

Explaining intra-party organisational variation at the sub-national level in India

Dr. Dishil Shrimankar¹

Leverhulme Early Career Research Fellow

Department of Politics, International Relations and Philosophy

Royal Holloway, University of London.²

Abstract

Existing scholarship on democratic theory has emphasized the role of political party's organization in establishing institutionalized party systems. If intra-party organization is understood to be a key explanatory variable, then it is important to explain why some political parties have strong internal organization in comparison to others. However, there is no single study, of which I am aware, that explains variations in the level of organizations within political parties in India. Using Chhibber, Jensenius and Suryanarayan's party organisation dataset alongside a qualitative example from the sub-national level in India, I show that there exists a 'U' shaped relationship between parties controlling the executive office and strength of individual party organisation. There exists a strong negative effect between time spent in executive office and individual party organisation. It is only in the very long run that parties in government reap small benefits of executive office for their individual party organisations.

Keywords: India, Party organisation and Executive Office

¹Dishil.Shrimankar@rhul.ac.uk

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1 Introduction

Since the publication of Randall and Svasand's (2002) paper on *Party Institutionalisation in New Democracies*, it is accepted that an individual political party's organisation plays a vital role in structuring the whole party system. A sufficient number of strong, stable and well-organized parties are vital for a well-institutionalized party system (Mainwaring and Scully, 1995). In turn, a well-institutionalized party system allows for effective government and provides voters with a clear, predictable and simplified set of electoral alternatives. Others have found an institutionalized party and party system to manage inter-ethnic conflicts (Weiner, 1967; Kohli, 1990), or distribute welfare goods (Rasmussen and Knutsen, 2019). In the Indian context, Chhibber, Jensenius and Suryanarayan (2014) show that the level of party organisation has a significant impact on the health of the party system, measured through fragmentation and electoral volatility. A strong party organisation decreases fragmentation and electoral volatility at the systemic level. In turn, the differences in the fragmentation of party systems explain the differences in the quality of representation and provision of public goods (Chhibber and Nooruddin, 2004; Banerjee and Hankla, 2014).

In this article, I build on Chhibber, Jensenius and Suryanarayan (2014) work on party organisation at the sub-national level in India. While Chhibber, Jensenius and Suryanarayan (2014) explore the effects of strong party organisation on the sub-national level party systems, I explain the sub-national variation in the organisation of political parties. In other words, while Chhibber, Jensenius and Suryanarayan (2014) treat party organisation as an independent variable, I treat it as a dependent variable. As mentioned above, if differences in party systems are important in explaining the differences in state expenditures on public goods (Chhibber and Nooruddin, 2004), and if party organisation is what explains the differences in the party systems across different Indian states, I ask the next logical question in line: What explains the differences in the internal organizations of political parties in India?

Moreover, I study intra-party variation in the level of organisation at the sub-national level as opposed to studying inter-party variation in the level of organisation at the

national level in India. The sub-national approach controls for a number of confounding factors that might influence why some parties have a strong organisation whereas others do not (Snyder, 2001; Tillin, 2013). In addition, I wish to take advantage of the intra-party variation present at the sub-national level in India to control for party specific factors that might influence the organisational characteristics of political parties. Building on the comparative literature on the determinants of strong party organisation (Bolleyer and Ruth, 2018; Levitsky, 2001), I evaluate their validity at the sub-national level in the world's largest democracy: India. Empirically, I examine the determinants of strong party organisation within all parties that gained more than 5 percent of the voteshare at the state level in the 15 largest Indian states during the state assembly elections held between 1967 and 2004. I seek to explain the cross-sectional, within party, and over time variations in the level of party organisation within most, if not all, political parties in India.

To my knowledge, this is the first study to examine the level of intra-party organisation at the sub-national level in India. Understanding the origins of different levels of party organisation at the sub-national level in India will in turn enhance our knowledge of why different regional party systems exist.

Theoretically speaking, there are two major contributions of this article. First, I underline reverse causality in the relationship between party organisation and incumbency. Existing narratives in India have exclusively focused on the importance of party organisation in increasing a party's chance of winning elections and gaining incumbency (Biswas, 2020), whereas in this paper, I show that the relationship between party organisation and incumbency can also work in the opposite and inverse direction, where being in government can be detrimental towards building, or at least sustaining, a strong party organisation. Second, this article contends with the growing comparative literature on the determinants of intra-party organisation which have shown that parties only invest in a strong organisation when they are in power and have access to state resources (Kitschelt et al., 1999; Kopecký, Mair and Spirova, 2012). Building a strong party organisation is costly, and parties do need resources to build a strong organisation. While I do not

dispute their arguments in its entirety, I show that the party organisational gains from being in government are very small, and are present only in the very long run. On the contrary, I build on Kothari (1964) and Shefter (1993) to show and explain why being in government does more harm to a party's organisation than benefit.

The paper proceeds as follows: I first discuss the theoretical argument and the key hypothesis. Subsequently, I present the main dataset used in this article and the empirical strategy. Thereafter, I discuss the findings from the quantitative analysis. In the subsequent section, I present qualitative examples that further help illustrate the key theoretical argument. In the final section, I conclude the paper and underline few potential avenues for further research.

