaland	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
17	Manipur	1	1	-	-	-	-	2
18	Mizoram	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
19	Tripura	2	-	-	-	-	-	2
20	Rajasthan	-	-	1	7	14	3	25
21	Gujarat	-	-	-	7	7	12	26
22	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
23	Maharashtra	-	1	2	7	12	3	25
24	Goa	-	2	-	-	-	-	2
25	Daman & Diu	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
26	Karnataka	3	6	8	9	2	-	28
27	Andhra Pradesh	33	3	3	-	-	-	39
28	Kerala	16	2	-	-	-	-	18
29	Tamil Nadu	35	1	-	1	-	-	37
30	Pondicherry	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
31	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
32	Lakshadweep	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	All India	144	48	53	109	82	35	471

Majority of such constituencies were from western and south-central Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan (except central part), northern and north-western Gujarat, western Himachal Pradesh and northern Uttar Pradesh. In majority of the constituencies where the party had fielded its candidates in 1996 than 1991, it had polled below 10 percent (Figure 1).

Out of the total 161 victories, the party had in this election, 52 were from Uttar Pradesh, 27 from Madhya Pradesh, 18 each from Bihar and Maharashtra, 16 from Gujarat, 12 from Rajasthan, 6 from Karnataka, 5 from Delhi, 4 from Haryana, and one each from Assam, Jammu & Kashmir and Chandigarh (Table 1).

The map showing the BJP victories clearly indicate that the party had majority of seats (119 seats) from Hindi Speaking States alone. These states constitute 73.91 percent of the total seats won by the party. The party had also won 34 seats from Western States (Maharashtra 18, Gujarat 16). The party won 6 seats from the Southern States (Karnataka alone) and one seat from Assam (North-Eastern States) also (Figure 2).

The spatial patterns of the party victories in this election indicates that majority of the seats won by the party were from six states: viz Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra. These states constitute 143 seats (about 89%) of the total seats won by the party in this election.

The seats won by the party in this election were basically from all parts of Uttar Pradesh (barring Rohilkhand); southern Bihar; Madhya Pradesh (barring eastern Vindhya Pradesh and southern Chhattisgarh); eastern and southern Rajasthan; Kutch and Saurashtra regions of Gujarat; Mumbai, North and Marthwada regions of Maharashtra; and coastal parts of Karnataka (Figure 2).

In the absence of any wave in favour of the BJP, two factors were mainly responsible for its impressive seat gains. "First, was the ability of the party to forge pre-election alliances with other parties, i.e., the Samata Party in Bihar, Haryana Vikas Party in Haryana and Shiv Sena in Maharashtra. Secondly, the party also succeeded in consolidating its support among the

upper castes while fracturing the votes of the OBCs. The success of BJP-Samata combine in Bihar was the best example of this delicate strategy” (Kantha, Parmod K., 1997).

Conclusion

The party’s electoral performance in this election was quite impressive. There were improvements in the number of seats contested (468 in 1991 to 471 in 1996), percent vote polled (20.11 to 20.29 percent) and number of seats won (120 to 161). Out of the total 161 victories, the party had in this election, 157 were from those 423 seats contested by the party both 1991 and 1996 elections. Among the other 48 seats contested by the party in 1996 elections the party could win only 4 seats. In terms of vote polled the Hindi-Speaking States remains to be the main base. It contributed 61.49 percent of the total vote polled by the party in this election. Outside the Hindi-speaking States, Maharashtra was the only state whose share in terms of total vote polled by the party had increased. In consonance with regional concentration of the BJP vote in Hindi-Speaking States, the party also recorded about 74 of the total seats

Won by it from this region. To sum up, the party continues to be a party of Hindi-Speaking belt with its extension in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnataka.

