

GENERAL ELECTIONS

POWER STRUGGLE FOR 2019
CONSEQUENTIAL
BATTLE IN
LARGEST
DEMOCRACY

BY ANAM KUMAR





Though it is too early to conclude which party will win the 2019 general elections, or to be precise will Narendra Modi be able to continue as Prime Minister for a second term, one set of people feels that given a second chance, Modi will make India more powerful domestically and internationally by doing bigger things than what he has already done in merely 5 years; while another set of people feels that Modi's charisma has waned considerably, and BJP would definitely face a strong challenge in 2019 general elections as a seemingly united opposition may bring better days if they come to power

The Indian general elections 2019 are going to be held in India in April or May 2019 to constitute the 17th Lok Sabha. Heated debates have started and fresher analyses are being made with each passing day as to in whose favour will the Indian public vote.

Predicting the results of any election is difficult. One may only conjecture, but even political experts are unable to make absolutely accurate forecasts. Here, an attempt has been made to put all facts and opinions together. The actual outcome of India's general elections 2019 and readers' opinions on various aspects may considerably differ from what has been presented here.

To move ahead, two relevant examples must be considered. In 2004, all opinion polls hinted that Vajpayee-led NDA would gallop back to power on the back of a 'Shining India' horse. Actually, BJP was overconfident and to take the opposition by surprise, even called an early election. When the Indian voters elected a Manmohan Singh-led government, all political pundits showed surprise. If the voters rejected the Vajpayee-led government, one of the significant factors being incumbency, the same did not happen in case of the Manmohan Singh-led government, which then carried on to rule India for a decade.

Actually, the Indian voters are known for their stunning talent to throw unexpected surprises during every election.

The above analysis compels us to believe that no one can tell who will win the 2019 elections. Increasingly people are changing their perceptions. Earlier it was clear to almost every voter of India that BJP would win the 2019 elections and Congress would

be defeated again, and that Modi is strong and Rahul is weak. However, things have changed within the last few months. Several of those who said with conviction that BJP would definitely win the 2019 elections, or those who said Congress would definitely lose, or those who said Modi can't be defeated, or those who said Rahul is not a good politician have backtracked their statements. The new bottomline for 2019 general elections is: the race is wide open!

SCRUTINY OF VARIOUS ANGLES IN 2019 ELECTIONS

Both state- and national-level factors will play a major role in the general elections. The general perception is that Narendra Modi-led BJP would retain power in the 2019 elections, even if the magical majority mark may remain elusive for the saffron party. However, of late, Rahul Gandhi-led Congress' attempts at creating a Grand Alliance of all national and regional parties have increasingly impacted people's opinion that a turnaround is possible. As has happened in the past, India's electoral arithmetic and political climate is liable to change at any time triggered by any incident that the public considers important, and the outcome of the elections can never be predicted with complete accuracy.

However, two unpredictable steps have already been seen: Shiv Sena decided not to support the government during the no-confidence motion in the Lok Sabha and also announced that it would contest the next general elections separately. Also unpredictably, Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) and Odisha-based Biju Janata Dal (BJD) chose not to support the opposition during the no-confidence vote by walking out

of the house. It means that if they could come to a pact during the no-confidence motion, they may do it after the elections too. So, if the NDA coalition fails to secure a majority in 2019, the BJD and TRS may secretly support the NDA, if not openly.

Similarly, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) had openly supported the Modi government during the no-confidence motion. Though it's not as powerful as it was during Jayalalithaa's time, it is still a force in Tamil Nadu.

Let's analyze various factors that are favourable for the BJP and its allies, and also factors that are not so favourable for them.

Rafale Deal: Though the Opposition was almost without a major issue throughout the Modi government's tenure, Rafale Deal has finally given a weapon and an opportunity to the Opposition. Full details are still not out. It's better to wait and watch in this case too, as time would tell if this issue goes in favour or against the Modi government.

Falling Rupee: Though it is being explained as due to international pressures and a demand-supply mechanism, the effect is being echoed in public psychology. Those who understand and those who do not understand the implications of a falling rupee are certain that it's bad for the economy, and thus it would affect BJP's chances in 2019 elections adversely.

