

# Analysis Of Rajasthan Politics

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## History of Rajasthan

### **From ancient times till 1956**

Rajasthan, or 'the land of Rajas (kings)' has a long and rich history as a geographic and cultural region. It was a part of several great empires of ancient India, including that of the Mauryas, the Shakas, the Guptas and Harshavardhana of Kannauj. Thereafter, it became the heartland of the Gurjara-Pratiharas and later, their successors i.e., the Rajputs. The Rajputs were divided into several clans such as Rathods, Sisodias, Chauhans, Tomars etc. Rajasthan derives a significant part of its identity from its Rajput heritage - attested to by the fact that it was formerly called Rajputana, 'the abode of the Rajputs'.

In the following centuries, the Rajput kingdoms posed a challenge to Muslim invaders who made repeated attempts to vanquish their power. Gradually, however, Rajputs assimilated into the administration of the Mughals (with exceptions such as Maharana Pratap of Mewar who has become an icon of Rajput resistance). They reasserted their power post the decline of the Mughal empire but soon faced another formidable force: the British. The British colonisers eventually subjugated all Rajput states and organised them into a province named Rajputana. The kings were allowed internal autonomy in return for recognising British paramountcy.

After Indian independence in 1947 there began a complex process of the integration of Rajput princely states into the composite State of Rajasthan as we know it today. This happened in many stages with the Rajput Princes merging to initially form two states: the Matsya Union and the Rajasthan Union. Both of these were then merged into Greater Rajasthan which in turn became the State of Rajasthan in 1956 under the States Reorganisation Act, 1956.

### **Post-independence electoral history**

Unlike other newly created states which already possessed a certain degree of cultural unity due to a common language, Rajasthan was an amalgamation of former rival princely states. This physical integration did not immediately lead to an emotional/cultural integration<sup>1</sup>. The latter was slowly, over the succeeding decades. Lodha and Jain<sup>2</sup> divide the post-independence political history of the state into three broad phases.

The first phase, beginning in 1947 and lasting till 1977, electoral politics was dominated by the Indian National Congress. This was an era when the clout of the former Rajput Maharajas was still a force to

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<sup>1</sup> Rima Hooja, *A History of Rajasthan* (New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2006), 1675.

<sup>2</sup> Sanjay Lodha and Nidhi Jain, "Decoding the sweeping BJP victory in Rajasthan," in *Electoral Dynamics in the States of India*, ed. Sandeep Shasti, Ashutosh Kumar and Yatindra Singh Sisodia (New York: Routledge, 2022), 130-131.

be reckoned with. During this phase, Rajasthan was primarily led by the Congress leader Shri Mohanlal Sukhadia who served as Chief Minister for 17 years in all. He has been credited with taking crucial initial steps to develop the social sectors (education and healthcare) in Rajasthan. However, Rajasthan remained insulated from national mainstream politics during this phase.

The second phase, running from 1977 to 1990, saw the decline of the Congress' local leadership due to the rise of the 'high-command' style of party organisation. This decline was accompanied by a steady growth of the Bharatiya Janata Party, led by Shri Bhairon Singh Shekhawat who dominated Rajasthan's politics after the exit of Shri Mohanlal Sukhadia. During this era, Rajasthan began playing a greater role in national level politics. Besides his vision for the state's progress, Shri Bhairon Singh Shekhawat was noted for his acute political instinct with which he knitted together uncanny alliances to form three BJP governments as the CM.

The third phase, starting from 1990 and continuing till date has seen the growing dominance of the BJP and also a consistent bipolarity in electoral politics. What has emerged is a revolving door system where there has been a regular oscillation of power between the INC and BJP since 1993. While the INC has been able to defeat the BJP in alternating assembly elections, the gap between the two (in terms of vote share and seats) has been widening in the Lok Sabha elections, with BJP in the lead. Although the INC won the 2018 assembly elections, its vote share was narrowly higher than that of the BJP and it further faced a resounding defeat in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections in the state.

### **Some important trends in Rajasthan's political history**

Throughout its political history, Rajasthan has witnessed factionalism within the leading political parties. As the former princely states became better integrated, regional loyalties eroded but factionalism shifted to a caste-basis<sup>3</sup>. Factions also arose from personal ambitions of party stalwarts. As early as 1958, the Mohanlal Sukhadia-led government of Congress weathered a major crisis when influential party leaders made allegations against him, demanding his resignation. Shri Ashok Gehlot's government, which came to power in 2018, survived two crises triggered by in-fighting within the party. However, it must be noted that this weakness in party organisation has affected the Congress as well as the BJP. For example, in 1996, a faction of BJP legislators unsuccessfully colluded with state Congress leaders to topple the government of Shri Bhairon Singh Shekhawat<sup>4</sup>.

As in other parts of the country, caste plays an important role in Rajasthan's electoral politics. However, unlike most other states, there is no one single caste that is dominant across Rajasthan. The upper classes namely, Rajputs, Brahmins and Mahajans are spread out across the state but each of them

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<sup>3</sup> K.S Saxena, "Politics in Rajasthan," *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 55, no. 3 (July-September 1994): 304.

<sup>4</sup> [The Times of India, March 12, 2014](#)

constitutes less than 8 percent of the population. The numerically largest caste is that of the Jats but they are concentrated in specific regions. In the absence of a pan-Rajasthan dominant caste, a more unified state-wide political leadership and mobilisation became hard to achieve<sup>5</sup>. In the recent decades, quota-politics has assumed tremendous significance, especially with the granting of OBC status to Jats in 1999 by the BJP-led Union government. This step caused the Jat community to shift its loyalty from the Congress to the BJP. Since then, a number of caste-based movements have sprung up, most notably from the Gurjars<sup>6</sup>.

Commentators have also pointed at the sub-regional dynamics of the state which have shaped people's political choices<sup>7</sup>. The Congress has seen a decline in sub-regions such as Bagar, Shekhawati, Marwar, Dhundhar and Haroti - many of these happen to be more developed regions. At the same time, BJP has gained massive support in these regions. However, its support in the less developed regions of Vagar, Merwara and Matsya regions has not been as strong.

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<sup>5</sup> Lawrence Shrader, "Rajasthan," in *State Politics in India*, ed. Myron Weiner (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), 326.

<sup>6</sup> Sanjay Lodha, "Subregions, Identity and the Nature of Political Competition in Rajasthan," in *Rethinking State Politics in India*, ed. Ashutosh Kumar (New Delhi: Routledge, 2011), 422.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, 424.

## Zonal Level Details

Rajasthan has 50 districts organised into 7 administrative zones/divisions. Of these, 19 were created recently in March 2023<sup>8</sup>. The Aravalli ranges cut across the state, roughly dividing it into two (informal) regions. The region to the north-west of the Aravallis comprises the whole of Bikaner and Jodhpur divisions and small parts of Ajmer and Jaipur divisions. The region to the south-east of the hills includes the Udaipur, Kota, Bharatpur divisions in their entirety and the remaining portions of Ajmer and Jaipur divisions.

**Table 1: Details of Division/Zones in Rajasthan**

Division (no. of districts)	Districts	Vidhan Sabha seats	Major castes	Remarks
Jaipur	Alwar Dausa Dudu Jaipur North Jaipur South Jhunjhunu Khairtal Kotputli Behror Neem-ka-Thana Sikar	50	Brahmin Chamar Gurjar Jat Mahajan Mali Meena	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Jaipur district has over 10% Muslim population</li> <li>2. In Alwar district, Scheduled Castes (SCs) account for 17.2% of the population</li> <li>3. Upper castes (Brahmins, Rajputs, Mahajans) have a large presence here</li> <li>4. Gurjars are an important community</li> </ol>
Ajmer	Ajmer Beawar Bhilwara Deedwana Kuchaman Kekri Nagaur Shahpura Tonk	29	Bhil Brahmin Chamar Jats Mahajans Meena Rajput	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Muslims constitute 12% of Ajmer's population. Ajmer also houses a major site of pilgrimage (Ajmer Sharif Dargah)</li> <li>2. SCs account for nearly one-fourth of Ajmer</li> </ol>
Bharatpur	Bharatpur Deeg Dholpur Gangapur City	19	Brahman Chamar Gurjar Jat	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Bharatpur is a Jat stronghold, sharing close cultural links with Haryana and Western UP</li> </ol>

<sup>8</sup> [The Hindu, March 17, 2023.](#)

Division (no. of districts)	Districts	Vidhan Sabha seats	Major castes	Remarks
	Karauli Sawai Madhopur		Mahajan Mali Meena	
Kota	Baran Bundi Jhalawar Kota	17	Bhil Brahmin Chamar Gurjar Mali Meena	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gurjars and Jats have a significant presence</li> <li>Muslims constitute 16% of Kota district's population</li> </ol>
Udaipur	Chittorgarh Banswara Dungarpur Pratapgarh Rajsamand Salumbar Udaipur	28	Bhil Rajput Brahmin	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Banswara, Dungarpur and Pratapgarh are tribal dominated areas. Banswara has over 76% tribal population</li> <li>Rajputs have had a historically significant presence here</li> </ol>
Jodhpur	Balotra Barmer Jaisalmer Jalore Jodhpur East Jodhpur West Pali Phalodi Sanchore Sirohi	23	Brahmin Jat Mahajan Rajput	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nearly one-fifth (19.3%) of the population of Jodhpur district is Muslim</li> <li>Rajputs and Jats have a major share in the population</li> </ol>
Bikaner	Anupgarh Bikaner Churu Hanumangarh Sri Ganganagar	24	Brahmin Chamar Jat Mahajan Rajput	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SCs constitute 20% of the population</li> <li>Jats are present in large numbers</li> </ol>

## Creation of New Districts

In March 2023, CM Shri Ashok Gehlot announced that Rajasthan would add 19 more districts, taking the total to 50. In August 2023, this decision was approved by the State Cabinet. The state government has allocated a fund of ₹2000 crore for the initial phase of setting up these new districts. While the decision was ostensibly based on the recommendations of the Ram Lubhaya Committee, the demand for new districts has been a long-standing demand across party-lines.

The initial announcement of these districts nine months before the state elections clearly pointed at electoral motives. The choice of new districts, however, requires further discussion. The political implications and possible motivations behind the formation of these districts have been analysed in Table 1(a) given below:

*Table 1(a): New districts and their political implications*

New District	Zone/Region	Political significance
Beawar	Ajmer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There is an important Jat presence in Ajmer region and <b>SCs</b> make up 25% of the population. This can be read as a part of INC's attempt to woo the Jat community</li> <li>2. In both Beawar and Shahpura Assembly seats INC was defeated in 2018. Ajmer city has also been a BJP stronghold. RLTP is another factor which has sprung up in this region</li> </ol>
Shahpura		
Didwana-Kuchaman		
Kekri		
Dudu	Jaipur	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. On the whole, this region was dominated by the INC in 2018 but Khairthal (BSP) was away from INC's reach.</li> <li>2. Dudu also happens to be an <b>SC</b> seat, so this can improve Congress' image in the <b>Dalit</b> community too.</li> <li>3. The MLA of Dudu, Shri Babulal Nagar has been a loyalist of Shri Ashok Gehlot and this could also be a means of rewarding him</li> </ol>
Jaipur		
Jaipur Rural		
Kotputli-Behror		
Khairthal		
Neem ka Thana	Sikar	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sikar has been constituted into a new Division. It happens to be the home-constituency of State Congress Chief Shri Govind Singh Dotasara, a popular Jat leader. This can help raise his stature among Jats in Sikar.</li> </ol>
Jodhpur		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Jodhpur region is an established stronghold of the Congress. However, in Phalodi, Congress lost to the BJP in 2018. Jodhpur is also Shri Ashok Gehlot's home</li> </ol>
Jodhpur Rural		



New District	Zone/Region	Political significance
Phalodi	Jodhpur	turf and he seems intent on securing his hold over it.
Sanchore		2. Jodhpur is crucial for <b>Rajput, Jat and Muslim</b> votes which could get consolidated in favour of INC
Balotra		
Deeg	Bharatpur	1. Bharatpur is arguably the most critical region for <b>Jat</b> votes. But the presence of BSP has been a threat to Congress' dominance in the region.
Gangapur City		2. Deeg MLA Shri Vishwendra Singh is a popular Jat-leader who switched from BJP to INC. This move may be partly intended to retain his loyalty 3. Bharatpur (Gangapur in particular) has a significant <b>Meena and Gurjar</b> population which is being wooed through this move
Salumbar	Udaipur	1. This is the only new district which has been created in a region which is a BJP stronghold (Mewar) 2. <b>ST votes</b> are clearly being targeted through this, as Salumbar is a ST-reserved seat
Anupgarh	Bikaner	1. An SC-reserved seat, Anupgarh was won by BJP in 2018. The new district is expected to sow a pro-Congress sentiment 2. Bikaner region has an important voter base of <b>Dalits</b> and Jats

On the whole, the new districts have been selectively created to serve the ends of wooing important voter groups. Many new districts seem aimed at securing **Jat and SC votes**. Several districts have also been created in the constituencies of loyalists<sup>9</sup> of Shri Ashok Gehlot: Shri Raghu Sharma (Kekri), Shri Vishwendra Singh (Deeg), Shri Babulal Nagar (Dudu), Ramkesh Meena (Gangapur City). This hints at an attempt by Shri Ashok Gehlot to consolidate his position in the party for being viewed as the undoubted CM candidate for Congress.

However, the Congress government faces some difficult challenges in reaping political dividends out of this step. Many areas which had raised the demand of being given a district status but were rejected have risen in protest. These include (but are not limited to): Sujangarh, Bhiwadi, Gudha, Bhinmal and

<sup>9</sup> [The Hindu, 23 March, 2023](#)

Surtagarh<sup>10</sup>. Appeasing the voters from these districts will present a tricky problem. It is worth noting that the tenure of the Ram Lubhaya Committee which recommended the creation of the new districts has been extended - suggesting that demands for more districts are being considered<sup>11</sup>.

