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Will regional parties be turfed out of Haryana?

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Abstract

This study examines the spatial distribution of electoral performance for national and regional political parties across assembly constituencies in Haryana. The analysis focuses on three key variables: vote share, seat share, and government formation. National and regional parties are treated as consistent entities across temporal and spatial dimensions in Haryana's electoral landscape. Regional parties encompass both state-recognized parties and registered unrecognized parties. The research utilizes secondary data sourced from the Statistical Report on General Election to the Legislative Assembly of Haryana, published by the Election Commission of India. A comparative and descriptive methodology is employed to analyze the electoral performance of national and regional parties across time and space. The findings indicate that Haryana's assembly elections exhibit both vertical and horizontal nationalization. The state's electoral history can be divided into three distinct phases: an initial phase dominated by national parties, a subsequent phase characterized by the emergence of regional parties, and a contemporary phase marked by the resurgence of national parties, accompanied by a decline in the influence of regional parties, mirroring the dynamics of the first phase.

Keywords: *National parties, regional parties, electoral performance, assembly constituencies.*

Introduction

India has a long history of elections with the first elections that were held way back in 1909-1910. Political parties form an integral part of the electoral landscape. These organizations come forward with their agenda and political philosophy during the electoral campaigns and other political events to grab power. India follows a federal system where people directly elect their representatives to the lower house (*Lok Sabha*) of the parliament and the members of the legislative assemblies (*Vidhan sabha*) of the state government. Since the late 1980s, three major political formations have dominated the study of India's electoral geography; first is the importance of regional parties and regional politics, second is the formation of coalitions at national and regional levels and third the polarization of national politics around the BJP (Bhartiya Janta Party), INC (Indian National Congress) and the third space (Tawa & Lama-rewal, 2009).

Regional and national politics are intrinsically linked. National parties generally aim to centralize power, while state or regional parties seek to decentralize it. However, the distribution of power between the Centre and the states is clearly outlined in the Constitution of India. A study by Chhibber

and Kollman (1998) on party aggregation in India and the United States of America suggests that a smaller number of national parties correspond to a greater centralization of power in both countries. Moreover, the study reveals that the voters tend to reject the regional parties when policies concerning smaller regions are predominantly shaped by central governments.

Review of literature

National and regional parties constitute pivotal components of political representation within multilevel democratic systems. Theoretical frameworks and empirical studies elucidate the dynamics shaping the interplay between these parties, with social cleavages, socio-cultural diversity, regional disparities, electoral systems, national co-partisanship, and legal frameworks identified as critical determinants. The prominence of regional parties has grown across various democracies, manifesting at both national and subnational levels of governance, where they form regional governments and contest national elections (Brancati, 2008; Bhattacharyya, 2018).

A critical examination of Spain reveals that socio-cultural cleavages and economic grievances significantly bolster support for regional parties. The proportional representation system in Spain amplifies linguistic and cultural diversity by empowering ethno-nationalist parties. Concurrently, voter dissatisfaction with national economic policies drives support toward regional parties perceived as more responsive to local needs (Lancaster & Lewis-Beck, 1989). Moreover, regional disparities in resource allocation profoundly influence national politics. Regions with fewer resources often resist perceived internal colonialism, while resource-rich regions seek to maintain their advantages, fostering a territorial redistributive dynamic that enhances the electoral success of regional parties in national contests (Kyriacou & Morral-Palacin, 2014).

However, social cleavages alone do not fully account for the strength of regional parties. Political decentralization emerges as a crucial factor, strengthening regional parties, whereas centralization undermines their influence. Comparative analysis of 37 democracies indicates that presidential systems, majoritarian electoral frameworks, concurrent elections, and cross-regional voting laws systematically weaken regional parties (Brancati, 2008). Additionally, the nature of electoral contests and campaign strategies significantly shapes party performance. National and regional parties strategically nationalize regional elections based on the performance of their national counterparts. Governing parties leverage national success to frame regional elections, while opposition parties nationalize regional contests to exploit national government failures, perpetuating a dynamic of nationalization tailored to strategic advantage (Cabeza *et al.*, 2016).

Furthermore, single-party dominance can precipitate the rise of regional parties. India exemplifies this phenomenon, where the fragmentation of the Congress party catalyzed the emergence of coalition politics and regional parties. Similar patterns are observable in the United Kingdom, South Africa, and Botswana, where dominant party systems have given way to regionalized political fragmentation (Ziegfeld, 2012). This analysis underscores the complex interplay of structural, socio-economic, and institutional factors in shaping the trajectories of national

and regional parties within multilevel democracies.