Falling Stock Market: Stock investors will be keenly following the political developments in the runup to the election, as poll outcome had often taken the market by surprise in the past. Fall and rise of Sensex has affected poll outcomes in the past, and is liable to make a dent in 2019 elections too. How much? Once again, we'll have to wait and watch.

Rising General & Fuel Prices: Price rise has deeply affected the pockets of Indian citizens. This is a major issue. Price rise during the previous Congress' government was one of the reasons because of which BJP had won the 2014 elections. This time, it would definitely give the BJP government a scare. Rising fuel prices have negatively impacted Modi

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government's chances of an easy win in 2019 general elections.

Farmers' Anger: Rage of farmers is an important setback for the Modi government. To swell their financial woes, fuel prices are at record high, fertilizers are becoming expensive, and rural incomes are dwindling. Crop yield is high, crop prices are low and input costs are high. March of thousands of farmers to New Delhi

recently highlighted the grave issue. To offset any adverse effect, the Modi government has raised state-mandated prices for winter crops such as wheat & rapeseed, and has announced minimum support prices (MSPs) for most crops yearly to set a benchmark.

Demonetization & GST: Both demonetization and GST are being showcased as important economic reforms by the BJP, while the

opposition has been projecting them as failures of the government. No doubt, both caused hardships, a temporary slackening of economy, and hurt short-term growth; however, instead of making a judgment, it should best be left to the voter to decide on the basis of his/her first-hand experience, if these two were good or bad.

Legislative Assembly Elections: Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Mizoram and Telangana are expected to go to polls before the end of 2018 and both the Congress and the BJP are gearing up to take each other on in a contest that will set the tone for the 2019 general elections. The outcome of these state elections would greatly impact the psychology of the voters, and in turn the general direction of voting in the parliamentary elections.

Anti-incumbency: It simply means voting against the government in power. Till a few months back, everybody was confident that the BJP government would be voted back to power. However, the public anger is on display due to several factors, and anti-incumbency appears possible now. Already speculations are rife that BJP will have to face anti-incumbency in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. There are chances that the same mood of the voters may be reflected at the national-level polling too. However, it's difficult to predict as of now, how strong or weak would be anti-incumbency. Also, BJP cannot be adversely affected only due to anti-incumbency, unless Congress and its alliance partners stick together and reap the benefits of any anti-incumbency with precise calculations. On the other hand, BJP will have to take some strong steps to revive the economy and mend the social fabric of the nation to avoid strong anti-incumbency.

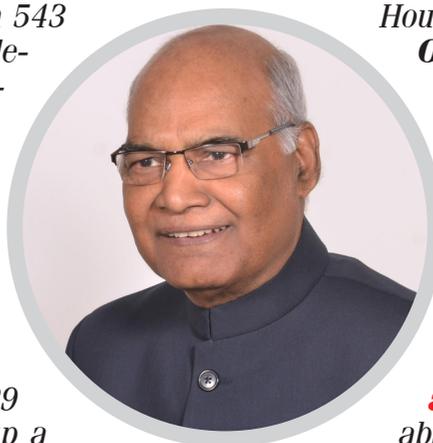
Opposition Unity: This is tricky now! Unity, Alliances and Mahagathbandhan sound really impressive. However, the past teaches us that political alliance among parties is a crazy horse! The more the number of parties claiming to be united, the crazier the horse gets. Distribution of seats, leadership concerns before and after the polling, and distribution of booty, in case the alliance wins enough seats to be able

ROLE OF PRESIDENT OF INDIA IN GENERAL ELECTIONS

As the uncertainty over 2019 general elections is rising, it is possible that BJP doesn't reach the magic number and no single party or pre-election coalition gets a clear majority. In such cases, the role of President of India, Ram Nath Kovind, becomes important, as in such cases, Article 75 of the Indian Constitution provides certain rights to the President to find a solution.

The strength of the Lok Sabha, i.e. the Lower House of Indian Parliament, is 545, out of which 543 are elected members, elected from single-member constituencies by first-past-the-post voting, and the remaining two are nominated by the President of India to make the total count 545. Any party that wins more than half the seats, 272, is invited by the President of India to form the government.

