



# The 2019 Lok Sabha elections: Part IV - Landslide victory for Hindu nationalists in the *Lok Sabha* elections

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## **India: Landslide victory for Hindu nationalists in the *Lok Sabha* elections**

By Dr. Klaus Voll and Dr. Joyce Lobo

The election, the world's largest, which took place in seven phases in a long-drawn process over six weeks, was the most bitterly fought one in independent India.

Exit polls had already indicated that the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) and its *National Democratic Alliance* (NDA) would sweep the 2019 *Lok Sabha* elections.

The Congress and its *United Progressive Alliance* (UPA) suffered a humiliating defeat. Independent regional parties performed differently, but lost overall some influence.

### ***The major players and their programmes***

The elections of 2019 established for a second time the hegemony of the BJP in Indian politics. There is no countrywide major rival left, because the Congress is only a shadow of its former self and did not win this time a single seat in 16 states, with only a few pockets left in the rest of the Indian Union.

This vacuum has been filled by the BJP and the regional parties, which are either allied as NDA with the BJP or as UPA with the Congress. Besides them, there are a number of parties, like the *YSR Congress* in Andhra Pradesh or the *Biju Janata Dal* (BJD) in Odisha, which keep an equi-distance from the two camps.

The major differences between the two blocks have been:

- The BJP emphasized '*Hyper-Nationalism*' and '*national security*' after the terrorist attack in Pulwama in Jammu & Kashmir, followed by a decisive Indian airstrike on terrorist camps deep in Pakistan. This had a major impact on the electorate.
- The BJP propagated aggressively its '*Hindutva*'-ideology to weave the politico-religious-cultural narrative, that nationalism means '*Hindutva*' or pride in Hindu culture.
- In the 2014 campaign, Modi made many promises, which he could not really fulfil, therefore the above topics were used to deviate from questions like unemployment, agrarian distress and the economic crisis.

On the other side the Congress and its allies tried to focus on:

- Unemployment, but without concrete proposals, how growth can be connected with the creation of jobs.
- The Congress focused on the 20% of the poorest population through the so-called NYAY ('Justice') programme and promised through a monthly topping up a basic annual income of 72 000 Rupees (slightly more than 900 Euro) for each of the relevant households.
- But this programme, introduced quite late in its manifesto, did not really reach the grass-roots workers and the potential recipients.

The two formations differed with regard to their positions vis-à-vis the crisis state of J&K, where the BJP pursues a hard-line approach and wants to abolish the articles 370 and 35 A of the constitution, in order to change the demography, whereas the Congress wanted to modify or even abolish stringent laws like the *Armed Forces (Special Powers) Acts* (AFSPA) and the sedition law, besides proposing a dialogue with all political and social stakeholders.

### ***Causes of victory and defeat***

BJP and NDA could more or less repeat their result of 2014 or, like the BJP, even improve it.

BJP portrayed Narendra Modi as the face of the party, the face of the campaign and as *the* prime ministerial candidate. Modi, an excellent orator, has used the language of the 'ordinary masses' to convey the work and position of his party. The Congress and its alliance members failed to project a strong leader, who would become the prime minister. Alliance leaders along with other non-allied regional leaders showed ambitions for the top executive post, thereby confusing the electorate further.

'*Nationalism*' and '*national security*' resonated well with the voters, especially also in rural and border areas, and did not permit the opposition to focus on unemployment, rural distress, a basic minimum income for the poorest 20% of society and other existential problems of the working people and middle classes. Therefore, nationalism and national security won over majoritarian Hindus.

BJP's electoral strategy has remained intact. It has respected its NDA partners and has been generous in terms of sharing seats with parties like *Shiv Sena*, *Janata Dal (U)* etc.

The propaganda machinery of BJP is well oiled with funds that have remained discreet. Hence, the propaganda focussed on fighting terrorists, countering the so-called notion of 'Hindu terror', Congress as the face of minorities and not majority Hindus, mockery of Rahul Gandhi as '*pappu*' (slang used for a naive boy), mockery of the Grand Alliance, etc. that put the Congress and opposition parties in a bad light. The media have furthered this propaganda of Modi as the ultimate leader.

The opposition, including the Congress party, did not succeed in highlighting various deficits of the NDA balance sheet and many unfulfilled promises, whereas Prime Minister Narendra Modi succeeded in introducing new topics into the campaign, like the role of ex-PM Rajiv Gandhi and his alleged involvement in an arms deal and the memory of the killing of thousands of Sikhs in 1984 in Delhi and elsewhere.