### Past Electoral Performance

The following table summarises the electoral performance of major parties in Rajasthan Vidhan Sabha (VS) elections since 2003 and Lok Sabha (LS) elections in Rajasthan since 2004. Seats won by each party have been indicated in brackets next to the vote share (in percentage).

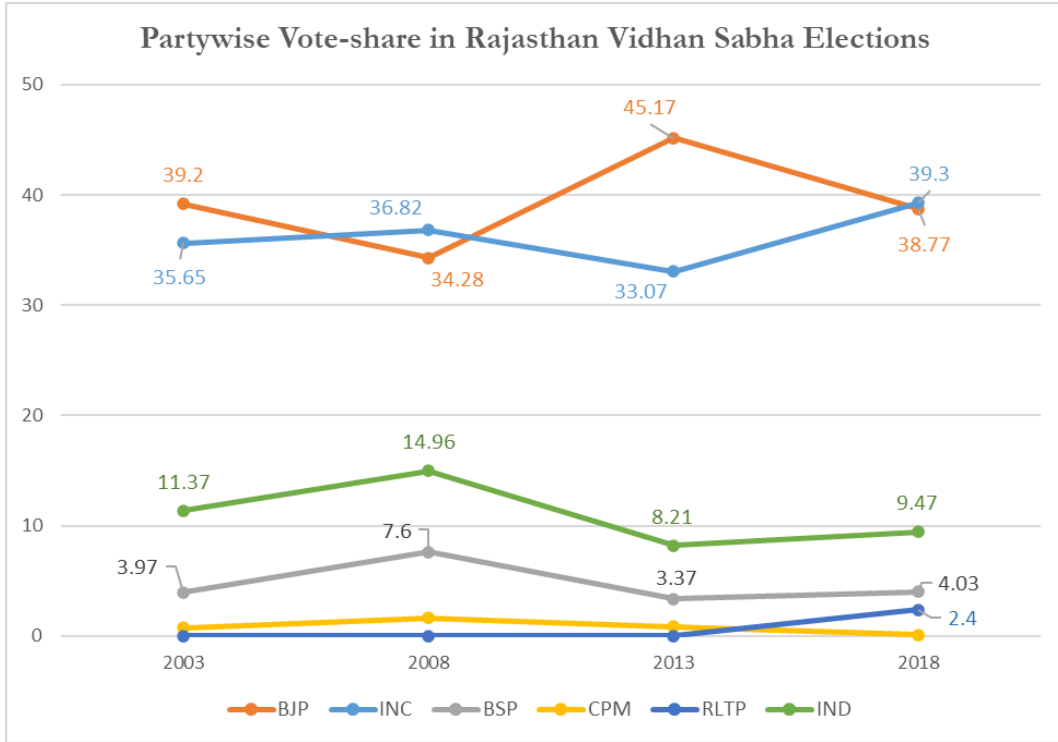
Party	2003 VS	2004 LS	2008 VS	2009 LS	2013 VS	2014 LS	2018 VS	2019 LS
BJP	39.20 (120)	49.01 (21)	34.28 (78)	36.57 (4)	45.17 (163)	55.61 (25)	38.77 (73)	59.06 (24)
INC	35.65 (56)	41.43 (4)	36.82 (96)	47.19 (20)	33.07 (21)	30.73 (0)	39.30 (100)	34.58 (0)
BSP	3.97 (2)	3.16 (0)	7.60 (6)	3.37 (0)	3.37 (3)	2.37 (0)	4.03 (6)	1.08 (0)
CPM	0.77 (1)	0.51 (0)	1.62 (3)	1.27 (0)	0.87 (0)	0.29 (0)	0.12 (0)	0.24 (0)
RLTP	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.40 (3)	2.05 (1)
IND	11.37 (13)	2.72 (0)	14.96 (14)	9.31 (1)	8.21 (7)	6.75 (0)	9.47 (13)	1.08 (0)
Others	9.04 (2)	3.17 (0)	4.72 (3)	2.29 (0)	9.31 (6)	4.25 (0)	5.91 (5)	1.91 (0)

**Table 2:** Party-wise vote-share and seats won in Vidhan Sabha and Lok Sabha elections

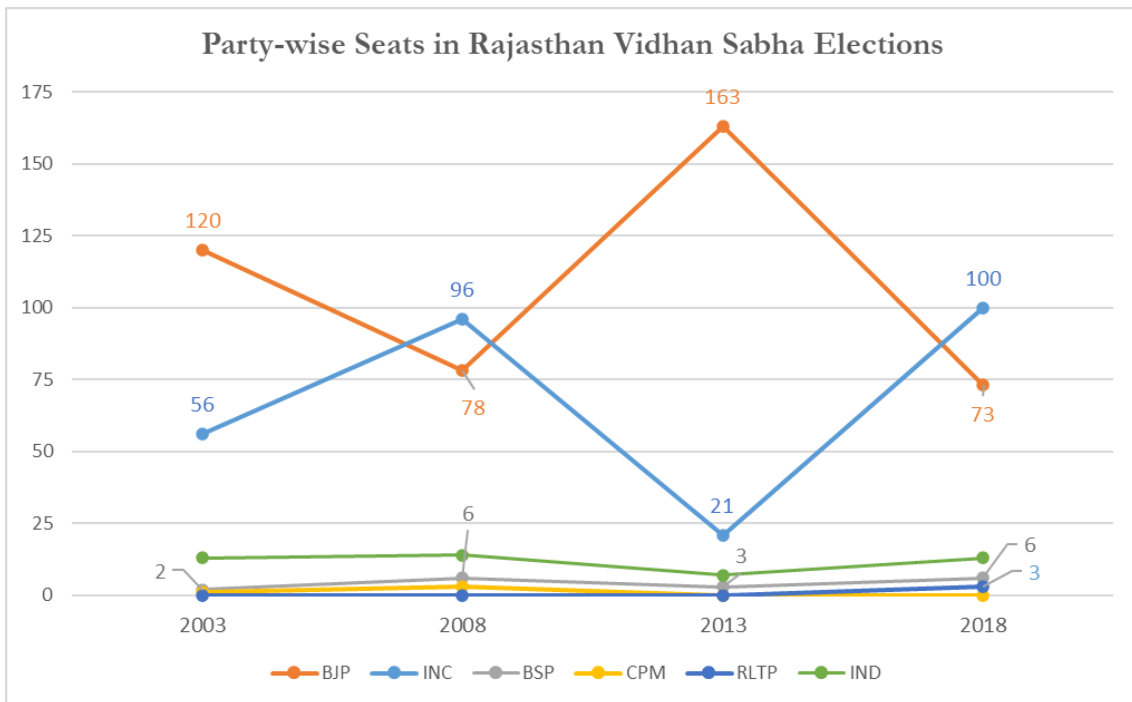
**Source:** Statistical Reports, Election Commission of India

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> [The Times of India, August 5th, 2023](#)



**Graph 1:** Party-wise vote-share in Rajasthan Vidhan Sabha elections across the years



**Graph 2:** Party-wise seats won in Rajasthan Vidhan Sabha elections across the years

## Analysis of Past Election Results

### **2003 Vidhan Sabha Election<sup>12</sup>**

The thumping victory of BJP in the 2003 Assembly elections was unprecedented in the state's electoral history and complex in terms of its reasons. The Ashok Gehlot-led Congress government had satisfactorily managed a drought which had occurred in early 2003. Shri Gehlot had also retained his state-wide popularity throughout his tenure. Yet, the Congress won merely 56 seats, a huge fall from the 153 seats it had won in the 1998 Assembly elections. The BJP, on the other hand, nearly quadrupled its seats from 33 in 1998 to a whopping 120 in this election.

Congress' defeat can be explained in several ways. The Congress vote share suffered splits due to rebel candidates. More importantly, there was rising anti-incumbency against the Congress government due to issues like poor electricity, drinking water shortages across the state, and spurt in unemployment. The Congress failed to take note of its poor performance in the 2001 bye-elections - a signal of growing anti-incumbency. It is interesting that the BJP did not make any notable use of its Hindutva card in its campaign, preferring instead to focus on governance related issues.

A key factor that worked in favour of BJP was effective mobilisation of a wide range of social groups and castes. The Congress, after its victory in 1998, ignored the increasingly pressing demand of the Jats to have a CM from their community. As a result their votes dramatically shifted to the BJP in this election. This was also helped by the grant of OBC status to Jats in 1999 by the BJP-ruled Atal Behari Vajpayee government at the Centre. Another gain for BJP was a considerable shift in votes of SCs and STs towards the BJP and away from the Congress - which was unexpected given the traditional hostility of these groups towards the BJP. The projection of Smt. Vasundhara Raje Scindia (who became the first woman CM of Rajasthan) as the CM-face had a remarkable effect of rallying women-voters in support of the BJP. The turnout of women voters was also crucial.

The reason why the Congress could not win despite the popularity of Ashok Gehlot is that the party relied excessively on their CM's image to garner support for re-election. Their projection of Shri Ashok Gehlot using the slogan "CM No. 1 of India" did not give the expected results. Moreover, the tussle between Shri Ashok Gehlot and the Pradesh Congress Committee chief Smt. Girija Vyas demoralised the party workers.

Another avoidable error on part of the Congress was not replacing the candidates who were identified by the then party President Sonia Gandhi as unpopular. Shri Ashok Gehlot reportedly opposed the move to replace them, lest they join rival parties. The voters, however, were unhappy with the old faces

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<sup>12</sup> 2003 election-analysis is based on: N.S. Gehlot, "Reflections on the 12th Assembly Elections of Rajasthan," *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 64, no. 3 (July-December, 2003): 191-202.

and voted them out. The BJP, meanwhile, had given tickets to 75 fresh candidates of whom 65 won the polls. This farsighted step by the BJP evidently paid off in fighting anti-incumbency in its own seats.

### **2008 Vidhan Sabha Election<sup>13</sup>**

The BJP's defeat in the 2008 Assembly elections was largely brought about by laxity in its campaigning. It is important to note that the Congress, despite emerging as the winner, could not secure a majority of seats (it had won 96 out of 200 seats). As pre-poll surveys conducted by CSDS-Lokniti have shown, there was no state-wide resentment against the Vasundhara Raje-led BJP which won 78 seats. There was a limited, although decisive shift away from the BJP which propelled Congress to its victory.

While the Congress retained about 66% of the voters who supported it in 2003, the BJP could retain only 57% of its supporters. On the whole, however, the BJP's loss was greater than the Congress' gain in terms of seats. This was due to the role played by the BSP in taking away some of BJP's votes - a fact that also explains why the Congress could not secure a majority. The BJP had attracted a significant number of Dalit and Adivasi votes in 2003 but this time the BSP weaned away many of these and even received the support of non-Dalit sections.

The gains made by the BJP in Adivasi and rural votes in the 2003 elections were likewise reversed. In fact, being city-centric was among the concerns about the BJP expressed by the rural voters. The Meena community was unhappy with the BJP's reservation promises to the Gujjars (with whom the Meenas have harboured longstanding tensions) and the unceremonious exit of Kirori Lal Meena from the BJP. In northern Rajasthan, the farmers' agitation due to insufficient electricity for irrigation was effectively leveraged by the Congress in its campaign.

The decisive blow to the BJP resulted from its ineffective campaigning style which lacked the vigour seen in that of the Congress. To begin with, the BJP delayed the announcement of its candidates and the release of its manifesto. It also failed to pacify the leaders who did not get tickets so as to prevent them from contesting as independents or on rival party tickets. The Congress' campaign was vociferous as it played out in the mainstream newspapers and television media where the party targeted the CM Smt. Vasundhara Raje's regal lifestyle and arrogance towards her own party members. It regularly highlighted issues such as shady land deals, crimes against women and widespread corruption.

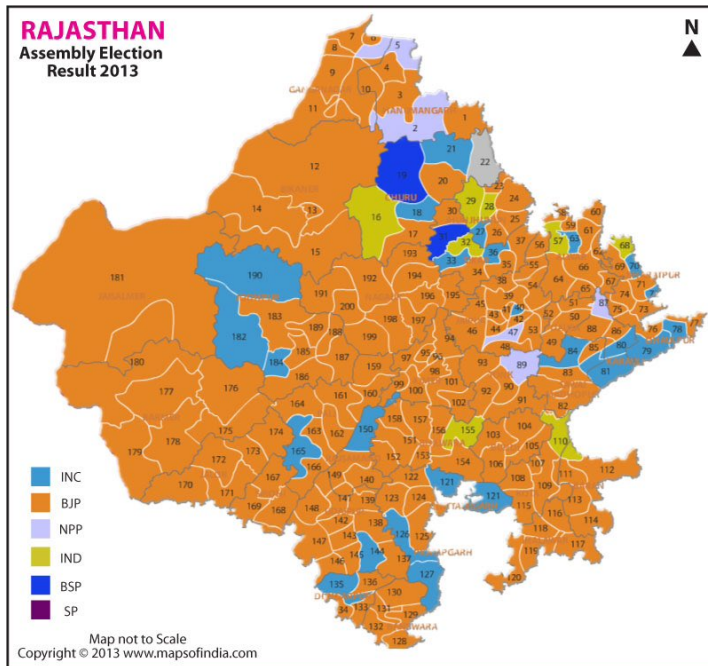
### **2013 Vidhan Sabha Elections**

The 2013 Assembly elections were significant for two reasons. First, the BJP won an unprecedented 163 seats, outdoing even the Congress' 153-seat victory of 1998. The Congress, though it won nearly

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<sup>13</sup> 2008 election analysis is based on: Sanjay Lodha, "Dissatisfaction and a Poor Campaign Defeat BJP," *Economic and Political Weekly* 44, no. 6 (February 7-13, 2009): 23-26.