BJP's win with a two-thirds majority in the last elections had surprised everyone as every general elections from 1989 onwards to the Lok Sabha had thrown up a



fractured verdict. If no party or coalition gets a majority in 2019 general elections, the Constitution of India has empowered the President of India to decide in her or his discretion whom to invite to become the Prime Minister and form a government. In the exercise of such discretion, constitutional conventions play an important role in guiding the President. Normally, the choice of Prime Minister will be decided by the party position in the House of the People.

Options before President Kovind: The primary factor will be his assessment of who as Prime Minister and which body of Council of Ministers will enjoy the confidence of Parliament in terms of Article 75 (3) of the Constitution, which reads: "The Council of Ministers shall be collectively responsible to the House of the People."

The following appear to be the options:

a) If there is no single party with an absolute majority, the President may look for

to form the government are major issues, which pose a continual threat to disrupt the entire alliance any time – before elections, during elections, after elections. If cards are not played well, and if all alliance partners are not kept continuously satisfied on all fronts, cracks would appear. The voters are deeply affected by the constitution and break-up of such alliances, and react positively or negatively through their votes. Burying the differences (which are quite a lot in number!), and a continual pragmatic approach are quite significant for the success of any such opposition unity.

The recent decision of BSP's Mayawati to stay away from any Congress-led alliance due to seat-sharing issues, and SP's hint that any delay in seat-sharing would pressurize it to fight the elections on its own, have shown that keeping the flock together wouldn't be easy. In such a case, calculations on which political parties would form an alliance would have to be done after elections, depending on the seats each wins.

Indian voters' general experience of previous united fronts of political

parties has never been good. Actually, different political parties may come together for fleeting or/and opportunistic benefits, their unity does not last long. The voters finally end up cheated and there is a general trust deficit regarding these united fronts.

Election Machinery: BJP has the best election machinery, the behind-the-stage organization that helps it during elections and later in deciding on popular policies during the government's tenure. Its booth-level committees has majorly helped it in all national and state elections.

Role of Regional Parties: As BJP feels that it may not win as many seats in 2019 general elections as it did in 2014, it would be more inclined to solicit support from regional parties. Congress is in a greater mess. After its worst performance in its electoral history, it is completely dependent on regional parties to hold BJP from winning a second consecutive term.

Though both BJP and Congress appear to have selected which regional parties to approach for support, changes till the end in politics are considered natural. Some non-

committal regional parties would wait for the election results to make their move after making the best calculations.

BJP's track record of convincing regional parties for support and keeping them together is better than the Congress. Also, in the current context, all regional parties that have stood against BJP, have a strong clout of their own, and would stake claim to as many seats as possible. Consequently, any Opposition Grand Alliance would be difficult to form and keep together.

MORE ANALYSIS

Now, moving ahead, a positive-negative analysis for both Congress and BJP would clarify things further.

What's Good for Congress & Rahul Gandhi: Though Modi is still the favourite candidate for the Prime Minister's post, Rahul Gandhi's popularity has increased. An increasing number of people and even political parties have conceded that if a Grand Coalition is to be made, Rahul Gandhi is the best person to lead it.

While BJP government has been

- the leader of a pre-poll alliance that has a majority.*
- b)** *If there is no such pre-poll alliance that has a majority, the President may invite the leader of the pre-poll alliance who is supported by a sufficient number of Lok Sabha MPs to command an absolute majority.*
 - c)** *It is only when options A and B are ruled out that the President may invite the leader of a post-poll alliance. The President will make sure that the groups or parties agree to some common programme or policies. The post-poll alliance must elect its leader before the President invites it to form the government.*
 - d)** *When options A, B, and C are ruled out, the President may send a message to the House asking it to elect its leader (to seek a vote of confidence).*
 - e)** *If the House also fails to elect its leader, the President may explore the possibility of installing a 'National Government,' in which all major political parties in the Lok Sabha may be represented. Such a government would only be a caretaker government for carrying out the day-to-day administration until the mid-term elections to the Lok Sabha are conducted.*
 - f)** *If there is no possibility of installing a 'National Government,' the President may call a mid-term election.*

"BJP'S TRACK RECORD OF CONVINCING REGIONAL PARTIES FOR SUPPORT AND KEEPING THEM TOGETHER IS BETTER THAN THE CONGRESS. ALSO, ANY OPPOSITION GRAND ALLIANCE WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO FORM AND KEEP TOGETHER"

variously called an ultra-right and orthodox Hindu nationalist government, Congress has managed to revive itself considerably. With a strength of only 44 MPs in Lok Sabha (UPA has 60), and BJP has 282 (NDA has 336), it could manage to give a hard time to the government within and without Parliament.

