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Electoral continuity and political stability in Gujarat, 1995–2022: Volatility, seat-vote elasticity and constituency margin persistence

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Abstract
Gujarat has returned the same party to office at every Assembly election since 1995. This paper asks how that continuity shows up in the arithmetic of votes and seats. Using a seven-election state series (1995–2022) taken from Election Commission of India returns and a verified 182-constituency results panel, we compute three quantities that are often conflated: aggregate vote volatility, the rate at which vote movements convert into seats, and the persistence of constituency-level competitiveness. The three-category Pedersen index ranges from 1.27 (2007–2012) to 14.16 (2017–2022); a refined index that separates new and exiting parties raises the 1995–1998 figure from 4.29 to 15.97 and the 2017–2022 figure to 16.37, showing that Gujarat's two most volatile cycles were both episodes of party entry or exit rather than of switching between the two principal parties.

Seat-vote elasticity measured on BJP's raw vote share is erratic, including two negative values (1995–1998 and 2012–2017). Measured on BJP's share of the two-party vote, both are positive: BJP's two-party share fell in each of those cycles, as did its seat share. (Two other cycles turn negative on the two-party measure, but only because their two-party changes were below half a point.) The two-party share stayed within a band of 2.2 points (54.20–56.40 per cent) from 1995 to 2017 before rising to 65.81 per cent in 2022. A pooled swing ratio of 2.76 (SE 0.51) is statistically indistinguishable from the cube-law benchmark of 3, but it rests almost entirely on the 2017–2022 cycle; excluding that cycle, the slope is 0.23 (SE 4.63). At constituency level, competitiveness persists strongly: winning margins correlate at r = 0.723 (2012→2017) and r = 0.711 (2017→2022), and seats that changed hands were won by roughly half the margin of retained seats. On 2022 margins, a uniform swing of about 9 points from BJP to each seat's runner-up would be required to remove BJP's majority. Gujarat's stability is therefore located less in a static vote than in a stable map of safe and marginal seats overlaid by a nearly frozen two-party balance that broke only once, in 2022.

Keywords: Gujarat, Pedersen Index, seat-vote elasticity, swing ratio, cube law, margin persistence, dominant-party systems, Indian State Elections

Introduction

Between 1995 and 2022 the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won all seven Gujarat Legislative Assembly elections [1]. The run spans six BJP chief ministers, one mid-term collapse of government (1996), a change of constituency map (2008) and the arrival of a third party at scale (2022). Continuity of this length is unusual among Indian states, where incumbent governments and individual legislators are frequently defeated [2]. A companion paper examines the substantive question of what that continuity is made of — policy delivery, governance shocks and social mobilisation [3]. A second companion paper examines where it is located geographically [4]. This paper is concerned with mechanics: how much the statewide vote has moved from one election to the next, how vote movements have converted into seat movements, and whether the seats that are competitive in one election are the same seats that are competitive in the next.

These questions matter for interpretation. A dominant party can owe its continuity to a large and static vote lead, to an electoral system that amplifies a modest lead, or to a stable geography of safe seats that insulates it from statewide swings. Each implies a different level of risk for the governing party and a different strategy for its challengers. Gujarat offers an unusually clean setting in which to separate them, because its two-party balance barely moved for twenty-two years and then moved sharply once.

Contribution

The paper makes four contributions. First, it reports Pedersen volatility for all six Gujarat cycles from 1995 to 2022, in both the conventional three-category form and a refined form that isolates the entry and exit of the All India Rashtriya Janata Party (1998), the Gujarat Parivartan Party (2012) and the Aam Aadmi Party (2022) [5, 6]. Second, it computes seat-vote elasticity for every cycle on both the raw and two-party vote, and pools the cycles into a single swing-ratio estimate tested against the cube law [7, 8]. Third, it tests constituency-level margin persistence on fully verified margins for all 182 seats in 2012, 2017 and 2022. Fourth, it converts the 2022 margin distribution into a seat-sensitivity schedule for the next election, stated as a conditional exercise rather than a forecast.

