

A Lasting Legacy: The BJP-led National Democratic Alliance and India's Politics

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Abstract

This article investigates how the Bharatiya Janata Party -led National Democratic Alliance government influenced India's domestic politics from 1998 to 2004. It argues that the core norms constituting the BJP's ideological basis precipitated lasting changes in the nature and functioning of India's domestic politics. The article finds that through leading the NDA government, the BJP made trends that had been normalising prior to 1998 and mainstreamed them in Indian domestic politics. This mainstreaming created a lasting legacy comprised of two specific changes – the redefinition of Indian democracy along more multi-faceted and majoritarian lines and the entrenchment of communalism and communal politics. These changes persisted after the BJP-led NDA left power in 2004, continued into subsequent Congress-led United Progressive Alliances and produced a long-term behavioural shift in Indian politics. Such normative changes threatened the tenets of secularism and inclusiveness that had been the long-standing benchmarks of domestic politics since independence in 1947.

KEY WORDS: Hindu nationalism, Hindutva, norms, values, India, politics

This article argues that through the core beliefs underlying their Hindu ideology, the BJP precipitated profound changes in the nature and functioning of India's domestic politics during and after the NDA government. Hindutva contrasts with previous Indian Congress Party who conceived of the Indian polity as being secular and inclusive. Instead, the ideology of the BJP indicates "Hinduness" based upon a common culture, linguistic features and geographical unity based on the "Hindu, Hindi, Hindustan" triptych. The article finds that through the BJP-led NDA, certain norms central to Hindutva became mainstreamed into Indian domestic politics. Through this mainstreaming the BJP successfully challenged the secular basis that had so dominated the nature of the Indian politics under Congress-led regimes and confirmed trends that had been normalising since the 1990s. Moreover, the BJP-led NDA inculcated two core changes to the typography of Indian politics; a redefinition of Indian democracy from a secular and socialist basis to a more multi-faceted and fully majoritarian entity, and the entrenchment of communalism and communal politics. It is these two normative changes that are the lasting legacies of the NDA.

Readings of ideology, identity, norms and their interaction lead to the use of social constructionism as the theoretical basis for this article. Largely focused upon the creation of social knowledge and reality through interaction, social constructionism serves as a mode of explanation to indicate and measure ideational change. Furthermore, it helps us to analyse identities that arise and compete within specific contexts, and the establishment of practice and culture. Social constructionism is thus an appropriate analytical tool for an analysis that rests upon the different sets of norms making up competing identities and ideologies (those of the BJP and that of Congress) in context of domestic Indian politics. In particular, its non-deterministic and trans-historical emphasis allows for an appreciation of how Indian politics has been influenced by different norms and identities over time. This efficacy also links to analytical approaches from historical sociology and historical institutionalism, which examine embedded state practice through notions of process tracing and path dependency.

Both Congress and the BJP have been dominated by different sets of norms which have influenced, structured and determined their political orientations, policies and practices. These norms have been in place for the duration of these parties' existences. Apart from resting upon beliefs of a secular and inclusive India, Congress policy has centred upon norms of equality, plurality and tolerance. Underpinning these tenets has been an anti-communal basis, the separation of state and religion, as well as the promotion of socialist democracy. In contrast Hindutva is characterised by an inherent assumption of cultural superiority, and a desire to aggressively rebuild

India as a Hindu Rashtra. By 1998 the BJP referred to Hindutva as “cultural nationalism” – a unifying principle that represented a Hindu-dominated world view based upon India’s “timeless cultural heritage”. In addition, the BJP called for “positive secularism,” which represented “justice for all, appeasement for none” and contrasted with Congress’ secularism, which was seen as discriminating against the Hindu majority.

While both parties supported a swadeshi approach to economics, for the BJP this meant “economic sovereignty” based upon Indian primacy and Hindu nationalism. Social constructionists also maintain that states are dependent upon normatively constituted practice, which is built through the interaction of identities and the reproduction of particular forms of action. This practice is structured by common elite beliefs, and the collective norms and social identities which they impose when in power – their “operational code beliefs”. This article looks at how one actor’s ideological beliefs – the BJP’s Hindutva – came to compete with the practices established by another actor (predominantly Congress-dominated governments up until 1998) through the BJP-led NDA government from 1998 to 2004. Due to competition between the two parties, it is expected that the BJP’s ideology would challenge established Congress-inspired state practices in India during this period and result in the modification of domestic institutions. These modifications would reflect the ontology of Hindutva, which acts as the key cultural variable that highlights deviations from established practices in the pre-NDA government era.