The present study aims to trace the spatio-temporal changes in the representation of national and regional parties in Haryana (Fig. 1). It seeks to answer the question of whether the regional parties will remain relevant in the political landscape of the state. The study adopts a comparative and descriptive approach, utilizing quantitative data on election results. Haryana is a state where national and regional parties have often been in close electoral contests. Many regional parties of the state established by the leaders who for diverse reasons broke away from the national parties i.e., Indian National Congress in most cases. Further, the study describes the temporal trends in the representation of the national and regional parties from 1967 to 2024 in the assembly elections of Haryana. The paper further presents the spatial patterns of support for national and regional parties in the assembly elections held in 2009, 2014, 2019 and 2024, followed by a spatio-temporal analysis of the results and possible consequences.

Electoral performance of national and regional parties

Temporal analysis

Since its separation from Punjab, Haryana has held 14 elections to elect representatives to its assembly. The state was dominated by national parties in electoral fields from the beginning. The Indian National Congress (hereafter INC) was the prominent national party in the state. However, regional parties too had electoral and political importance. The Indian National Lok Dal (hereafter INLD), a regional party, once ruled the state once with a clear mandate.

Vote share

As is evident from Figure 2, the national parties had higher vote share in all the elections except one dominating from 1967 to 1991 assembly elections. The maximum difference was in 1987 elections when national parties secured over 81percent of the vote share. The regional parties could barely manage to secure 0.09% of the votes polled. Thereafter, the vote share of the national parties witnessed consistent decline till 1996 when there was a resurgence of support to the regional parties who were in competition with the national parties till the 2009 elections. Significantly, the regional parties secured higher vote share than the national parties in the 1996 assembly elections. Interestingly, two newly formed regional parties (registered as unrecognized) secured maximum vote share in that election. The minimum difference between the national and regional parties was recorded in the 2000 assembly elections, when national parties secured 46.94% as against 36.16% by the regional parties. However, after 2009, the trends shifted again, with the vote share gap widening in favour of the national parties. Interestingly, independent (unaffiliated) candidates secured a greater share of the votes compared to those cast in favour of the regional parties (except in 1968) till 1987. However, after 1987 regional parties secured more votes than the independents till 2019. The recently held assembly elections in 2024 again saw a rise in the vote share of the independents registering a higher vote share than regional parties (Fig. 2).

Seat share

The second variable- the seat share of the contesting parties was identical to the trend and pattern in vote share though the magnitude was different as evident in Figure

