

# 17<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha Elections 2019: Repeat Performance of NDA in Bihar and Jharkhand

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Results of the elections to 17<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha have been unprecedented in many senses with BJP (Bhartiya Janata Party) winning 303 seats. National Democratic Alliance (NDA) made a history with an unprecedented mandate in the state of Bihar by winning all but one seat that it contested. NDA thus won 39 of the 40 Lok Sabha seats in the state of Bihar. BJP and its ally bagged 11 of the 14 seats in the state of Jharkhand. BJP, the major ally of NDA swept the 2019 Lok Sabha elections and routed the opposition in several states across the country; Bihar and Jharkhand were two of those states.<sup>1</sup>Caste which was used to be considered as social infrastructure of politics and indeed it has been since independence seems to have ebbed in 2019 election. Caste though may have been a factor but it was not the dominant factor in this election. Caste played its role to the extent that the pre-poll alliances were crafted carefully to keep a hold on the traditional vote banks. Where caste factor was not very effective the Hindutva narrative delivered the results. There were several other factors alongside the Hindutva narrative including the good works delivered during the Modi-I regime (mid-May 2014 to mid-May 2019).

**Table-I:** 2019 Lok Sabha Results of Bihar

S. No.	Party	Seats Won	Percentage of Votes Polled
1	Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP)	17	23.57%
2	Indian National Congress (INC)	1	7.70%
3	Janata Dal (United)	16	21.82%
4	Lok Jan Shakti Party (LJP)	6	7.86%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	

*Source: Election Commission of India*

Table-I reveals that BJP won 17 seats with 23.57 % of the total votes polled. On the other hand its major partner and ally in Lok Sabha elections Janata Dal (U) of Nitish Kumar won 16 seats with 21.82% of the total votes. Lok Janshakti Party won 6 seats with 7.86% of the votes whereas Indian National Congress could manage only one seat with 7.7 % of the votes. Together NDA polled nearly 45% of the votes in the Lok Sabha elections in the state of Bihar.

**Table-II: 2019 Lok Sabha Results of Jharkhand**

S. No.	Party	Seats Won	Percentage of Votes Polled
1	Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP)	11	50.96%
2	Indian National Congress (INC)	1	15.63%
3	AJSU	1	4.33%
4	Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM)	1	11.51%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	

*Source: Election Commission of India*

Table-II reveals that in the state of Jharkhand BJP won 11 of the 14 seats with 50.96% of the total votes polled which is an absolute majority. Congress Party, AJSU, and JMM could manage one seat each in the election. Congress got 15.63% of the votes while JMM got 11.51% and AJSU a mere 4.33% of the total votes. This smacks almost a clean sweep by the BJP in Jharkhand.

## **Electoral Fronts and their Tally**

### ***Bihar:***

There were three fronts contesting elections for 40 Lok Sabha seats in the state of Bihar. First was the National Democratic Alliance led by BJP in which JD(U) and BJP shared 17 seats each and gave 6 seats to LJP. BJP won all the 17 seats while JD(U) won 16 and lost one seat of Kishanganj where his candidate Syed Mahmood Ashraf lost to his rival candidate of Indian National Congress Mohammad Jawed by a margin of 34,466 votes. As stated above in Table-I Janta Dal (United) of Nitish Kumar won 16 seats with 21.82 percent of the total votes polled in the

Lok Sabha. Nitish Kumar joined the NDA fold in July 2017 and made it categorical that he wants to stay in state politics as Chief Minister and is not interested in National politics at the Centre. However, quite often the BJP leaders in the state have been expressing opinion that Nitish Kumar should shift to Centre Politics and give the reins of the state to BJP that has categorically been denied by Nitish Kumar.