33% of the votes, was left with a paltry 21 seats - its worst ever performance in the state. Second, this election was also important as part of the run-up to the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. In Rajasthan, the political tradition had been such that the party winning the Vidhan Sabha polls invariably won the most seats from the state in the Lok Sabha polls as well<sup>14</sup>.



The biggest factor that worked to the BJP's advantage was Shri Narendra Modi's prominent role in the election campaign. PM Modi was already being projected as the PM-face of the BJP and his soaring nation-wide popularity gave a huge fillip to the BJP, a fact that was acknowledged even by the newly elected CM Smt. Vasundhara Raje.

The Ashok Gehlot-led Congress government faced what has been termed as 'double anti-incumbency' as the voting public were deeply unhappy about the scam-ridden UPA government<sup>15</sup> at the Centre as well as in

the state. Shri Ashok Gehlot himself had been accused by the BJP of perpetrating a mining scam wherein he allegedly gave sandstone mining contracts to his personal relations. The magnitude of corruption in the Congress was seen when the party gave tickets to two former MLAs who were the key accused in the infamous Bhanwari Devi murder case of 2011. This led to a public outcry which was effectively amplified in the BJP's campaign.

The inability of the government to check inflation was another reason why a large section of the economically weaker sections shifted to the BJP. What was noteworthy was the fact that the Congress' support base among the SCs and STs nearly collapsed and shifted to the BJP<sup>16</sup> - illustrated by the fact that the Congress could not win in a single SC reserved constituency in Rajasthan. At the same time, the Dalit-centric BSP lost half of its seats to the BJP and saw a major dip in its vote-share. The

<sup>14</sup> This trend was broken in 2019 when the BJP won all LS seats in Rajasthan despite losing to INC in the Assembly elections in 2018.

<sup>15</sup> [The Hindu, 8 December 2013.](#)

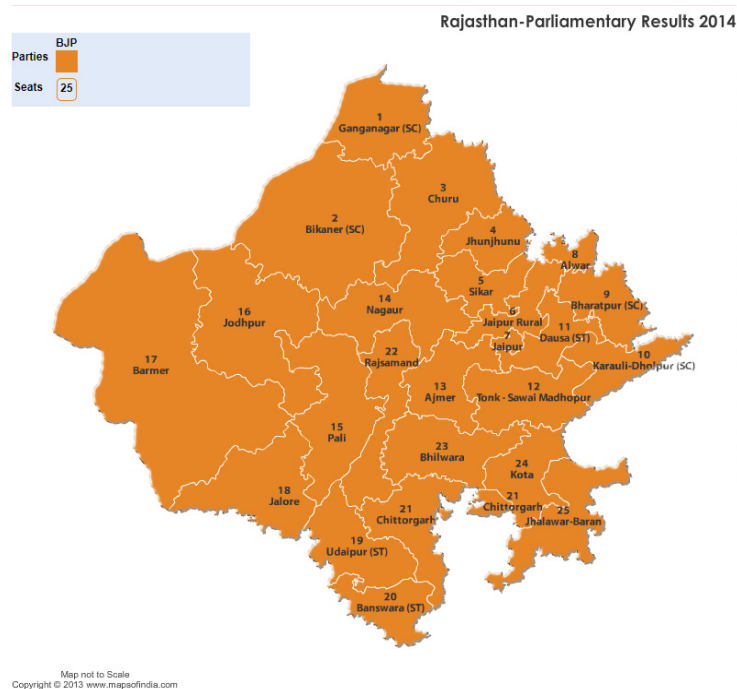
<sup>16</sup> "2013 Legislative Assembly Elections, Rajasthan," *Economic and Political Weekly* 49, no. 6 (February 8, 2014): 90-93.

Congress registered an 8.2% decline in its voteshare among SCs and a 3.1% decline in case of STs whereas the BJP registered an increase of 11.3% and 14.6% in its SC and ST voteshares, respectively<sup>17</sup>.

The poor delivery of Congress government's welfare schemes was another reason for the voters' ire. Some freebie-schemes were announced in the months just before the elections in an attempt to woo poorer voters but even these were marred with serious implementational defects. A free-medicine scheme was tainted with reports of contaminated drugs being given to patients<sup>18</sup>. The thrust given to job-creation and price stabilisation resonated strongly with the voters. An attempt made by the Congress to highlight the resignation tendered by Shri L.K. Advani to the BJP (which was withdrawn very quickly) fell flat because of being effectively countered by the BJP's aggressive campaign riding on PM Modi's personality.

### 2014 Lok Sabha Elections

While the clean-sweep of BJP in Rajasthan during the 2014 General Elections was not a surprise, what was remarkable was the magnitude of the Congress' defeat. Winning all 25 Parliamentary seats in the state, BJP inflicted the worst defeat ever faced by the Congress in the electoral history of the state. It



improved its vote-share by 18% over 2009 LS elections and increased its seats by nearly six times<sup>19</sup>.

It had been a longstanding political tradition in Rajasthan that the victory in the Assembly elections would invariably also win most of the Lok Sabha seats from the state. The 25-seat haul of the BJP in May 2014 came close on heels of its emphatic win in the Vidhan Sabha polls of December 2013. The CM Smt. Vasundhara Raje had launched a campaign for the LS elections under the banner of "Mission 25" - which aimed at winning all 25 Parliamentary seats in the state<sup>20</sup>. An

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 93

<sup>18</sup> [India Today, 4 December 2013.](#)

<sup>19</sup> [Election Commission of India, Statistical Reports of General Election to Lok Sabha, 2014 - Rajasthan.](#)

<sup>20</sup> [The Economic Times, May 16, 2014.](#)

important fact that illustrates the efficacy of the BJP's campaign in Rajasthan is that even those sections of rural people who were the least exposed to television news were more likely to vote for BJP than its rival, the Congress<sup>21</sup>.

The single most important factor that catapulted the BJP was the role of Shri Narendra Modi in the Lok Sabha election campaigns - a factor that boosted the BJP's votes in the Vidhan Sabha elections too. Pre-poll surveys showed that Shri Narendra Modi's popularity had surged to surpass that of Shri Rahul Gandhi, Smt. Sonia Gandhi and Shri Manmohan Singh put together<sup>22</sup>.

As in the 2013 Vidhan Sabha elections, the Congress faced a formidable double anti-incumbency. As the CSDS-Lokniti post-poll survey showed, even those voters who were satisfied with the Ashok Gehlot-led state government had less than 50% chance of voting for it at the Centre<sup>23</sup>. The primary concerns were with corruption, poor infrastructure and unemployment. Welfare schemes launched by Shri Gehlot's government were found to have been poorly targeted, which raised public perception of rampant corruption in the administration. With respect to unemployment, the BJP gained considerable support among the youth of the state and among first-time voters. On the whole, the party benefited from a 14.7 percent increase in voter turnout in the state which rallied more voters against the incumbent regime.

Another crucial aspect of this verdict was the support received by the BJP from across the social spectrum. Gujjars, Jats and Malis all rallied behind Shri Narendra Modi in their bid to oust the Congress government. The party was also able to make inroads into Muslim votes and the Congress consequently saw its Muslim vote-base shrink from the 2009 levels. Dalit and Adivasi votes also swung towards BJP's favour as did the votes of the economically weaker sections who were hit by price-rises and the job-crisis.

### **2018 Vidhan Sabha Elections**

The Congress victory in the 2018 Assembly elections was achieved with an extremely narrow voteshare margin of 0.53 % against the BJP. The BJP won 77 seats as against the Congress' 100 seats. Clearly, the BJP was not defeated as hard as the Congress was in 2013. As one commentator put it, the BJP "was defeated but not disgraced."<sup>24</sup> The Congress' prospects for a more massive mandate were spoiled by some mistakes in the run-up to the elections. For one thing, the Congress did not announce any

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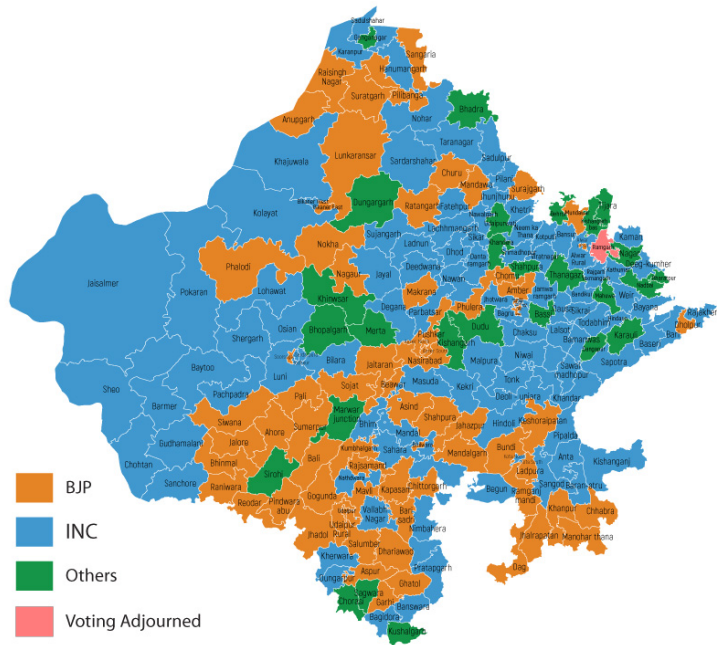
<sup>21</sup> Rahul Verma and Sanjay Kumar, "The Arithmetic and Implications of the 2014 Lok Sabha Elections," *Research Journal of Social Sciences* 22, no. 2 (2014): 24.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, 20-21.

<sup>23</sup> [CSDS-Lokniti, National Election Study 2014](#)

<sup>24</sup> Lodha and Jain, *op cit.*, 132.





CM-face despite Shri Ashok Gehlot being a clear choice (as seen in Lokniti’s pre-poll survey<sup>25</sup>). The BJP, despite allegations of corruption against Smt. Vasundhara Raje, decided to project her as the CM-candidate and this worked well for them. The Congress was also delayed in declaring its list of candidates and when it did so, many frustrated MLAs who were denied a ticket contested as independents and even won.

As for the BJP, a critical error was in not paying attention to grassroots level party

organisation in the light of the by-polls where BJP candidates lost consistently, especially in early 2018<sup>26</sup>. This was so despite Smt. Vasundhara Raje terming these losses a “wake-up call” for the party.

What was especially significant was the fact that many Rajput BJP leaders close to the ministers lost in these by-polls - a signal that the Rajput community was going to vote against the BJP in large numbers. This eventually did happen with many prominent Rajput leaders like Shri Rao Rajendra Singh, Shri Gajendra Singh Khimsar and Shri Rajpal Singh Shekhawat facing defeat in the December 2018 assembly polls. The resentment of the Rajput community can be attributed to several factors<sup>27</sup> such as the denial of a ticket to influential Rajput leader Shri Jaswant Singh in 2014 Lok Sabha elections, Smt. Vasundhara Raje’s opposition to the popular Rajput leader (and Union minister) Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat being appointed as State BJP Chief. The controversy over the Hindi film Padmaavat also added to the ire of the community<sup>28</sup>.

Smt. Vasundhara Raje’s growing distance from the masses further contributed to the weakening of her public image. This was seen in the slogan (which had become popular in many parts of the state): “*Modi tujhse bair nabin, Vasundhara teri khair nabin*” (“Modi, we have no complaints against you, but Vasundhara shall not be spared”).

<sup>25</sup> [CSDS-Lokniti, Rajasthan Pre-Poll 2018 Round II](#)

<sup>26</sup> [The Indian Express, December 12, 2018.](#)

<sup>27</sup> [Hindustan Times, December 12, 2018.](#)

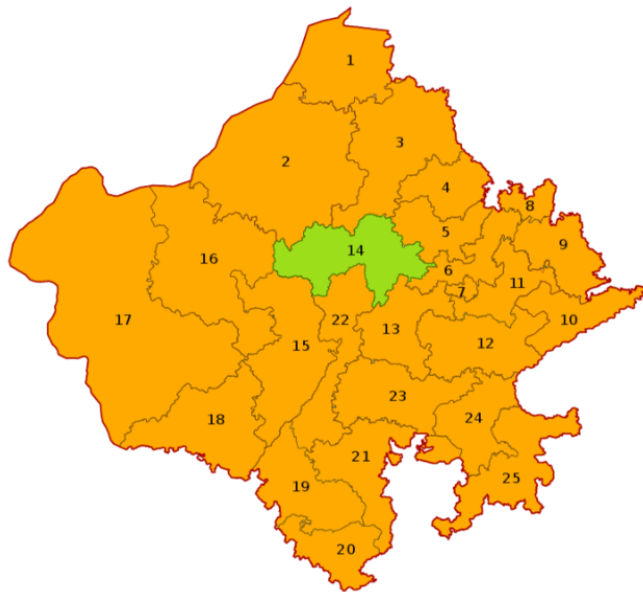
<sup>28</sup> The state government did ban the film in January 2018 but the ban was later quashed by the Supreme Court in February 2018

On the other hand, the Congress campaign was managed by Shri Sachin Pilot whose Gujjar background helped garner a large fraction of Gujjar votes. Sachin Pilot's effective and persistent voice against the failure of the Raje government to fill vacancies in government departments helped mobilise the youth against the incumbent party. He also carried out a state-wide padyatra and achieved the sort of voter-outreach that was missing in the BJP's campaign.

Finally, the BJP was also unable to manage the rebels who quit the party for some reason or the other. Shri Hanuman Beniwal, who was suspended from the party in 2013 launched his Rashtriya Loktantrik Party (RLTP) which won three seats. The Bharatiya Tribal Party (BTP) which won two seats also played a similar role and helped to split the votes to the two major parties.