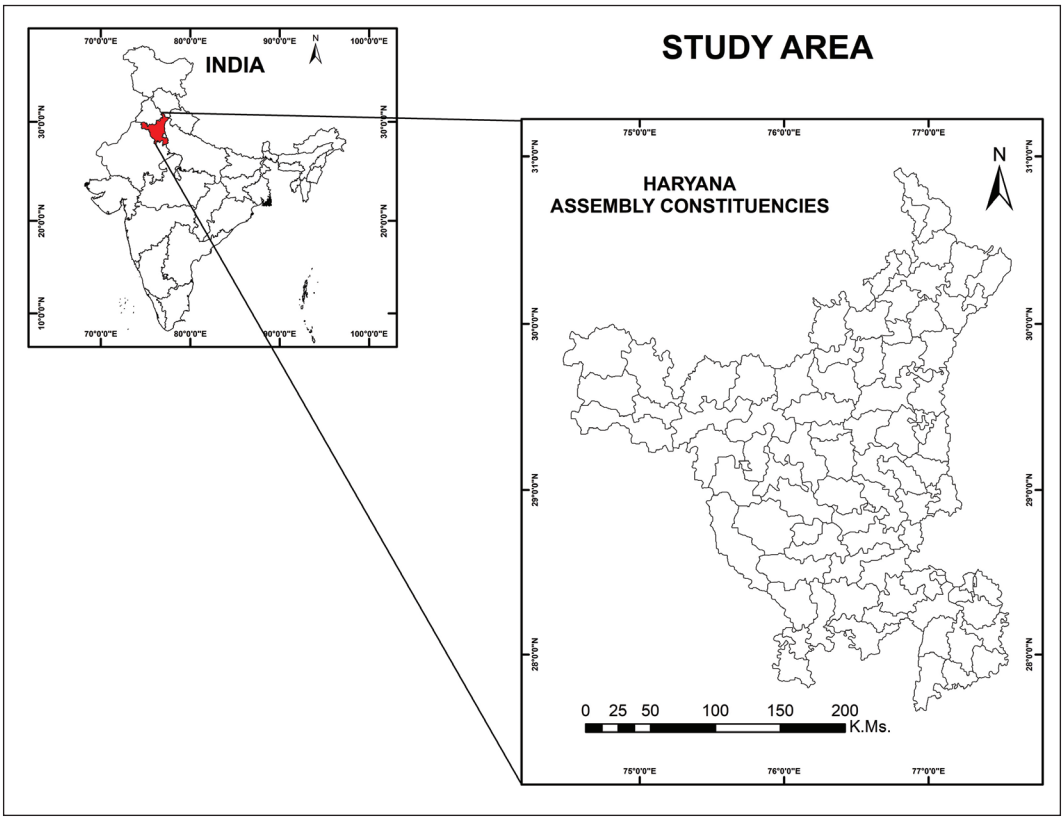

Fig. 1: Study Area: Haryana Assembly Constituencies

3. National parties remained ahead of the regional parties in 12 out of 14 elections held. The national parties dominated till 1991 with wide margins. The highest disparity occurred in 1987 when national parties won around 92% of the seats, while regional parties failed to secure even a single seat in the assembly.

During 1996 to 2009, competition between national and regional parties was quite close and the period can be recognized as the rise of regional parties and the decline of the overwhelming dominance of the national parties. During this period, the 2000 assembly elections were won by the INLD, a regional party, with a clear mandate paving the way for the first ever regional party to form a government in the state that continued till 2005. The national parties however re-established their supremacy after 2009, once again marginalizing the regional parties. Significantly, the independent candidates, unaffiliated with either national or regional parties secured more seats than regional parties till 1987, except in 1968, and after that regional parties consistently won more seats than the independents till 2019. However, in the 2024 assembly elections, independents once again led the tally over regional parties (Fig. 3).

Government formation

The third variable concerns the role of parties in government formation. It is found that