Lok Jantantrik Party of Ram Vilas Paswan<sup>2</sup> won all the 6 seats in the Lok Sabha that it got as a share within NDA. During the election campaign he gave special attention to the problem of terrorism. His family members Chirag Paswan, Ramchandra Paswan and Pashupati Paras contested the election from Jamui, Samastipur and Hajipur respectively and won. With this win it became the largest political family in Parliament. This is something that the BJP has been opposing tooth and nail since 2014 to castigate and attack Congress, and yet it is promoting among its own allies, which amounts to doublespeak. This has happened in spite of the fact that Ram Vilas Paswan himself did not contest Lok Sabha election in 2019. The other three seats that it had got were Vaishali, Khagaria and Nawada. Its percentage of votes polled in successive Lok Sabha elections have remained somewhat constant ranging between 6 to 8 percent. The LJP polled 8.2 percent votes in 2004, 6.6 percent in 2009, 6.5 percent in 2014 and 7.9 percent in 2019.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Paswan's 6.5 percent Dalit vote has largely remained with him, irrespective of who he has been in alliance with. His strong presence has not allowed anyone else to emerge as the leader of the Dalit community, taller than him. Jitan Ram Manjhi of Hindustani Awam Morch made all efforts to emerge as the leader of the Dalit community in caste-based Bihar but in vain. He has largely been a victim of his own miscalculations which Ram Vilas has been very apt at.

Rashtriya Janata Dal failed to win even a single seat in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. As per the seat sharing in the *Mahagathbandhan*<sup>4</sup> in the state, the RJD fought 19 seats, Congress on Nine seats, RLSP on Five seats, VIP and HAM on three seats each. One seat was left by RJD for the CIP (ML). RJD had carefully chosen its partners and tried to hold on to its Muslim-Yadav vote bank. RJD was successful in bringing together Rashtriya Lok Samata Party of Upendra Kushwaha, Extremely Backward Caste leader Jitan Ram Manjhi of Hindustan Awam Morcha, and Vikas Sheel Insaan Party of Mukesh Sahani yet could not translate the pre-poll alliance into post-poll any significant win. Including Congress they together tried to woo the Muslim voters which were their traditional stronghold.<sup>5</sup> The alliance seemed quite formidable from

the viewpoint of vote banks, however it did not work and failed to deliver any significant win for the alliance. It sounded as if even Upendra Kushwaha's and Jitan Ram Manjhi's calculations went utterly wrong. Consequently, barring Kishanganj where Dr. Mohammed Jawed of the Congress won, the coalition scored nil. RJD got more than 15% of the votes but could not manage even a single seat. Last but not the least, the *mahagathbandhan* was an uncomfortable marriage with infighting and rebellion<sup>6</sup> and it was indeed difficult for each of the partners to work in tandem that may have provided an opportunity to the other side to ridicule them as *maha-milawat*. Thus, opposition in the state of Bihar was almost a disunited force and thus left the turf wide open for the ruling party for which it was almost a cake walk. Opposition owing to its own miscalculations, misdoings and infighting ceased to be any formidable force during the election of 2019.

### ***Jharkhand:***

Jharkhand Lok Sabha elections too were swept by BJP which bagged 11 of the 14 seats as stated above and one more seats was won by its ally All Jharkhand Student Union (AJSU) which bagged the Giridih seat. Among the other parties that won the other two seats were from the opposition i.e. Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and Congress. Both these parties won one seat each. JMM won the Rajmahal seat and INC won the Singhbhum seat. BJP had swept even the 2014 Lok Sabha elections when it had secured 12 of the 14 seats. Thus, it was a repeat performance for the BJP in the state.

Jharkhand demographic character is quite dispersed with around 27% of the state's population comprising of Scheduled Tribes; 12% Scheduled Castes and 35-40% backward castes. In terms of religion, 67.83% of the population belongs to Hindu religion and Muslims are 14.5%, Christians are 4.3% and other religious denominations are about 12.84% (these are primarily *adivasis*<sup>7</sup> following their own religion) of the total population.<sup>8</sup>Therefore, given the diverse nature of the vote bank in 2019 elections the Jharkhand's *mahagathbandhan* of all the non-Left parties of the state i.e. Congress, JMM, Jharkhand Vikas Morcha (JVM) and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) came into existence. The alliance was being considered as one of the most formidable in the country. The pre-poll alliance was struck with a view to consolidate the votes of different section of the society in one fold to defeat the most comfortably entrenched BJP in the state. Congress contested on half of the seats, JMM on four seats, whereas JVM on two seats and RJD contested on one seat only. However, over the last few years BJP too worked on its vote bank and has been successful in drawing a significant proportion