### 2019 Lok Sabha Elections<sup>29</sup>

The BJP emerged with an ever bigger mandate in the 2019, winning nearly 60% of the votes in Rajasthan and bagging 24 seats out of 25 (one seat was won by its ally RLTP, shown in green in the map below). With this victory, BJP broke the political tradition of Rajasthan that the victor in Vidhan Sabha polls would emerge victorious in the Lok Sabha polls as well. The Congress had won the Vidhan Sabha polls just 6 months before the Lok Sabha elections were held and yet could not win a single Parliamentary seat in the state.



The Congress made several errors in its strategy. First, it began making an earnest effort on campaigning when it was too late. Much time was wasted because of the in-fighting between the CM Shri Ashok Gehlot and the Deputy CM Shri Sachin Pilot. This tussle also demoralised the party workers on ground. Senior Congress leaders in the state were reluctant to contest the elections because of the imminent wave in favour of BJP and consequently the Congress had to field new candidates (children or proteges of veteran leaders) who were routed by incumbent BJP MLAs. Shri Ashok

Gehlot's son Vaibhav Gehlot was defeated by Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat while Rajasthan Assembly Speaker Shri C.P. Joshi's protege Devakinandan Gujar was defeated in Rajsamand - to cite a few examples.

<sup>29</sup> 2019 election analysis based on: Lodha and Jain, *op. cit.*

The Congress campaign tried to highlight the pro-farmer policies of the Gehlot-led government such as a loan-waiver programme, improved electricity in villages etc. but these were no match for the ultimate election-issue in BJP's campaign arsenal: national security. BJP's support base received a significant boost after the Balakot airstrikes carried out in February 2019. More so than the 2014 elections, this election witnessed a more visible role of Hindutva which was evident in the Lokniti post-poll survey after the May 2019 elections. This again could not be effectively countered by the Congress. Eventually, the Congress campaign in the state became increasingly negative and ended up being a reaction to the BJP's campaign.

As was the case in 2014, the massive popularity of Shri Narendra Modi was critical to ensuring the BJP's success. This is why the voters overwhelmingly voted for the BJP despite the popularity of the Congress leaders like Shri Ashok Gehlot within the state. These leaders could not offer any alternative to the stature of Shri Narendra Modi. The popular faith in 'BJP and Modi' was high despite the attempt of the opposition to raise issues like the Rafale deal, corruption and persistent unemployment. This is explained by the success of the BJP's use of media in projecting Shri Narendra Modi's government as strong yet clean and honest. This especially involved highlighting the demonetisation as a measure to flush out black money.

BJP also learnt from its mistakes of 2018 and carried out better social engineering. It tied up with Hanuman Beniwal's RLTP under the NDA umbrella. It also managed to woo Meena community votes by giving their leader Kirori Singh Lal Meena a Rajya Sabha seat. It likewise brought in Kirori Singh Bainsla to give a fillip to the mobilisation of Gujjar votes. The party was also very tactful in keeping Smt. Vasundhara Raje away from the centre-stage by promoting her candidature for BJP's national Vice President.

## Zonal Level Political Analysis

### Jaipur Division

Party/Year	2003	2008	2013	2018
BJP	42.44 %	41.50 %	49.69 %	43.78 %
INC	41.28 %	40.24 %	34.95 %	47.64 %

**Table 3:** *Votes share of BJP and INC in Jaipur Division*  
**Source:** *Statistical Reports, Election Commission of India*

Jaipur division has 10 districts (including the ones newly created in March 2023) which cover the Dhundhar, Matsya Shekhawati regions. Among the prominent BJP leaders of this division are Shri

Satish Poonia (Jat), Shri Kalicharan Saraf (Bania/Mahajan) and Shri Ramlal Sharma (Brahmin) from Jaipur and Shri Jaswant Singh Yadav from Alwar district. Important Congress leaders from this zone include Shri Lalchand Kartaria (Jat), Smt. Shakuntala Rawat (Gurjar by birth), Shri Gopal Lal Meena (Meena) from Jaipur and Shri Mahadeo Singh Khandela and Shri Govind Singh Dotasara (Jat) from Sikar. As pointed out earlier, Jaipur has a significant presence of all major castes. To a certain extent, Jats have a more visible presence given the relative proximity of Jaipur to the Jat dominated region of Bharatpur.

As can be seen from **Table 3**, there has been a close contest between the INC and BJP except in 2013 when a large gap between their vote-shares could be seen. Currently, the BJP controls the Jaipur Municipal Corporation. It is on the whole difficult to call Jaipur a BJP stronghold despite the fact that the BJP has generally outperformed the Congress in urban centres of Rajasthan.

As far as developmental issues of political significance are concerned, urban infrastructure is a pressing demand of the people of Jaipur. The Jaipur-Delhi expressway and the Jaipur-Ajmer highway have witnessed massive congestion. The Jal Jeevan Mission is also not being diligently implemented<sup>30</sup> in Jaipur and Alwar due to which the water-woes of this division are still struggling to find respite. When in 2018 the BJP government tried to lay additional water-supply lines for Alwar district, Congress-backed protests by farmer groups compelled the government to shelve the plan<sup>31</sup>. The unpreparedness of the Gehlot administration for the flood-like situation in July in Jaipur and its vicinity is likely to increase anti-incumbency in the division.

### Ajmer Division

Party/Year	2003	2008	2013	2018
BJP	45.90 %	45.41 %	48.11 %	37.65 %
INC	38.73 %	34.07 %	29.22 %	38.37 %

**Table 4:** *Voteshare of BJP and INC in Ajmer Division*  
**Source:** *Statistical Reports, Election Commission of India*

Ajmer division comprises nine districts. Prominent BJP leaders from this zone include: Shri Vasudev Devnani (Sindhi), Smt. Anita Bhadel (SC), Shri Kailash Meghwal (SC). Shri Hanuman Beniwal (Jat) of the RLTP and Shri Sachin Pilot (Gurjar) of the Congress are other important leaders. Of the 29 constituencies in the division, 5 are reserved for the Scheduled Castes who constitute a large fraction (24%) of its population. Of the leaders mentioned above, Shri Kailash Meghwal is the seniormost, and

<sup>30</sup> [The Economic Times, March 27, 2023.](#)

<sup>31</sup> [The Times of India, November 15 2018.](#)

wields considerable influence over the Bhilwara region. Shri Sachin Pilot has emerged as a formidable Gurjar leader and is widely popular among the youth of his community. Shri Hanuman Beniwal, formerly a BJP member, has been making significant efforts to rally the Jat population of this zone as well as in other parts of Rajasthan.

Ajmer and Bhilwara districts have been BJP strongholds at least since the past 20 years. This is suggested by the fact that the Congress' vote-share was nearly 10% less than BJP even in 2008 - the year in which it won the state elections. In the Nagaur district, RLTP (founded by Shri Hanuman Beniwal) has emerged as a major electoral obstacle for the BJP as well as the Congress. In fact, the BJP's voteshare in Nagaur constituency was reduced to a mere 18.67 % in 2018 and the party could not even finish as the runner up.

Ajmer has long suffered from poor traffic management, a problem worsened by the criss-crossing of railway tracks over the city. Under the Ajmer Smart City Mission, an 'elevated road project' was undertaken which has almost neared its completion. The Congress has been alleging that the Congress-controlled areas (constituencies) have been deliberately excluded from the Ajmer Smart City Mission<sup>32</sup>. The BJP needs to refute these claims by stepping up urban infrastructure in Ajmer beyond the Smart City framework. Waterlogging and poor sanitation are other issues flagged by the people. In Nagaur, the state government under Shri Ashok Gehlot has been able to achieve 100% electrification of all government schools<sup>33</sup> - an achievement which might improve INC's beleaguered vote-share in this district.

### **Bharatpur Division**

<b>Party/Year</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2018</b>
BJP	29.87 %	33.89%	35.02 %	34.24 %
INC	25.65 %	28.70 %	29.29 %	36.80 %

***Table 5: Voteshare of BJP and INC in Bharatpur Division***

***Source: Statistical Reports, Election Commission of India***

Bharatpur division has six districts within its boundaries. Prominent BJP leaders from this zone include Shri Vijay Bansal (Agarwal community). Former CM Smt. Vasundhara Raje also shares family ties with Bharatpur's Bamraulia Jat clan who view her as their matriarch. Congress MLA Shri Vishwendra Singh, son of the last Maharaja of the Princely State of Bharatpur is an influential leader who is popular among the Jat community. Shri Joginder Singh Awana (INC) is an important Gurjar

<sup>32</sup> [Hindustan Times, November 02, 2019.](#)

<sup>33</sup> [Indian Express, March 16, 2021.](#)

leader from Bharatpur whereas Shri Ramkesh Meena and Shri Ramesh Chandra Meena are from the Meena community. Gujjar-Meena tensions are a well known fact in northern Rajasthan and Bharatpur is no exception.

It is only since 2013 that Bharatpur division's political contest has become a two-way struggle between Congress and BJP. Before that, the two parties faced formidable competition from the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and INLD (Indian National Lok Dal). Even in 2018, these smaller parties had eaten away a large chunk of BJP's voteshare. The BJP could not win even a single seat from Bharatpur district where the BSP won two seats (neither of them reserved for SCs) and Rashtriya Lok Dal won one seat. Shri Vishwendra Singh who holds considerable weight in the Jat-dominated region switched from the BJP to the Congress in 2008 over factional differences with the late Shri. Digamber Singh. In June 2022, BJP MLA from Dholpur Smt. Shobharani Kushwah was expelled from the party for cross-voting. There is a need for the BJP to strengthen grassroots leadership in the Bharatpur division.

Bharatpur divisions' drinking water shortage is a serious problem and was a key election issue in 2018 Vidhan Sabha polls. In 2022, the Ashok-Gehlot led government approved the Chambal Dholpur Water Supply Project. However, being a long term one, it is unlikely to yield political dividends for the Congress before the upcoming Assembly Polls. Caste-conflict between the Gujjars and Meenas over the proposal of ST reservation for the former has been raging for nearly 15 years in Bharatpur and Karauli areas<sup>34</sup>. This conflict has even extended to the use of dam water by the two communities. Both BJP and Congress have been wooing both communities in the run up to 2023 Vidhan Sabha polls.

### Jodhpur Division

Party/Year	2003	2008	2013	2018
BJP	43.47 %	35.27 %	50.61 %	40.13 %
INC	39.80 %	41.66 %	38.24 %	45.21 %

**Table 6:** Voteshare of BJP and INC in Jodhpur Division

**Source:** Statistical Reports, Election Commission of India

Jodhpur is geographically a large division, comprising 11 districts which make up nearly one-third of the total area of Rajasthan. The population is largely concentrated in Jodhpur, Barmer, Sirohi and to a lesser extent, in Jaisalmer. The prominent BJP leaders from this zone include: Shri Suryakanta Vyas (Brahmin) and Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat (Rajput, MP and Union Minister). CM Shri Ashok Gehlot's home turf in Jodhpur where he has held on to his constituency of Sardarpura since 1999 -

<sup>34</sup> [The Wire, July 01, 2021.](#)

even in those elections where Congress party was routed. Shri Harish Chaudhary (Jat) is an important Congress leader from Barmer.

Scions of two influential families, Shri Mahendra Singh Bishnoi and Smt. Divya Maderna (Jat) are also incumbent Congress MLAs from this division. Both of them hail from powerful political families (Bishnois and Madernas) that were tainted in the infamous Bhanwari Devi murder case of 2011.

Earlier, Jodhpur region used to be a BJP bastion but with the rising popularity of Shri Ashok Gehlot, the BJP managed to win only 2 seats from this district in 2018. The Jodhpur constituency, however, remains with the BJP. CM Gehlot's popularity is partly due to his Mali (OBC) caste background. As a result, the BJP needs to work on consolidating the OBC votes in Jodhpur to be able to displace Shri Ashok Gehlot from his home turf. Doing so would also be a huge boost to BJP's prestige in the state. Candidate selection is another area that needs to be reworked, considering the fact that the BJP fielded old-timers (sitting MLAs) in 2018 and faced a massive defeat in this division whereas the Congress which swept through this area had fielded fresh faces<sup>35</sup>.

Law and order has emerged as a leading election issue in and around Jodhpur, especially after the recent gangrape of a Dalit student at Jai Narayan Vyas University<sup>36</sup>. The Osian killings of July 2023 where 4 members of a family were hacked and burnt to death has also shocked the state, leading to calls for the CM's resignation. The BJP's campaign has been kicked off by Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, who is seen as a key contender for state level leadership against CM Gehlot. In the past year or so, Hindutva has also become an election-issue, especially with the communal riots seen last year on Eid and Akshaya Tritiya. Recently, the state government evicted Hindu immigrants (from Pakistan) from their slums in Jaisalmer district<sup>37</sup> - an issue which can be raised to the BJP's advantage.

### Kota Division

Party/Year	2003	2008	2013	2018
BJP	42.51 %	44.90 %	51.14 %	46.83 %
INC	34.74 %	41.34 %	35.41 %	45.96 %

**Table 7:** *Voteshare of BJP and INC in Kota Division*  
**Source:** *Statistical Reports, Election Commission of India*

Kota division comprises four districts, making it the smallest division in the state. The prominent BJP leaders from the division include: Shri Om Birla (MP, Kota), Smt. Vasundhara Raje (originally a

<sup>35</sup> [Outlook, December 01, 2018.](#)

<sup>36</sup> [LiveMint, 18 July 2023.](#)

<sup>37</sup> [Swarajya Magazine, March 17, 2023](#)

Maratha has a pan-Rajasthan support) and Shri Prabhu Lal Saini (Jat) and Shri Madan Dilawar (. Key Congress leaders include: Shri Shanti Kumar Dhariwal (Jat) who represents Kota (North) constituency in the Vidhan Sabha. Since this region is a mosaic of various caste groups, no single community enjoys any predominant position.

