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## DOES BJP'S LANDSLIDE VICTORY IN UP-ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS 2017 GUARANTEES ITS VICTORY IN 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS? – A CRITICAL REVIEW

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### ABSTRACT

BJP won with a three-fourth majority in Uttar Pradesh, garnering about 40 per cent of the total votes polled in Assembly Elections 2017. SP, Congress and BSP put together got around 50% votes. It is therefore clear that a Grand Alliance of SP, BSP and Congress could have easily routed BJP in UP. Muslim vote got divided between SP(29%) and BSP(18%), (total 47%), letting BJP win easily with 39% votes in the 59 Muslim Dominated Constituencies. Similarly, among the 85 reserved seats in the state, BJP outflanked all other parties by getting 40% of the votes with BSP, SP & Congress got 24%, 19% & 7% of the Dalit Votes respectively. In 2014 Loksabha Elections, BJP got 282 seats out of 543. It will, however, be a challenge for it to duplicate this performance in 2019. In some places, like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat and possibly Uttar Pradesh, the party may not be able to hold as much ground in 2019 as it currently does. There is, however, some space for BJP to do better in other big states like Maharashtra, Bihar, Odisha and in West Bengal. Odisha and Bengal have never seen BJP governments. However, recent local elections show that the BJP has replaced the Congress as the opposition in Odisha and it has secured a foothold in Bengal. Most of us thought Atal Bihari Vajpayee would win a majority in 2004. Indeed, he was himself so confident of victory that he called for elections six months early, only to lose. And so, it would be unwise to predict what will happen in next two years from now.

**Keywords:** UP Assembly Elections, Landslide Victory, BJP, SP, BSP, Vote Share, Muslims, Jats, Dalits.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In Assembly Election 2017, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won with a three-fourth majority in Uttar Pradesh, garnering about 40 per cent of the total votes polled. Its closest contender, the ruling Samajwadi Party (SP), and Mayawati-led Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) have got about 22 per cent votes each. Congress bagged only six per cent of the votes. Thus, SP, Congress and BSP put together got around 50% votes. It is therefore clear that a Grand Alliance of SP, BSP and Congress could have easily routed BJP in UP. Moreover, things would have been even worse for BJP if all secular forces could have come together and fought against BJP.

In the 73 seats in Phase 1 of the polls, BJP's vote share increased from a mere 16% in 2012 to 45% in 2017 whereas the vote share of all other parties declined. This clearly indicates that the Jats had stood by BJP, just as they had during the Lok Sabha elections. The campaign saw an intense battle between SP and BSP to win over Muslim votes which make up about 19% of the electorate. But fact remains that Muslim vote got divided between SP(29%) and BSP(18%), (total 47%), letting BJP win easily with 39% votes in the 59 constituencies in UP where more than a quarter of the voters are Muslim. Similarly, there was a much hyped battle between BJP and BSP to win Dalit votes, especially non-Jatav Dalits. Among the 85 reserved seats in the state, BJP outflanked all other parties by getting 40% of the votes with BSP, SP & Congress got 24%, 19% & 7% of the Dalit Votes respectively. Thus putting SP, BSP & Congress, their Dalit vote bank share come to 50% against BJP's 40%.

In 2014 Loksabha Elections, BJP got 282 seats out of 543. It will, however, be a challenge for him to duplicate this performance in the north. In some places, like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat and possibly Uttar Pradesh, the party may not be able to hold as much ground in 2019 as it currently does. One cannot improve on perfection, and in Gujarat, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan and Delhi, he has already achieved perfection. There is, however, some space for BJP to do better in other big states like Maharashtra (where it won 23 out of 48), Bihar (22 out of 40), Odisha (1 out of 21) and in West Bengal (2 out of 42). Odisha and Bengal have never seen BJP governments. However, recent local elections show that the BJP has replaced the Congress as the opposition in Odisha and it has secured a foothold in Bengal. To some extent, this is because of Modi's overall popularity and it will benefit his candidates in 2019. Because he has this breathing space in these four states, the five southern states then become much less crucial for Modi.