Additionally, social constructionists argue that competing norms not only dictate state practice but also that state practice is affected by wider structural change. Therefore, the BJP’s domestic positioning as the party of India’s middle class, supposedly at the forefront of India’s economic liberalisation and exposure to globalisation, is a critical part of this analysis of the NDA period. In order to isolate the presence or not of change under the BJP-led NDA, the post-NDA period will also be examined. The article is split into four major sections. Section one deals with the BJP’s constrained dominance of the NDA coalition, as well as their promotion of Sangh Parivar activists into state institutions, in order to highlight their ability and positional strength to affect the workings of the Indian state from 1998 to 2004.

Further it highlights institutional changes during the NDA concerning state practice towards India’s Muslim and Christian minorities, and attempts at rewriting Indian history – these practices contrasted with previous secular Congress governments and augmented the promotion of the Hindutva world view. Together, sections one and two trace the process by which the predominant norms of Hindutva were injected directly into the workings of India’s domestic politics during the NDA period. In turn, section three shows the resonance of Hindutva within India through the BJP’s predominantly middle class voter base and the party’s use of mass media; factors which reinforced the BJP’s political status. Here the changes in state practice explored in sections one and two are linked to wider structural changes affecting India and show how, by addressing middle class fears over India’s economic liberalization and globalisation, Hindutva found continued concordance with its political supporters. The final section analyses the post-NDA period from 2004 onwards, in order to assess whether the BJP-led NDA had a lasting impact on the normative nature of Indian domestic politics. The article ends with some conclusions on the ongoing influence, significance and legacy of the 1998-2004 NDA government.

Political Realities and the Nature of Governance

Despite the radical promise of its 1998 election manifesto, the diverse nature of the

NDA coalition constrained the BJP’s activities while in government. Therefore, in

the NDA’s National Agenda, the BJP planned to enact a Uniform Common Civil Code, to build a temple in Ayodhya on the site of the destroyed Babri Masjid, and to remove Article 370 from the Indian Constitution were all set aside to be reflective of coalitional consensus. Coalition partners did, however, agree with the BJP pledge to exercise the option to induct nuclear weapons. As such, the coalition that enabled the BJP to come to power also forced it to dilute its agenda in order to maintain its stability and continuance. That no coalition had ever served a full term in Indian politics underscored such a prerogative. In 1996 the BJP had led an administration that lasted 13 days but failed to gain the necessary stable support of regional parties. Through the NDA’s consensus-based National Agenda that was inclusive of disparate non-Hindutva views, the BJP appeared more legitimate to their secular critics, a factor which produced a more stable coalition.

Despite its diluted agenda, the BJP dominated the NDA coalition and secured the key domestic cabinet positions of Prime Minister, Home, Financeer, and Education. This positioning of BJP personnel in key posts allowed the promotion and injection of Hindutva's core norms and values into government policy and out into Indian society. Such dominance enabled the BJP's policy norms to potentially become national policies via the legitimation of elected power. The makeup of the coalition also played a key role and was representative of a political system that had "become looser and more fragmented [as] politicians mobilise support along ever narrower lines of political identity", be they religious, regional, caste, linguistic or ethnic. This diversity produced a local over national bias in many of the smaller coalition parties who were more concerned with regional than national politics. Thus, while the NDA coalition constrained the BJP domestically from its full ideological programme, the BJP remained the coalition's sole dominant player with a national agenda. The BJP's susceptibility to coalition politics remained apparent throughout the period from 1998 to 2004, however, most particularly during April 1999, when the AIADMK withdrew its support. This withdrawal resulted in the NDA's temporary dissolution and a new general election, which they won with new partners in October 1999. The BJP's dominance of the NDA was reinforced by the structure of Indian governance and the relationship between government and the Indian bureaucracy, whereby every institution of governance is subordinated to the political elite, which constitutionally resides at the apex of power¹. Critical to these relationships is the personalised nature of Indian politics based upon loyalty and the willingness to subordinate ministry interests to those of an individual political leader. Such a system can foster both corruption and nepotism, especially in conjunction with the promotion of one's own party workers and loyalists. Accordingly, the BJP systematically promoted its own supporters to positions of influence during the NDA period, again placing them in positions from which they could promote Hindutva and its associated norms. Just as Congress' dominance of Indian politics until the late 1980s had allowed its politicians and associates to dictate India's political agenda according to their political values, the BJP could now do the same. As such, the placement of their supporters in government institutions, as "normprotagonists," acted as a conduit between BJP leaders and the Indian population. The BJP acts as the political wing of the Hindu nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and its wider Sangh Parivar, an association designed to promote the Hindutva world view.

