Indian General Election 2019:
Analysing the Outcome

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The reasons of BJP's overwhelming mandate are many. Data from the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) postpoll survey shows that the BJP has not only managed to expand its support base among new social groups, but it has also enhanced its performance in rural and semi-urban voters, while retaining its urban votes. CSDS data also shows that opposition parties hope from caste-community driven alliances was punctured by the BJP, and its vote share in constituencies with various proportions of Dalit, Adivasi and Muslim population went up. The main opposition party Congress didn't win a single seat in 16 states even in some states with Congress government. Even after five years in the opposition, taking advantage of the anti-incumbency effect and making numerous allegations on the Modi government, the Congress could get only eight seats more than the last time. So, what went wrong with the Congress and what led this mandate to the BJP?

Ineffective Opposition

Indian election 2019 witnessed a coming together of some political parties which were hitherto arch rivals, keeping caste equations in mind in anticipation to stop the BJP from repeating its 2014 performance. However, social engineering formula of opposition parties and their conflicting signals portrayed their incompetence to form a credible Pan-India alliance. More importantly, the Congress and other regional parties in opposition failed to impress voters with any overarching counter narrative against the Modi government. Selective questioning of institutions, indecent slogans and personal attacks on Modi, indecisiveness about governance agenda etc. by the opposition parties failed to create an impact to the Modi government without offering any tangible alternative. Inability to come together and too many ambitious leaders in the opposition parties made their whole campaign like a rudderless ship. The lackadaisical and dynastic approach of regional parties confused voters about their core strengths and agenda resulting in consolidation of votes against such parties. On the other hand, the BJP's nationalistic appeal and their coordinated campaign along with the NDA partners and effective communication skills convinced voters to rally behind the Modi government. Modi's regular interactions with people significantly increased the BJP's support base geographically and socially. Modi's promise to build a stronger, safer and prosperous nation resonated across length and breadth of India. While increasing number of seats

registered growing margins of victory, vote share of regional parties also got reduced. Whether it signals shrinking role of regional parties in Indian politics or not, is a topic of further research.

BJP's Well Oiled Machinery

In contrast to the opposition parties' organisational weaknesses, the institutional strength of the BJP enabled it for a focussed, coordinated and aggressive campaign. The BJP spoke the language of nationalism and development, which appealed cutting across class and caste. The BJP spearheaded a wider movement driven by nationalism and came out with the pledge of "India First". Besides BJP's strong organisational structure, its grassroots associations, abundant financial resources and cadre of disciplined workers stood in stark contrast to the opposition parties institutional flaws and lack of resources. The BJP's well-oiled machinery delivered a clear and focussed message to the voters about various government schemes, promises and plan of actions. Further, the organisational strength was instrumental in mobilisation of voters with great efficiency. While the BJP's election campaign planning and strategy was instrumental in winning the election, Modi's image as a clean and dynamic leader ensured this landslide victory to the BJP.

Modi's Leadership

According to CSDS data, 32 per cent voters would not have voted to the BJP if Modi was not the PM candidate. Indeed, Modi's unmatched acceptance as a leader and his humble background became a prized possession for the BJP. Modi successfully tapped aspirational India through his continuous, frequent and sustained interactions with the people. His development oriented politics, national security agenda and his promise of asserting India's centrality to global affairs contributed to his credibility. The Pulwama terrorist attack in February 2019 and India's response with the Balakot airstrikes, further boosted Modi's image as a strong and decisive leader. He became the BJP's 'trump card'. Well-oiled machinery of the BJP used its trump card very efficiently through five Cs: Communication with the voters, Cooperation with the alliance partners, Contacts with party workers, supporters and grassroots organisations, Coordination between the government, the party and their thought-leaders, Control and management of narratives. The BJP mixed national security with a muscular nationalism that became electoral advantage for the BJP and completely derailed the Opposition. Modi projected himself as a strong '*Chowkidar*' (watchman) and it became a turning point in favour of the BJP. His larger than life persona, his eloquence and persistent energy made the opposition dynastic and caste politics appear irrelevant. The key question in the minds of many voters was – if not Modi, who?

Delivery of Schemes

Delivery of government schemes was perceived another important element of Modi's success. In his first term as prime minister, the Modi government launched numerous schemes targeted at farmers and excluded sections of society. The beneficiaries of various schemes such as opening of the bank account for every Indian family, building toilets, funds for building a house, health insurance, gas connection to poor families at subsidized rates, rural electrification, digital India (making all government services electronically available to the public), Start-up India (to Promote new enterprises), Stand Up India (loans up to 10 lacs to 1 crore for establishment of new companies to scheduled castes / tribes and women entrepreneurs), Make in India etc. appeared to have touched lives of people. Further, through the "*Mann ki baat*" (voice from the heart) program, Modi made robust bond with the people.

Building a New India

2019 election mandate to the Modi government is also seen by many in India as a response to all those critics, both domestic and international, who called Modi a divisive figure. Generally, the Modi government acknowledged that the strength of a nation lies in the social harmony prevailing within, hence, his government worked for a "New India" with collective efforts and focussed on inclusive growth. Many Indians see him as a great unifier who has empowered backward and dalits through various government schemes and affirmative actions. Modi's constant interactions with farmers, cleaners, shopkeepers, small vendors etc. created a sense of respect and dignity among common man. Modi launched the "New India Movement 2017-2022" and envisaged India free from poverty, corruption, terrorism, communalism, casteism and uncleanliness and unite the entire country by adopting good governance using technology. All these influenced aspirational India. How Modi will make use of this massive mandate to build a new India will now be closely watched.

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