2 Theory

The theoretical argument I put forward in this article is not new. The argument was first discussed by Rajni Kothari (1964) in his famous essay on the Congress 'System', and is more commonly known in India as the 'Kamaraj Plan'. K.Kamaraj was a former Chief Minister of the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, and former national president of the Congress Party. The key idea of the plan was to secure voluntary relinquishment of ministerial or governmental posts by senior Congress ministers to enable them to devote all their time to the organisational work of the party so that the 'unhealthy' trend in the formation of groups and factions and the consequent weakening of Congress organisation could be arrested. At the heart of this doctrine lies a theory that access to executive office and political power increases factionalism and nepotism which weakens the foundations of the organisation that helped the party access political power. The doctrine also argued that once in office, the party leadership focuses on the day to day workings of the government at the expense of building and sustaining a strong party organisation. Party organisational work is neglected because of the time and devotion given to the workings of the government.

In addition, I argue that the party leadership who control the executive not only

neglect party organisational work, but instead have a stronger incentive to weaken their own party organisations. They would want to weaken their own party organisations to dismantle any structures in place that could allow new members to gain access to the executive office. A party with a strong organisation provides clarity to politicians about their role in the organisation, such as the process of upward mobility in the party, the rules of succession planning, and the extent to which party decisions are taken based on clearly understood rules as opposed to the whims of its leaders (Chhibber, Jensenius and Suryanarayan, 2014, 492). The party elite who control the executive would want to displace the above procedures that could open up channels to dislodge their own lucrative positions in the government. Instead, the party leadership can rely on governmental patronage and policy-making influence to sustain and enlarge their own support bases (Shefter, 1993). They no longer need a strong party organisation to mobilise electoral support. Indira Gandhi's example of de-institutionalising the Congress Party organisation perfectly illustrates the above point. After becoming Prime Minister in 1967, she dismantled any channels and procedures in place that could challenge her position. Intra-party elections for the selection of party committees at local, district and national level were suspended. The party posts were filled by appointees of Indira Gandhi. Congress Party Chief Ministers of many states were thrust aside by Indira Gandhi in favour of her own people (Manor, 1978). Her actions eventually split the Congress Party in 1969. Despite the split in the party organisation, her faction of the Congress Party won the general elections of 1971. This further emboldened her to centralise power in her own hands. She dismantled any remaining structures of Congress Party organisation. Instead of using the party machine to muster support in the elections, she used personal charisma and new channels for the distribution of spoils from New Delhi down to her supporters.

However, when the party does not control the executive office, it will not have governmental patronage and policy-making influence to support and enlarge its support base. Strong organisational characteristics such as the process of upward mobility and clearly defined rules of succession will be needed to attract new members to the party. Furthermore, the party leadership will be able to concentrate on building a strong organisation

in the absence of day to day governmental work. And finally, in the absence of political power, factionalism will also be kept in check to manageable levels.

This argument is set against the prevailing view on the determinants of strong party organisation. Others have argued that controlling the executive strengthens a party organisation (Kitschelt, 1994; Kopecký, Mair and Spirova, 2012). This is because the party controlling the core executive office gains from access to political power, governmental patronage, and policy-making influence. These resources in turn allow the party to build a strong organisation. While forming a party in India is not particularly costly, forming a party with a strong organisation is. Building a strong organisation in a large country like India require resources that allow the party to set up (1) functioning local level offices, (2) have communication channels linking local level office politics with party elites sitting at higher levels, (3) resources to conduct free and fair intra-party elections, and (4) mobilise and galvanise voters and grass-root level party workers. Therefore, any party in India which has controlled the executive office over a long period of time will accumulate resources needed to see a secular increase in the organisational strength of the party. These benefits to the party's organisation should be seen more as a by-product of the longevity of executive access, rather than any deliberate attempt by the party leadership to improve its organisation. Since the organisational gains from being in executive office over a very long period are a by-product of the longevity of executive access, as opposed to the deliberative work of its leadership, we see a very small improvement in the party's organisational strength from long executive office access.

H1 *Executive Office*: I hypothesize a U shaped relationship between years spent in executive office³ and party organisation, where there is a large negative effect between time spent in executive office and party organisational strength for a long period of time. Only in the very long run, we will see some benefits of executive office being reaped by the party, albeit in a very small way.

³It is important to mention that the measure of executive office years is a cumulative one as opposed to a continuous one.

3 Data and Empirical Strategy

The primary data for the study comes from Chhibber, Jensenius and Suryanarayan (2014) ‘party organisation’ dataset. I operationalise the main dependent variable of the study in line with their operationalisation of party organisation:

“A party was categorized as less organized when there was no clear succession plan within the party, where party functionaries roles were fluid and election-focused, and where opportunities for upward mobility were either limited or prone to the whims of a few leaders. In addition, a less organized party depended on the charisma of a single leader and decision-making within the party was referred to as ad hoc by commentators. In a more organized party, career decisions for party activists and succession issues were more transparent and routinized and the party did not depend only on the personalities of individuals. In addition, the parties showed organizational continuity that lasted beyond elections.” (Chhibber, Jensenius and Suryanarayan, 2014, 493)

Chhibber, Jensenius and Suryanarayan (2014) provide data for the internal organisation of all parties that received more than 5 % voteshare in all the major Indian states.⁴ They provide coding for 138 regional election years between 1967 and 2004 for parties at the state-level, allowing for state-party units of national parties, like the Congress Party and the BJP, to have different party organisation scores depending on the state and time period. Each party or state-party unit could receive a score of 1, 2 or 3, with 3 being the most organized and 1 being the least.⁵

I empirically measure H1 by manually coding the number of years the party or state party unit was in power at the state-level either single-handedly or as part of a coalition government.⁶ Even though Chhibber, Jensenius and Suryanarayan (2014) party organi-

⁴The Indian states included in their dataset are the following: Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

⁵As an additional robustness check on Chhibber, Jensenius and Suryanarayan (2014) party organisation dataset, I test the association between Chhibber, Jensenius and Suryanarayan (2014) party organisation scores and the proportion of defections from an individual political party. If, indeed, Chhibber, Jensenius and Suryanarayan (2014) party organisation dataset measures the strength of individual party organisation, then their scores should correlate negatively with the proportion of defections from the individual political party. The results for the tests are displayed in Table A2 in the appendix.