The BJP-led NDA and India's Politics

Permeating all levels of Indian society, the Sangh Parivar consists of unions, educational organizations such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. and militant wings. During the NDA government, the BJP promoted many of its RSS affiliates, along with members of other Sangh Parivar groups, in order to further strengthen its political position. Such promotion allowed these groups to influence the Indian state as "extra-state powers that enforced accountability at the lower levels"². Such positioning also permitted state "patronised and institutionalised anti-minority activities by the Sangh Parivar. Additionally, there was evidence of the "saffronisation of affirmative action" by Supreme Court judges whereby judgments came to have an inherently pro-BJP or pro-Hindu bias. Therefore, even though the more militant aspirations of the BJP's political manifesto never materialised, such promotions allowed the BJP to challenge established state practice by introducing Hindutva-orientated policies and behaviour. The next section will show the impact of this influence concerning the BJP-led NDA's treatment of India's Muslims and Christians, and their attempts at rewriting Indian history.

Through its Hindutva ideology, the BJP "attempted to provide an outlet for the religious and cultural consciousness of the people, one that was completely ignored and devalued by secularity"³ and the policies of Congress. Therefore, in its emphasis on a Hindu Rashtra, the BJP shifted away from notions of an inclusive, secular India to one that was communal, Hindu-based and Hindu-orientated.

The promotion of Hindutva domestically demanded the identification and targeting of suitable outsiders with whom to portray the Hindu Rashtra under attack. These outsiders were primarily the traditional BJP/Sangh Parivar target of

the Muslim population but also India's Christian minority. As such, the BJP promoted policies that had clear dissonance with Congress' secular norms, which were rejected as biased against Hindus and "pseudo-secular". Such policies led to increased violence and discrimination against India's Muslims and Christians during the BJP-led NDA period, often aided by the political involvement of Sangh Parivar elements. Promotion of the Hindu world view also involved BJP attempts to rewrite history to compound their discrimination against these groups and to re-orientate the normative basis of the India state.

Programmatic Communalism and the Gujarat Meltdown

By the 1980s, the politics of Congress were deemed by Indian commentators of all hues to be increasingly communal; most notably the anti-Sikh pogroms following Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984, and also during elections in Kashmir. Concerning the 1984 riots, in particular, the central government was often complicit in the violence by providing information on Sikh addresses, businesses and property⁴. However, while Congress "often tolerated, encouraged and supported communalism in various ways ; this communalism was opportunistic whereas the BJP's communalism is programmatic – dedicated to the creation of Hindu Rashtra".

The BJP's umbilical cord to the RSS furthermore underlined the party's ideological commitment to communalism, as did chauvinistic and masculine characterisations of the BJP protecting Mother India from outsiders.

Emblematic of these entrenched beliefs, in 1990, BJP president Advani went on a

Rath Yatra across India, intended to culminate in Ayodhya where the RSS and the VHP were trying to replace Babri Masjid with a Hindu temple. Advani was arrested before his arrival, leading to communal rioting by Hindutva activists. The VHP held further ethno-religious mobilisations in Ayodhya throughout 1991 and then on 6 December 1992, a BJP-VHP rally at the site led to the destruction of the mosque and sparked Hindu-Muslim riots across India, leaving 1200 people dead. Although BJP-held state assemblies were dissolved, and the RSS and VHP temporarily banned, Ayodhya established the legitimacy of Hindutva among the Hindu middle class, as well as confirming the party's political threat to Congress. That the Ram Janmabhoomi campaign was the largest mass movement since independence underscored this threat, as well as the rising efficacy of communal politics. During the BJP-led NDA, government ministers subsequently promoted the central tenet of the BJP's communal and explicitly exclusionary politics of "One Nation, One People, One Culture". This promotion challenged, contrasted and competed with the inclusive secular vision that Congress had carried out from independence. The BJP continuously cast aspersions on the loyalty of Indian Muslims to India, regarding them as constituting a "fifth column" that threatened

the nation. These normative beliefs became personified by events in Gujarat in 2002. Since assuming power in Gujarat in 1995, the BJP had stacked its inner ranks with VHP and RSS members, and others that shared and would actively promote Sangh Parivar policies and programs. Often this was to the detriment of officials who were neutral and secular. As a 1998 joint report remarked, "a well planned strategy is being operated by the Hindutva forces in Gujarat and it aims at communalising society at the grass root level". Such trends were compounded in 2001 with the appointment of Narendra Modi as chief minister in the state, the first RSS pracharak to gain such a position. In response to an attack on a train in Godhra that killed 58 Hindu pilgrims on 27 February 2002, Modi claimed that the violence stemmed from Pakistan, aimed at destabilising the state. True to BJP policy norms, state officials argued that local Muslims were both to blame and were inherently pro-Pakistani in their loyalties. On the following day, Hindu-Muslim communal violence erupted across the state, leaving thousands dead in a matter of days, and marked the worst communal violence since Partition.

