

# UP Lok-Sabha Results: A beginning of the end of Casteism

Chandhra Mohan Uppadhyay

The outcome of the general election of 2019 may be termed as historic. While BJP made a comeback for a second consecutive term at the centre, the mandate also indicates that alliance arithmetic by itself does not guarantee a victory. BJP projected Mr. Narendra Modi as its mascot, and he in turn converted the electoral campaign a near presidential-type. His personality and leadership qualities became the central focus of the campaign and other got compared with him. Nobody stood a chance. Congress candidate Mr. Rahul Gandhi could not match the huge popularity, communicative skills and the immense popularity of Narendra Modi. **NDA** was at advantageous position from the very outset. The General election was not one man show either. The alliance between BJP and other regional parties that is **NDA**, played a significant role in ensuring the victory for alliance in different parts of India.

BJP successfully resolved the recalcitrant of its alliance and grouses of partners, where as Congress and its alliance that is **UPA**, could fare satisfactorily. Congress was not only slow in solving the alliance constrains but it also lacked a vision-plan, which left the alliance partners sceptical and hesitant. This election is also a story of the success of one strategy of alliance formation over the other. The NDA government led by Narendra Modi was much ahead of its predecessor, United Progressive Alliance (UPA) when it came to the distribution of social goods through welfare policies. A cursory look at the welfare benefits given by the two regimes, arguing that in its two terms (between 2004 and 2014), the UPA benefitted 200 million people through its social policies whereas the NDA targeted 260 million people in half the time through its flagship programmes such as Housing for All, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, and two insurance schemes for financial inclusion. In its post-poll survey Lokniti-CSDS\* asked which of the NDA schemes voters liked best. Close to 60% of the respondents (56%) chose not to answer to this question. For those who did respond, the highest proportion of 7% chose Ujjwala Yojana, followed by Swachh Bharat Mission, Jan Dhan Yojna, PM Awas Yojna and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao. Most schemes were drafted to

provide socio-economic security to the poor and weaker sections of society. In line with this, the Lokniti-CSDS data shows that beneficiaries mainly belonged to the villages, and were part of scheduled castes or scheduled tribes. This indicates that government to some extent, successfully delivered the welfare services to its target population. Keeping this in mind, in the next section we discuss the impact of social policies launched by the government on electoral outcomes. The BJP undoubtedly had an upper hand among beneficiaries, but the Lokniti-CSDS post-poll survey shows that welfare schemes were not even an issue that was critical to voting behaviour in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. In total only 1% of respondents stated that welfare schemes were the biggest issue for them, a statistic that was further divided into central government and state welfare schemes.

More than any State-election result, it is the UP Lok-Sabha elections result, which has sprung the surprise. As a corollary, it has also engendered a new idea of the end of the caste-politics in India or at least the beginning of its end. The contest was keenly watched as the alliance called 'Mahagathbandhan' of the Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party, and Rashtriya Lok Dal, covertly assisted by Indian National Congress, took the resolve to challenge the domination of the Bharatiya Janata Party. Despite the formidable looking combination, BJP managed a good performance. Consequently, the alliance could not tolerate this ignominy of defeat, and disintegrated post elections. Despite an aggressive and highly competitive campaign, the results show that the alliance could not make a dent; it won just 15 seats, the BSP 10 and the SP 5. The BJP won 62 seats, down from 71 earlier, but increased its vote share from 42.63% (2014) to 49.6%, while SP-BSP vote share dropped from 42.2% (2014) to 37.3%\*. The alliance put up a brave fight in western UP, winning at least half of the 14 seats of the Meerut, Moradabad and Saharanpur divisions; elsewhere it lost badly, particularly in eastern UP where it had earlier won Gorakhpur and Phulpur in the by-polls in 2018. In 2014 Lok Sabha elections BJP won 73 seats with its alliance partner Apna Dal. This election became unique for more than one reason. Along with entry of Mr. Narendra Modi the then Chief Minister of Gujrat, to the national politics, it also witnessed the consolidation of voters cutting across caste and class, in favour of BJP. Riding on the huge popularity of Narendra Modi, the BJP entered the arena of UP Assembly elections 2017 and was successful in decimating both the regional parties and emerged victorious.

Things were quite different when BJP decided to seek re-election of Modi government in 2019. The question of anti-incumbency was staring in the face, with not so reassuring economic record, and with the

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formation of pre-poll alliance between friend-turned foe-turned friend SP and BSP, it was generally believed that the BJP would not be able to replicate its success in 2019. The formation of the alliance in UP prior to the 2019 elections was seen as a significant strategy, as the combined vote share of these parties in 2014, and the forging of a Jat—Jatav and Yadav-Muslim combination would limit the seats the BJP could win, and thereby stop its march to the Centre. Its disappointing performance can be understood by placing it within the post-Mandal discourse and power struggles in UP. Let us have a look of the election results<sup>1</sup>.