⁶As a further robustness check, I present findings in Table A3 where I show that the main results are robust to excluding executive office years accumulated because of junior coalition membership.

sation dataset starts coding from 1967, I start coding the number of executive office years from the first regional elections held in a particular state. Importantly, I exclude the years where a President’s rule is imposed in the state. Furthermore, to capture the ‘U’ shaped relationship hypothesised in H1, I include a stand-alone and a squared executive office variable.⁷

The unit of analysis for this paper is at the party level. Considering there are number of parties that gained more than 5 % voteshare for each state-election year, I have decided to capture all the time invariant omitted variables by including a state-election year dummy variable. However, for robustness checks, I do present the complete results in the appendix, where I exclude the state-election year dummy but instead control for the omitted variables.⁸ In addition, I control for whether a specific party is incumbent-either in simple majority or in coalition-at the state-level when the state went to polls. I also control for individual party’s vote shares⁹ and an individual party’s age, measured in years since its foundation.

To analyze the relationship between my explanatory variables and the main dependent variable of party organisation, I run Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions with robust standard errors. For additional robustness checks, I do run ordinal logistic regressions. The results are presented in the appendix.¹⁰

4 Findings

In Table 1, model 1 is the baseline model where I regress our dependent variable on the main independent variables *Executive office* and *Executive office*² along with a range of party specific control variables. In this model, I do not control for any fixed effects and/or

⁷Here, it is important to mention that my measure of executive office is a cumulative measure of executive office years as opposed to a continuous one. Theoretically speaking, we should expect the continuous executive office measure to have a stronger negative effect on a party’s organisation in comparison to a cumulative executive office measure. This is because in a cumulative executive office measure, parties will have incentives to strength their organisation when they are out of power. This opportunity is not present for parties that are continuously in power. See Table A4 in the Appendix where I replicate Table 1 but with a continuous executive office measure as opposed to a cumulative one.

⁸Please see Table A5 in the appendix.

⁹The results do not change substantively if I switch an individual party’s voteshare with seatshare.

¹⁰See Table A6

Table 1: Determinants of strong party organisation

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Party organisation		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Executive office	-0.045*** (0.014)	-0.046*** (0.014)	-0.050*** (0.015)
Executive office ²	0.001*** (0.0003)	0.001*** (0.0003)	0.001*** (0.0004)
Incumbency	-0.033 (0.084)	-0.016 (0.073)	-0.051 (0.086)
Party voteshare	0.009*** (0.003)	0.008** (0.004)	0.010** (0.005)
Party Age	0.002 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)
Constant	1.420*** (0.065)	1.287*** (0.330)	1.566*** (0.401)
Controls	No	No	Yes
State FEs	No	Yes	No
Year FEs	No	Yes	No
Party FEs	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	455	455	455
R ²	0.038	0.654	0.729

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

state-election year dummy variable that accounts for the time invariant omitted variables. Here, we see that there exists a negative relationship between the number of years a party controls the executive office and its organisational strength. If the average organisational strength is 1.42 after controlling for party specific variables, a year in government leads to a reduction in 0.05 units in the party organisational strength. The average of 1.42 shows that parties in India do not have strong organisations, as the dependent variable can only take three values; 1 (low), 2 (medium), and 3 (high). Now, if they were to spend 5 years in government, it would lead to a 0.22 units decrease in their organisational strength. I interpret this effect to be substantive considering the average (1.42) level of party organisation. The coefficient for the squared term is positive, albeit with a significantly smaller effect size. If the threshold value¹¹ is at 22.5 years; it means that for the first 22.5 years the organisational strength of the party reduces by 0.05 units for every year in executive office. The organisational benefits only increase by a mere 0.001 units after the first 22.5 years of executive office. Substantively speaking, this means that being in power does a substantial damage to the party organisation for a long time before helping it improve, and that too in a very marginal way. This finding is in line with H1 where according to the theory we expect a ‘U’ shaped relationship, with a strong negative relationship for a long period of time, only marginally turning to benefit the party in the very long run. In model 2, I include state, party and year fixed effects, and in model 3, I control for the state-election year dummy¹² that accounts for the time invariant omitted variables. The findings are substantively robust to changing the model specifications.

In addition, we also find some evidence that an individual party’s voteshare is positively associated with its organisational strength. Here, we have to be careful about drawing any causal interpretations because it could very well be the case that strong party organisation contributes towards increasing the party’s voteshare rather than the other way around.

In Table 2, I rerun the same models but now I exclude the Congress Party. The

¹¹The threshold value is the value of the independent variable at which the impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable changes signs.

¹²The state-election year dummy variable subsumes the need for including state and year fixed effects because of perfect collinearity.