Rahul Gandhi has projected himself as one who is not after the PM's post, in stark contrast to BJP's Narendra Modi. He has suggested to all political parties that a grand coalition is possible, and the PM may be chosen later depending on which political party garners maximum seats and on whose name a consensus is reached.

An interesting fact is that Modi's popularity is not as strong as it was in 2014, while Rahul Gandhi has consistently improved. Another interesting fact is that it's not a norm that strong orators or politicians like Modi would definitely win, and weak orators or politicians would definitely lose. If that had been the case, BJP would have definitely won a second term under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

Something that has gone totally wrong for BJP is the gap between expectations and implementations. The balloon of hype and promises that was inflated as Modi became the PM and in the ensuing years, lost

gas consistently with several policy decisions.

India is a huge country with a legacy of protecting and balancing innumerable philosophies, religions, castes and communities. Since ancient times, it is better known for embracing everyone and rejecting no one. BJP somewhere went wrong by creating rifts between different philosophies, religions, castes and communities, while trying to strengthen its own ideology, which it mistakenly assumed to be the core of every Indian – even Hindus. Hindustan is actually a country of all religions. All philosophies, religions, castes and communities together create Hindustan. No one party can claim to own the Indian philosophy.

Congress' performance in the last Gujarat Assembly polls under Rahul Gandhi's leadership have shown that BJP can fall down and Congress can rise. Rahul is also improving. He has time and again proved that he has all elements in his personality required to take on any national political challenge. He has improved the working culture of the Congress. He has reorganised the CWC, striking a balance between young energy and experience of the old guard.

What's Bad for Congress & Rahul Gandhi: The general perception, which appears as deliberately fashioned, among the masses is that Rahul Gandhi is not mature enough to lead the country. He needs more political exposure to harness his skills.

Congress has lost in majority of the states. Reviving takes time and the incumbent government has all resources and powers to manipulate opinions and/or actually do good in the state and strengthen its base for the next elections. This means, Congress' position nationwide is weak. It has lost in even those states, which were considered its stronghold. It doesn't augur well.

Rahul Gandhi's political immaturity would definitely pose a challenge in discussions and negotiations to form a grand alliance. He will have to deal with seasoned and astute politicians such as Sharad Pawar, Mayawati and Mamata Banerjee. He will have to balance very carefully, satisfying people from his own party in the

ROLE OF ELECTION COMMISSION

The Election Commission of India is an autonomous entity prescribed in the Constitution of India. It is the federal authority responsible for administering all the electoral processes of India and ensuring they are free and fair.

Candidates are required to file their nomination papers with the Electoral Commission. Then, a list of candidates is published. No party is allowed to use government resources for campaigning. No party is allowed to bribe the candidates before elections. The government cannot start a project during the election period. Campaigning ends by 6:00 pm two days before the polling day.

process of seat sharing while ensuring he doesn't belittle alliance partners.