Contrasting with many other instances of communal violence, observers noted the extent of state complicity and orchestration in the Gujarat riots, arguing that most of the violence "was state-backed and one-sided violence against Muslims – tantamount to a deliberate pogrom". Certainly, the infiltration of Sangh Parivar activists into the Gujarati state apparatus aided the resultant organised, systematic and pre-planned violence, whereby rioters were given lists of Muslims' houses, flats and shops, were supported by local police and even provided with legal assistance in case of arrest. In short, the "saffronisation" of state institutions – enabled by the presence of BJP personnel who promoted Hindutva policy norms – meant that there was no protection for Gujarat's Muslim population. These actions

clearly echo with the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. These events served as an example of the extreme communal agenda of the BJP that is possible when orchestrated through a state apparatus where Hindutva has become embedded and normalised. Shortly after the riots, a BJP hardliner stated that “the party leadership can certainly translate this Hindu backlash into votes”. Presciently, in December 2002, the Modi government was swept back into power in state assembly elections, revealing the powerful succour of Hindutva, even at its most communal, and its acceptance into mainstream Indian government. Although not replacing existing norms of tolerance and equality, Gujarat in 2002 showed how these norms were being widely challenged by competing BJP policy norms, producing new and developing (proto-normative) practices in domestic politics.

Targeting Christians and “Recasting the Past”

The arrival of the BJP into power also saw an upsurge in violence against India’s Christian minority. Much of this violence stemmed from the Christian conversion of Hindus and the presence of Christian missionaries in tribal areas. Reflective of this differing set of beliefs and values, after 1998 the RSS explicitly prohibited Hindus from conversion to Christianity and the BJP prevented foreign missionaries from entering the country. Regular attempts by Christian groups to convert lower-caste Hindus that weakened Hindutva’s higher-caste framework, were also part

of this equation. Violence against Christians during the BJP-led NDA involved the setting fire of prayer halls, churches, shops and houses during December 1998 and, most infamously, on 27 January 1999, the burning to death by Hindu extremists of an Australian missionary, Graham Staines, and his two sons. In the wake of attacks

on Christians in Gujarat and Orissa in 1999, the NDA’s Prime Minister Vajpayee “questioned the religious freedoms guaranteed by the Indian constitution, and the BJP government created a culture of impunity in which even low-level police officials felt emboldened to harass the Christians”. Again, this example shows how by leading the NDA, the BJP had a national governmental platform with which to legitimise their policy norms and practices. Youth organisations associated with the RSS also carried out attacks and burnt Valentine’s Day banners, making Christians the BJP’s “new enemies” necessary to consolidate the rise of Hindutva.

Rewriting history also became a key BJP strategy to gain both popular and scholarly support, and to intrinsically influence the education of the Indian population through the promotion of Hindu nationalist policies. The ICHR, central to the promotion and nature of education in India, was established in 1972. With its Murli Manohar Joshi as Minister of Human Resource Development, the BJP government reconstituted the Council and directed it “to promote ‘national history’”⁵. The BJP also gained control of the National Council for Educational Research and Training, which produces the majority of national school texts. As elsewhere, these bodies were re-staffed with BJP and RSS personnel to propagate and promote BJP norms of cultural nationalism, positive secularism and a tacitly communal agenda against India’s non-Hindus. To this end in 2000, the National Council for Educational Research and Training issued a (later scrapped) national curriculum framework that represented “an agenda for the ‘Hinduisation’ of education” and the downgrading of non-Hindu contributions to the world. These actions were taken to promote the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan interpretation of Indian history that is strongly communal and Hindutvabiased. Such actions again challenged the prior benchmarks of India’s educational system of tolerance, plurality and secularism.

Through the rewording of textbooks, staff changes and the reorganisation of educational institutions, the BJP attempted “to recast the past” in order to embed Hindutva’s normative principles within it. This manipulation of history by the BJP was intimately tied to their cultural nationalist norms and further coupled with their anti-Muslim and anti-Christian norms. Rewriting Indian history was designed to promote a pro-Hindu world view that fully subscribed to the ideals of a resurgent and glorious Hindu Rashtra, and more intrinsically to supplant decades

of Congress-led policy and associated norms. An example of this re-ordering, included pushing back the period of the Rig Veda to 5000 BC against the general scholarly consensus of 1500 BC, in order to establish India (and Hinduness as the world’s oldest civilisation. In turn, science was demoted in favour of religious

education, while astrology was introduced into schools along with the study of Sanskrit. Additionally, there was the “linguistic cleansing” of cities and other geographical locales whereby non-Hindu names were replaced by Hindu designations. By changing

educational practices, the BJP was also attempting to change the norms and beliefs underlying these practices, in order to make them resolutely pro-Hindutva in their ends.