Table 2: Determinants of strong party organisation: Excluding INC

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Party organisation		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Executive office	−0.071*** (0.024)	−0.060*** (0.023)	−0.093*** (0.034)
Executive office ²	0.003** (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.002 (0.001)
Incumbency	−0.123 (0.111)	−0.040 (0.085)	−0.070 (0.113)
Party voteshare	0.014*** (0.004)	0.007 (0.004)	0.017** (0.007)
Party age	0.008** (0.003)	−0.002 (0.002)	−0.003 (0.003)
Constant	1.289*** (0.089)	0.890** (0.400)	0.923* (0.533)
Controls	No	No	Yes
State FEs	No	Yes	No
Year FEs	No	Yes	No
Party FEs	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	320	320	320
R ²	0.053	0.787	0.881

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

main rationale for doing this is because the Congress Party has been in power the longest between 1967 and 2004. This robustness test is important to underline that the results are not only driven by the Congress Party.

We do find strong and robust evidence for the negative relationship between the years spent in executive office and party organisational strength. However, the positive relationship for the squared coefficient is not robust to the inclusion of fixed effects and controlling for the state-election year dummy. Substantively speaking, this means that parties, other than the Congress Party, also see harm being done to their own organisational strength when they spend time running the executive office. However, they do not see any benefits to their party organisations from controlling the executive for long periods of time. One simple explanation could be that other than the Congress Party, not many parties have controlled state executives for a long period of time, especially between 1967 and 2004. There is the exception of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)-CPI (M)-in West Bengal, but this effect is state specific with much of that variation accounted for in modes 2 and 3.

Finally, can the theoretical argument be applicable to all the political parties in India? The Kamaraj plan was specifically in reference to the Congress Party. Will cadre-based parties with ‘thick’ party organisations like the Communist Parties and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) also harm their party organisations when they get access to the executive office (Gunther and Diamond, 2003; Thachil, 2014) ? For example, the BJP is associated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a volunteer Hindu nationalist organisation with an army of foot soldiers. Most of the party’s prominent leaders come from the RSS. These leaders might be tempted to weaken their own party organisation once in office, but their ability to weaken the RSS can be questionable considering the RSS has its own leadership and independent organisational structure. Another example is of the Communists, which are organised as a cadre-based party on the principle of democratic centralism as per the Comintern’s principles of party organisation (Rodrigues, 2006). Party organisational bodies such as the General Secretary, Central Committee, and State Committee are important functions within the party, at least as per the principle of

democratic centralism. Therefore, in principle, controlling the executive office should not be able to weaken such functions within the party as those leaders who go on to control the executive office would have served a minimum period of candidature on these bodies.

To probe this further, I run three separate models for three political parties-the Congress Party, the BJP¹³, and the Communists¹⁴-in Table 3. These are also the only three parties for which we have sufficient N to make any meaningful party-level statistical inferences. In all the three models I do not include any party specific control variables, fixed effects and/or the state-election year dummy so as to capture the baseline association between the main independent variables and the primary dependent variable. First, we see that all the three parties start with different levels of average party organisational strength. On average, the Communists have the strongest organisational strength (2.417), followed by the BJP (2.100) and then by the Congress Party (2.020). Once the parties start accumulating years in executive office, we see that there is a statistically significant negative relationship between time spent in office and party organisational strength for the Communists and the Congress Party, but no statistically significant association for the BJP. Interestingly, we see a greater damage done to the Communists with years in executive office in comparison to the Congress Party. Furthermore, the Congress and the Communists see improvements in their organisational strength after 30.5 and 12.8 years, respectively, but there is no statistically significant positive association for the BJP. Does this mean that the BJP's organisation is immune to the damage (or benefit) acquired as a result of being in power? As mentioned above in the theory section, the BJP does have the RSS to provide external organisational support, which might evade the damaging effects of time spent in executive office. Rather than drawing any substantive inferences from the statistical analysis, it is important to highlight that between 1967 and 2004, the BJP has a maximum of 8 years in executive office. A single BJP state unit-the Gujarat state unit-accounts for this time. Is the Gujarat BJP an exception to H1 or is the BJP's party organisation protected from the damaging effects of running the executive office?

¹³I include Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) along with the BJP.

¹⁴I include the Communist Party of India (CPI) along with the Communist Party of India (Marxist)-CPI (M) as the organisational differences between the two are more a matter of degree than of kind (Nossiter, 1988).

A more fruitful answer to the above question will be provided in the following section through qualitative examples from the Gujarat BJP unit.

Table 3: Determinants of strong party organisation: three examples

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Party organisation		
	INC	BJP	Communists
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Executive office	-0.061** (0.024)	0.248 (0.203)	-0.103** (0.049)
Executive office ²	0.001** (0.001)	-0.026 (0.028)	0.004** (0.002)
Constant	2.020*** (0.249)	2.100*** (0.106)	2.417*** (0.160)
Controls	No	No	No
State FEs	No	No	No
Year FEs	No	No	No
Party FEs	No	No	No
Observations	135	79	49
R ²	0.069	0.040	0.081

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

5 Qualitative examples from the Gujarat BJP state unit

The BJP formed state governments in Gujarat for the first time in the 1990s. Although it had formed state governments in 1977-79 when it was part of the Janata Party, it was only in the 1990s that the party was able to form state governments under its own party label. As written by Shah (1996, 165), the BJP was able to do this on the back of a strong party organisation. This is also echoed in the earlier piece by Shah (1991, 2921), where he writes that the BJP's growth in Gujarat is not an overnight development. The BJP has built up its organisation and support through sustained effort both on secular and communal lines since the end of the 1960s.