## International Journal of Engineering Researches and Management Studies

Most of us thought Atal Bihari Vajpayee would win a majority in 2004. Indeed, he was himself so confident of victory that he called for elections six months early, only to lose. And so, it would be unwise to predict what will happen two full years from now. Governments and heroes have lost their popularity in much, much lesser time. The numbers, however, look very good for Modi. We could say it is his election to lose, rather than the opposition's to win

**(1) Kumar Shakti Shekhar & Ankit Mishra (2017):** Riding on 'TsuNamo', Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has won with a three-fourth majority in the country's most populous state of Uttar Pradesh, garnering about 40 per cent of the total votes polled. Its closest contender, the ruling Samajwadi Party (SP), and Mayawati-led Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) have got about 22 per cent votes each. Congress, which fought the UP election in alliance with the Samajwadi Party, bagged only six per cent of the votes. On the other hand, BJP polled about 40 per cent of votes. Even though this is two per cent lower than the 42 per cent votes BJP had got in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the party has swept the Uttar Pradesh election.

However, in retrospect, it is clear that Samajwadi Party, BSP and Congress could have together pipped BJP in UP. On March 9, the day exit polls were declared, SP chief Akhilesh Yadav indicated that his party was ready to join hands with BSP. He had exhorted all "secular forces" to come together to keep the "communal" BJP away from power in case there was a hung Assembly. It goes to the credit of Akhilesh Yadav and election strategist Prashant Kishor for SP and Congress forming an alliance. However, the story today would have been different had BSP too joined the SP-Congress bandwagon. RJD supremo had even floated the idea of BSP joining the two parties but it did not materialize. SP, BSP and Congress should have learned from the Bihar experiment where the ruling Janata Dal (U), RJD and Congress joined hands to convincingly defeat BJP in the 2015 Assembly election. As in the case of RJD in Bihar, Yadavs and Muslims are SP's votebanks in UP. It had come back to power in 2012 with their solid backing. While the Yadavs constitute 15 per cent of the state's total votes, Muslims form 18 per cent.

**(2) Subodh Varma (2017):** Analysis of detailed results and comparison to earlier elections show up the truth about three riddles and the myths that pose as their answers: what happened to the Muslim vote? What happened to the Dalit vote? And what happened to the Jat vote? Individual votes cannot be tracked, but voting trends in constituencies give an indication of where preferences of communities are heading.

The Jat Vote: In the 73 seats in Phase 1 of the polls, BJP's vote share increased from a mere 16% in 2012 to 45% in 2017 while RLD, led by Jat leader Ajit Singh, declined from 11% to just 6%. As can be seen from the below table, the vote shares of all other parties and even of independent candidates declined. This clearly indicates that the Jats had stood by BJP, just as they had during the Lok Sabha elections.

Percentage Vote Shares in 73 Seats in 1 <sup>st</sup> Phase of Election		
	2017	2012
BJP	45	16
RLD	6	11
SP	17	23
BSP	22	29
INC	5	9
IND	2	3.4

Source: Election Commission of India, Figures rounded off.



## International Journal of Engineering Researches and Management Studies

**The Muslim Vote:** The campaign saw an intense battle between SP and BSP to win over Muslim votes which make up about 19% of the electorate. BJP's resounding victory, even in Muslim concentration areas, has led to speculation that, either the Muslim vote got divided between SP and BSP letting BJP win easily, or that Muslims voted for BJP. Both appear to be erroneous theories. SP (29%) and BSP (18%) together got 47% vote in the 59 constituencies in UP where more than a quarter of the voters are Muslim. This is virtually unchanged since 2012 elections. Hence, the Muslim support for the two parties, especially that of SP's 29% vote share in these seats shows that its Muslim support base largely intact.