On the whole, the BJP is on a fairly strong footing in the Kota division. The Congress has never won more than 50% of seats in Kota district in the past 20 years - even in those state elections where it won. Jhalawar district, on the other hand, is thoroughly a BJP bastion due to the presence of leaders like Smt. Vasundhara Raje who represents Jhalrapatan from this district.

While Kota is widely seen as a thriving hub of the coaching industry, the locals have several issues which they think are not being addressed by the administration or by their representatives. Despite having stalwarts like Shri Om Birla and Shri Shanti Kumar Dhariwal among their leaders, the locals feel that their leaders have largely neglected Kota<sup>38</sup>. The poor condition of the roads in the district, along with the inordinate delays in the implementation of the proposed Kota airport are major sources of dissatisfaction among the people. There is also a widespread perception that the city needs to grow beyond the coaching industry to create more jobs for the youth. There is considerable scope for the tourism industry to be developed in the region.

### Udaipur Division

Party/Year	2003	2008	2013	2018
BJP	50.47 %	41.21 %	50.80 %	45.82 %
INC	39.82 %	44.60 %	39.10 %	42.26 %

**Table 8:** *Voteshare of BJP and INC in Udaipur Division*

**Source:** *Statistical Reports, Election Commission of India*

Udaipur division spans across the Mewar region - considered among the most politically influential parts of the state which explains the fervid pace at which the Congress and BJP are seeking to woo voters from here. Mewar was historically a centre of Rajput resistance against foreign rule, exemplified by Maharana Pratap's defiance against the Mughal emperor Akbar. Moreover, it also includes a large tribal belt (containing many ST reserved constituencies) which is dominated by the Bhil tribals. For the past 15 years, Udaipur has been a BJP bastion.

Until recently, the most prominent BJP leader from this region was Shri Gulab Singh Kataria (representing Udaipur constituency) who was appointed as the Governor of Assam in February 2023,

<sup>38</sup> [The Times of India, 05 September 2022.](#)



effectively marking his exit from active electoral politics<sup>39</sup>. In his absence, a power vacuum has emerged in the Mewar region. Another major BJP leader Shri Chandra Prasad Joshi (Brahmin) of Chittor is being viewed as a potential candidate to take Shri Kataria's place. Other than these, Smt. Diya Kumari (Rajput) from Rajsamand is another popular BJP leader from this zone, partly owing to her status as the granddaughter of the last Maharaja of Jaipur, Man Singh II. On the other hand, Congress MLA and Assembly Speaker Shri C.P. Joshi (Brahmin) is also a veteran leader from this region and so is Smt. Girija Vyas (Brahmin), former MP.

Leaders from the important Meena community are spread between both major parties. Shri Mahendrajeet Singh is an important ST leader from Banswara. It should also be noted that the Gujarat-based Bharatiya Tribal Party led by Chhotubhai Vasava had won 2 of the ST reserved seats in Dungarpur in 2018. This party could be co-opted by an electoral alliance to prevent a splitting of votes.

A key political flashpoint in the upcoming election would be the Kanhaiya Lal murder case of June 2022 where a Hindu tailor was beheaded by two Muslim men, in reaction to the formers' comments on the Nupur Sharma controversy<sup>40</sup>. The BJP has consistently projected this issue as a failure of Shri Ashok Gehlot's government to protect the Hindu community from extremist violence and as an instance of its appeasement politics. This issue is also related to the consolidation of OBC votes in Rajasthan as the victim was from the OBC (Teli) community. This is another reason why votes of the Meena community (another OBC group) would be decisive. Besides this issue, the local people of Udaipur have often raised the issue of improving tourism in the 'City of Lakes' by stepping up transport infrastructure and by the cleaning and beautification of the lakes in the city.

### **Bikaner Division**

<b>Party/Year</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2018</b>
BJP	44.79 %	43.18 %	47.29 %	37.44 %
INC	38.01 %	36.39 %	36.06 %	40.31 %

***Table 9: Voteshare of BJP and INC in Bikaner Division***

***Source: Statistical Reports, Election Commission of India***

Bikaner is the northernmost division of Rajasthan and comprises five districts, two of which (Churu and Hanumangarh) share their boundaries with Haryana. Consequently, Jats have a very important place in its politics. There is also a large presence of Brahmins and Dalits in the political landscape of Bikaner. Prominent BJP leaders from this zone include: Shri Arjun Ram Meghwal (MP and Union

<sup>39</sup> [Indian Express, 24 May 2023](#)

<sup>40</sup> [India Today, 30 June 2023.](#)

Minister, hails from Dalit community), Shri Rajendra Rathore (Rajput, also Leader of Opposition in Vidhan Sabha), Shri Rahul Kaswan (MP, belongs to Jat community), Smt. Sidhi Kumari (Rajput), and Shri Abhishek Matoria (Jat). Shri Rahul Kaswan hails from a local political family of Churu whereas Smt. Sidhi Kumari is descended from the erstwhile Royal family of Bikaner and enjoys considerable popularity among the local population. Congress' Bhanwar Singh Bhati (a minister in the Gehlot government) is also a notable leader from this zone.

Bikaner is not a stronghold of either the BJP or the Congress. Till 2018, the BJP did have an upper hand in the major urban centres but its hold had weakened after the 2018 polls. Bikaner (East) and Churu, however, remain firmly in BJP's hands as the local leadership has wide popular appeal. It is noteworthy that in the 2018 Vidhan Sabha elections, two seats were won by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) - one each in Bikaner and Hanumangarh districts. From Sri Ganganagar seat, an independent candidate and a Congress rebel Shri Raj Kumar Gaur had won the polls.

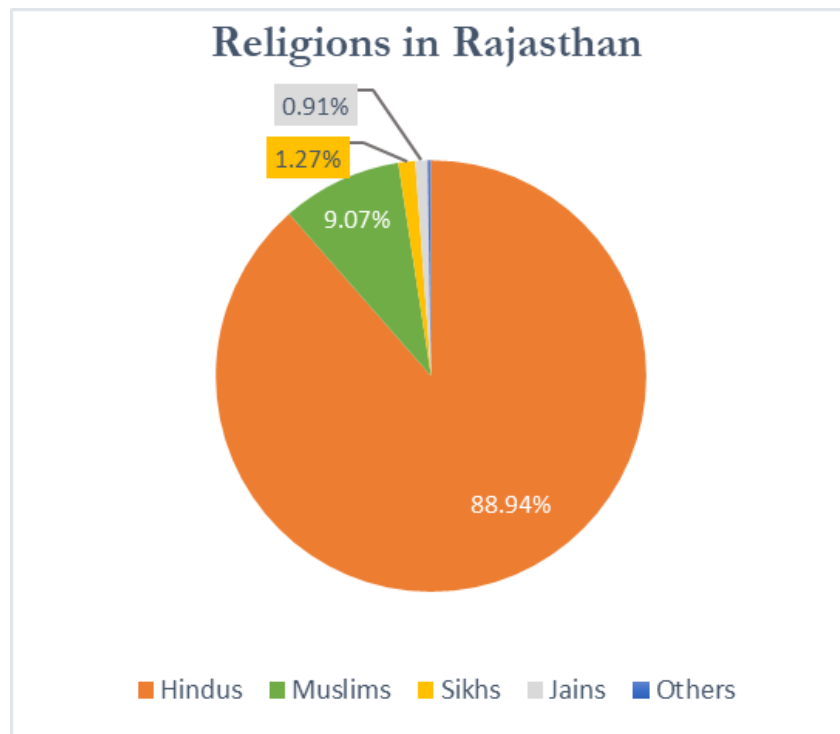
The thrust of BJP's campaign for the upcoming election seems to be focused on wooing the Jats, Dalits and Brahmin voters<sup>41</sup>. A communal flashpoint has emerged with a recent case wherein a Muslim school teacher and a female student in a same-sex relationship eloped. This is widely being seen as a case of abduction and possible conversion and Shri Rajendra Rathore has taken up the cause of the victim's family<sup>42</sup>. On the developmental front, Shri Narendra Modi has recently inaugurated several infrastructure projects in Bikaner, as poor connectivity is among the primary concerns being raised against Shri Ashok Gehlot's administration.

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<sup>41</sup> [India Today, 07 July 2023.](#)

<sup>42</sup> [The Times of India, 06 July 2023.](#)

## Major Voter Groups



**Graph 3:** Religious groups in Rajasthan;  
**Source:** Census of India, 2011

Caste	Percentage of Population
Jat	9%
Brahmin	8%
Mahajan	7%
Chamar	7%
Rajput	6%
Bhil	6%
Gurjar	5%
Meena	5%

**Table 10:** Important Caste groups among Hindus  
**Source:** Lodha 2011, pp. 406

As pointed out earlier, Rajasthan's caste composition is complex in the sense that there is no single caste group that is numerically predominant such as the Marathas in Maharashtra or the Jats in Haryana and the Lingayats of Karnataka. The Jats are the largest caste group but they too constitute barely 10% of the population. The historically powerful Rajput community is nearly half the size of the Jat community. The Rajputs, Brahmins and Mahajans - traditionally viewed as the upper/privileged castes - are spread out across Rajasthan and so are the Chamars (SCs). Jats, along with other groups such as Malis are classified as OBCs, who together constitute about 50% of Rajasthan's population.

### **Jats**

Numerically the largest caste in Rajasthan (nearly 10% of the population), the Jats comprise of a large number of sub-castes such as Ahlawat, Beniwal, Dhaliwal, Kharal, Poonia, Teotia, Maderna, Garhwal, Kaswan, Nehra, Johiya etc. They are traditionally a landowning agricultural community and have considerable heft in the electoral politics of Rajasthan, so much so that both BJP and Congress had appointed Jats as their state party presidents (before BJP replaced Shri Satish Poonia with Shri Chandra Prasad Joshi in March 2023). Jats are highly influential in Bikaner (Churu and Hanmangarh), Jaipur (Sikar and Jhunjhunu) and Bharatpur<sup>43</sup> (which was formerly a Jat kingdom).

Since Independence till the 1990s, Jats favoured the Congress in the Vidhan Sabha elections. After BJP took up the cause of OBC reservation for Jats, resulting in Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee's government recognising Jats as OBCs in 1999, Jats have swung in favour of the BJP<sup>44</sup>. However, Jats expressed widespread discontent over Smt. Vasundhara Raje's government (owing to agrarian distress) in the 2018 elections and BJP lost out on a large number of Jat votes. The emergence of Shri Hanuman Beniwal's RLTP has also diverted Jat votes. Presently, both Congress and BJP are seeking to woo this community, one of whose primary demands is a Jat CM for Rajasthan.

**Table 11:** Major Leaders from the Jat community

<b>Name</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Responsibilities held</b>
Shri Satish Poonia	BJP	Ex-BJP State President
Shri Govind Singh Dotasara	INC	INC State President
Shri Rameshwar Dudi	INC	Ex Leader of Opposition in State Assembly
Shri Shanti Kumar Dhaliwal	INC	Minister of Urban Development and Housing

<sup>43</sup> [The Economic Times, December 07, 2018.](#)

<sup>44</sup> Lodha, *Subregions in Rajasthan*, 422

Name	Party	Responsibilities held
Shri Hanuman Beniwal	RLTP	MP, Nagaur
Shri Vishwendra Singh	INC	Minister of Tourism
Shri Subhash Maharia	BJP	ex-MP, Sikar

### **Brahmins**

Accounting for about 8 percent of the state's population, Brahmins are spread out across Rajasthan and are not concentrated in specific regions. The Brahmin community subsumes a large number of sub-castes such as: Joshi, Vyas, Gaur, Bias, Pareek, Shrimal, Sharma, Dadheech, Purohit and Jangid. Brahmins have historically played an important role in Rajasthan's politics - four former CMs have been Brahmins - but their role has diminished in the past thirty years or so. Nevertheless, they remain an important vote-bank - signified by the appointment of Shri Chandra Prasad Joshi as the new State BJP President in place of Shri Satish Poonia.

Traditionally in Rajasthan, as in many other states, Brahmins have been a loyal support base for the BJP. A recent illustration of the same can be found in the Brahman Mahapanchayat organised at Jaipur in March 2023 which was largely attended by Brahmin leaders from the BJP. Some degree of disenchantment was witnessed before the 2018 Vidhan Sabha polls but the provision created for upper castes under EWS quota is expected to have lifted Brahmin sentiments in favour of BJP.

**Table 12:** Major Leaders from the Brahmin community

Name	Party	Responsibilities held
Shri Chandra Prasad Joshi	BJP	BJP State President
Shri C.P. Joshi	INC	Speaker of the Rajasthan Assembly
Shri Ghanshyam Tiwari	BJP	MP (Rajya Sabha)
Shri B.D. Kalla	INC	Minister of Education
Smt. Suryakanta Vyas	BJP	MLA
Shri Arun Chaturvedi	BJP	ex-MLA
Smt. Girija Vyas	INC	ex-MP

## Rajputs

Rajputs constitute about 6% of Rajasthan's population, although in recent times some have put the figure at 8%. The important sub-castes within the Rajput community include: Rathor, Sisodia, Kachhwaha, Bundela, Gohil, Chavda, Bhati, Jadaun, Parmar and Chauhan - although many other communities have also claimed Rajput status. While Rajputs dominated the political landscape of Rajasthan in the pre-independence era, their predominance has been subdued in the decades after Independence. Only one CM in Rajasthan's electoral history has been a Rajput i.e., Shri Bhairon Singh Shekhawat and even that was over 25 years ago.