Structure

Section 2 sets out the conceptual distinctions; Section 3 states the hypotheses; Section 4 describes data and methods,

including the corrections made to the source tables; Sections 5 to 8 report volatility, elasticity, persistence and seat sensitivity; Section 9 discusses the results; Section 10 sets out limitations; and Section 11 concludes.

Conceptual Framework: Continuity, Volatility and Conversion Are Different Quantities

Government continuity is a binary state-level outcome: did the incumbent formation retain office? Aggregate volatility, conventionally measured by the Pedersen index [5], is a continuous measure of how far party vote shares moved between two elections. Seat-vote elasticity, or the swing ratio, measures how strongly the electoral system converts vote movements into seat movements [8, 9]. Constituency persistence asks whether the competitive structure of the map — which seats are safe and which are marginal — carries over from one election to the next. A party can retain office in a high-volatility election (if the volatility is among its rivals), lose seats while gaining votes (if its rivals gain more), and win a landslide on a modest swing (if the system is highly responsive). Gujarat exhibits each of these possibilities at some point between 1995 and 2022.

Comparative work treats low volatility as a sign of party-system institutionalisation [10], and the literature on Indian party systems has emphasised high volatility and weak institutionalisation at the state level [11]. The classic account of one-party dominance in India described a system in which a dominant party absorbs factions and faces opposition chiefly at its margins [12, 13]. Gujarat after 1995 is a case of dominance by a party other than Congress, and of a dominant party facing a single principal rival for most of the period. That configuration makes the two-party vote the natural measure of the underlying balance, and makes the arrival of a third party in 2022 a natural experiment in how volatility can rise while the dominant party's seat position strengthens.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The paper addresses three questions. RQ1: How large has aggregate vote volatility been in Gujarat, and how much of it reflects party entry and exit rather than movement between the two principal parties? RQ2: How responsive is the conversion of votes into seats, and is that responsiveness stable across cycles? RQ3: Does a constituency's competitiveness in one election predict its competitiveness in the next?

- **H1:** Three-category volatility will be low in cycles without party entry or exit and high in the cycles in which a party entered or left at scale; the refined index will exceed the three-category index in those cycles.
- **H2:** Measured on the two-party vote, the swing ratio will be positive in every cycle and close to the cube-law benchmark of 3; measured on the raw vote, it will be unstable because third-party movements contaminate the denominator.
- **H3:** Constituency margins will persist significantly from one election to the next, and seats that change hands will have been won by narrower margins than seats that are retained.

Data and Methods

State-level vote shares, seat totals and turnout for 1995–2022 are taken from the Election Commission of India (ECI) statistical reports [1] and compiled into a state dataset [14]. Vote shares follow the ECI convention, which includes NOTA votes in the denominator from 2017, the first Gujarat Assembly election in which NOTA was available. Constituency-level winners for all seven elections and winning margins for 2012, 2017 and 2022 were compiled into a constituency panel [15], cross-checked seat by seat against IndiaVotes [16] and the ECI totals; where IndiaVotes and ECI-based sources disagreed on a margin, the ECI-derived Indiastat constituency factbooks [17] were used to decide. Because the 2008 delimitation redrew boundaries [18], constituencies are matched across elections by name within each delimitation, not by Assembly Constituency (AC) number.

1. Verification and corrections

The verification audit identified several errors in the source tables from which the datasets were first compiled. Table 1 lists the corrections made. With these corrections, every year's seat table reproduces the certified ECI party totals exactly.