of the state's backward castes and Dalits in the Hindutva fold. According to some experts the absence of a visible political alternative for backward castes has also helped the BJP. JMM is the largest opposition party in Jharkhand and continues to be viewed primarily as an *Advasi* party that has little to offer to the backward castes. According to CSDS survey nearly 70% of the voters of backward castes voted for the BJP-AJSU combine.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, in the eight non-ST seats taken together, the BJP and AJSU got more than twice the number of votes polled for the opposition and together their vote share increased from 47% in 2014 to approaching 55% in 2019. On the other hand, on the six ST seats of the State, the collective vote-share of the opposition parties increased from 33.89% to 43.45% during the last five years.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, like BJP even the opposition has been able to enhance its voting percentage but failed to translate the same into seats.

There were number of issues on account of which the BJP win was in doubts during 2019 Lok Sabah elections. First was the very existence of the *mahagathbandhan*, that the votes would now get consolidated in one fold, which may have materialised yet could not lead to damage the prospects of BJP. Secondly, BJP could sweep the election once again in 2019 in spite of the fact that since it came to power in 2014 number of starvation related deaths occurred in the state and it made national and international headlines. Other perturbing phenomenon was the number of mob lynching incidents which again created national furore. Therefore, this led to unpopularity of the government and yet it went on to amend the land laws to ease acquisition of the *adivasi* lands, though it withdrew the amendments owing to widespread protests in the state.<sup>11</sup> The 2019 did not only deliver a landslide victory to BJP, but it also marked substantial growth in its vote share. BJP's vote share which was 33% in 2004 (first General Elections after the formation of the state of Jharkhand) grew to 51% in 2019. On the other hand, the vote share of the *mahagathbandhan* has continued to shrink which becomes evident from the Table-III below. This is quite remarkable to note that despite the angst against the BJP among the *Adivasis*, the party managed to increase its vote share in the ST seats from 2014 to 2019. The anti-conversion law that was formulated and adopted in 2017 and was aimed at further deepening the wedge between Christian *Adivasis* and the non-Christian ones, seems to have gained considerable success. The other flagship programs of BJP like rural housing and LPG subsidy have equally paid electoral dividends. On the other hand, they also impressed upon the populace as to how the opposition failed to provide socio-economic dividends like ration, pensions, MNREGA etc to the needy in the state. These were very much prominent during the

election campaign in 2019. Thus BJP had good story to share and deliver to the people of Jharkhand and it has paid dividends to the party in the 2019 elections. Congress brought together JMM, JVM and RJD in Jharkhand and they made all efforts to bring tribal and non-tribal parties and woo the voters. However, they could not make much of difference and a Congress leader pointed out, “we have not been able to explain these results. The BJP government in state is extremely unpopular, nationalism as a narrative does not echo with Jharkhand so much and yet we lost.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the paradox that demands explanation as to in spite of the fact that the BJP government was unpopular for many of its policies; how it could manage an unprecedented vote share and win 12 of the 14 seats of Lok Sabah? One probable answer could be the national narratives that were the popular in the entire country became a determining factor rather than local issues.

**Table-III:** Vote share and Seats won by both the Alliance in Jharkhand

Lok Sabha Election year	NDA [BJP + AJSU]		<i>Mahagathbandhan</i> Congress + JMM + JVM + RJD	
	Total Seats won	%age of Vote Share	Total Seats Won	%age of Vote Share
2004	1	34.7%	12	41.23
Note:	JVM was formed in 2004 and its leader Babulal Marandi was with the BJP at that time. In 2004, one seat was won by the CPI and in 2009, independents won two seats.			
2009	8	29.72%	4	37.27
2014	12	44.48%	2	36.81
2019	12	55.29%	2	34.58

Source: Suraj Dutta, “Will BJP’s Formidable Victory in Jharkhand Wake the Opposition up From Its Slumber”, *The Wire*, June 07, 2019, [www.thewire.in](http://www.thewire.in)

Thus, Table-III above makes it quite obvious that the percentage of NDA has been constantly and continuously on the rise in successive elections, where has for the other side it has been receding with each successive election. The same has been true in case of the number of seats won by both sides.