Despite this, Rajputs remain quite influential in Rajasthan politics given their distribution across almost all of Rajasthan's sub-regions. Traditionally, Rajputs were loyal supporters of the BJP whose predecessor the Bharatiya Jan Sangh took up the cause of Rajput Maharajas and zamindars vis a vis land reforms of the Congress<sup>45</sup>. In 2018 however, Rajputs sharply swung away from the BJP and voted for Congress in large numbers due to certain caste-based grievances such as the refusal of the BJP high command to nominate Rajput leader Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat as the CM-face. In the run-up to 2023 elections, BJP as well as Congress are seeking to woo Rajput votes by co-opting the legacy of Shri Bhairon Singh Shekhawat in their campaigns<sup>46</sup>.

**Table 13:** Major Leaders from the Rajput community

Name	Party	Responsibilities held
Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat	BJP	Union Minister (Jal Shakti)
Shri Rajendra Rathore	BJP	Leader of Opposition
Shri Pratap Singh Kachariyawas	INC	Minister of Food and Civil Supplies
Shri Prabhu Lal Saini	BJP	Ex-Minister of Agriculture
Smt. Diya Kumari	BJP	MP, Rajsamand
Shri Narpat Singh Rajvi	INC	MLA, Chittorgarh

## Gurjars

Gurjars account for about 5% of the state's population but have been viewed as electorally significant in a large number of seats. They are largely concentrated in the Hadoti (Kota division) and Dhundhar

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<sup>45</sup> Shrader, *op. cit.*, 354

<sup>46</sup> [Indian Express, 22 May 2023.](#)

(Jaipur division) regions. Their community subsumes numerous subcastes such as Awana, Bainsla, Bhadana, Meehlu, Bhiduri, Kunduana, Amolia, Balasiya and Karahana.

The Gurjar community has been divided in its support to BJP and the Congress. In 2018, no Gurjar leader from the BJP could get elected to the Vidhan Sabha, owing to widespread discontent against the Raje-government on its handling of the Gurjar agitation (for reservations) in which nearly 70 Gurjars were killed<sup>47</sup>. The role of Shri Sachin Pilot as a widely popular Gurjar leader has further strengthened the community's inclination towards the Congress albeit there may still be some discontent over his dismissal as Deputy CM in 2020. In August 2023, the Gehlot-government announced a 6% reservation for Most Backward Classes (MBC) within the OBCs (who already have 21% reservation in the state). This move is, to a large extent, aimed at securing Gurjar votes as they are the most prominent MBC.

**Table 14:** Major Leaders from the Gurjar community

Name	Party	Responsibilities held
Shri Sachin Pilot	INC	Ex-Deputy Chief Minister
Shri Vijay Bainsla	BJP	President of Gurjar Aarakshan Sangharsh Samiti
Shri Shakuntala Rawat	INC	MLA, Bansur
Shri Ashok Chandna	INC	Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs
Shri Indraj Singh Gurjar	INC	MLA, Viratnagar
Shri Joginder Singh Awana	INC	MLA, Nadbai

### Meena

Meenas are a Scheduled Tribe that account for 5-6 % of the state's population. They include a number of sub-castes such as Padiyar Meena, Bhil Meena, Zamindar Meena, Rawat Meena, Thakhur Meena etc. They are electorally significant in the ST reserved constituencies which are 25 in all. Their populations are mainly concentrated in Eastern Rajasthan, specifically in the regions around Kota and Jaipur and to a lesser extent in Ajmer and Nagaur.

The Meena community has traditionally voted for the Congress but it had sharply switched to the BJP in 2013 before again returning to the Congress in 2018. Veteran BJP leader Shri Kirori Lal Meena's return to the BJP after a 10-year hiatus away from the party did not pay off well, as only one out of 13

<sup>47</sup> [Indian Express, 30 January 2023.](#)

seats in Eastern Rajasthan were won by BJP in 2018<sup>48</sup>. In 2020, another popular Meena leader, Shri Harish Meena, switched from the BJP to Congress.

**Table 15:** Major Leaders from the Meena community

Name	Party	Responsibilities held
Shri Kirori Lal Meena	BJP	MP, Rajya Sabha
Shri Harish Meena	INC	MLA, Deoli-Uniara
Murari Lal Meena	INC	Minister of State for Agriculture
Parsadi Lal Meena	INC	Minister of Health
Ramesh Chandra Meena	INC	Minister of Panchayati Raj
Kailash Chandra Meena	BJP	MLA, Garhi
Gopi Chand Meena	BJP	MLA, Aspur

### **Scheduled Castes (including Chamars)**

Though not a single caste group in themselves, Scheduled Castes constitute nearly 18% of Rajasthan's population - larger than even the Jats. The SCs are spread out across the state. The largest sub-group, the Chamars, account for 7% of the population. Other SC groups include Bairwa, Meghwal, Koli/Kori, Dom, Kamad, Kanghar, Mahar, Salvi, Sargara, Thori, Turi, Dhed etc. As of now, 34 Assembly seats are reserved for SC candidates.

The Scheduled Castes have generally supported the Congress. There are variations, however. While Bairwas have usually supported the Congress, the Koris have been BJP voters. It must be noted that in 2013, the Congress could not win a single SC reserved Constituency in the Assembly polls - largely driven by dissatisfaction with the government on developmental issues as well as the changes made to the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. Another factor has been the BSP which captured six seats in 2018. The recent elevation of Shri Arjun Ram Meghwal as the Union Law minister is partly an attempt by the BJP to woo Dalit voters in Rajasthan. Over the years, BJP's voteshare among the Dalits has been improving and in 2018 there was only a 1.6% gap in voteshare, in favour of the Congress<sup>49</sup>.

**Table 16:** Major Dalit leaders in Rajasthan

<sup>48</sup> [Hindustan Times, December 13, 2018.](#)

<sup>49</sup> [India Today, July 22, 2023](#)



Name	Party	Responsibilities held
Shri Arjun Ram Meghwal	BJP	Union Minister for Law and Justice
Shri Kailash Chandra Meghwal	BJP	Ex-Speaker and incumbent MLA, Shahpura
Smt. Anita Bhadel	BJP	MLA, Ajmer South and ex-Minister for Women and Child Development
Shri Bharosi Lal Jatav	INC	MLA, Hindaun
Shri Prashant Bhairwa	INC	MLA, Niwai
Shri Parasram Mordiya	INC	MLA, Dhod
Smt. Manju Meghwal	BJP	MLA, Jayal and ex-Minister for Women and Child Development

## Major Cohorts

There are a large number of non-governmental organisations and pressure groups in Rajasthan, representing different communities and classes. The important ones which have had a large following and a certain degree of influence on policy makers are the following:

### Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS)

Founded in 1990, MKSS works to secure the rights of farmers and workers in the economically backward region of Central Rajasthan. It is best known for leading the state-wide protests for right to information legislation in the 1990s. It describes itself as an independent non-party political organisation.

Central Rajasthan is drought-prone and the government had been organising Famine Relief Works to provide employment to the poor. But these were riddled with corruption and non-implementation. To bring the culprits (bureaucrats and local politicians) to the book, the MKSS organised a series of jan-sunwais (public hearings or social audits) in the early 1990s wherein they obtained records like muster rolls and bills of payments and expenditure by the government<sup>50</sup>. These were then cross-checked using testimonies of the villagers (beneficiaries of government schemes).

This exercise exposed the massive leakages in the usage of government funds. Following massive dharnas and rallies, especially in Jaipur, the Rajasthan government eventually agreed to bring a law

<sup>50</sup> Bhatnagar et al, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, Working Paper (World Bank, 2003).

providing the right to information to citizens. The Rajasthan Right to Information Act, 2000 came into force in 2001. Four years later, the Right to Information Act, 2005 (RTI Act) was passed by the Parliament. MKSS continues to work for ensuring accountability of government functionaries through effective implementation of the RTI Act and pressuring the government to control agricultural prices<sup>51</sup>.

### **Shri Kshatriya Yuvak Sangh (SKYS)**

Founded in 1946 by Shri Tan Singh in Jaipur, SKYS is very different from other Rajput-based groups like the Karni Sena which has largely made use of violent, confrontational tactics to push forth demands for reservations for Rajputs. SKYS is a voluntary organisation whose stated aim is to “re-establish the Kshatriya culture in society”<sup>52</sup> and seeks to achieve this through peaceful, constructive work. The organisation holds a large number of camps throughout the year in which young men (and since 1995, also women) mainly from the Rajput community are trained in social work and participate in organising cultural activities. The SKYS, over the decades, has acquired a large following among the Rajputs - attested to by the huge attendance seen in 75th anniversary celebrations of SKYS in December 2021. The rally held on this occasion was attended by all major Rajput politicians hailing from Rajasthan, including Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawt and Shri Rajendra Rathore<sup>53</sup>. While not a professedly political organisation, SKYS can still play an important role in the mobilisation of the Rajput community.

### **Gurjar Aarakshan Sangharsh Samiti**

Emerging as the main pressure group for demanding reservations for the Gurjars in Rajasthan, the Gurjar Aarakshan Sangharsh Samiti held protests in 2007-08 which led to the Gurjars being recognised as a Special Backward Class in 2008 - giving them 5% reservation in government employment. However, the implementation of this provision has been marred with judicial battles with the Rajasthan HC staying the process several times<sup>54</sup>.

In 2020, Shri Kirori Singh Bainsla, who had been leader of the Samiti since 2004, led protests reiterating the demands, but also emphasising on the demand to be recognised as a Scheduled Tribe. The community threatened another agitation in late 2022, which compelled another round of talks with the Gehlot-led government. Other demands of the Samiti include filling vacancies in government employment, scholarships for Gurjar youth and an increase in the budget of the Devnarayan Board set up for the welfare of the Gurjar community<sup>55</sup>. This pressure group has not hesitated to adopt

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<sup>51</sup>M <https://mkssindia.org/about/KSS>

<sup>52</sup> [Shri Kshatriya Yuvak Sangh](#)

<sup>53</sup> [India Today, 02 January 2022.](#)

<sup>54</sup> [The Wire, 19 October 2020.](#)

<sup>55</sup> [Economic Times, November 12, 2020,](#)

disruptive tactics including blocking of railway lines to force the government to the negotiating table. In 2007-08, nearly 70 Gurjars were killed in clashes with the police and in 2020, there were at least three such deaths.

### **Jat Mahakumbh**

Jat Mahakumbh is a massive congregation of Jats and Jat-organisations from across Rajasthan. It held its most recent gathering at Vidhyadhar Nagar in Jaipur on 5th March 2023. It was convened by Shri Ramlal Meel, a veteran Jat leader. The massive gathering was attended by lakhs of Jats from the state - which can be read as a show of strength by the community to push parties to take its demands seriously in the run-up to the upcoming assembly elections. The key demands raised in March 2023 meet were<sup>56</sup>: (a) a Jat CM for Rajasthan; (b) raising the OBC quota reservation in Rajasthan from 21% to 27%; and (c) expediting the work of setting up a Tejaji Board for the welfare of Jats and other farming communities. The political heft of this cohort can be gleaned from the fact that all major Jat leaders, across party lines, were present in the meeting and even spoke to the Jats gathered. While the farmer leader Shri Ramesh Tikait was among the speakers, Jat leader Shri Hanuman Beniwal had absented himself from the event. Shri Ramlal Meel has said that the Jat community should aim for securing at least 50 seats in the upcoming Assembly elections<sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> [Dainik Bhaskar, 05 March 2023.](#)

<sup>57</sup> [The Hindu, 13 March 2023.](#)

## BJP - Organisation

The Bharatiya Jan Sangh, precursor of today's BJP, had a significant presence in Rajasthan right from 1952 when it won 8 seats in the Assembly and by 1962 raised its tally to 15 seats. But it was not until 1977 that the Janata Party (of which the Jan Sangh was a part) formed the government with Shri Bhairon Singh Shekhawat as the CM. Since 1993, the BJP has formed governments alternatingly with the Congress.

*Table17: Key leaders and office-bearers*

Name	Position	Caste
Shri Chandra Prasad Joshi	State President	Brahmin
Shri Balaknath Yogi	State Vice President	Yadav
Shri Chunni Lal Garasiya	State Vice President	Bhil (ST)
Shri Sukhbhir Jaunpuriya	State Vice President	Brahmin
Shri C.R. Chaudhary	State Vice President	Jat
Shri Narayan Panchariya	State Vice President	Brahmin
Shri Sardar Ajay Pal Singh	State Vice President	Sikh
Shri Mukesh Dadhich	State Vice President	Brahmin
Smt. Santosh Ahlawat	State Vice President	Jat
Shri Prabhulal Saini	State Vice President	Rajput
Shri Jitendra Gothwal	State Vice President	Jat
Shri Shravan Singh Bagdi	State Vice President	Bhil (ST)
Shri Bhajanlal Sharma	General Secretary	Brahmin
Smt. Diya Kumari	General Secretary	Rajput
Shri Jagveer Chhaba	General Secretary	Jat
Shri Damodar Agarwal	General Secretary	Bania
Shri Motilal Meena	General Secretary	Meena

Name	Position	Caste
Shri Panjak Gupta	State Treasurer	Bania
Shri Rajendra Rathod	Leader of Opposition	Rajput
Shri Satish Poonia	Deputy Leader of Opposition	Jat
Shri Prahlad Joshi	Election-in charge (also Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs)	Brahmin

Given the caste-ridden politics of Rajasthan, BJP's endeavour has been to satisfy different caste groups by appointing leaders to strategic positions, as can be clearly seen from **Table 17**. The State President, Shri Chandra Prasad Joshi is a Brahmin. Until March 2023, the State President was Shri Satish Poonia who is from the Jat community that has considerable political heft in Rajasthan. Since then, he has been the deputy Leader of Opposition in the Vidhan Sabha. The leader of opposition is Shri Rajendra Singh Rathod, a Rajput. **Jats and Brahmins currently dominate the state party organisation**, as Table 17 shows. But the party has also sought to give representation to Rajputs, Banias, Bhils and Meenas and to a lesser extent, to Gurjars among the office-bearers.