Table 1: Corrections made to the source tables during verification

Item	Source-table value	Verified value	Effect
BJP vote share, 1998	45.79%	44.81%	Pedersen 1995–98 and 1998–02; elasticities
Turnout, 2012 / 2017 / 2022	71.32 / 68.41 / 64.51%	72.02 / 69.01 / 64.84% (ECI statistical reports)	Turnout series only
INC vote share, 2012	38.94%	38.93%	2012 two-party share; elasticities
2012 seat table	BJP 116, INC 60	BJP 115, INC 61 (Pavi Jetpur BJP; Lunawada, Sankheda INC)	2012→2017 retention
Dhoraji margin, 2012	26,258	2,943	Margin persistence
2017 margins	159 seats, many incorrect	All 182 seats re-verified	Margin persistence
Margins differing from ECI final counts	Gandhinagar North 2017: 5,736; Nikol 2012: 49,302; five 2017 seats off by 3–239 votes	Gandhinagar North 4,774; Nikol 48,712; Mehmedabad, Vaghodiya, Sankheda, Raopura, Olpad per ECI	Persistence r (2017→22) 0.712 → 0.711
AC numbers, 2017 and 2022 sheets	Seats 166–182 shifted	Matched by name	All 2012–2022 seat-level tests
2007 seat table	Jasdan INC→BJP and Mansa BJP→INC (by-election overwrites)	Jasdan INC; Mansa BJP	2002→2007 retention

Note: The two 2007 errors offset each other in the party totals, which is why a total check alone did not detect them. Sources: ECI [1]; IndiaVotes [16].

2. Pedersen index

The Pedersen index is half the sum of absolute changes in party vote shares between two elections [5]. The three-category version groups BJP, INC and all others. Because grouping hides movement among the 'others', we also compute a refined version that separates any party that

entered or left with more than 3 per cent of the vote: The All India Rashtriya Janata Party (AIRJP, 11.68 per cent in 1998), the Gujarat Parivartan Party (GPP, 3.63 per cent in 2012) and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP, 12.92 per cent in 2022) [6].

3. Seat-vote elasticity and the pooled swing ratio

For each cycle, BJP's raw elasticity is the change in its seat share divided by the change in its vote share, both in percentage points. Because the denominator is contaminated whenever votes move between BJP and third parties, we also compute a two-party elasticity using BJP/ (BJP + INC). Single-cycle ratios become unstable when the denominator is small, so the principal estimate is a pooled ordinary-least-squares regression of the six seat-share changes on the corresponding vote changes [8, 19]. A slope of 1 indicates proportional conversion; the cube law implies a slope of about 3 in a two-party contest [7].

4. Margin persistence

Each constituency's winning margin is expressed as a percentage of the votes polled by all candidates in that constituency (NOTA excluded), so that seats of different size are comparable; because NOTA took 1.84 per cent of votes statewide in 2017 and 1.57 per cent in 2022, these percentages are slightly higher than shares of ECI valid votes, which include NOTA. Results using raw vote margins are reported alongside. We report Pearson and Spearman correlations between consecutive margins for 2012→2017 and 2017→2022 (N = 182 in each pair), and Welch t-tests comparing the current margins of seats that retained their previous winning party with those that changed hands.

5. Seat sensitivity

For the forward-looking exercise, a uniform swing of s points from BJP to the runner-up in every BJP-held seat reduces BJP's margin by 2s points; a seat is lost when its 2022 margin is below 2s. The exercise follows the logic of the uniform-swing model [20]. It is a sensitivity schedule, not a forecast: it holds the identity of each seat's runner-up fixed and ignores differential regional swing.

Aggregate Volatility, 1995–2022

Table 2: Pedersen volatility index, three-category and refined, Gujarat 1995–2022

Cycle	Three-category	Refined	Difference	Principal movement
1995–1998	4.29	15.97	+11.68	AIRJP enters (11.68%); others fall
1998–2002	9.47	11.68	+2.21	AIRJP exits; BJP +5.0, INC +4.4
2002–2007	2.01	2.01	0.00	Minimal movement
2007–2012	1.27	4.56	+3.29	GPP enters (3.63%)
2012–2017	3.71	3.71	0.00	GPP exits; INC +2.5
2017–2022	14.16	16.37	+2.21	AAP enters (12.92%); INC −14.2

Note: The refined index separates AIRJP (1998), GPP (2012) and AAP (2022); for 2002–07 and 2012–17 no new party exceeds the 3% threshold on entry, so the refined and three-category values coincide (2012–17 records GPP's exit, which the three-category grouping already captures). Source: authors' calculations from ECI returns [1].