## Post-election Feud or Facts

Nitish Kumar had initially indicated that he was looking forward to his party joining the new Modi dispensation at the Centre. However, soon the stand changed and he made an announcement that his party will support the government from outside. Nitish Kumar did attend the swearing-in ceremony of the Modi government and clarified that the BJP was insisting on all allies to agree from a 'symbolic representation' in the Union Cabinet and that this was unacceptable to him. Later, the JD(U) president said, "The unanimous view of JD(U) leaders is that we should stay out of the ministry. Everybody felt there should be proportional representation in an alliance government."<sup>13</sup> It was also pointed out by Nitish Kumar himself that he wanted a representation that was in proportion to the strength of a party in the Parliament and that he would not join the government in future as well as it would smack of a bargain whereas his stand is a principled one. The BJP and JD(U) have been in alliance since 1996, except for a four-year-long hiatus between 2013 and 2017 when Nitish Kumar had quit the NDA and forged a short-lived alliance with the RJD and the Congress.<sup>14</sup> Another speculation has been doing the rounds that given the fact that BJP won 17 seats which is one more than the JD(U) and it may have motivated BJP to consider JD(U) as a junior partner and ask for more seats in Legislative Assembly elections. Therefore, JDU may have been interested in keeping the equations intact in any future negotiations and not to budge before a national party which is quite infamous for engulfing whichever regional parties it formed an alliance with. Nitish Kumar must have learnt a lesson from the history of BJP and its current stature in national politics.

Upendra Kushwaha of RLSP alleged the winner party that it has misled the people of Bihar as people got swayed away from the actual issues and voted on non-issues. He also said to have learnt lesson and will be cautious and aware of their (BJP's) conspiracy in elections.<sup>15</sup> The fact remains that he was formerly a minister in NDA during the Modi-I regime. He was thus critical of the BJP and the ruling alliance including Nitish Kumar even after the election. How Kushwaha manages himself in national or state politics in future would be interesting to watch. For the present he himself seems to have become a non-issue in national and state politics.

Most startling of the facts of post-2019 elections was the complete washout of RJD from Bihar. A party that was formed in 1997, this has been the first general election when the party has failed to win even a

single Lok Sabha seat in Bihar. Ironically, with 81 MLAs in the 243-member assembly, the RJD is still the largest party in Bihar.<sup>16</sup> The assessment of the voting pattern also reveals that the RJD-led grand alliance has fallen behind the NDA in 73 of the 81 assembly segments. Therefore, it smacks of the future imminent loss to RJD even in Legislative Assembly elections. According to the same report, in 2014 RJD polled 7,224,893 or 20.46 percent of the votes in Bihar. However, in 2019 they have 6,270,107 or 15.04 percent (according to ECI the figure is 15.36%) of the vote share which is quite demoralising.<sup>17</sup> The Grand Alliance in Bihar was being led by RJD yet it outsourced the responsibility to untested leaders like Mukesh Sahni, Jiten Manjhi and Upendra Kushwaha. RJD's dependence on others was evident from the fact that for nearly 30% of EBC vote it gave only one ticket to an EBC candidate, despite contesting from 19 seats. The JD(U) fielded five EBC candidates, all of whom won. The BJP's two EBC candidates won. The RJD's Yadav-Muslim base (30 percent of the electorate) has failed to stop Nitish in successive polls because he has forged similar consolidation of EBCs and *Mahadalits*.<sup>18</sup> Thus, given the fact the RJD supremo Lalu Prasad is in jail in the fodder scam case, the party need to work hard to at least retain its last assembly gains in the coming assembly elections else the party which was once the pride of OBC community in the state of Bihar as well as in national politics would die and unsung death. The second line of leadership which was divided on the eve of 2019 Lok Sabha elections need to work really hard and in tandem in the interest of the party as well as the voters to maintain its share in political power. Lalu Prasad Yadav for now seems to be an spent force in politics; but his second line of family leaders are very much alive and must come together as a potent force to play a considerable role in the state and in national politics.