Percentage Vote Shares in 59 Muslim Concentrated Constituencies		
	2017	2012
BJP	39	22
SP	29	26
BSP	18	22
Congress	7	12

**Source: Election Commission of India, & Chief Election Officer UP, Fig rounded off.**

**The Dalit Vote:** There was a much hyped battle between BJP and BSP to win Dalit votes, especially non-Jatav Dalits. Dalits make up about 21% of the population in UP. Since BSP lost badly in the elections ending up with just 19 seats, there was a view that Dalits voted en masse for BJP. Actually, BSP has got 24% votes, down from its 27% in 2012. Among the 85 reserved seats in the state, BJP outflanked all other parties by getting 40% of the votes with BSP a distant second at 24%. Again, BJP's appeal was across all castes and may have included some Dalit communities too, but BSP's vote share indicates that at 24%, it is just about retaining its Dalit base while BJP surged ahead. Moreover, SP and Congress got 19% & 7% of the Dalit Votes respectively. Thus putting SP, BSP & Congress, their Dalit vote bank share come to 50% against BJP's 40%.

Percentage Vote Shares in 85 Reserved Constituencies		
	2017	2012
BJP	40	14
SP	19	32
BSP	24	27
Congress	7	11

**Source: Election Commission of India - Fig rounded off.**

**(3) Aakar Patel (2017):** Let us not be Yogis or mystics and stay away from making a prediction today about the elections of 2019. But we can still have a look at the numbers of 2014, break them down, and analyse what the possibilities for 2019 are.

The recent victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party in Assembly Elections (2017) of Uttar Pradesh is thought to have made a return to power of Narendra Modi in 2019 inevitable. If this is indeed so, what will need to happen? In 2014 Loksabha Elections, BJP got 282 seats out of 543. The numbers for Modi came mainly from states in north India. The places where he was particularly dominant were those where the BJP either had sitting governments or had a strong presence. These were Modi's home state Gujarat (where he won 26 out of 26), Rajasthan (25 out of 25), Madhya Pradesh (27 out of 29), Jharkhand (12 out of 14), Himachal Pradesh (4 out of 4), Haryana (7 out of 10), Delhi (7 out of 7), Chhattisgarh (10 out of 11), Uttarakhand (5 out of 5) and Uttar Pradesh (71 out of 80).



## International Journal of Engineering Researches and Management Studies

This sweep of the northern states plus a handful in the northeast took Modi to over 200 seats, the first time such numbers had been delivered in 30 years. He then only needed to deliver average performance in the other parts to win. So the simplest path for him would be to do the same thing again.