Three-category volatility averaged 5.82 points across the six cycles. The two highest readings are 1998–2002 (9.47) and 2017–2022 (14.16); the 2017–2022 figure is about one and a half times the next-highest. The lowest readings are 2002–2007 (2.01) and 2007–2012 (1.27), two consecutive cycles in which the statewide vote barely moved.

The refined index changes the picture most for 1995–1998. In 1998 Shankersinh Vaghela's AIRJP, formed after his breakaway from the BJP, polled 11.68 per cent. Grouped with all other parties, its arrival is largely offset by the decline of independents and smaller parties, so the three-category index records only 4.29. Separated out, volatility for the cycle is 15.97, the second-highest figure in the series. The same applies in reverse in 1998–2002, when the AIRJP vote disappeared (the party having merged into Congress), and to a lesser degree in 2007–2012 with the GPP. In 2017–2022, the refined index adds only 2.2 points to an already high three-category figure, because AAP's entry and INC's loss of 14.2 points are both visible in the grouped measure.

H1 is supported. Every cycle with a three-category or refined index above 10 involved a party with more than a tenth of the vote entering or leaving (the AIRJP in 1998 and 2002, AAP in 2022).

The other three cycles — 2002–2007, with no new party, and 2007–2012 and 2012–2017, which saw only the GPP's small entry and exit — recorded volatility between 1.27 and 4.56 on either measure. Gujarat's electorate, on this evidence, has rarely moved between the two principal parties; the large movements have been movements into and out of third parties.

Policy Insight 5.1

A volatility index computed on grouped categories can hide the most important event in a cycle. In Gujarat, the three-category index understates 1995–1998 volatility by a factor of almost four. Any monitoring of electoral risk in a dominant-party state should track new-party vote separately, because the dominant party's main exposure has historically come from splinters and entrants rather than from its established rival.

Seat-Vote Elasticity and the Swing Ratio

Table 3: BJP seat-vote elasticity by cycle, raw and two-party, 1995–2022

Cycle	Δ vote (pp)	Δ seat share (pp)	Raw elasticity	Two-party share (%)	Δ two-party (pp)	Two-party elasticity
1995–1998	+2.30	−2.20	−0.95	56.40 → 56.25	−0.15	14.60
1998–2002	+5.04	+5.49	1.09	56.25 → 55.93	−0.32	−17.16
2002–2007	−0.73	−5.49	7.52	55.93 → 56.38	+0.45	−12.20
2007–2012	−1.27	−1.10	0.87	56.38 → 55.14	−1.24	0.89
2012–2017	+1.20	−8.79	−7.32	55.14 → 54.20	−0.94	9.35

2017–2022	+3.45	+31.32	9.08	54.20 → 65.81	+11.61	2.70
Pooled OLS (6 cycles)	—	—	3.16 (SE 2.55)	—	—	2.76 (SE 0.51)

Note: Seat share = BJP seats / 182. Two-party share = BJP / (BJP + INC) vote. Single-cycle ratios with denominators below one point (1995–98, 1998–02, 2002–07, 2012–17 on the two-party measure) are arithmetically unstable and are reported for completeness only. Source: authors' calculations from ECI returns [1].

On the raw vote, BJP's elasticity ranges from −7.32 (2012–2017) to 9.08 (2017–2022) and is negative in two cycles. In 1995–1998, BJP's vote rose by 2.30 points while it lost four seats; in 2012–2017, its vote rose by 1.20 points while it lost sixteen. Taken at face value these are paradoxes. On the two-party vote both paradoxes disappear. In each of those cycles INC's vote grew proportionally faster than BJP's, so BJP's share of the two-party vote fell (by 0.15 and 0.94 points respectively) and its seat share fell with it. The negative raw elasticities are artefacts of votes moving from third parties to both principal parties at different rates. The two-party measure produces its own negative values, in 1998–2002 and 2002–2007, but these arise from two-party changes of 0.32 and 0.45 points — movements too small to carry a ratio — and are best read as zero.