The BJP won a simple majority in the 1995 Gujarat regional elections. The BJP's victory in the 1995 state elections created deep tensions within the BJP state unit. The tensions were primarily between two state level leaders, Kesubhai Patel and Shankarsinh Vaghela (Patel, 1999). Both the leaders wanted Chief Ministership and important cabinet ministries for members of their own factions. Kesubhai Patel became the Chief Minister in the aftermath of the 1995 state elections. A number of reports highlighted that soon after becoming the Chief Minister, Kesubhai Patel's faction completely sidelined Vaghela's faction from accessing any perks of the executive office (Shah, 1998). The increasing factional dispute between the two eventually led to the exit of Vaghela along with 40 other Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs). Vaghela and other MLAs would later form their own party in 1996. This is the first example which illustrate the growth of factionalism and cracks in the Gujarat BJP's party organisation as a result of executive power. The BJP's central leadership did intervene to stem the growing factionalism within the state unit of the party. The party's central leadership appointed Suresh Mehta as the new Chief Minister replacing Kesubhai Patel (Indian Express, 1995*a*). However, Kesubhai Patel returned as the Chief Minister following the victory of the party in the 1998 Gujarat state elections.

Kesubhai Patel's tenure did not last long. A number of party workers complained

to the central BJP unit of mismanagement of the state party's organisation by Kesubhai Patel. The Gujarat BJP workers even organised a convention to fight the nepotism and corruption by the state-level BJP leadership (Indian Express, 1995*b*). Once again, the central leadership came to rescue the Gujarat BJP's party organisation. They replaced Kesubhai Patel with Narendra Modi in the aftermath of the 2001 Bhuj earthquake (Bunsha, 2001).

By the time Narendra Modi took over the leadership of the Gujarat BJP unit in 2001, the party had been in power for over 6 years. The negative effects of executive office on the party's organisation were further reflected prior to the 2007 state elections. The RSS cadres, which provide the bulk of the BJP's organisational backbone, were completely sidelined by Narendra Modi so much so that the RSS's leadership asked them not to canvass for the party prior to the 2007 regional elections (Jaffrelot, 2009). Furthermore, the number of RSS local branches had diminished from 1500 to one thousand and attendance was down by an estimated 50 percent. Modi not only systematically sidelined the RSS in Gujarat but he also sidelined his own party organisation. In the 2012 Gujarat state elections, he completely personalised his election campaign hardly mentioning the party and any other state level party worker. In addition, Modi used what Jaffrelot (2013) refers to as 'high-tech populism' to mobilise support for his party. Modi's hologram appeared on stage in 3D simultaneously in different locations to deliver his speeches to massive audiences. Modi's centralised style of functioning angered a number of his own party cadres, who left the party to campaign for the Congress Party label. Furthermore, the BJP's veteran leader Kesubhai Patel formed his own party-the Gujarat Parivartan Party (GPP)-prior to the 2012 state elections. The GPP received the support of the RSS and many BJP party workers, especially in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat. Modi was only successful in sidetracking the RSS and his own party organisation because of the resources available to him as result of being in control of the executive office. While it is very difficult to provide any direct evidence of the use of state resources by Modi to finance his political campaigns, some estimates suggest that Modi's holographic shows costs him 150 crore rupees (or approximately 20 million US dollars) (Nair, 2012). It

would be very hard to imagine a political party in India spending such vast amount of money without having had any control of the executive office.

The above examples show how access to the executive office not only opened up cracks within the BJP's party organisation but also led to the marginalisation of the RSS, the party's organisational backbone. The example of Narendra Modi sidelining the RSS in Gujarat is particularly illustrative of the theoretical argument put forward earlier. Building on Kothari (1964) and Shefter (1993) I argued that access to the state executive office incentivises the party leadership to weaken their own organisation so as to prevent other members from accessing it. Narendra Modi, a product of the RSS himself, not only sidetracked other party members, as the examples of his political campaigns from 2007 and 2012 show; he also marginalised the RSS in Gujarat. The RSS is credited to have built the party and his position in Gujarat. Therefore, its marginalisation shows that the grasp of power does not even spare the very organisation that brought people and party to power.

The above examples highlight the damage done to the BJP's organisation as a result of continued executive office access. The examples are in line with the first part of H1, where we expected a large negative effect between time spent in executive office and party organisational strength. However, in H1 we did not hypothesise a simple linear negative relationship between executive office access and party organisational strength. Instead, we expect a 'U' shaped relationship between years in executive office and party organisational strength, where in the very long run, the party will see some benefits of executive office being reaped by the party, albeit in a small way. Indeed, we do see some small benefits reaped by the BJP organisation as a result of long executive office access. Unlike the 1990s, the BJP has a working and well functioning party office in every corner of the state. The party has even built a grandeur headquarters in the state capital called *Shree Kamalam*. With respect to the organisation, the BJP has dedicated local cells that aim to recruit a canvasser-or *panna pramukh*- from every page of an electoral roll. There exists an electoral roll for every polling booth. There are approximately 45000 polling booths in Gujarat, with each electoral roll running into several pages. In theory,

the party aims to recruit close to 150000 to 200000 local level canvassers. While it is difficult to estimate the accurate number of canvassers recruited by the party, I did hear conversations about a dedicated budget being provided to the district level offices for the recruitment of local level canvassers by the party's state-level leadership during my fieldwork prior to the 2017 Gujarat state elections.