The BJP, Globalisation, Middle Class and Media

Prior to being in government with the NDA, the BJP had become a mass party in the early 1990s when the Indian political scene was becoming more aligned to capitalism rather than socialism. Although the Indian polity had earlier attempted to articulate a continued social democratic vision of capitalism in the 1980s, Congress had decisively turned towards a neo-liberal agenda, largely as a result of the end of the Cold War as well as the 1991 balance of payments crisis. By being explicitly pro-capitalist, the BJP's neo-liberal agenda helped to stabilise this trend both ideologically and politically. Intrinsicly, economic liberal reform had always been a central tenet of BJP policy rather than being a reaction to outside circumstances (the stock BJP criticism of Congress' liberalisation in the early 1990s). Furthermore, being the party of the middle class augmented these foundations. Made up of a variety of entrepreneurs, businesspeople, traders and small indigenous manufacturers, the middle class has the most to gain from a modern India but they are also at the frontline of rapid cultural change in the face of outside forces and economic liberalisation. All these characteristics firmly situated the BJP within the important domestic trends present within India in 1998 as the NDA entered government, as did their confluence with globalisation and modern media. Protecting the interests and Hindu identity of the middle class would, therefore, further allow the mainstream promotion of Hindutva and its core normative principles.

Redefining Swadeshi and Embracing Globalisation

The initial emphasis that the BJP had placed upon self-reliance economics before coming to power (based upon a need to protect India's independence and sovereignty from outside influence) was largely reshaped under the NDA. In fact, BJP policy in government appeared to be very similar to that of Congress because of the centralist tendency in Indian politics, as well as the imperatives and incentives of the international system. The need for a stable environment in order to support India's continued economic growth was also a factor, necessitating outward-looking economic linkages. As a result, the BJP largely advocated the neoliberal position held by the previous Congress government⁶. While this approach was an adaptation of swadeshi, which for BJP supporters now indicated "India first", it also indicated a break from the strictly nationalist precepts of the RSS. This redefinition meant that as long as it benefited India's national interest, economic self-reliance could be based both within and outside of India. Therefore, increased foreign direct investment would benefit both India and any foreign investor, while additionally allowing India to gain foreign knowledge and expertise to grow and then be self-reliant in the future. This redefinition successfully harnessed Hindutva rhetoric of re-strengthening and revitalising India, and harmonised (rather than competed) with previous Congress norms and conceptions of swadeshi.

Much research concerning the rise of Hindu nationalism firmly situated it within the context of growing globalisation in the 1990s. It had been observed that religion and nationalism are "relevant organising principles at a time when modern society is making increasing demands on individuals." In India in the 1990s, the combination of these factors through the ideology of Hindutva led to a particularly powerful and attractive ideological response to changing economic conditions for portions of India's population. Furthermore, the coincidence of culturally and geographically specific Hindutva and the emergence of a Western liberalised and globalised economy in India (driven by consumerism and privatisation) questioned what national identity ought to be. Hindutva was thus "a bold strategic response to this question"⁷, as it embraced not only fears over the rising influence of (outside) economic forces on Indian society but provided an answer to it concerning the protection of the Hindu Rashtra. This acceptance showed the influence of wider structural changes on the BJP's rise, as well as their impact upon India's governmental practice. In these ways, as McDonald critically notes, "economic prosperity, a strong state, and an authentic and unequivocal cultural and national identity are all imagined within Hindu nationalist discourse as the necessary ingredients for realizing the promise of recognition in global modernity." The BJP's triumph in the 1999 national elections by presenting itself as the party of economic growth and military strength successfully fed into this logic. At the same time, India's previous protectionist strategies under Congress governments were argued to have neither helped to combat poverty nor make the economy stronger, especially when contrasted to China in the 1990s⁸. Furthermore, economic growth in a

globalised capacity was regarded as a key part of being a great power – itself a core BJP policy norm with which to mark the resurgence of India under the aegis of Hindu revivalism. As part of perceptually building this aim, the BJP declared their vision to make India a developed country by 2020. By making such a public pronouncement, commentators noted that this was “in itself a big mental leap, given the traditional self-perception as a weak and developing country”. The confluence of BJP policy norms with wider structural trends in India and world, both legitimised and mainstreamed their world view within India’s domestic political scene.