The two-party measure exposes a second, more important feature of Gujarat's electoral history: from 1995 to 2017 BJP's two-party share hardly moved. It stayed between 54.20 and 56.40 per cent across six elections. Every seat movement in that period — BJP's high of 127 seats in 2002, its low of 99 in 2017 — occurred on two-party changes of less than 1.3 points. In 2022 the two-party share jumped by 11.61 points to 65.81 per cent, because INC's vote fell by 14.2 points while BJP's rose by 3.45, with AAP absorbing most of the INC loss.

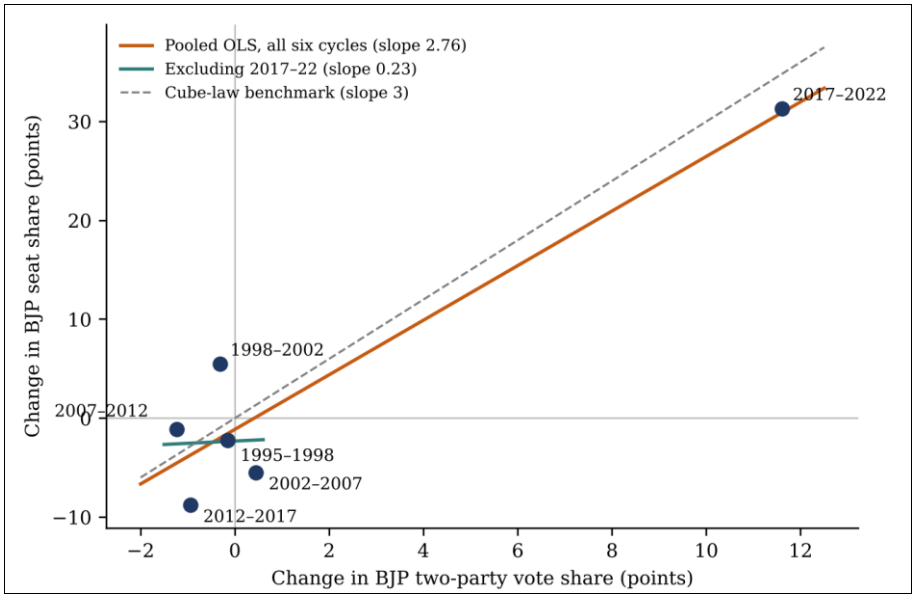


Fig 1: Change in BJP seat share against change in BJP two-party vote share, six cycles 1995–2022. The orange line is the pooled OLS fit; the teal segment is the fit excluding 2017–22; the dashed line is the cube-law benchmark (slope 3).

The pooled regression of seat change on two-party vote change gives a swing ratio of 2.76 (SE 0.51; 95% CI 1.36–4.17; R^2 = 0.882; p = 0.0055), with an intercept indistinguishable from zero (p = 0.666). The slope does not differ significantly from the cube-law value of 3 (p = 0.662). The equivalent regression on the raw vote is uninformative (slope 3.16, SE 2.55, R^2 = 0.278). As Figure 1 shows, however, the pooled two-party estimate is determined almost entirely by the single 2017–2022 observation. Excluding it, the slope is 0.23 (SE 4.63; R^2 = 0.00): across the five earlier cycles, seat-share changes of up to 8.8 points occurred with no systematic relation to two-party vote changes, because the vote changes were too small to measure a relation against.

Table 4: Pooled swing-ratio regressions, Gujarat 1995–2022

Specification	Slope	SE	95% CI	R^2	p (slope)	p (slope = 3)
Two-party vote, all six cycles	2.76	0.51	1.36 to 4.17	0.882	0.0055	0.662
Two-party vote, excluding 2017–22	0.23	4.63	−14.49 to 14.95	0.00	0.96	0.592
Raw BJP vote, all six cycles	3.16	2.55	−3.91 to 10.23	0.278	0.28	0.952

Note: OLS of change in BJP seat share (pp) on change in vote measure (pp); N = 6 (5 when 2017–22 is excluded). Source: authors' calculations.