In 2014, the BJP had 29.9% of the vote, JD(U) had 16.04% and the LJP had 6.5%, of vote share. In 2019 according to Election Commission of India website, BJP got 23.58% of votes, JD(U) got 21.81% of votes, and LJP got 7.86% of the votes share.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, what comes out obvious is that in terms of percentage of votes the performance of BJP has gone down from 29.9% to 23.5%, meaning a loss of nearly 5% of vote share in the state. This difference may be owing to the loss of seat share as it contested only on 17 seats and won all, whereas in 2014 it had won 22 seats. On the other hand in Jharkhand BJP got 50.96% of the total votes polled in the state in 2019 Lok Sabha elections, which has registered a growth over its earlier performances.



## **Nota Votes**

A total of 8,17,139 Nota (None of the Above) votes were cast in the state of Bihar which was highest in the country and according to the Election Commission's website, the Nota share in the state was 2 percent of the total votes polled in the 40 Lok Sabha seats of Bihar. The 1,89,367 voters of Jharkhand opted for NOTA option, which was 1.27 percent of total votes polled in the 17<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha elections in the state.<sup>20</sup> Though it may not sound substantial vote yet it may have been decisive in many cases on many seats. The Indian leadership must take into account the growing number of NOTA choices among the voters, which could be detrimental for Indian democracy in the long run as it would also reveal the political alienation of the masses in the country towards leadership and the affairs of the state as a whole.

## **Pre-election Calculations and Speculations**

Pre-election political discussion often raised questions as to whether ruling NDA alliance would be able to replicate its 2014 performance in the Hindi heartland states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand? In 2014 parliamentary elections the NDA, was facing a fragmented opposition, and got massive support in three states, winning 73 of the 80 parliamentary constituency in Uttar Pradesh (UP), 31 out of 40 seats in Bihar, and 12 out of 14 Lok Sabha seats of Jharkhand. Even then there were doubts about replication of its performance in spite of the fact that the opposition though were trying to pose a united front yet were divided within as discussed above. In Bihar the BJP had contested 30 Lok Sabha seats and won 22 of them in 2014 and the tally of NDA was 31 seats from Bihar. However, mid-way BJP had entered into an alliance with JD(U) to be a ruling party in the state and that led to seat sharing alliance in Lok Sabha as well in 2019. Consequently, the BJP contested 17 seats only in spite of the fact that in the last General Elections it had won 22 seats. Though it had begun with a deficit of five seats yet it won all the seats that it contested including its alliance partner Lok Janshakti Party. Therefore, it makes it quite obvious that it was a repeat performance for NDA as well as BJP as its dominant partner both in Bihar as well as Jharkhand. The pre-poll calculations of NDA and its partners were quite effective which is obvious from the score card whereas it was just the opposite for the opposition.

## **Concluding Remarks**

BJP rode roughshod on many of the issues that were raised on account

of the formal policies adopted and informal allegations waged during the 2014 to 2019 i.e. Modi-I regime of NDA: demonetization, Goods and Service Tax (GST), mob-lynching, surgical strike, Balakot strike, and teen-talak are to name but a few of the national issues that subsequently figured during the electoral campaign in 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Even in Bihar there were few scandals of huge proportions and even the government and its members were implicated into it. Bihar government's embarrassment over reports on the sexual exploitation of young girls at a shelter in Muzaffarpur kept haunting the Nitish Kumar's fate. However, nothing sounded like a deterrent factor when the results were delivered. The smaller regional parties in both these states of Bihar and Jharkhand may have been successful in managing a huge chunk of seats to contest but they could not transform the same into victory. The bigger parties were contesting from fewer seats whereas the smaller parties were contesting from more seats; yet the results were otherwise in both these states.

Jharkhand also has belied most pre-poll speculations. The opposition alliance in Jharkhand was armed with number of contentious issues arising out of some controversial decisions of the Raghubar Das government. His tampering with tenancy and land acquisition laws and the proposed move to close down government schools in rural areas were upsetting for the tribal people. As alleged the changes in Land Acquisition and Forest Rights Act were threatening to displace 10 to 11 lakhs of tribal families. This was being done to create a land pool for industrial purposes. Similarly, the government's proposed move to club small village schools with bigger ones would lead to the closure of 12,000 schools in remote areas, which according to government was to conserve resources. Other issues such as mob lynching were also being highlighted nationally. Raghubar Das though is the first non-tribal Chief Minister in the 19-year-old state, which was carved out of Bihar in 2000; yet Jharkhand delivered victory on 12 of the 14 seats of Lok Sabha which is highly commendable. This was amidst infighting within BJP as well and against all odds.