The Party, the Middle Class and the Mass Media

In electoral terms, while nationally representing a minority of the population, BJP supporters form the majority of the educated, upper caste and upper class groups. For the Hindu middle class, “BJP support of economic liberalisation policies addressed their rising economic ambition . . . [and] the ideology of Hindutva took care of their identity problems”. As the BJP’s most important constituency, the middle classes conversely set the BJP’s agenda – from ardent chauvinistic nationalism to economic reform – without necessarily harbouring the communalism of lower caste Hindus. Therefore, by being in tune with the mainstream developments within Indian society, the BJP itself became part of that mainstream, legitimizing Hindutva through a consolidation of its middle class support base. Such support is not without its tensions, however, especially concerning the small trader base of the BJP who are threatened by large corporations both inside and outside India. The party’s manifesto hence promised “full liberalisation and calibrated globalisation” ,in order to protect them. Just as the rewriting of history can reinforce the projection and acceptance of new national identities, the use of media imagery was a vital aspect of BJP policy to domestically embed Hindutva in accepted state practice. In particular, the BJP used mass media to produce “a militarised Hindu nationalist discourse, according to which India is under siege in the face of the enemy within – the Muslims who live in India, and the enemy without, Muslims who live in Pakistan and Bangladesh” The funding of violence at Ayodhya in 1992 by Hindus in Canada and America shows the strength and reach of such imagery and the associated identities and nationalisms that accompany it⁹. Within this discourse, images play a critical role in reinforcing identities, stereotypes and threats and, throughout the 1990s, the symbols of Ram Mandir, Babri Masjid and Muslim infiltrators all became “coded images . . . incorporated and exploited in the political process” Hindutva’s mass appeal to identity markers, such as religion, national difference and masculinity, overlapped with modern consumerism by redefining “popular symbols and insert[ing] an invigorated sense of identity by including these symbols in daily narratives”. Examples of these linkages include the screening of an adaptation of the Ramayana on Indian television in 1987 and 1988 to an audience of 80 million, as well as the transmission of events such as the Hindutva processions . The BJP also regularly attacked anti-Hindu messages in the media, cinema and the arts.

In these ways, BJP policy norms and principles resonated with emerging social and structural changes in India, a resonance which allowed the former to be more readily acceptable. The rising circulation of mass imagery was coupled with a revolution in print media within India, which observers linked to the electoral rise of the BJP .

As part of this phenomenon linking Hindu organisations, ideology, imagery and the media, “the ‘Hinduisation’ of the press thus led to the portrayal of the upper-caste Hindu’s view as the only and true reality”. When one adds the intellectual influence of the English-language media, often used by political analysts and elites as an ideational mouthpiece, the power of the media for the promotion of Hindutva becomes even more apparent. Therefore, the way that the Sangh Parivar has “selected and manipulated images to implant, uphold, and reinforce its world view, show[ed] a media mastery and an eye for symbols that would put most ad agencies to shame”. These developments helped embolden Hindutva as a competing and, moreover, legitimate ideology versus Congress during the NDA period, firmly implanting its norms, values and associated imagery into India’s national consciousness.

Aftermath: The NDA and the United Progressive Alliance

Despite being unable to fulfil entirely their radical electoral agenda, yet able to dominate the NDA coalition, the BJP’s stint in power is claimed to have “transformed the complexion of the political process in India”.

It did this by presenting Hindutva as an acceptable, viable and experienced political force. In particular, the NDA’s success at being India’s first coalition to complete an entire term countered the criticisms of “instability and questionable legitimacy”¹⁰ put to earlier

Indian governments. As Advani noted, the “term coalition dharma is the BJP’s contribution to the lexicon of Indian democracy.” Furthermore, the NDA was the first full-term non-Congress-dominated government since independence. Such factors allowed a Hindutva agenda, ranging from nuclear tests to discrimination against India’s minorities and the rewriting of Indian history, to be systematically implemented. This process challenged existing (Congress-dominated) state practice by introducing new behaviour concerning how Indian politics ought to be conducted. Overall, the interaction of norms between those of Congress prior to 1998 and BJP policy norms during the BJP-led NDA from 1998 to 2004 resulted in discernible harmonisation, dissonance and change.