H2 is therefore only partly supported. Measured on the two-party vote, elasticities are positive in all three cycles with a two-party movement of more than half a point (2007–2012, 2012–2017 and 2017–2022) and the pooled estimate is close to the cube-law value. But the evidence that Gujarat's electoral system converts two-party swings at a cube-law rate rests on one cycle. What the series establishes more firmly is that seat outcomes before 2022 were not driven by the two-party balance at all; they were driven by the distribution of a nearly constant vote across constituencies

— the subject of Section 7 and of the companion geography paper [4].

Advisory Note 6.1
Seat losses on a rising vote share, as in 2017, are not evidence that the electoral system has turned against the governing party. They are evidence that the opposition's vote rose faster. A party strategist reading only its own vote share in 2017 would have concluded that it had improved its position; the two-party measure shows it had weakened slightly, and the seat count followed the two-party measure.

Constituency Margin Persistence
If Gujarat's seat outcomes before 2022 were driven by the distribution of a stable vote rather than by statewide swings, the map of safe and marginal seats should itself be stable. Table 5 tests this directly for the two consecutive pairs on the current delimitation.

Table 5: Constituency margin persistence and retained-versus-flipped margins, 2012–2022

Test	2012 → 2017	2017 → 2022
Pearson r, margin as % of candidate votes	0.723 ($p < 0.001$)	0.711 ($p < 0.001$)
Spearman ρ, margin %	0.546 ($p < 0.001$)	0.492 ($p < 0.001$)
Pearson r, margin in votes	0.740 ($p < 0.001$)	0.752 ($p < 0.001$)
Variance in current margin explained (r^2, %)	52	51
Seats retaining previous winner	124 (mean margin 16.3%)	101 (mean margin 30.2%)
Seats changing hands	58 (mean margin 8.6%)	81 (mean margin 14.1%)
Welch t-test, retained vs changed	$t = 4.95$, $p < 0.001$	$t = 7.42$, $p < 0.001$

Note: N = 182 constituencies in each pair, matched by name on the 2008 delimitation. Margins verified seat by seat against ECI and IndiaVotes [1, 16]. Source: authors' calculations.

Margins persist strongly in both pairs. A constituency's 2012 margin explains about half the variance of its 2017 margin (r = 0.723), and its 2017 margin explains about half the variance of its 2022 margin (r = 0.711). The rank correlations are lower (0.546 and 0.492) because the relation is driven most strongly at the top of the distribution: Gujarat's safest seats — concentrated in the urban cores of Ahmedabad, Surat and Vadodara [4] — are safe in every election, while the order among close seats is reshuffled. The persistence holds even through the 2017–2022 cycle, in which 81 of 182 seats changed hands.