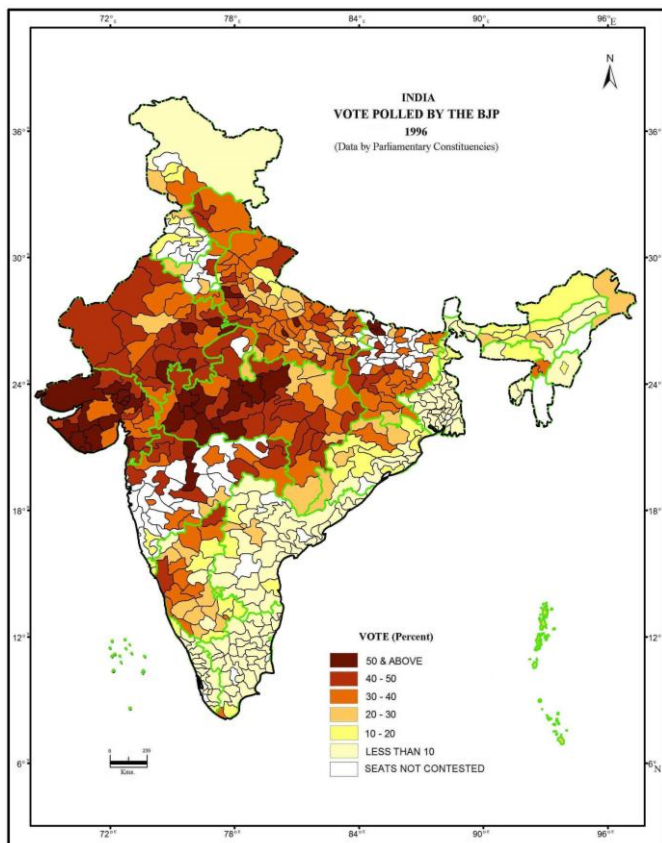


Fig 1

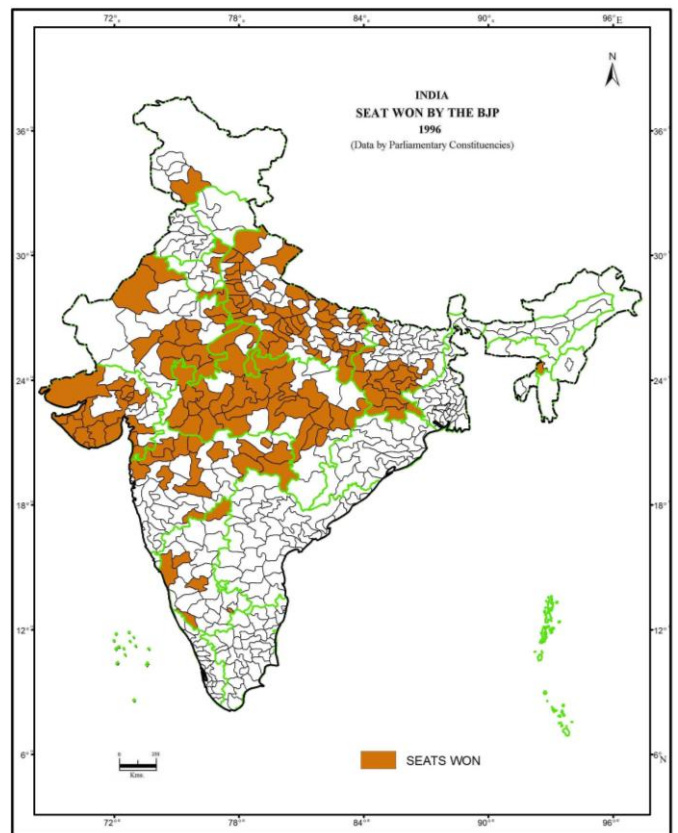


Fig 2

The party in this election had polled 6,79,50,851 votes – an increase of 1,26,05,776 votes than 1991 elections. The close scrutiny of the vote data reveals that Hindi-Speaking States continues to be most fruitful region for the BJP. In this election, this region contributed 61.49 percent of the total vote polled by the party. It also shows that the share of this region in the party’s has improved (56.96 percent in 1991). The state of Uttar Pradesh alone added 22.64 percent vote in the party’s total vote bank. Outside Hindi-Speaking belt, the other major contributors in the party’s total vote share were Maharashtra (9.10 percent), Gujarat (7.14) and Karnataka (6.84). The analysis also reveals that outside the Hindi-Speaking belt the major states whose share in the party’s vote has increased were Maharashtra (8.5 in 1991 to 9.10 in 1996) and Orissa (1.79 to 2.57). The states of Gujarat (9.74 to 7.14), Karnataka (8.15 to 6.84) and west Bengal (6.55 to 3.71) recorded decrease in the share.

References

1. Abid, Mohammad. Electoral Politics in India: An Overview, Indian Journal of Politics. 2004; 38(4):27-39.
2. Appaiah, Parvathi. Hindutva. Ideology and Politics, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi. 2003.
3. Chaudhuri, Amiya K. Regime Changes in West Bengal and the 1999 Parliamentary Elections in. 2003.

4. Wallace P, Roy R. (eds.), India's Elections and 20th century Politics, Sage Publications, New Delhi. 1999, 249-272.
5. Basu, Amrita. The Transformation of Hindu Nationalism? Towards a reappraisal in Frankel, Francine R. et.al. (eds.), Transforming India, Oxford, New Delhi. 2000, 379-403.
6. Pai, Sudha. State Politics: New Dimensions, Shipra Publications, Delhi. 2001.
7. Patel P. Sectarian Mobilization, Factionalism and Voting in Gujarat, Economic and Political Weekly. 1999; 34(34-35):2423-2433.
8. Ghosh, Partha S. BJP and the Evolution of Hindu Nationalism: from Periphery to Centre, Manohar Publisher & Distributors, New Delhi. 1999.
9. Hansen TB, Jaffrelot, C. (eds.). The BJP and the Compulsions of Politics in India, Oxford University Press, New Delhi. 1998.
10. Seshia, Shaila. Divide and Rule in Indian Party Politics: The Rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party, Asian Survey. 1998; 38(11):1036-1050.
11. Kantha, Parmod K. General Elections, 1996-BJP Politics: Looking beyond the Impasse, Economic and Political Weekly. 1997; 32(48):3090-3100.
12. Aggarwal JC, Chowdhry NK (eds.). Elections in India, 1952-96: Constituency Profiles, Results and Analysis Focusing Poll 1996, Shipra Publications, Delhi. 1996.