Harmonised continuities were present concerning swadeshi, as pre-1998 Congress and BJP norms combined through a shared focus on the diplomatic saliency of continued economic growth via gradual liberalisation and calibrated globalisation. Clear and contested dissonances were present with pre-1998 norms of equality, tolerance, secularism and plurality being pitted against the BJP’s cultural nationalism and positive secularism. Although these BJP norms gained pre-eminence during the NDA as the party promoted its Sangh Parivar supporters, this normalisation appeared to be heavily dependent upon the BJP being in power, and these norms were thus overturned after the BJP’s 2004 electoral defeat. BJP attempts at rewriting Indian history were symptomatic of such processes, with pro-Hindutva textbooks being scrapped post-NDA. There were also two important substantive changes. Firstly, the Congress norm of secular and socialist democracy was replaced by a norm of multi-faceted and majoritarian democracy. As such, the NDA established the BJP’s political legitimacy as they served a full term in office and by doing so hence reorientated Indian democracy away from its traditional roots to something more accepting and accommodating of Hindutva. Secondly, the anti-communal norm in place under pre-1998 Congress regimes was replaced by a communal norm. This replacement occurred because the BJP legitimised communal politics through the NDA, inspiring what had been a nascent and normalising trend before 1998 to become a core mainstream norm within India’s domestic politics.

Democracy Redefined

Despite predictions from the majority of India’s political analysts of a guaranteed renewed mandate, and being “poised for a great leap forward”, the BJP lost the 2004 Lok Sabha elections. Congress significantly ameliorated their 1999 election performance by gaining 31 seats while the BJP lost 44. From this basis, Congress went on to form the UPA with 11 coalition partners. To gain a majority, the UPA became dependent on the support of the Left Front (consisting of four Communist parties) and made Manmohan Singh India’s new Prime Minister. The BJP’s loss was partly ascribed to the failure of the NDA’s “India Shining” campaign, which led to a polarisation of rich and poor voters¹¹. Voters were also concerned with their immediate water, road, electricity and job needs rather than with the BJP’s emphasis on India’s economic growth that mainly benefited the middle classes. The rise of such as the Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party was also important, as was voter backlash concerning the Gujarat pogroms of 2002. Within the Sangh Parivar, activists cited the neglect of core Hindutva ideology as the cause of the defeat, ideological dilution due to the coalition and leadership differences between the BJP’s Advani and Prime Minister Vajpayee.

These trends were compounded in the 2009 Lok Sabha elections with the BJP losing a further 22 seats, while Congress gained 61 – figures that corresponded to the respective losses and gains for the NDA and UPA. With 262 seats, the UPA were only 10 seats away from a majority and gained the seats of several low-caste parties to renew their mandate. Analysts also noted how the rise of caste-based politics fragmented the BJP’s voter base, as did the emergence of the “Third Front” of mainly Communist parties. Despite their loss, the influence of the 1998-2004 BJP-led NDA was important concerning the

2004 and 2009 results as it had proved the legitimacy of a non-Congress-dominated coalition, which then validated future political possibilities for any other political groupings. Importantly too, despite a growing gap in terms of seats between Congress and the BJP, popular vote numbers were much closer; in 2009, Congress gained 153,482,356 votes, while the BJP gained 102,689,312 votes. Thus, the Congress gained 37.22% of the popular vote and 48.25% of seats, versus the BJP's 24.63% and 29.28%, respectively. All of these factors aided the redefinition of Indian democracy away

from a norm of secular and socialist democracy to something much more multifaceted and majoritarian. While Congress almost reversed the coalition trend in India politics present since the 1980s, by 2009 Indian democracy had matured into an entity consisting of multiple parties, a maturation which redefined the traditional normative basis of Indian democracy and which the BJP-led NDA had legitimised.

Communalism Entrenched

The BJP's political validation through the 1998-2004 NDA resulted in a further substantive normative change within domestic politics, namely the entrenchment of communalism and communal politics. The BJP's advantageous electoral positioning within a modernising, globalising and media-dominated middle class additionally strengthened their mainstream acceptance. Commentators also talked of a commensurate shift of "the centre of gravity of Indian politics to the right" especially concerning capitalism and positive secularism. These shifts questioned the legitimacy of Congress' normative secular basis but also seemingly demanded that Congress and India's leftist parties become less socialist in orientation. Reflecting their emergence as a political tool in the 1980s and their proto-normalisation as the BJP rose to prominence in the 1990s, under the NDA communal (and therefore anti-secular) politics therefore became, according to author interviews with senior Indian academics in May 2008, an accepted part of politics for all parties. Thus, something that had been a trend before 1998 became legitimised by a communal party (the BJP) as they entered India's political mainstream and served a full term in government. As one senior academic said in an interview with the author in May 2008, post-2004 there has been a "normalisation of the BJP and its way of thinking." This is particularly the case for the media-influenced and expanding middle class and continued economic growth underpinned by neo-liberal policies.