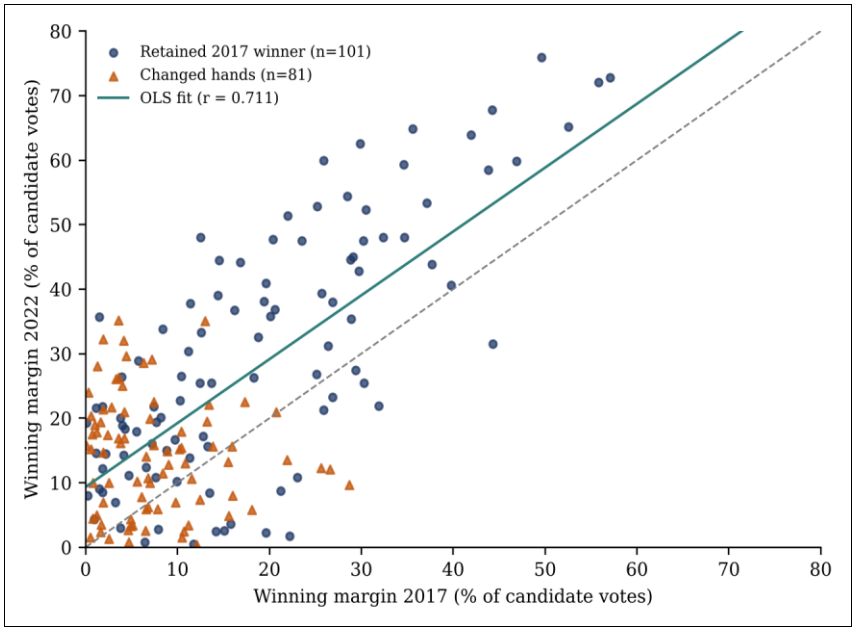


Fig 2: Constituency winning margin, 2017 against 2022, by whether the 2017 winning party retained the seat (r = 0.711). Points above the dashed equality line widened their margin.

Retained seats were won by much wider margins than seats that changed hands: 16.3 against 8.6 per cent in 2017 ($t = 4.95$), and 30.2 against 14.1 per cent in 2022 ($t = 7.42$). H3 is supported. In Gujarat, the seats that change hands are a recognisable subset — those that are closely fought — and, because margins persist, the seats that a party holds, it tends to hold comfortably. The pattern differs from systems in which competitiveness is reshuffled at random from one election to the next; it is the pattern of a map with a stable core and a contestable periphery.

Table 6: Distribution of winning margins, 2012, 2017 and 2022

Margin band (% of candidate votes)	2012	2017	2022
Below 2%	18	29	8
Below 5%	50	56	26
Below 10%	84	89	43
Median margin (%)	10.8	10.4	18.9

Note: Counts of constituencies (of 182) won by less than the stated margin. Source: authors' calculations from the verified panel [15].

Table 6 shows the competitive periphery expanding and then contracting. In 2017, 56 seats were decided by less than 5 per cent and 29 by less than 2 per cent; this is the election

in which BJP fell to 99 seats. In 2022 only 26 seats were decided by less than 5 per cent and the median margin almost doubled to 18.9 per cent. The 2022 landslide was not a narrow sweep of many close seats but a broad widening of margins across the map.

Policy Insight 7.1
Because Gujarat's margins persist, a target list built from the previous election's close seats has genuine predictive value: in both measured transitions, margins carried over strongly from one election to the next, and the seats that changed hands were won by roughly half the margin of retained seats. This is a structural property of the map, not of any one campaign, and it should anchor seat-level risk assessment in the state.

Seat Sensitivity on the 2022 Margins

Table 7: BJP seats retained under a uniform swing from BJP to each seat's runner-up, applied to 2022 margins

Uniform swing (points)	BJP seats lost	BJP seats retained (of 156)	Majority (92) retained?
1	3	153	Yes
2	10	146	Yes
3	15	141	Yes
4	18	138	Yes
5	23	133	Yes
6	33	123	Yes
7.5	47	109	Yes
10	73	83	No
12.5	89	67	No
15	105	51	No

Note: A swing of s points reduces a seat's margin by 2s; seats with a 2022 margin below 2s are counted as lost. The swing at which BJP falls below 92 seats is 8.95 points. Source: authors' calculations from the verified 2022 margins [15].

The 2022 result leaves BJP with a large cushion. Only 12 of its 156 seats were won by less than 5 per cent and 23 by less than 10 per cent; its median winning margin was 21.4 per cent. A uniform swing of 5 points to the runner-up in every BJP seat would cost it 23 seats, leaving 133. Its majority would be lost only at a uniform swing of 8.95 points. For comparison, BJP's two-party share rose by 11.61 points between 2017 and 2022; the swing needed to remove its majority is of the same order as the swing that produced the 2022 landslide.