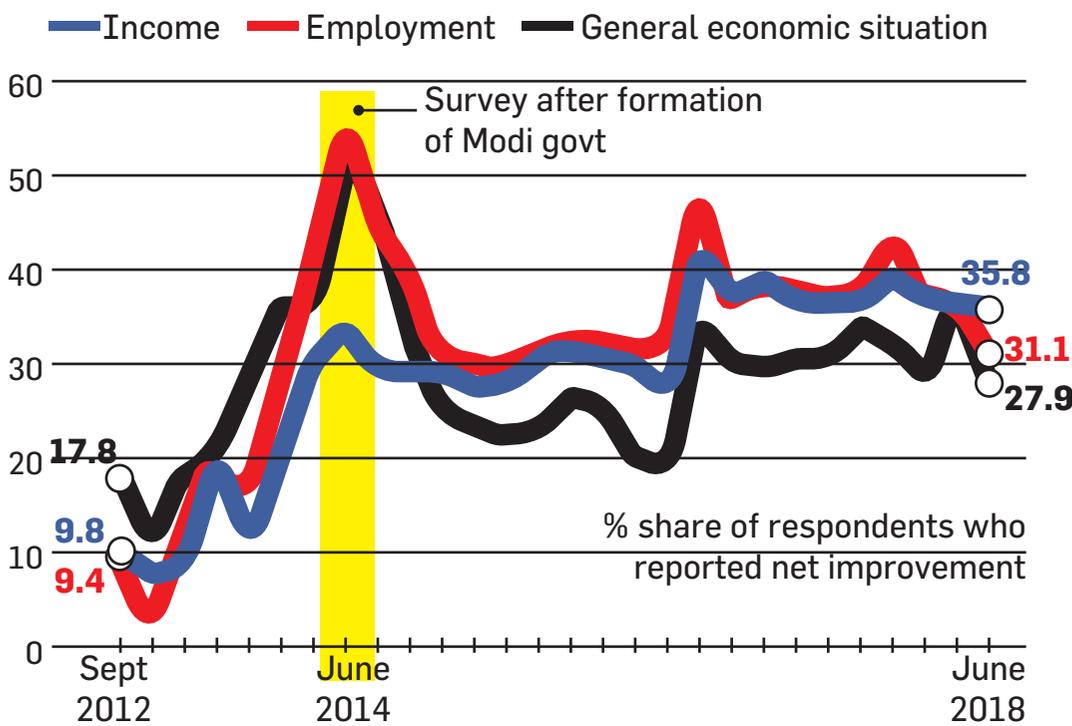
He has to fight the negative propaganda spread against him on social media, and has to work hard to challenge that image. He also has to shake off the burden of charges that he is a privileged beneficiary of dynastic politics.

What's Good for BJP & Narendra Modi: Modi government must be given immense credit for what it has done for the nation during its 4-plus years' tenure. India is the fastest growing major economy in the world, our foreign relations with most countries have improved, we have also enhanced the spheres of technology and infrastructure, and all these

wonderful achievements have been made under the dynamic leadership of Narendra Modi.

Narendra Modi is still the biggest leader of India in contemporary politics. No other leader of any national or regional political party can match his profound political and popular charisma. Learning from all mistakes and failures, he can still guide his party to another wonderful victory.

Though Congress is targeting the government on the Rafale deal, Modi government's tenure is free of any major corruption charges. Modi is also considered a man with a vision, who really wants to make India better on every domestic and international front. Because of his good understanding and



Source: RBI

relations with the business community and business-friendly policies, he is popular among the business class also.

Amit Shah is a star strategist. His style of calculations and wresting political victories from seemingly impossible situations, may help BJP turn things around for the best.

The political background in the country has undergone an overall change. The BJP is no longer only a party representing the Hindi heartland – it has successfully unfurled its wings in the northeast region of the country under Modi's leadership.

There is a strong belief that the BJP may lose in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. However, it is also a reality that a significant number of voters in these states still prefer Modi over their own state BJP chief ministers. That means the people may reject the BJP



in the state-assembly polls but will vote for the BJP in the Lok Sabha elections. **What's Bad for BJP & Narendra Modi:** BJP has gone wrong on many counts, especially its ideology. The fact that BJP's electoral tool of Hindutva has been repeatedly rejected by the Indian voters, speaks loud that elections cannot be won only on religious issues. Not only are other

social, economic and political issues are more important, but extreme and highly radicalized views of political parties are also rejected outrightly.