Thus, it would not be an exaggeration to conclude that in both these states, 17<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabah elections delivered unprecedented results defying erstwhile traditional vote bank politics. The caste combinations on both sides made the contest an even one, with the anti-BJP having a slight edge owing to consolidation of Muslim and Yadav's votes in its favour; yet the anti-Modi block simply melted away along with caste and religious boundaries, and was swept away by the saffron wave. According to many experts 2019 was more on account of 'Modi wave' rather than 'saffron wave'.

## Reference

- [1] Suraj Dutta, “Will BJP’s Formidable Victory in Jharkhand Wake the Opposition up From Its Slumber”, *The Wire*, June 07, 2019, [www.thewire.in](http://www.thewire.in)
- [2] Ram Vilas Paswan is the only political leader in the country to have been part of eight Union Cabinets beginning 1989 and having served under six Prime Ministers: Vishwanath Pratap Singh (1989-90); H.D. Devegowda and I.K. Gujral (1996-98); Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1999-2004); Manmohan Singh (2004-2009); and Narendra Modi. This is remarkable for a person whose vote bank share is a mere 6 to 8 percent of Bihar’s electorate and whose Lok Sabha numbers has never touched double digits. It is indeed an extraordinary achievement. See Amitabh Srivastava, “Ram Vilas Paswan: The Weather God”, June 6, 2019, [www.indiatoday.in](http://www.indiatoday.in)
- [3] Amitabh Srivastava, “Ram Vilas Paswan: The Weather God”, June 6, 2019, [www.indiatoday.in](http://www.indiatoday.in)
- [4] Also known as ‘Grand Alliance’ was a formidable alliance of seven political parties and claimed to have been representing 80% of the social and caste groups. As mentioned in Srinand Jha, “Bihar state’s vital role in Indian elections”, March 29, 2019, [www.asiatimes.com](http://www.asiatimes.com)
- [5] Sobhana K. Nair, “Caste Calculus goes for a toss in the north”, *The Hindu*, May 23, 2019, [www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com)
- [6] For example the RJD itself fielded their own leader against Congress’s Ranjeet Ranjan in Supaul to counter her husband Pappu Yadav who despite many requests contested against RJD candidate Sharad Yadav. Similarly, Congress rebel Shakeel Ahmed fought against VIP’s Badri Kumar. As reported in Sobhana K. Nair, *Ibid.*, No.5.
- [7] An important point to be noted here is that in 2011 Census the option *advasi* as religion was absent and therefore many of them marked themselves as Hindus.
- [8] *Ibid.*, No.1.
- [9] *Ibid.*, No.1.
- [10] *Ibid.*, No.1.
- [11] *Ibid.*, No.1.
- [12] As quoted in Sobhana K. Nair, *Ibid.*, No.5.
- [13] PTI (Patna), “JDU dismisses rift within alliance, says firmly standing with NDA”, June 8, 2019, [www.indiatoday.in](http://www.indiatoday.in)
- [14] *Ibid.*, No.13.
- [15] As quoted in PTI, “Be ready for Nitish Kumar’s ‘Dhokha number 2’: RLSP chief Upendra Kushwaha warns BJP”, June 3, 2019, [www.indiatoday.in](http://www.indiatoday.in)

- [16] Amitabh Srivastava, “Bihar: End of the RJD?”, May 31, 2019, [www.indiatoday.in](http://www.indiatoday.in)
- [17] Ibid., No.16.
- [18] Ibid., No.16.
- [19] Available on <https://results.eci.gov.in/pc/en/partywise/partywiseresult-S04.htm?st=S04>
- [20] PTI, “Lok Sabha Elections 2019, Bihar sees highest number of Nota votes”, May 24, 2019, *Business Standard*, [www.business-standard.com](http://www.business-standard.com)