Nevertheless, the physical expansion of the party in the state is incomparable to the organisational damage it has done by souring its relationship with the RSS and increasing intra-party factional dispute. The damaging effects of the organisational weakness of the party were felt in the 2017 state elections. The BJP reduced its seat tally from 115 during the 2012 state assembly elections to 99 during the 2017 state assembly elections. Of course there are multiple reasons that explain why the party had its worst seat-wise performance in the state since the mid-1990s, with a weaker party organisation as one amongst them as opposed to the only one.

6 Conclusion

This article provides the first comparative assessment of why political parties have different levels of party organisation at the sub-national level in India. It adds value to the on-going research on the role of party organisations in shaping party systems and electoral outcomes in India (Schakel, Sharma and Swenden, 2019). Importantly, it underlines a major endogeneity problem affecting current work on party organisation in India. Conventional wisdom associates strong party organisation with improving the parties' chances of gaining access to state government. On the contrary, I show that access to governmental power has negative effects for individual party organisational strength. Building on the existing theoretical literature on the role of executive office in shaping individual party organisations, I have argued that the relationship between time spent in government and party organisational strength is not linear. There exists a strong negative relationship between running the executive office and individual party organisational strength in the long run, and a weak positive association between running

the executive office and individual party organisational strength in the very long run.

Using a statistical approach at the sub-national level in India, I find the stand-alone *Executive Office* term to be negatively correlated with the dependent variable, whereas the squared *Executive Office* term to be positively correlated with the primary dependent variable. Importantly, the stand-alone executive office term has a much stronger negative effect on the dependent variable in comparison to the squared positive coefficient. This lends support to the primary hypothesis of the paper. Furthermore, the robustness of the results across a range of model specifications and control variables increases the confidence in the paper's core findings. Finally, I also provide examples from the Gujarat BJP unit to substantiate the theoretical claims that access to the executive office does more harm to the party's organisation before helping it in a small manner.

Overall, the findings of the paper paint a vicious circle of governmental control and party organisational strength for political parties. One of the primary aims of political parties is to capture political power. However, once in power, the organisational strength of political parties will depreciate due to factional dispute, negligence as a result of day to day governmental work, and leadership self-interests. This will eventually make the party weaker and have negative electoral consequences. Overtime this will contribute towards parties losing government control and executive office. Although being in opposition will allow the party to rebuild its organisation; the party's organisational growth will be arrested once again when it captures power. Is this vicious cycle inevitable? Are there ways parties can break free from it? Former Congress Party national president K.Kamaraj did offer ways out of the vicious circle. As mentioned above in the theoretical section, he did advocate senior leadership of the Congress Party to relinquish their governmental position to occupy party organisational posts in order to symbolically and practically raise the profile of party organisational posts. This would allow the party to keep the factional dispute in check as new members will be able to experience the perks of being in office. Moreover, by raising the profile of party organisational posts it will create more positions within the party to satisfy disgruntled factional leaders. It will also allow senior leadership of the party to focus on building a strong party organisation in the

absence of day to day governmental work. And finally, a rotation policy of allowing new members to access executive office will satisfy new and older members alike. Despite the intuitive appeal of the Kamaraj plan, it remains very difficult for the party leadership to implement it, partly because applying this policy in practice would require relinquishing governmental control. The Congress Party has never fully adopted the Kamaraj plan in practice. When the BJP came to power at the national level in 2014, Amit Shah, a senior BJP leader, did remain as the national party president. However, in the aftermath of the 2019 national elections, he took the post of Home Minister (India's equivalent of Home Secretary). To this end the BJP is following in the footsteps of the Congress Party rather than acting any different.

Finally, as a way of conclusion I would like to highlight some limitations of the analysis presented here and how future research could address them. First, the proposed model is based on Chhibber, Jensenius and Suryanarayan (2014) party organisation measure. While regression analysis between Chhibber, Jensenius and Suryanarayan (2014) party organisation data and political defections do increase our confidence in using their data as the primary dependent variable, it does not allow us to capture the effect of the central hypothesis of the paper on the different facets of party organisation. Chhibber, Jensenius and Suryanarayan (2014) party organisation measures organisational features catering to intra-party institutionalisation, whereas there are many additional organisational characteristics such as local branch autonomy, party finance management, intra-party democracy, which remain unaddressed. More data collection and qualitative work on the different facets of party organisation in India will shed light on the role of executive office in influencing different features of party organisations. Second, the analysis presented in the paper is more focused on a party-centric as opposed to voter-centric view of party organisations. Future research should also investigate the role of voters in incentivising party elites to invest in a stronger organisation.