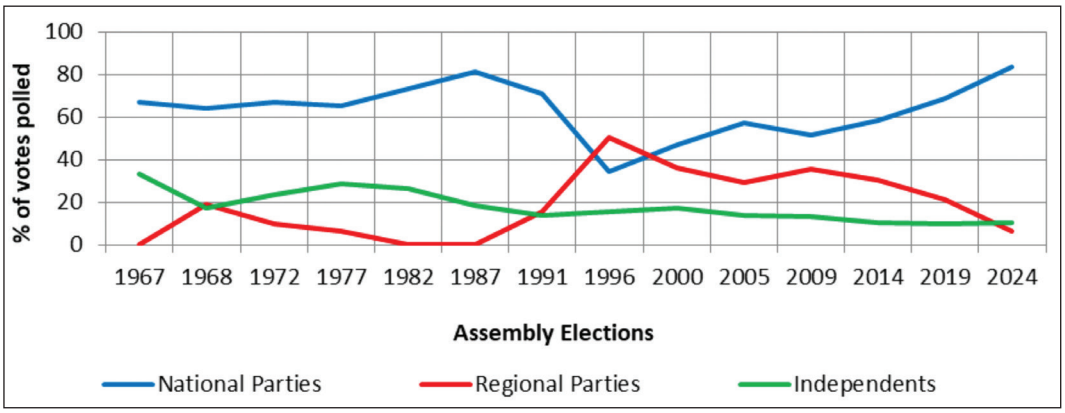

Fig. 2: Haryana: Vote share, 1967-2024

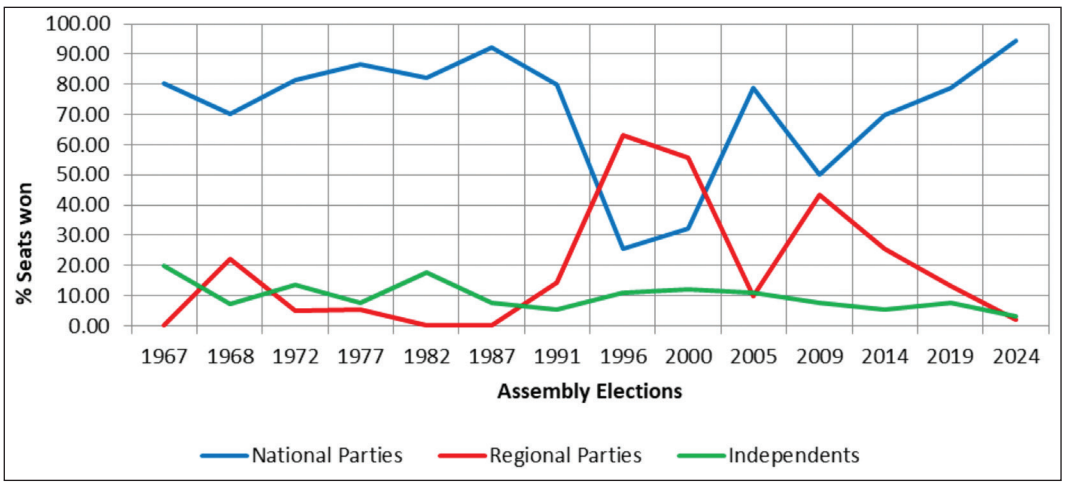

Fig. 3: Haryana: Assembly election wise seat share, 1967-2024

regional parties played a role in the formation the state government only four of the 14 times. However, in none of these instances they were able to form the government without the support of national parties, except once, which was also a pre-election coalition. However, out of the four times, only twice the regional parties had a larger mandate than the national parties. In contrast, national parties formed governments 10 times in the state and did not require the help of any regional party. However, two out of the 10 times, the national parties formed a government in coalition with other national parties.

Results of Temporal Analysis

Assembly elections in the state thus can be classified into three distinct phases. The first one was characterized by the dominance of national parties from 1967 to 1987. During this period, national parties dominated in all the three variables and the regional parties were on the edge of the state's electoral gains. The period was dominated by the INC and

Table 1: Haryana: Percent vote share of national and regional parties, 2009-2024

Party	2009	2014	2019	2024
National	51.5	58.38	68.84	83.21
Regional	35.33	30.59	20.93	6.32
Independents	13.16	10.6	9.71	10.47

Source: Statistical Report on General Election, 2009, 2014, 2019& 2024 to Haryana Assembly

Table 2: Haryana: Assembly constituencies won & vote share by national and regional parties, 2009

Party	%Vote	Constituencies won	Party
Indian National Congress (INC)	35.08	40	National
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	9.04	4	National
Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)	6.73	1	National
Indian National Lok Dal (INLD)	25.79	31	Regional
Haryana Janhit Congress (HJC (BL))	7.4	6	Regional
Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD)	0.98	1	Regional
Independent	13.16	7	N.A.
Total Seats		90	

Source: Statistical Report on General Election, 2009 to the Assembly of Haryana

Janata Party/Janata Dal led by Devi Lal.

The second period saw the rise of regional parties from 1991 to 2009. After the 1987 elections, national parties' graph of vote share and seat share declined. In 1996, a regional party- Haryana Vikas Party (HVP) formed the government in the state for the first time. However, the party was in coalition with BJP, a national party. In the subsequent 2000 assembly elections, another regional party, INLD grabbed 47 seats which was a clear mandate in terms of seats. However, the party was also in coalition with BJP.

Thus, regional parties were successful in edging out the national parties as the parties not only got a clear mandate in vote and seat share but successfully ran the government of the state for the full term of five years.

However, in the 2005 assembly elections, regional parties were comprehensively defeated by the INC, despite remarkable gains made by the former. In the 2009 elections again the national party INC required the support of defected members from Haryana Janhit Congress Bhajan Lal (HJC-BL), a regional party. The performance of regional parties in terms of vote and seat share was substantial in these elections.

The third period coincides with the contemporary period from the 2014 assembly elections onwards which is marked by a return of national parties, especially by the BJP to their former glory. In this period the BJP transformed into a major force shedding its former king-maker role. Its ascendancy at both the state and central level marked a paradigm shift in Haryana's politics, raising critical questions about the electoral future of regional parties in the state. INLD was

Table 3: Haryana: Constituencies won and vote share by national and regional parties, 2014

Party	% Vote	Constituencies won	Party
Indian National Congress (INC)	20.58	15	National
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	33.2	47	National
Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)	4.37	1	National
Indian National Lok Dal (INLD)	24.11	19	Regional
Haryana Janhit Congress (HJC-BL)	3.57	2	Regional
Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD)	0.62	1	Regional
Independent	10.6	5	N.A.
Total Seats	90		

Source: Statistical report on general election, 2014 to the legislative assembly of Haryana.

Table 4: Haryana: Assembly constituencies won & vote share by national and regional parties, 2019

Party	% Vote	Constituencies won	Party
Indian National Congress (INC)	28.08	31	National
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	36.49	40	National
Indian National Lok Dal (INLD)	2.44	1	Regional
Jan Nayak Janta Party (JNJP)	14.84	10	Regional
Haryana Lokhit Party (HaLP)	0.65	1	Regional
Independents	9.71	7	N.A.
Total Seats		90	

Source: Statistical report on general election, 2019 to the legislative assembly of Haryana.

the main opposition in 2005, 2009 and 2014 elections. The party, however, suffered a significant decline in its electoral fortune after its fragmentation in 2018 as Jan Nayak Janta Party (JNJP). However, JNJP was in alliance with BJP after 2019 assembly elections in the state but regional parties' vote share and seat share have been consistently declining since 2009. The INC emerged as the principal opposition in the state following the 2019 assembly elections.