### Morchas

Rajasthan BJP has a total of seven morchas representing different interest groups in the state. These morchas have been integrated in the *Nahi Sabega Rajasthan* campaign of the State BJP, with each raising pertinent issues related to Shri Ashok Gehlot's governance. Under this broad campaign, Morchas have begun conducting their respective outreach programmes through rallies, dharnas and gheraos in various parts of Rajasthan. Table 18 summarises the issues being brought to fore by the various morchas:

**Table 18:** Rajasthan BJP Morchas and their Presidents

Morcha	President	Activities/Issues raised
Yuva Morcha	Shri Ankit Chechi	RPSC paper-leak scandal
Mahila Morcha	Smt. Raksha Bhandari	Rising crimes against women
Kisan Morcha	Shri Bhagirath Chaudhury	Crop-damage due to untimely rains, promotion of farmer schemes launched by the

Morcha	President	Activities/Issues raised
		BJP-led Central government
SC Morcha	Shri Kailash Meghwal	Mounting atrocities against Dalits and Adivasis in Rajasthan
ST Morcha	Shri Narayan Meena	
Alpsankhyak (Minority) Morcha	Shri Hamid Khan Mewati	Deficiencies of the Gehlot government in catering to the needs of minorities

### **Infighting issues in the BJP**

So far, the BJP has adopted the policy of campaigning using the face of Shri Narendra Modi who has made several visits to the state for inaugurating infrastructure projects in various districts. The official stance has been to promote “Team Rajasthan” and not any particular CM candidate<sup>58</sup>.

The impasse over the CM-face is due to persistent in-fighting in the BJP which has been going on since the party lost the 2018 elections in Rajasthan. Former CM Smt. Vasundhara Raje was sidelined in the years following 2018 and was given a nominal position in the national leadership as National Vice President. It is believed that she had fallen out of favour with the High Command due to her autocratic style of governing by relying only on bureaucrats<sup>59</sup>, which alienated her from other leaders and the party workers.

Shri Satish Poonia was appointed the BJP State President and he was seen as a leading contender for the CM post, in place of Smt.Vasundhara Raje. Elevating Poonia was also meant to secure the Jat votebank as the Jats have been clamouring for a CM from their community. However, this was not all. The Rajputs have also been demanding a CM from their community and this led to speculations about Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat and Shri Rajendra Singh Rathore also being in the fray for being the CM candidate<sup>60</sup>. All throughout this tussle, Smt. Vasundhara Raje had been holding her own rallies across the state, asserting her enduring popularity among the masses.

Since early 2023, the party has begun taking serious measures to control the infighting within its ranks. Shri Satish Poonia was not given an extension as the State President, which would have suggested that he was the party’s CM candidate. Instead, Shri Chandra Prasad Joshi, a Brahmin, was made the State

<sup>58</sup> [The Print, 25 August 2021](#). Also see [The New Indian Express, 29th July 2023](#)

<sup>59</sup> [The Hindu Frontline, July 13 2023](#).

<sup>60</sup> [The Hindu, 08 February 2023](#).

President in March 2023. Shri Chandra Prasad Joshi is a choice to which Smt. Vasundhara Raje is less likely to object<sup>61</sup>, and his appointment was made partly to mend ties with her.

### **Current Strategies: CM-face, election campaign issues**

Smt. Vasundhara Raje has an appeal among voters from all castes, though she is herself a Scindia (Maratha) whereas Shri Satish Poonia's support-base is largely limited to Jat dominated areas. The losses faced by the party in the by-polls in Rajasthan<sup>62</sup> also indicated the inadequacy of the leadership provided him and the need to bring Ex-CM Raje back to the fore. Thus, despite not declaring an 'official' CM-candidate, the BJP has **unofficially decided to project Smt. Vasundhara Raje as the CM-face.**

Moreover, BJP's defeat in the Karnataka Assembly elections this year has also offered a clear lesson: that a strong local leadership is essential and an overreliance on national leadership can be unwise. In Karnataka, senior leaders such as Jagdish Shettar were sidelined, causing defections to the Congress<sup>63</sup>. While such an extreme eventuality is not likely in Rajasthan, it does indicate that the party will continue to count on the support commanded by its senior leaders.

The BJP's election strategy so far has been to highlight the misgovernance and corruption in Shri Ashok Gehlot's regime as well as the rising menace of crimes against women and Dalits. Shri J.P. Nadda, BJP National President, had launched the 'Nahi Sahega Rajasthan' campaign which is also being aggressively run on social media. The important thing would be to hold the party together by taking leaders from different communities along in the campaign and ticket distribution process.

### **Congress - Organisation (Rajasthan Pradesh Congress Committee)**

As in most states, the Congress dominated the electoral landscape of Rajasthan in the initial years after the state was formed. But unlike many other states, it has not only survived in Rajasthan but has remained a credible challenger to the BJP. Since 1993, it has formed three governments under Shri Ashok Gehlot as the CM and each time, it has been voted out of power. In the coming elections, therefore, Rajasthan Congress is facing a 25 year old pattern of revolving door electoral politics.

### **Major Leaders and Office-holders**

The Rajasthan Pradesh Congress Committee (RPCC) has many times the number of members in BJP's Rajasthan unit. With 121 secretaries, 48 general secretaries and 21 Vice Presidents, the Congress Organisation seems to rely on the numbers to provide extensive representation to not only castes but also different districts/regions. The important members of the RPCC are as under:

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<sup>61</sup> [India Today, 27 March 2023.](#)

<sup>62</sup> Between 2019 and 2022, BJP won only one of eight by-polls in Rajasthan

<sup>63</sup> [India Today, 16 May 2023.](#)

*Table 19: Key office-bearers of RPCC*

Name	Position	Caste
Shri Govind Singh Dotasara	State President	Jat
Shri Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa	AICC In-Charge of Rajasthan	Sikh
Shri Ashok Bairwa	State Vice President	SC
Shri Bhanwar Lal Meghwal	State Vice President	SC
Shri Mahendrajeet Malviya	State Vice President	Brahmin
Shri Murari Lal Meena	State Vice President	Meena
Shri Uday Lal Anajana	State Vice President	Jat
Shri Gopal Singh Shekhawat	State Vice President	Rajput
Shri Hira Lal Bishnoi	State Vice President	Bishnoi
Shri Bharatram Meghwal	General Secretary	SC
Shri Dheeraj Gurjar	General Secretary	Gurjar
Shri Ashok Kumar Saini	General Secretary	Rajput
Shri Leela Maderna	General Secretary	Jat
Shri Jagdish Raj Shrimali	General Secretary	Brahmin
Smt. Rehana Rayaz	General Secretary	Muslim
Shri Vaibhav Gehlot	General Secretary	Mali
Shri K.C. Bishnoi	General Secretary	Bishnoi
Shri Chiranji Lal Badaya	Treasurer	Bania
Shri Suresh Choudhary	Spokesperson	Jat

As in the case of BJP, the RPCC is also **dominated by Jat** members as shown in **Table 19**. Strategic positions such as that of the President and Spokesperson are held by Jat leaders. However, there is also



a significant presence of **Dalits** among the office-bearers. Representation of **Gurjars** is markedly greater than in BJP and there exist few members from the **Muslim** community as well.

### **Election Committee**

On 20th July 2023, the Congress announced the list of party leaders who have been appointed to the election committee - which would play a key role in carrying out the campaign and ticket distribution. Both CM Gehlot and Shri Sachin Pilot have been named in the list but neither has been made the chairperson of the committee, which will be chaired by Shri Govind Singh Dotasara. But the majority of its members are known to be Gehlot-loyalists, indicating that the CM will have an upper hand in ticket distribution<sup>64</sup>. While the Congress too has not named any CM candidate, it is increasingly clear that the party cannot hope to succeed without Shri Ashok Gehlot at the forefront.

### **Morchas**

Rajasthan Congress has three main frontal organisations (morchas) in Rajasthan. The SC and ST Departments of the RPCC are currently without Presidents. There is no broad umbrella campaign theme under which these morchas are carrying out their outreach programme, especially after the conclusion of the Bharat Jodo Yatra. On the whole, they seek to highlight the governance record of Shri Ashok Gehlot's government to the voters. The newly appointed President of the Rajasthan Mahila Congress is a supporter of Shri Sachin Pilot and this move may be to appease his camp.

<b>Morcha</b>	<b>President</b>	<b>Issues raised/activities</b>
Rajasthan Youth Congress	Shri Ganesh Ghogra	Conducted outreach as part of Bharat Jodo Yatra. Organised protests against disqualification of Shri Rahul Gandhi as MP.
Rajasthan Mahila Congress	Smt. Rakhi Gautam	Focused on promoting pro-women schemes of Gehlot-government and outreach to tribal women.
Rajasthan Kisan Congress	Shri Sandeep Singh Choudhary	Has been inactive on its social media since 2020. Kisan Sammelans have been held and focus has been on debt-settlement for farmers

*Table 20: Morchas of Rajasthan Congress*

<sup>64</sup> [The Hindu, 21 July 2023.](#)

## Aam Aadmi Party Organisation

In February 2023, the AAP announced that it would field its candidates in all seats in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. AAP had contested the 2018 Vidhan Sabha polls in Rajasthan in 142 seats and had forfeited its deposit in all of them. Back then, AAP's Rajasthan unit had fought the elections entirely on its own without much involvement by the national leadership. This time, however, Shri Arvind Kejriwal along with Bhagwat Mann have personally led large-scale election rallies in the state. The victory of the AAP in Punjab in 2022 and its subsequent recognition as a National Party by the Election Commission after its performance in the Gujarat elections are factors which may have emboldened the national leadership of AAP to make a serious foray into Rajasthan.

In 2018, the party had not built up any organisational structure in the state, nor had it offered any meaningful programme that would serve as an alternative to the BJP and the Congress. This time, the AAP has begun the work of building the party organisation from the local level upwards, starting from the panchayat level to block, and district levels<sup>65</sup>. A membership drive was carried out in January and February 2023 and the party claims that around 4.15 lakh people took up AAP membership in Rajasthan<sup>66</sup>. The party has also set up a youth wing and a women's wing in the state. A new State President has been appointed, Shri Naveen Paliwal.

However, it cannot be ignored that the party organisation is still, at best, in a nascent stage and cannot expect to achieve the kind of grassroots level penetration that the two major parties can. So far, the election speeches of Shri Arvind Kejriwal have projected AAP as a 'clean' alternative to both BJP and Congress. He has tried to characterise both these parties as corrupt and has even alleged that Shri Ashok Gehlot has a tacit understanding with Smt. Vasundhara Raje and hence both of them do not take action on corruption charges against each other<sup>67</sup>. He has promised to bring his 'Delhi model' of governance to Rajasthan and has already made promises of free electricity in his rallies. It must be noted, however, that AAP poll promises in Rajasthan are basically freebies - a tactic similar to what has helped the AAP maintain popularity within Delhi.

While the party works to deepen and strengthen its organisation, Shri Arvind Kejriwal has not ruled out forming electoral alliances with other smaller parties to create a third front against BJP and the Congress. There have been speculations about an alliance between AAP and Hanuman Beniwal's RLTP<sup>68</sup> which, if it actually formed, could in the two in consolidating the Jat voters of Rajasthan.

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<sup>65</sup> [The Quint, 08 April 2023](#)

<sup>66</sup> [Indian Express, 14 March 2023](#)

<sup>67</sup> [Indian Express, 14 March 2023](#)

<sup>68</sup> [The Quint, 08 April 2023](#). Also see: [The Times of India, 02 June 2023](#).

A major setback for the party could be its near total lack of local leadership. While AAP is not expected to sweep the coming polls, it *can* dent the voteshare of the BJP and Congress provided the party aggressively pursues its organisation and campaign efforts. There have been reports that the Congress and AAP had arrived at a tacit understanding that if the Congress would support the AAP in the Parliament on the Delhi Services Ordinance Bill, then AAP would refrain from contesting in Rajasthan. The Congress did oppose the Bill (as it would have been politically inconsistent to not do so when a no-confidence motion had been admitted). But its support has been half-hearted<sup>69</sup> as Congress leaders such as Shri Ajay Maken and Shri Sandeep Dikshit have supported the Ordinance. So, it remains to be seen if the AAP would cede any political space in Rajasthan for the Congress.

## **Major Opportunities for the BJP**

While Shri Ashok Gehlot remains popular as a leader, there are several issues on which the Congress can be cornered in Rajasthan. Some of these are already being leveraged in BJP's campaign in the state:

### **Congress infighting (Gehlot-Pilot Tussle)**

In 2020 the power struggle between CM Shri Ashok Gehlot and his then Deputy Shri Sachin Pilot broke out in the open. Although CM Gehlot has survived this revolt as well as another rebellion in September 2022, there has not yet been a complete solution to the factional conflict.

The most important threat to Congress' party organisation in Rajasthan has undoubtedly come from Shri Sachin Pilot. In 2020, Pilot, then the Deputy CM, threatened to topple Shri Ashok. Gehlot's government for not being made the CM - a post he believed he was entitled to for his prominent role in helping the Congress win in the 2018 Assembly polls. It was Gehlot's carefully aimed accusation that Pilot was being backed by the BJP that helped to thwart the revolt<sup>70</sup>. But Shri Sachin Pilot was removed from his posts of Deputy CM and Rajasthan Pradesh Congress Committee President. Since then, he has kept aloof from the Gehlot-administration, all the while refuting speculations about his proximity to the BJP<sup>71</sup>. Shri Govind Singh Dotasara, a Jat leader, was appointed as the Rajasthan PCC President..