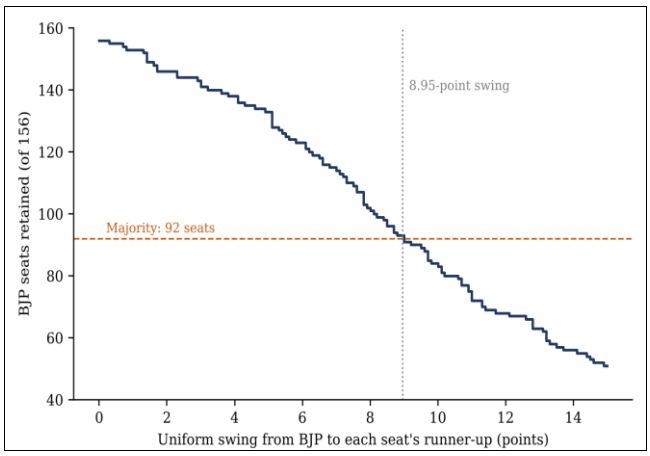


Fig 3: BJP seats retained as a function of a uniform swing to each seat's runner-up, on 2022 margins.

Two features of the 2022 result make the uniform-swing schedule an upper bound on opposition prospects rather than a central estimate. First, the runner-up in 2022 was INC in some seats and AAP in others; a swing against BJP that is divided between two opposition parties reduces BJP's margin by less than 2s in each seat. Second, Section 7 shows that change in Gujarat is concentrated in closely fought seats on a persistent map, which implies that real swings are not uniform. Read together with the persistence results, the schedule describes the scale of opposition consolidation that would be needed, not the likelihood that it occurs.

Discussion

The three quantities measured in this paper describe a distinctive form of continuity. Aggregate volatility has been low except when a party entered or left. The two-party balance between BJP and INC hardly moved for two decades. Constituency competitiveness has been persistent, with a stable core of very safe seats and a periphery of close seats in which change is concentrated. Seat totals before 2022 — ranging from 99 to 127 — were therefore shaped less by statewide swing than by how a nearly constant vote fell across that periphery in each election.

This has a direct implication for how the 2017 and 2022 results should be read. The 2017 result, BJP's lowest seat total in the period, came on a two-party share only 0.94 points lower than in 2012; the companion geography paper shows that most of the loss was concentrated in Saurashtra-Kutch [4]. The 2022 result was the first genuine break in the two-party balance since 1995, and it came from the collapse of INC's vote rather than a large rise in BJP's. The highest volatility in the series therefore coincided with the dominant party's strongest seat position: the volatility occurred among its opponents.

The contrast with conventional accounts of Indian state politics, which emphasise anti-incumbency and high volatility [2, 11], is instructive. Gujarat is not a low-volatility system in every cycle; it is a system in which volatility has been channelled into the opposition space, leaving the governing party's vote intact. The same mechanism that produced the 2022 landslide — a divided opposition — is also the condition under which the uniform-swing schedule in Section 8 overstates BJP's vulnerability.

Limitations

Two limitations bear on the conclusions. First, the pooled two-party swing ratio rests on six cycles, five of which have two-party movements below 1.3 points; the estimate of a cube-law rate of conversion is driven by the single 2017–2022 cycle and should not be treated as a stable parameter of Gujarat's electoral system. Second, margin persistence is measured only on the current delimitation (2012–2022), because verified seat-level margins were compiled for those three elections; whether the pre-2008 map showed the same degree of persistence is untested.

Conclusion

Gujarat's three decades of single-party government rest on three arithmetic regularities documented here. Aggregate volatility has been high only when parties entered or left the system. The two-party balance between the two principal parties was nearly frozen from 1995 to 2017 and broke decisively only in 2022, through the collapse of the opposition vote. And the map of safe and marginal seats is

persistent, with change concentrated in a recognisable periphery. On the 2022 margins, a uniform swing of about 9 points to a consolidated opposition would be required to remove BJP's majority — a swing comparable in size to the one that produced the 2022 result. The governing party's exposure, on this evidence, lies less in the movement of its own vote than in whether its opponents' vote consolidates or fragments.

Declarations

Funding: The authors received no specific funding for this work.

Competing interests: The authors declare no competing interests.

Data availability: State-level results are taken from the Election Commission of India's statistical reports [1]. The datasets compiled by the authors [14, 15] are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Ethics statement: This study uses only publicly available aggregate election returns and did not involve human participants.

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