The Congress has been facing a decline of sorts with party members moving to 'winnable' parties like the BJP. Infighting within the party, lack of organisational work at the ground level and failure to come out with a pan-India narrative has cost the party its national image. The BJP has been successful in highlighting the Gandhi family as the dynasty, that has been ruling and according to them ruining India for decades. The BJP's cadres have seeped into educational institutions and changed curricula to suit its interest.

There was too much of focus by Congress on the 'Rafale' scam. Proving the alleged corruption of the 'Rafale scam' becomes difficult, unless there is a sustained campaign through the help of a non-corrupt person like Anna Hazare, as done in "*India Against Corruption*" (IAC). Also the charge by Congress, that *chowkidar chor hai* ('the night guard is a thief with reference to Modi) backfired not because Modi donned the prefix of *Chowkidar*, but because he has a clean image personally and there have been only allegations.

BJP has been successful in conveying to the common people, that they have been part of the corruption drive through 'demonetisation' and the introduction of GST. People in India, who struggle with corrupt political and bureaucratic officials right to the gram (local) level feel buoyant, when they become part of a corruption drive. Fighting against corruption, and bringing development or '*vikas*' were the key reasons for BJP's victory in 2014. Lack of development has been also linked to corrupt officials, as it reminds them of potholed roads, leaky drainages, lack of pavements, lights or basic infrastructure.

The welfare schemes introduced by the Modi government have been mentioned in every campaign apart from national security. Thus building of toilets under the *Swachh Bharat Mission-Gramin* (SBM-G), distribution of LPG gas cylinders under the *Ujjwala Yojana* scheme, electrification of households, building houses, releasing money under the *Mudra yojana* to start a business, *Ayushman Bharat Yojana* for a health insurance cover for the poor, open *Jan Dhan* accounts, build roads and infrastructure indirectly sent the message to the voter, that development is taking place under Modi despite a mixed economic record.

However, the lack of party funds may have not enabled Congress to hold better campaigns. According to the *Association for Democratic Reforms*, the BJP's income increased from Rs 673.81 crore in 2013-14 to Rs 1027.3 crore in 2017-18. The Congress saw its relative share in the total income for national parties fall from 39 per cent (2013-14) to 14 per cent (2017-18). The Congress only had approximately Rs 200 crore in its coffers in 2017-18. In 2017-18, 95 per cent party contributions made through electoral bonds introduced for campaign finance went to the BJP.

The Grand Alliance or the *Mahagatbandan* of *Samajwadi Party* (SP) and the *Bahujan Samaj Party* (BSP) failed to capture a majority of seats in Uttar Pradesh (See Table 1). The caste equations were better worked out by the BJP. Also the SP-BSP alliance has not been able to transfer sufficient votes to each other, because Modi has been convincing in terms of welfare measures that have cut across caste sections.

Second, removing Modi from power is not a goal that the electorate had in mind. The electorate expects much more. Third, regional party leaders do not have a pan-India appeal.

The following table shows the performance of the major parties in comparison with 2014:

**Table 1: Lok Sabha Results 2019 and 2014**

Party	2019		2014	
	Seats	Votes share (%)	Seats	Votes share (%)
BJP	303	37.5	282	31.34
INC	52	19.6	44	19.52
DMK	23	2.24	--	--
AITC	22	4.1	34	3.8
YSRCP	22	2.5	--	--
SHS	18	2.1	18	1.9
JDU	16	1.46	--	--
BJD	12	1.36	20	1.7
BSP	10	6.3 (with SP)	--	--
TRS	09	1.29	11	1.2
LJSP	06	NA	--	--
NCP	05	1.41	--	--
SP	05	--	--	--
TDP	03	NA	16	2.5
AIADMK	01	1.25	37	3.3
Others	35*	NA	36	30.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>542</b>		<b>543**</b>	

**Source:** Election Commission of India

**Notes:**

\*Others for 2019 results include parties like AAP (01), AJSU (01), AIMM (02), AIUDF (01), CPI (02), CPM (03), IUML (03), JKNC (03), JDS (01), JMM (01), KCM (01), MNF (01), NPF (01), NPP (01), NDPP (01), RSP (01), SAD (02), SKM (01) and Others (08, names not mentioned)

\*\* Total number of seats in Lok Sabha is 545 out of which 2 are nominated by the President of India.

The BJP became the single largest party with 303 seats, that means an own absolute majority. Together with the NDA partners, they reach nearly a two thirds majority.