Though everywhere a two-thirds majority won by the BJP in 2014 general elections has been touted as historic, the BJP did not use it constructively, thoroughly and accurately. A two-thirds majority is

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not only a sign that a government has unlimited support, which would help them win the next and/or the next few elections, it also brings with it immense responsibility. The BJP, instead of boasting about it as a symbol of high-powered victory, must have used it to radically change India for the better. It was actually an unprecedented opportunity to unite India where there were rifts, to start long-term impactful projects on history, research and development, infrastructure, scientific advancements, and make remarkable progress in the spheres of economy and international relations. It was a golden opportunity to better, if not resolve, the Kashmir issue, as well as border issues with Bangladesh and China, as complete majority gives a government absolute power to make those amendments which a coalition-led government may never attempt or implement. The powerful energy of a two-thirds majority could have been used in a constructive debate all across India to explore and create long-term institutional and philosophical changes to an already rich heritage and society of India than wasting the same powerful energy into trivial issues such as JNU agitation, beef eating, cow smuggling, compulsory slogans such as 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai' in schools, suppressing dissent by calling people anti-national, surgical strike, etc.

With the growing uncertainty with each passing month, and with voices raising that BJP may not win comfortably or may even lose 2019 elections, extremist tools such as Hindutva and Ram Temple may become political necessity for BJP, which are deliberately kept on back burner for now. However, they would, in all probability, do more harm than good in 2019 elections. Hindutva, if understood correctly, stands for all positive intentions and deeds. If implemented in this positive avatar, it may help BJP immensely.

Radical measures of BJP government in good faith have actually backfired, as people, especially the middle class, bore the brunt as they appeared ill-conceived and ill-implemented measures, such as Demonetization, GST and Aadhaar enrolment. Extremist ideology, remarks and

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intentions of BJP have made people believe that a BJP-led government is anti-democratic and intolerant, while the very fabric of India is world-renowned for its democratic and tolerant hues.

The weather and sky are not as clear as they were in 2014. Congress was in the midst of one of the worst corruption charges, the economy was in a bad shape, and Narendra Modi appeared a charismatic and invincible leader who could make a dramatic turnaround to bring the old glory of India back. However, the ensuing once-in-a-generation electoral rout of Congress would not be possible again. 44 seats of Congress also reflects that it had reached its bottom. Now, there's way only up.

The BJP has often been criticized for terrorizing people into not saying anything against the BJP, its government or Narendra Modi. Anyone sharing anything against the three or opposing their views has been often branded anti-national.

While minorities like Muslims and Christians are overwhelmingly against the government, the majority Hindu community is virtually split down the middle over its support/opposition.

WHAT WOULD HELP BJP

In the available time, some platforms may be transformed into positives for the BJP.

Young voters: They are above past politics. They want results. BJP has been successfully highlighting its current achievements, and they have been embraced by the youth.

Women Welfare: BJP's women welfare schemes would definitely mobilize them in favour of BJP. At the state level, the female turnout generally surpasses the male turnout, so they



constitute a large section of voters.

Social Media Campaign: BJP is a clear winner on this front. Be it projecting positives of its own government or negatives of Opposition, BJP has impacted opinions nationwide. The use of latest technology is also in favour of BJP. Though other parties are waking up to this new and powerful phenomenon, they would take time in reaching the level where they could compete with BJP. Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp played a significant role in BJP's win in 2014 elections, and they are going to be an important battleground in 2019 elections as well.

CONCLUSION

Whatever the outcome of general elections 2019 for Lok Sabha in India, one thing is certain: A new India is in

the offing. If BJP and alliances win the elections with a majority, it'll be a great opportunity for India, as BJP can continue its development agenda, and learning from all its past mistakes it'll have a better chance to succeed politically while strengthening India. If Congress or a Congress-led alliance forms the next government, it'll be again a great opportunity for India, as Congress' experience of governance and handling the economy would help it revive the economy and put it on a higher level of growth.

As history is witness, strong leaders and parties have lost elections, and seemingly weak leaders and parties have won them. Anything is possible!

As citizens, we must look forward to 2019–2024 as a golden period, in which we would reap our rewards of being the fastest growing major economy in the world. All good that has come our way would be evident in that period, and must propel India to a leading world position. This would also be the period when we start reaping the rewards of some of the foundational changes brought in by Modi government and must continue the good work to do even better in the future.

Let us all be optimistic: whoever wins in 2019, India will be a definite winner.

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