Spatial analysis

Four assembly elections were held in Haryana (2009, 2014, 2019 and 2024) after the implementation of the 2008 delimitation order by the delimitation commission. The boundaries of the assembly constituencies remained unchanged in the subsequent elections, allowing for a straight forward comparison in spatial voting patterns (Table 1).

Spatial pattern, 2009

In 2009, seven national and 42 regional (9 state & 33 registered unrecognized) parties contested the elections. National parties secured 16.17% more votes than regional parties. Out of these seven national parties, three parties won a total of 45 assembly constituencies. On the other hand, three regional parties secured a total of 38

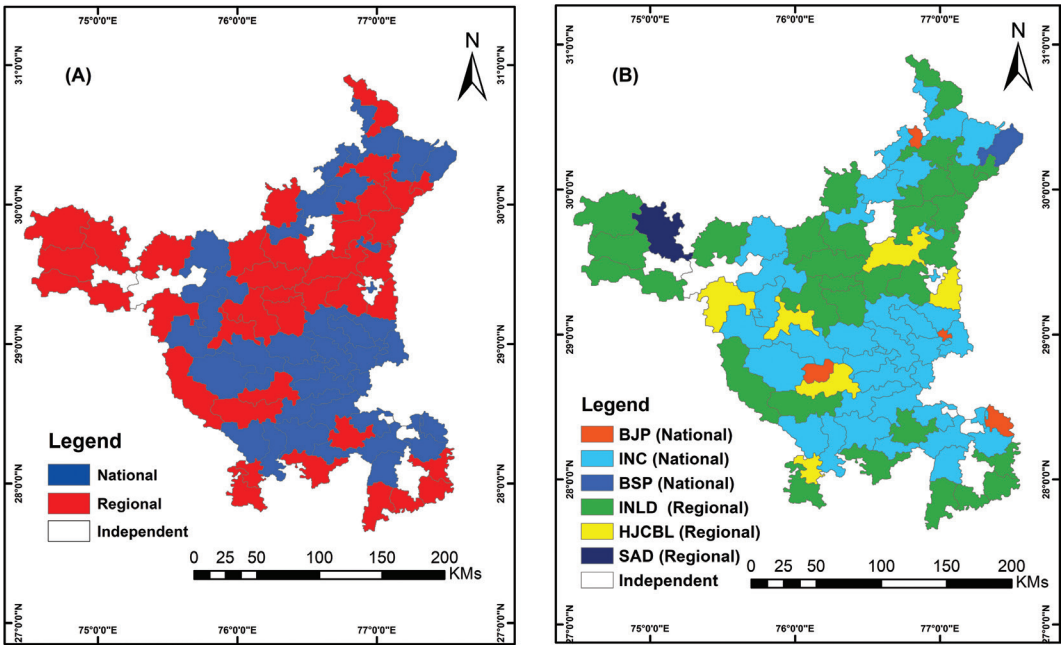

Fig. 4: (A) Haryana: Representation of national and regional parties, 2009;
(B) Party representation, 2009.