Significantly, the electoral rise of Hindu nationalism "altered the balance of power between Hindus and Muslims that had persisted since Partition" (Nasr, 2005: 193).

Furthermore, the 1998-2004 BJP-led NDA allowed those groups associated with it to firmly establish their political positions. Thus, even post-NDA, Sangh Parivar activists spread their influence through the national and local institutions of government across India. The saffronisation of the state and society has made progress in the last 15 years . . . the Hindu Rashtra is in the making along the societal lines the RSS has always valued."

Through their active discrimination against Muslims, Christians (in particular Sonia Gandhi on account of her Italian roots) and the lower castes (themselves becoming a bigger target in light of their electoral success), the BJP and the wider Sangh Parivar entrenched communal norms. Pankaj Mishra, a leading intellectual, describes how this development has "infected India's state and civil society with illiberalism". Continued communal violence against Muslims and Christians, and the involvement of Sangh Parivar activists in domestic terrorism in

2008 (and potentially earlier) has further compounded and engrained this perspective.

Conclusions: The BJP as a Normative Influence in Indian Politics During the BJP-led NDA period, the core norms underpinning the BJP's Hindutva ideology competed with, and at times successfully challenged, the normative structure of domestic politics. This article has shown how this process produced two significant modifications to the normative basis and practice of Indian politics –namely the ascendancy of multi-faceted and majoritarian democracy and the entrenchment of communalism and communal politics. These substantive changes

occurred as BJP policy norms gradually supplanted those of previous Congress regimes prior to 1998, became established during the NDA and then persisted into the subsequent UPA governments from 2004 onwards. Moreover, while these norms were nascent and normalising before the arrival of the BJP-led NDA government in 1998, it was only during the NDA that they were assertively

established, entrenched and, in effect, mainstreamed into the topography of contemporary politics. This normalisation was achieved via the validation of the BJP's political legitimacy, India's political centre ground shifting to the right and the avowal of "communalised commonsense". Concurrently, the BJP-led NDA saw the emergence of an acceptable political religious nationalism capable of successfully questioning the secular origins of the Indian state. Despite losing power post-2004, the BJP became established as the primary alternative to Congress.

Regarding our analytical framework from social constructionism, we have shown that these changes occurred within the context of competing norms and identities (predominantly those of Congress and of the BJP), as well as wider structural factors (primarily liberalisation and globalisation). These findings offer a new perspective on the role of norms and identities in structuring and influencing the delineation of Indian domestic politics. In turn, our analysis has suggested that it was a specific confluence of core BJP policy norms with these wider structural occurrences that signalled the BJP's ascent to power and their legitimacy while in government. This legitimacy provided them (and their Sangh Parivar supporters) with the opportunity to influence the normative basis of domestic politics. This influence was far from uniform during the NDA period and beyond. Core norms concerning the basis of Indian politics remained in place (most notably equality, tolerance, secularism and plurality), while norms concerning swadeshi merged with existing values. Our analysis thus showed that there are multiple norms competing for pre-eminence, producing a political topography that is often in constant flux and adjustment. Moreover, this topography helps to indicate how political culture is itself more fluid than absolute, both in its core tenets but also how it reacts to, assimilates and rejects new beliefs and values. Future research could be fruitful in moving analysis away from a typical Congress/BJP dichotomy to revealing these core shared norms fundamentally structuring politics.

Neither must these norms be regarded as being mutually inclusive. As this article has also shown, what are frequently regarded as diametrically opposed norms (such as secularism and communalism) do exist concurrently and are in constant competition with each other. Thus, one must remember that prior to 1947, Congress attracted many supporters who would now be considered Hindutva stalwarts, while the 1984 anti-Sikh pogroms revealed distinct communal elements in the party. This presence suggests that even though the BJP's political star may appear to be waning after the 2009 elections, the nature of its ideology and incumbent norms has a constant, influential and, above all, normative potential within Indian politics.

Congress is also a normative force as it is both responsive to and influential upon other (competing) norms. In this way, the two highlighted normative changes cannot only be traced as stemming from, and being reflective of, the BJP's political rise and period in office. The emergence of multi-faceted democracy (such as the lower caste parties and the nascent Third Front) can be argued to have additionally occurred as a deep-seated reaction to Hindutva itself. In turn, the shifting of India's political centre ground to the right can also be seen a counter-Hindutva trend in that communal sentiments are now being harnessed by more political groupings. Thus, the emergence of these new norms, although inculcated by the BJP, is in many ways a negative development for them as competition for voters diversifies and increases. As such, the two lasting normative legacies of the NDA may well mark the long-term dilution, rather than the long-term dominance, of Hindutva policy norms within Indian domestic politics.

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