The Congress with a meagre 52 seats has not even the right to perform as “*Leader of Opposition*”, as it failed to secure the necessary number of seats.

The Congress, whose leadership spread optimism till the end, is the clear loser. Only in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Punjab, the party could perform reasonably well. Otherwise, the Congress is in shambles, as demonstrated in the resignation of its President Rahul Gandhi.

### ***Performances in various states***

**Table 2: Regionwise performance of parties/allies in 2019 Lok Sabha Election**

<b>Party</b>	<b>South</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>North-East</b>	<b>North</b>	<b>Central</b>	<b>West</b>	<b>Overall</b>
BJP	29	54	14	94	37	75	<b>303</b>
BJP Allies	02	23		04		19	<b>48</b>
Congress	28	06	04	09	03	02	<b>52</b>
Congress Allies	34	01				05	<b>40</b>
BSP-SP	00	00		15			<b>15</b>
Others	36	34	07	04		03	<b>84</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>542</b>

**Note:** South 5 states and 01 *Union Territory* (UT), East 4 states and 01 UT, North East 8 states, North 6 states and 2 UT, Central 2 states, West 4 states and 3 UT

In South India, the BJP performed extremely well in Karnataka and opened its account in Telangana, whereas its efforts in Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu did not succeed. BJP has repeated its victory in the Hindi heartland belt and Western India along with the new gains in the East and North-East (See Table 2).

But in Maharashtra, together with the *Shiv Sena*, and alone in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh the BJP fared extremely well, although it had lost in the latter states the Assembly elections in late 2018.

Nobody expected such a good performance by the BJP in the 200 million state of Uttar Pradesh, against the powerful alliance of BSP-SP, which represented *Jatav-Dalits* and *Yadav-OBC's* (Other Backward Castes) and Muslims.

The BJP forged an alliance of Upper Castes, non-*Jatav-Dalits* and non-*Yadav-OBC's*, which by and large proved to be numerically stronger. This delivered about 62 seats along with 2 seats with *Apna Dal* (AD) in Uttar Pradesh.

The BJP managed the biggest surprise in West Bengal and nearly succeeded to dislodge the ruling *All India Trinamool Congress* (AITC). Also in Odisha, the BJP could raise its tally.

Big winners amongst the state-bound parties have been the YSRCP in Andhra Pradesh, the *Shiv Sena* in Maharashtra, DMK in Tamil Nadu and the *Janata Dal United* in Bihar, whereas the *Biju Janata Dal* in Odisha and the *Telangana Rashtriya Samiti* could hold their leading positions with reduced majorities.

The *Trinamool Congress* remained narrowly ahead of the BJP, but it is doubtful, if it can resist the BJP in the next Assembly elections in West Bengal.

Big losers have been the *Telugu Desam Party* in Andhra Pradesh, the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu, the *Rashtriya Janata Dal* in Bihar and the BSP, SP and *Rashtriya Lok Dal* in Uttar Pradesh, besides the Indian Communists.

### ***Perspectives***

The following topics will need the urgent attention of the new government:

- A review of the economic situation and targeted measures for its revitalization.
- Concepts for the creation of jobs, in order to reduce mass unemployment.
- Construction of a temple for the Hindu-god *Ram* in Ayodhya.
- Abolition or amendments of the articles 370 and 35 A, in order to change the demographic conditions in Jammu & Kashmir, which is not shared by all its allies.
- Introduction of a Uniform Civil Code.
- Introduction of a *National Citizenship's Register* outside of Assam.
- More intensive measures against black money and corruption.

Much will depend, if the BJP wants to see its mandate go into the direction of a different 'Republic' and thereby into a '*Hindu Rashtra*', e. g. 'Hindu Empire', or if it will give utmost priority to the economy.

Much will also depend, if the new government can reduce the fears amongst religious minorities through social harmony and keep at bay the radical forces of the '*Hindutva*'-camp, like the new MP Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur with her extreme opinions, even praising the murderer of Mahatma Gandhi as a 'patriot'.

The successful "*social engineering*" of the BJP, e.g. of parts of the OBC's and Dalits along with Upper Castes, has certainly strengthened the social cohesion, transcending 'caste' and 'class'.

Will the economy take priority vis-à-vis some of the extreme socio-political ideas? If there will be renewed campaigns against Muslims and Christians, like in the first Modi government, then the cohesion of the Indian society is at stake with negative consequences for the economy.

From an international and European view, the developments in India will deserve much attention with regard to their economic direction and the social transformation, which the new government might have in mind, in order to transform this great country into a major power in the world.

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