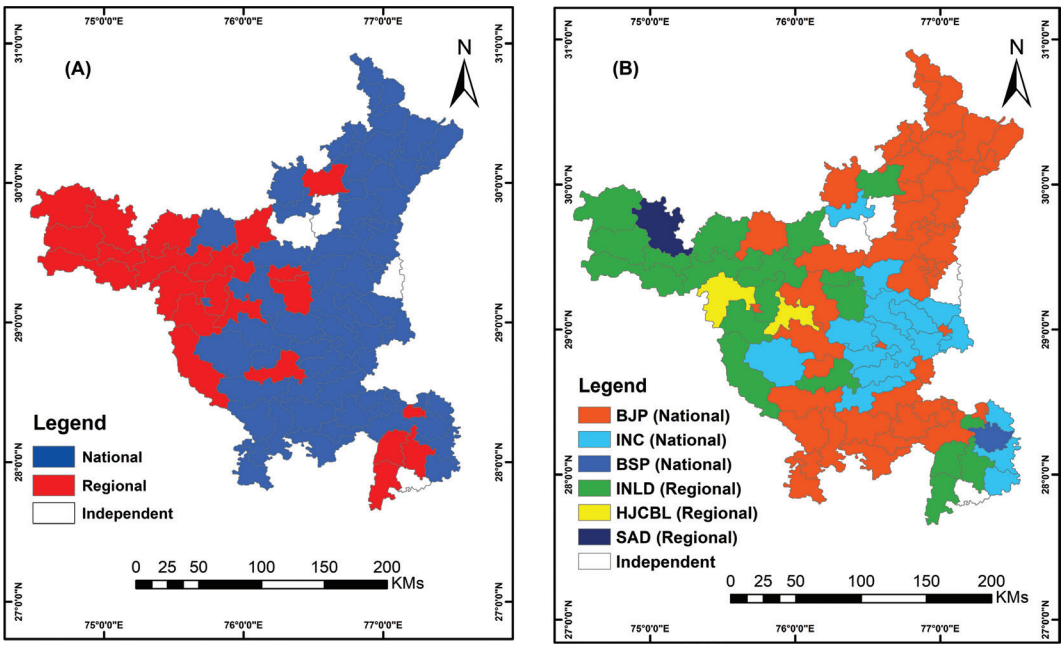

Fig. 5: (A) Representation of national and regional parties, 2014; (B) Party representation, 2014.

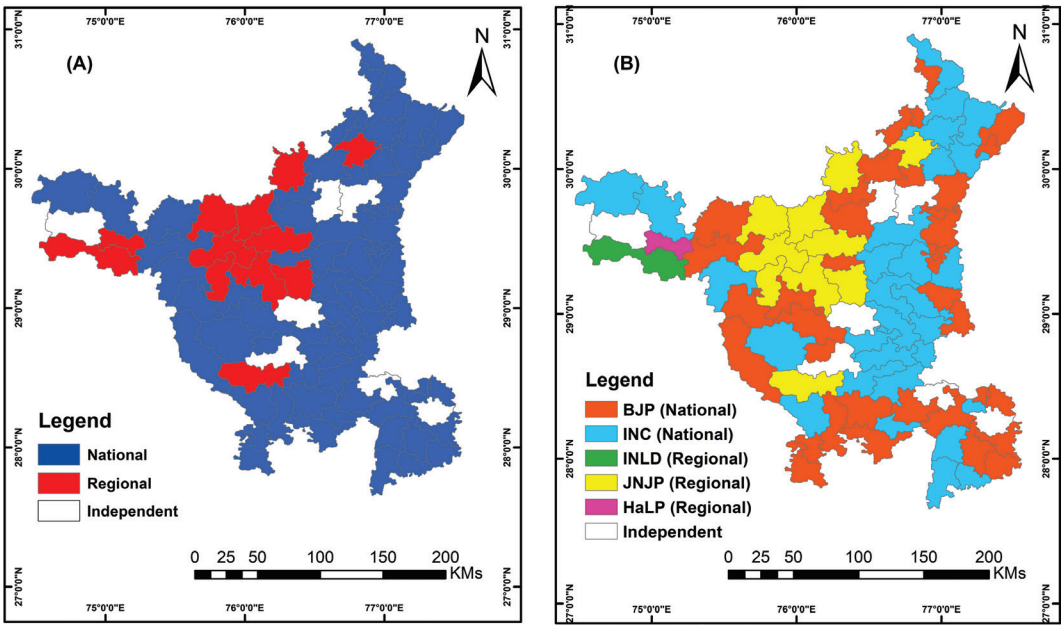

Fig. 6: (A) Representation of national and regional parties, 2019; (B) party representation, 2019

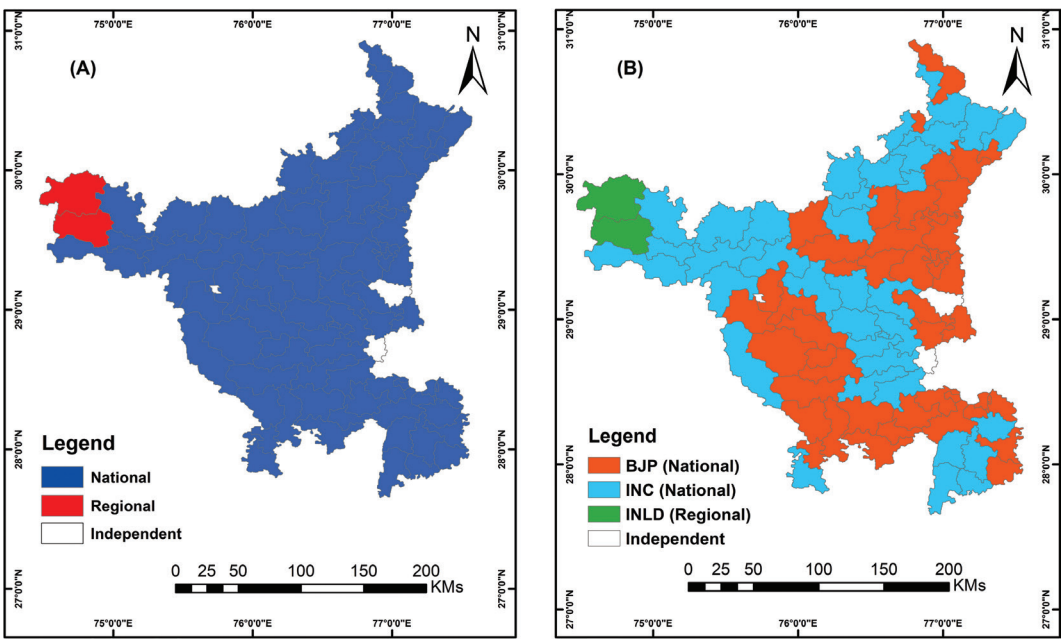

Fig. 7: (A) Representation of national and regional parties, 2024;
(B) Party Representation, 2024.