### 2. FINDINGS

- In 2017 UP Assembly elections BJP got about 40 per cent of the total votes polled whereas SP, Congress and BSP put together got around 50% votes. It is therefore clear that a Grand Alliance of SP, BSP and Congress could have easily routed BJP in UP 2017 polls. Moreover, things would have been even worse for BJP if all secular forces could have come together and fought against it.
- In the 73 seats in Phase 1 of the polls, the Jats had stood by BJP, just as they had during the Lok Sabha elections. As for the Muslim votes, the campaign saw an intense battle between SP and BSP to win over Muslim votes which make up about 19% of the electorate. But fact remains that Muslim vote got divided between SP(29%) and BSP(18%), (total 47%), letting BJP win easily with 39% votes in the 59 constituencies in UP where more than a quarter of the voters are Muslim.
- Similarly, there was a much hyped battle between BJP and BSP to win Dalit votes, especially non-Jatav Dalits. Among the 85 reserved seats in the state, BJP outflanked all other parties by getting 40% of the votes with BSP, SP & Congress got 24%, 19% & 7% of the Dalit Votes respectively. Thus putting SP, BSP & Congress, their Dalit vote bank share come to 50% against BJP's 40%.
- In 2014 Loksabha Elections, BJP got 282 seats out of 543. It will, however, be a challenge for him to duplicate this performance in the north. In some places, like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat and possibly Uttar Pradesh, the party may not be able to hold as much ground in 2019 as it currently does. One cannot improve on perfection, and in Gujarat, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan and Delhi, he has already achieved perfection.
- In Gujarat, the BJP faces a revolt from its most loyal voter, the Patidar. In Rajasthan, there is a competent local leader in Sachin Pilot. Like in Punjab, which also had competent local leadership, it will be a seat by seat fight.
- Fortunately for Modi, there is some space for him to do better in other big states. He will most likely improve his strike rate in Maharashtra (where he won 23 out of 48), Bihar (22 out of 40), Odisha (1 out of 21) and in West Bengal (2 out of 42). In Maharashtra, the BJP has become the state's dominant party, eclipsing Congress, Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress and Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena.
- Odisha and Bengal have never seen BJP governments. However, recent local elections show that the BJP has replaced the Congress as the opposition in Odisha and it has secured a foothold in Bengal. To some extent, this is because of Modi's overall popularity and it will benefit his candidates in 2019. Because he has this breathing space in these four states, the five southern states then become much less crucial for Modi. However, here also, he is well placed. He will probably match or improve on his performance in Karnataka (17 out of 28), Andhra Pradesh (2 out of 25), Kerala (0 out of 20), Tamil Nadu (1 out of 39) and Telangana (1 out of 17). In some of these states, the BJP has a good vote share even in defeat (for example 10 percent in Kerala). It is placed to become a permanent presence there.
- This is in some measure because of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh *karyakarta* (whom Modi always congratulates and thanks when he assesses local election victories). Decades of unselfish volunteer work has produced results. In some measure it is also due to the decay of Congress, which has lost space in all these states.
- Most of us thought Atal Bihari Vajpayee would win a majority in 2004. Indeed, he was himself so confident of victory that he called for elections six months early, only to lose. And so, it would be unwise to predict what will happen two full years from now. Governments and heroes have lost their popularity in



## International Journal of Engineering Researches and Management Studies

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### 3. CONCLUSION

BJP cannot depend upon its own strength keeping in mind the declining vote share in some of the northern states especially, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and probably Uttar Pradesh where it has already reached the perfection and there is no scope of further betterment. It will not be able to get as many seats in these northern states as it got in 2014 General Elections. Hence, if BJP want to install another Government at the Centre after General Elections 2019, it will be prudent on its part to forge pre-poll alliances with the regional parties (in some of the states) which are not totally averse to the idea of joining hands with BJP and does not feel it to be a totally untouchable party. Moreover, if BJP wants to fight all 80 seats on its own in UP, it will have to improve upon its vote share from present 40% to around 50% or will have to enter into an alliance with RLD or any other principal party viz SP or BSP to ensure the retention of most of the seats in this giant state.

Apart from BJP, Congress is the only major party still enjoying the status of a National Party and having a pan India appeal among secular mindset of people and regional parties in many states. The advantage with the Congress is that almost none of the regional parties is averse to the idea of joining hands with it. Moreover, it is having its own government (or still have a stronghold) in some of the states. Hence, if it at all wants to have any say in 2019 General Elections, it will have to act like a common thread or a glue, binding all regional parties together. It will have to shed its dominating attitude and work on forming a UPA-3 by forging Grand Alliance with the Regional Parties which boast themselves of being Anti-BJP, anti-communal, and have a common motto of keeping the the BJP out of power at the Centre. The congress should even be prepared to give an outside support with a view to dislodge BJP from the centre. An idea of projecting a clean-image-person like Nitish Kumar, as the Prime Minister may probably work and go down well with all the regional parties.

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All Regional Parties having an anti-BJP mind set are better advised not to go alone and fight all seats on their own in their respective state. It will rather be prudent on their part (especially SP, BSP, JDU, RJD, TMC, BJD and other regional parties) to forge an alliance with each other in their respective states with Congress as one of the partners so as to ensure a bipolar contest – with BJP on the one side and all the opposition parties put together on the other side. Under any circumstances, the Regional Parties whose presence is confined to their respective state alone, have to avoid a three-corner-contest and to ensure that all Anti-BJP parties come together and forge a grand-alliance to fight against the BJP. They, can however include Congress as one of the partners in their Grand-Alliance.

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