Many of the MLAs supporting Shri Ashok Gehlot and Shri Sachin Pilot have been shifting sides over the past three years. Of the 19 MLAs who rebelled along with Pilot, at least two have returned to the Gehlot-camp: Shri Vishwendra Singh and Shri Ramesh Meena. Of the Gehlot-loyalists, Shri Rajendra Singh Gudha had switched over to the Pilot-camp and Shri Pratap Singh Kachariywas has been giving mixed signals and has switched sides multiple times. Gehlot's loyalists include most of the 90 MLAs who had threatened to resign in protest in 2022 when Gehlot decided to contest for the post of INC

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<sup>69</sup> [The Times of India, July 16, 2023](#)

<sup>70</sup> [The Print, 01 October 2022.](#)

<sup>71</sup> [India Today, 15 February 2022.](#)

President. An exact list of Gehlot-supporters would be difficult to draw up and it could include most ministers and a large number of Congress MLAs. Here's a tentative list of important leaders from both camps. Names of those who switched have been highlighted:

### **Sachin Pilot Supporters**

1. Deependra Singh Shekhawat
2. Murarilal Meena
3. Hemaram Choudhary
4. Gajraj Khatana
5. Darshan Singh Gurjar
6. Indraraj Gurjar
7. Rakesh Pareek
8. Mukesh Bhakar
9. Ved Prakash Solanki
10. Suresh Modi
11. G.R. Khatana
12. P.R. Meena
13. Brijendra Singh Ola
14. Rajendra Gudha
15. Khiladi Lal Bairwa
16. Giriraj Singh Malinga

### **Ashok Gehlot Supporters**

1. Govind Singh Dotasara
2. C.P Joshi
3. Sanyam Lodha
4. Shanti Kumar Dhariwal
5. Mahendra Jeet Singh Malviya
6. Shakuntala Rawat
7. Govind Ram Meghwal
8. Mahesh Joshi
9. Ramlal Jat
10. Ashok Chandna
11. Bhajanlal Jatav
12. Dharmendra Rathore
13. Vishwendra Singh
14. Ramesh Meena

In May 2023, Shri Sachin Pilot went a step further and issued an 'ultimatum' to the Gehlot-led government to act on three demands: an enquiry against former CM Smt. Vasundhara Raje over corruption allegations, compensation for students who have suffered due to paper leaks, and the dissolution of the Rajasthan Public Service Commission due to widespread corruption in the body. Both Shri Ashok Gehlot as well as the Congress high command side-stepped this ultimatum.

However, the two leaders have agreed to work together after a 'truce' was brokered by the Congress high command in late May 2023. Again, after a high level meeting of party leaders in July Shri Sachin Pilot reiterated his commitment to serve in any capacity that the high command may assign. For all appearances, the party seems to have diffused the Gehlot-Pilot tussle. But it is an uneasy peace between two leaders and it is unclear if the party has decided on how power will be shared between them. Shri Sachin Pilot has not been appointed as the State Party President, nor as the chairman of the election committee, hinting that the Gehlot-faction is still having the upper hand. In such a situation, discontent in Shri Sachin Pilot's camp is very much possible and this can demoralise the party workers of the Congress.

Shri Ashok Gehlot remains the most popular face of the Congress in Rajasthan<sup>72</sup>. In fact, one may say that his popularity is now greater than it was during his earlier stints as the CM when he was perceived as a nominee of the Congress high command. This explains why there was a rebellion against Shri Ashok Gehlot's decision to contest the election for the Congress President last year wherein MLAs loyal to him threatened to quit, giving him a compelling reason to stay on in Rajasthan.

### **Inaction of Congress on corruption cases**

There have been serious allegations of Shri Ashok Gehlot's involvement in a fairly large mining scam which goes back to 2013. He has been accused of allotting sandstone mines in the Western Rajasthan to his close relatives. There have also been reports of rampant corruption in transfers and posting of teachers in government educational institutes<sup>73</sup>. Besides, the inaction of the government over the paper-leaks in Rajasthan Public Service Commission examination have also brought his credibility into question - this was an issue which was also raised by Shri Sachin Pilot during his period of estrangement from the CM. Recently, Shri Rajendra Gudha, formerly a minister in the Gehlot-government before being sacked, claimed to possess a "red diary" which allegedly contains incriminating evidence of corruption against the Gehlot-government<sup>74</sup>. These issues can significantly fuel the BJP's efforts to spur anti-incumbency.

### **Pan-Rajasthan Support for Smt. Vasundhara Raje**

As pointed out above, although officially the BJP has been campaigning in Rajasthan using the face of PM Modi, it has, going by all appearances and indication, unofficially decided to project Smt. Vasundhara Raje as the CM-face. This is because of the fact that she is the only BJP leader in Rajasthan who commands popularity across various caste-groups. Smt. Vasundhara Raje hails from the Scindia royal family of Gwalior and as such she is a Maratha. But she was married into the royal family of the former Princely State of Dholpur (who are Jats) and this allows her to project herself as the 'daughter in-law of Jats'. She has also used her royal lineage to identify herself with the Rajputs. Her son Shri Dushyant Singh, who is recognised as heir to the royal house of Dholpur is married to Smt. Niharika Singh, who hails from the royal family of the erstwhile Samthar State (who are Gurjars) and this gives her a degree of leverage in the Gurjar community as well.

### **Rising rate of crime**

The inability of Shri Ashok Gehlot's government to control the rise in crimes in the state is an important area where the BJP can project an alternative that shows zero tolerance for crimes. This has in fact already been made part of BJP's "Nahi Sahega Rajasthan" campaign. NCRB data shows that

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<sup>72</sup> [The Times of India, 27 July 2023.](#)

<sup>73</sup> [India Today, Nov 16, 2021](#)

<sup>74</sup> [The Hindu, 27 July 2023.](#)

Rajasthan reported the highest number of rape cases in the country in 2021-22<sup>75</sup>. In 2020-21, a total of 2835 children were reported as abducted, averaging to 8 children per day. Crimes against Dalits have also been a worrying trend in the state<sup>76</sup> and with sufficient sensitisation of the SCs, this could wean Dalit votes away from the Congress to some extent.

### **Communal Tensions**

The gruesome killing of Kanhaiya Lal, a tailor from Udaipur in June 2022 has flared up communal sentiments in the state. Shri Ashok Gehlot's administration has been accused of inordinate delays in arresting the culprits and investigating the matter. The public resentment over the failure of the administration and the police in preventing this killing led to widespread protests in spite of Section 144 of CrPC (curfew) being imposed on the city. Communal clashes had also erupted in Jodhpur in May 2022 just before Eid. In April that year, the administration in Alwar had demolished a 300-year old Shiva temple, amidst protests by Hindu organisations. Occurrences such as these could feed directly into the BJP's targeting of the Gehlot-government for practising appeasement politics.

### **Drain of public money through freebies amid rampant unemployment**

It must be noted that Shri Ashok Gehlot's populist schemes can prove to be a threat as well as an opportunity to the BJP depending upon how well the party is able to bring out the inefficacy of these schemes in tackling economic distress and unemployment in the state. In 2022, Rajasthan had a deplorably high unemployment rate of 30.7%, - which is the third highest in the country. As of February 2023 Nearly 18.4 lakh youth have been registered as unemployed by the Department of Skill and Entrepreneurship (Government of Rajasthan) but only 6.2 lakh (less than one-third) of them have received the benefit of the department's schemes so far<sup>77</sup>. There has also been mounting agrarian distress, with rising indebtedness and crop failure due to untimely rain<sup>78</sup>. These areas of popular discontent can be channelised to discredit the 'pro-poor governance' of the Gehlot-administration.

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<sup>75</sup> [The Economic Times, 30 August 2022.](#)

<sup>76</sup> [The Hindu, March 25, 2022](#)

<sup>77</sup> [The Business Standard, February 28, 2023](#)

<sup>78</sup> [Newslaundry, 23 March 2023.](#)

## Major Threats for the BJP

As BJP campaigns on full throttle in the state, it has to act against certain issues that may weaken its organisation as well as support-base. The important ones are as follows:

### **Infighting among state leaders**

Since the party's defeat in the 2018 Vidhan Sabha polls, there has been a factional struggle between former CM Smt. Vasundhara Raje and her opponents including former State President Shri Satish Poonia and Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat. Added to this is the fact that Shri Satish Poonia and Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat are seen as representatives of two important castes: Jats and Rajputs respectively. With the appointment of Shri Chandra Prasad Joshi as the new state unit chief, the party seems to be making efforts to undo the estrangement with Smt. Vasundhara Raje, but it remains unclear if her rivals for being the CM candidate would work unitedly, especially at the grassroots level. While the factionalism in the BJP has not yet broken out openly as it did between Gehlot and Pilot, simmering relations between the senior BJP leaders of the state need to be reined in.

### **Short term impact of populist schemes**

CM Gehlot's freebies may be based on unsound economics in the longterm sense, but this may not be well understood by the voters. In the past one year, Shri Ashok Gehlot's government has brought out a number of so-called 'pro-poor' schemes which have enjoyed significant popularity among the ordinary people<sup>79</sup>, despite experts pointing out their fiscal and administrative flaws: the Right to Health Act (2022) which gave every resident of the state the right to get emergency treatment free of charge even at private establishments. The shift to the Old Pension Scheme is also expected to draw the public sector trade unions towards the Congress. The recently passed Minimum Guaranteed Income Bill is another such populist scheme which promises 125 days of wage employment and a pension for vulnerable groups. Rajasthan has also become the first state to pass a bill to secure the rights of gig-workers.

Besides these legislative measures, the government has announced in February 2023 a scheme to provide gas cylinders to BPL families at ₹500 per cylinder. This, however, is being done under the Ujjwala Yojana launched by the BJP government at the Centre in 2016. June 2023 free-electricity for the first 100 units for all households in Rajasthan irrespective of their economic condition (BPL and otherwise). In August 2023 State Government launched "Indira Gandhi Smartphone Yojana" under which smartphones are being distributed among young women with the added benefit of free internet connectivity for three years. A day after launching this scheme, the government has announced a complete waiver of fuel surcharge on electricity including agricultural power consumers.

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<sup>79</sup> [The Hindu, July 10, 2023](#)

### **Caste factors**

The 2018 Vidhan Sabha elections witnessed a number of castes who traditionally voted for BJP, voting in large numbers for the Congress instead<sup>80</sup>. Among these were Jats and Rajputs - both having grievances of their own. BJP's social engineering needs to prevent such a shift in the coming elections. However, with the sacking of Shri Satish Poonia (a Jat leader) from the post of State President and the reluctance of the party to name any Rajput leader (primarily Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat) as their CM-face may make it difficult to woo the voters from these castes. The Bharatiya Tribal Party (BTP) had also eaten into BJP's adivasi votes in 2018 and had won two seats among the 25 constituencies reserved for the STs.

However, the BJP has tried to appease various castes. The new State President Shri Chandra Prasad Joshi is a Brahmin. Shri Satish Poonia has been made the Deputy Leader of Opposition whereas the Rajput leader Shri Rajendra Rathore has been the Leader of Opposition since April 2023. Making Shri Arjun Ram Meghwal, an MP from Bikaner as the new Union Law Minister can also help attract Dalit votes.

### **Creation of New Districts**

The political implications of the creation of 19 new districts by the Gehlot-government has been discussed in an earlier section. It is noteworthy that new districts have largely been created in areas where the Congress dominated in the 2018 polls and seem to be aimed at securing votes of Jat and SCs, besides smaller communities like Gurjars and Meenas in certain areas. BJP faces the challenge of countering the goodwill that this step is likely to have generated in those areas which were carved out as new districts.

### **Emergence of a 'third-force'**

While BJP and the Congress are the two major parties in the fray, smaller parties such as Shri Hanuman Beniwal's RLTP and Shri Arvind Kejriwal's AAP may split the anti-Congress votes and even reduce the BJP's seat-share. In 2018, RLTP could seize three seats with nearly 2.50% voteshare. Since 2020, Beniwal has broken off with the BJP (RLTP had joined NDA in 2019) and is working to consolidate Jat votes in Rajasthan. On the other hand, AAP has made a loud foray into Rajasthan with party chief Shri Arvind Kejriwal. Kejriwal personally addressing election rallies - albeit it has not built a strong organisational structure yet. Amid speculations of an alliance between RLTP and AAP to create a third front, the voteshare of both major parties face the threat of being dented, though not decimated. Pre-empting such an outcome would require BJP to consider reviving the alliance with RLTP

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<sup>80</sup> [Hindustan Times, 12 December 2018.](#)



## Conclusion

This primer has reviewed the state politics in Rajasthan keeping in view the upcoming State Assembly Elections in December 2023. Broad trends which can be politically significant have been highlighted by summarising the political and electoral history of the state. Rajasthan, since 1998, has witnessed a 'revolving-door' pattern of electoral politics with the power switching between BJP and Congress. Yet, either party has its own regional strongholds. While the BJP remains strong in and around Ajmer, Bhilwara, Kota and Udaipur, the Congress' foothold is strong in Bharatpur and Jodhpur regions.

Caste continues to be a factor of enormous political importance in Rajasthan, with 'mahapanchayats' being organised by caste groups to assert caste-identities for greater space in politics. The Jats, being the numerically largest caste-group have been pressing for a CM from their community.

While the Congress has a much larger party organisation (Rajasthan Pradesh Congress Committee), it is to be noted that the Rajasthan BJP's 'morchas' have been effectively mobilised under the *Nahi Sabega Rajasthan* campaign, whereas the SC and ST morchas of the RPCC are still without Presidents. The BJP has sought to satisfy various caste-identities by choosing office-bearers in the State Party Organisation from different castes.

The BJP's main areas of strength would be the unresolved tussle within the Congress (between Shri Ashok Gehlot and Shri Sachin Pilot), the rising rate of crime in the state and the inaction on corruption cases, all of which are being highlighted in its campaign. The major areas of threats would be the infighting/rivalry among State leaders representing different caste-groups, the short-term popularity of Gehlot-regime's freebie schemes, and a possible split of votes due to the presence of AAP and RLTP as contenders in the polls.