Table 5: Haryana: Assembly constituencies won & vote share by national and regional parties, 2024

Party	% Vote	Constituencies won	Party
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	39.94	48	National
Indian National Congress (INC)	39.09	37	National
Indian National Lok Dal (INLD)	4.14	2	Regional
Independents	10.47	3	N.A.
Total Seats		90	

Source: Statistical report on general election, 2024 to the legislative assembly of Haryana.

constituencies and seven constituencies were won by independents. The highest number of constituencies was won by INC i.e. 40 and the second largest party was INLD with 31 constituencies. INC successfully formed the government with the support of independents and a faction of HJC (BL) members (Table 2).

The 2009 spatial pattern presents clear strongholds of national parties in the eastern, central and southern parts of the state. Apart from these strongholds, national parties also had some representation from western and northern parts of the state. Regional parties had their strongholds in the north-eastern and western parts too. However, these parties had representation from far southern and northern parts of the state (Fig. 4A). Evidently the spatial pattern of national parties is a reflection of the spatial pattern of INC. In the same way spatial pattern of regional parties is a reflection of that of the INLD. Both the BJP and the BSP had representation in 5 seats, but neither established any significant stronghold in the state. The representation by both parties was highly scattered. HJC-BL and SAD, both the regional parties represented 7 seats in the state. None of the parties had any stronghold in the state even after the HJC-BL represented 6 seats alone in the state. Both the parties had scattered representation from southern, eastern, central and western parts of the state (Fig. 4B). The scattered representation suggest that these wins or support was mainly for the candidates; not for the parties they contested from.

Spatial pattern, 2014

The 2014 assembly elections of the state were contested by 45 parties of which five were national parties and 40 were regional parties (6 state & 34 registered unrecognized). National parties secured 27.79% more votes than the regional parties. In terms of seat share, three national parties collectively won 63 assembly constituencies in these elections while three regional parties won only 22 constituencies (Table 3). The BJP dominated with win in 47 constituencies and the regional party INLD won 19 constituencies. Thus, national parties again dominated not only in terms of vote share and seat share but also in government formation as BJP successfully formed the government without any external help this time.

In the 2014 elections, a distinctive spatial pattern emerged between national and regional parties. National parties represent a continuum from northern and eastern to southern parts of the state. On the other hand, regional parties were restricted to the western

and central parts of the state. However, some scattered seats were represented from northern and southern parts of the state (Fig. 5A). Political party-wise mapping shows that BJP, INC and INLD dominated the electoral space of the state. BJP had its strongholds in northern and southern parts of the state. Despite these two strongholds, the party represented a strip of assembly constituencies from central Haryana and some scattered assemblies from eastern and central parts. INC represents a compact cluster of assemblies from the central-eastern parts and south-eastern edge of the state. The INLD represented the western part of the state and some scattered representations from the southern, central and northern parts of the state (Fig. 5B).

Spatial pattern, 2019

In 2019, a total number of 70 parties contested the elections. Out of these, six were national parties and 64 regional parties (seven state & 57 registered unrecognized parties). National parties secured 47.91% more votes than regional parties and were ahead of the regional parties in vote share. The national parties won 71 assembly constituencies in contrast to only 12 by the regional parties. Despite this dominance, the BJP formed the government with the support of the JNJP, a regional party and several independent candidates.

In the 2019 elections, regional parties secured a majority of seats from the central parts of the state. They also won some seats from the western and northern regions, and one seat from the southern part of the state. The national parties again represented the state from northern and eastern to southern parts in a continuum. They also secured seats from western and central parts of the state. Regional parties, however, experienced a decline in the western and central parts of the state (Fig. 6A).

When political party-wise representation was analyzed, it was found that JNJP, a regional party represented a stronghold in the central part of the state. The INLD secured only two seats from the western part. On the other hand, INC and BJP representing national parties dominated the political space. The INC maintained its stronghold in the eastern part of the state and also regained ground in the northern and western regions. BJP secured maximum number of seats in the elections, appeared spatially fragmented in the elections. The party secured most of its seats from the southern and northern parts of the state, but did not find any stronghold in a continuum (Fig. 6B).