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Appendices

Table A1: Descriptive Statistics

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Party.org	455	1.497	0.779	1	3
Executive	455	8.101	10.854	0	46
Executive ²	455	183.174	348.416	0	2,116
Party Voteshare	455	22.803	14.084	4.830	56.360
Incumbency	455	0.354	0.479	0	1
Party Age	455	41.490	40.505	0	119

In Table A2, I regress political defections on Chhibber, Jensenius and Suryanarayan (2014) party organisation scores. Data on political defections are compiled by the Trivedi Centre for Political (TCPD) at the Ashoka University (Jensenius and Verniers, 2017). The TCPD have developed a name-matching algorithm that identifies possible identical names in order to facilitate the coding of individual politicians careers. I use their algorithm to compile a dataset of defections or politicians who leave their former party to contest for an alternative party or as independents. I merge this data with Chhibber, Jensenius and Suryanarayan (2014) party organisation dataset. Here, it is important to note that TCPD’s algorithm only includes defections data for 8 out of the 15 states included in Chhibber, Jensenius and Suryanarayan (2014) dataset. Put differently, data for important states like Assam, Bihar, Kerala, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal are missing.

Model 1 in Table A2 shows that there exists no statistically significant relationship between Chhibber, Jensenius and Suryanarayan (2014) party organisation scores and political defections at the state-level. However, when we include state, year and party fixed effects, we see a statistically significant negative relationship between Chhibber, Jensenius and Suryanarayan (2014) party organisation scores and political defections at the state-level. For every one unit increase in the Chhibber, Jensenius and Suryanarayan (2014) score, we see approximately two to three candidates disincentivized from leaving their former party. This effect is robust to using the Chhibber, Jensenius and Suryanarayan (2014) scores as binary where a score of 1 captures low organisation, and a score of 2 or 3 capture strong organisational strength.

Table A2: Party organisation and political defections

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Defections		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Party.org	0.220 (0.914)	-2.674** (1.105)	
Party.org (binary)			-4.831*** (1.740)
Constant	5.641*** (1.471)	6.340 (8.608)	4.358 (8.453)
State FEs	No	Yes	Yes
Year FEs	No	Yes	Yes
Party FEs	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	229	229	229
R ²	0.0003	0.586	0.591

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Below I perform robustness test where I replicate Table 1 but now exclude executive office years accumulated because of junior coalition membership. Essentially, if you are a junior coalition member, you are not attributed any executive office years in the revised measures I use below. The main substantive findings of Table 1 are replicated in Table A3 below.

Table A3: Determinants of strong party organisation (Discounting junior coalition members)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Party organisation		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Executive office	-0.042*** (0.014)	-0.050*** (0.014)	-0.052*** (0.016)
Executive office ²	0.001** (0.0004)	0.001*** (0.0003)	0.001*** (0.0004)
Incumbency	-0.061 (0.085)	-0.028 (0.074)	-0.060 (0.087)
Party voteshare	0.010*** (0.003)	0.009** (0.004)	0.011** (0.005)
Party Age	0.002 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)
Constant	1.401*** (0.065)	1.291*** (0.328)	1.559*** (0.402)
Controls	No	No	Yes
State FEs	No	Yes	No
Year FEs	No	Yes	No
Party FEs	No	Yes	Yes Observations
455	455	455	
R ²	0.033	0.657	0.730

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

In Section 3, I clarify that my measure of executive office years is a cumulative one as opposed to a continuous one. We expect the continuous executive office measure to have a stronger negative effect on a party's organisation because parties do not have opportunities and incentives to strengthen their organisation unlike a cumulative measure where parties have incentives to strengthen their organisation when they alternate in and out of power. In Table A4, we see that the Executive office coefficient is stronger for models 2 and 3 when compared to models 2 and 3 from Table 1. This provides some evidence in favour of the theoretical expectation that parties alternating in and out of power do have more incentives to strengthen their organisation in comparison to those parties that continuously control the executive office.

Table A4: Determinants of strong party organisation (Continuous Executive Office)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Party organisation		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Executive office	-0.038*** (0.015)	-0.079*** (0.018)	-0.086*** (0.019)
Executive office ²	0.001*** (0.0004)	0.002*** (0.0005)	0.002*** (0.0005)
Incumbency	0.034 (0.094)	0.167** (0.083)	0.170* (0.094)
Party voteshare	0.008*** (0.003)	0.009*** (0.004)	0.011** (0.004)
Party Age	-0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.002)	0.0002 (0.003)
Constant	1.457*** (0.066)	1.687*** (0.377)	2.067*** (0.497)
Controls	No	No	Yes
State FEs	No	Yes	No
Year FEs	No	Yes	No
Party FEs	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	455	455	455
R ²	0.025	0.667	0.743

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

In addition to the above theoretical discussion, there are multiple alternative explanations as to why parties invest in a stronger organisation.

As mentioned by Kitschelt and Kselman (2010), increasing fragmentation of the party system puts pressure on political parties to invest in a stronger organisation. As the number of political parties in a party system rises, it becomes increasingly costly for voters to gather sufficient information to assess the record of incumbents and the promises of potential challengers. Under such conditions, parties face greater pressures to invest in an organisation that stabilizes ties with the followers. Party system fragmentation also increases the incentives to invest in a strong party organisation through an alternative mechanism. In a highly fragmented party system, parties face greater pressures to cultivate distinctive party brands, which are able to underpin stable commitments to clearly defined groups. Politicians have more options to switch between political parties without compromising on their core ideological platforms, as there are multiple parties which may be competing on similar ideological platforms. To dis-incentivise politicians from defecting, parties invest in a strong organisation that stabilizes the ties with the politicians and followers. It is true that the existing literature on party system fragmentation argues that a strong party organisation contributes to lower party system fragmentation, as politicians will be dis-incentivised from defecting (Kitschelt et al., 1999). But, as argued above, empirical evidence from the comparative literature also points to the contrary situation, where a high level of party system fragmentation could also incentivise political parties to invest in a strong party organisation in order to pre-empt defections of politicians and party workers.

HA1 *Fragmentation*: The more fragmented a state-level party system is, the more likely the party or party unit is going to be organized.

Second, building on Chandra's (2004) and Singh's (2015) work on ethnic identity, sub-nationalism and party organisation in India, I argue that high levels of sub-nationalism at the regional level can incentivise parties to invest in a strong organisation. Similarly

to Singh's argument, I argue that attachment to an overarching sub-national identity encourages parties to invest in a strong organisation. A strong party organisation is one where the process of upward mobility, and the rules of succession planning are clear, and are not based on the whims of a few leaders. Importantly, as underlined by Rasmussen and Knutsen (2019), parties with strong organisations take leadership and strategic decisions with clear and stable rules, informed through dense networks linking party elites with broad constituencies outside the core organisation. When the rules of succession and upward mobility are clear and transparent, and parties are linked with broader constituencies outside the core organisation, politicians from diverse ethnic backgrounds can occupy regional level leadership positions within the party organisation. In a region with a strong sense of sub-nationalism, party elites will not be worried about the prospects of diverse ethnic sub groups occupying leadership positions, as the attachment to an overarching sub-national identity will mean that their perception of what counts as "us" versus "them" is replaced with the more inclusive "we". This increase in sub-national solidarity will decrease the ethnic fears within the parties (Chandra, 2004). Party elites will be less concerned about which specific ethnic sub-group occupies leadership positions. This will in turn motivate them to institutionalize the process of upward mobility and succession planning.

HA2 *Sub-nationalism*: Higher levels of sub-nationalism is positively correlated with higher levels of organisation for the particular party or state party unit.

Third, increasing political and economic decentralization at the regional level could motivate parties to invest in a strong regional party organisation. When political power and economic resources are centralized, there is little incentive for parties to invest in the organisation of their state-level units. However, when substantial political and economic power is decentralized, the incentives to strengthen the organisation of the state-level unit increase, as parties will wish for better management of their organisation in order to capture the lucrative political and economic resources available at the regional level.

Alternatively, it could also be argued that greater availability of political and economic resources at the sub-national level could provide the necessary resources for regional level political elites to invest in a stronger regional party organisation.

HA3 *Decentralization*: Higher levels of political and economic decentralization towards the sub-national level increase the organizational strength of the party or party unit at the sub-national level.

Fourth, political parties find it increasingly important to strengthen their organisation where the ideological differences between parties are less pronounced, and more catch-all in nature. Citizens and followers in ideologically polarized contexts are more likely to recognize differences across political parties and, in turn, form stable attachments to them, as opposed to environments driven by fluid-, and less ideological differences. In contexts where the ideological differences between political parties are more pronounced, political parties' attempts to generate stable attachments by appealing to long-term partisan loyalties are less costly and more likely to pay off as compared to party systems where ideological differences between parties are smaller and less visible. This means that ideological polarization decreases the incentives for political parties to invest in a stronger organisation. In contrast, in catch-all political environments, citizens and followers will find it difficult to form strong emotional attachments, making it imperative for political parties to invest in strong programmatic platform or strengthen their party organisation. Therefore, one can expect party organisation to be stronger in contexts where the party system is less polarized, i.e. the ideological differences between parties are weaker and less visible, in comparison to a party system that is more polarized along partisan lines.

HA4 *Polarization*: The less polarized a party system is, the more likely the party or party unit is going to be organized.

Table A5: Party organisation and alternative explanations

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Party_org		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Executive office	−0.054*** (0.014)	−0.060*** (0.015)	−0.046*** (0.014)
Executive office ²	0.001*** (0.0004)	0.001*** (0.0004)	0.001*** (0.0003)
Incumbency	−0.108 (0.087)	−0.117 (0.089)	−0.030 (0.077)
Party voteshare	0.016*** (0.004)	0.017*** (0.004)	0.010** (0.004)
Party Age	0.002 (0.002)	0.004* (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)
ENVP	0.109*** (0.033)	0.012 (0.057)	0.025 (0.045)
Sub nationalism	0.009 (0.033)	0.115 (0.094)	0.078 (0.083)
Post 1991	0.183** (0.080)	0.351 (0.239)	−0.176 (0.316)
Cleavage	−0.004 (0.004)	0.090 (0.064)	0.003 (0.049)
Constant	0.901*** (0.234)	−0.651 (1.327)	0.931 (1.041)
State FEs	No	Yes	Yes
Year FEs	No	Yes	Yes
Party FEs	No	No	Yes
Observations	449	449	449
R ²	0.076	0.247	0.656

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A6: Party organisation as an ordinal variable

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Party organisation		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Executive office	-0.137*** (0.042)	-0.267*** (0.079)	-0.494*** (0.108)
Executive office ²	0.003** (0.001)	0.005** (0.002)	0.007*** (0.002)
Incumbency	-0.056 (0.247)	-0.295 (0.452)	-2.024*** (0.584)
Party voteshare	0.025*** (0.009)	0.035 (0.023)	0.030 (0.025)
Party Age	0.009** (0.005)	6.785*** (0.019)	8.842*** (0.019)
Controls	No	No	Yes
State FEs	No	Yes	No
Year FEs	No	Yes	No
Party FEs	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	455	455	455

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01