Spatial pattern, 2024

In the 2024 assembly elections, a total of 60 parties contested- five were National parties and 55 were regional parties (five were state and 50 were registered unrecognized parties). National parties secured 76.89 per cent more votes than regional parties and won 85 assembly constituencies while regional parties (INLD) could manage to win only two constituencies. Compared to 2019, national parties gained 14 constituencies in 2024. Regional parties in contrast lost 10 constituencies (Table 4 & 5). The 2024 elections once again revealed the supremacy of the national parties in all metrics of electoral ascendancy relegating the regional parties to electoral insignificance and their future.

The spatial pattern of the 2024 elections further revealed that the regional parties were

continuously losing their space to national parties. The regional party of INLD, once a domineering electoral force secured win in only two constituencies-both located in Sirsa and traditional stronghold of the party. The trend of regional parties shrinking continued westward, as both constituencies lie in the far west of the state. Except for these two western seats, three seats were won by the independents i.e. Hisar in the western part and Gannaur and Bahadurgarh in the eastern part of the state (Fig. 7A).

Another significant spatial outcome of the election is the bi-polar representation of the national parties namely the BJP and the INC. The BJP represents the northeastern and southern parts of the state, while INC represents the central-eastern, western, northern and northwestern parts of the state (Fig. 7B). The results of the 2024 assembly elections show that the regional parties have been almost turfed out of the state and the current political landscape is dominated by the BJP (a national party). The BJP also achieved a hat trick of consecutive victories, becoming the first party in the state's history to do so.

Discussion

Thus, the spatial patterns of performance of regional parties show consistent decline in support base which is widespread over almost all regions of the state. This contraction, over time, has moved progressively from the northern, eastern and southern regions toward the central and western regions. In 2009, representation of the regional parties came from all parts of the state, except the central-eastern region (Fig. 4). By 2014, it had been reduced to the central and western regions, along with some area of the far south of the state (Fig. 5). In 2019, the representation of regional parties was limited to central and western parts only with a reduced magnitude (Fig. 6). Thus the national parties (BJP & INC) in the state represented almost the state except some part of western and central Haryana in 2019. In 2024 regional parties were limited to the far west of the state (Fig. 7). Notably, the western part of the state includes Sirsa, hometown of the major regional parties of the state namely INLD and JNJP.

The nationalization of elections is an important phenomenon in multi-level democracies. The *nationalization* has two dimensions i.e. vertical and horizontal. The vertical dimension refers to the influence of national factors or politics on regional elections while the horizontal dimension refers to a relatively uniform vote share of parties across electoral districts. (Cabeza, *et al.*, 2016; Schakel and Romanova, 2020).

Haryana represents the nationalization of its assembly elections throughout all three phases. The nationalization is evident not only in vertical dimension but also, to some extent, in the horizontal dimensions of the state. The temporal analysis clearly indicates a vertical linkage between the state's political parties and national politics, as all three phases of national elections reflected similar patterns. The national elections were dominated by the Congress party till 1989. After that, various regional parties emerged on the basis of various caste and regional combinations and the pattern lasted till 1999 (Yadav, 1999). In the same way assembly elections of Haryana were dominated by the Congress during the first phase and after that regional parties' rise was seen in the second phase. In the third phase, the assembly elections in the state were won by the leading parties of the Lok

Sabha elections. Thus, it can be stated that the vertical linkage between Haryana's state politics and national politics has existed from the very beginning.

Conclusion

The spatial analysis of the assembly elections suggests that national parties have continuously increased their vote and seat share across the state, while regional parties have experienced a corresponding decline. In 2024, the regional parties were restricted to two assembly constituencies in far west of the state. This reduction in the territorial presence of regional parties, alongside the statewide expansion of national parties (BJP and INC) and the emergence of a bi-polar electoral contest is evidence of the horizontal nationalization of politics in the state.

Thus, the study finds a trend that the regional parties are being slowly but surely getting turfed out of Haryana. The only regional party, INLD won only two assembly seats in the 2024 elections. The JNJP had vanished by 2024, as the party failed to win even a single seat in the elections.

The regional or national parties do not have any permanent stronghold in the state. The spatial political representation was switched from one election to another election. The fate of the regional parties in the state seems closely tied to the broader national political arena and issues. Thus, the social cleavages and regional base theories were found weak during the elections covered in this study.

The regional parties may however revive by reinventing themselves; by differentiating or distancing from the national parties' agenda and prioritizing local issues.

Competing interest

The corresponding author declares that they have no conflict of interest.

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