**CONSTITUENCIES: 80**

	Seats won	Vote share (%)
Apna Dal (Soneylal)*	<b>2</b>	NA
<b>BJP</b>	<b>62</b>	49.6
Bahujan Samaj Party	<b>10</b>	19.3
Congress	<b>1</b>	6.3
Samajwadi Party	<b>5</b>	18

\*Part of BJP-led NDA      Source: Election Commission

The formation of the alliance that is '**Mahagathbandhan**' was possible on the account of a sense of entitlement of dominant intermediary castes like Jats, Yadavs and Jatavs, who were feeling quite insecure post the rise of Modi in 2014, which also signified the decentring of their political prominence. But it created a counter-mobilisation of lower OBCs and smaller Dalit groups which, unwilling to return to a Yadav-Jatav dominance, have moved towards the BJP in even greater numbers in 2019. The power-struggle was already there and one can easily discern the struggle between these two to garner the support of lower OBCs and the consequent shifts to the manner in which the SP and the BSP, as parties of social justice, have represented the lower OBCs in their folds. The power-struggle has some-thing to do with, what **Celestine Bougle** (Essays on Caste System) calls "mutual-repulsion", which is not only confined to SP and BSP, but equally applicable to Jats and Jatavs, Yadavs and Kurmies and so on. Throughout the 1990s, Both the SP and BSP, failed to weld the backward classes and Schedule Castes, into a cohesive political community simply because of this mutual-repulsive character. While class-based changes due to education, urbanisation, vernacular newspapers, satellite TV etc, exacerbated the already existing divisions, the SP, when in power, undoubtedly favoured

the Yadavs. It led to the emergence of the Most Backward Classes, who feel they are the most neglected and have in recent years become very demanding. Similarly, the BSP, since the mid-1990s, with its preoccupation with power, has not been a democratising force like in the past when it moved downwards to mobilise the smaller, poorer Dalit groups. They, therefore, view it now as a purely Jatav party. It is this new voting bloc of the non-Yadav and non-Jatav Dalits, who constitute a substantial section of the electorate, that has been profitably mobilised by the BJP, first in 2014 and now in larger numbers in 2019. The BJP took a leaf out of Mr. Nitish Kumar’s book to tap the simmering discontent among the extremely backward sections of society, who were feeling cornered by the utter dominance of JatavandYadav in their respective categories. “Non-Yadav OBC castes and sub-castes like Koeris, Kurmis, Mauryas, Shakyas, Kushwahas, Lodhs, Vishwakarmas, Chaurasias, Prajapatis, and non-Jatav Dalit castes were wary of the domination of OBC and SC categories by Yadavs and Jatavs respectively. The BJP was successful in understanding their anxieties and accommodating them.”<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1: Caste Community and Party Voted for, In Lok Sabha Elections 2019 (UP)**

Caste	Congress %	BJP+ %	Mahagath-bandhan %	Others %	N
Brahmins	6	84	6	4	171
Rajputs	5	89	6	—	156
Vaishyas	13	74	4	9	23
Jats	2	91	7	0	58
Other upper castes	5	84	10	1	94
Yadavs	5	24	62	9	261
Kurmis+Koeris	5	80	14	1	201
Other OBCs	5	74	18	3	520
Jatavs	1	17	75	7	263
Other SCs	7	49	42	2	154
Muslims	15	8	74	3	459
Others	1	52	37	10	115

N is the weighted data set (total N=2,705, of which 2,475 voted and gave caste-community details).

Source: CSDS—Uttar Pradesh NES post-poll survey 2019.

These factors suggest that it is not the end of caste politics in India, but rather it is the adroit utilization of caste-consciousness and even the sharpening of caste divisions at micro-level.<sup>3</sup>

While caste retains its importance in UP and elsewhere, the first two decades of 21<sup>st</sup> Century, have also witnessed within OBCs and STs & STs categories, an upwardly mobile aspirational class, strongly attracted to Modi's promise of development. Noted scholar Sudha Pai writes "The collapse of the Congress party in UP, most evident in the defeat of Rahul Gandhi, provided greater space to the BJP".<sup>4</sup>

The support for the BJP increased as one went up among educated section of society. Table 2 amply demonstrates that BJP is the favourite of highly educated people. Not only the educated but the semi or even illiterates also favoured BJP.

**Table 2: Education Levels and Party Preferred in Lok Sabha Elections 2019 (UP)**

Education	Congress %	BJP+ %	Mahagath-bandhan %	Others %	N
Non-literate	4	47	44	5	676
Up to primary	8	43	46	3	335
Up to metric	6	53	38	3	657
College and above	8	55	34	3	733

N is the weighted data set (total N=2,705, of which 2,401 voted and gave details about their education).

Source: CSDS—Uttar Pradesh NES post-poll survey 2019.

This implies that the narrative of the BJP was more convincing for the educated, among whom more than half of the respondents favoured it. Interestingly, the votes for the BJP from the non-literate category also increased sharply by nearly 5 percentage points, as compared to 2014.<sup>5</sup>

“Despite the BJP government’s economic failures, Modi was able to set the agenda of the election. He succeeded in conveying the message that he had improved India’s stature at the international level. The Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS)–Lokniti post-poll survey would help unpack this verdict further. This survey clearly indicates that Modi, at the time of elections, was the most popular leader securing the support of close to half the respondents, having a clear 32% lead over Rahul Gandhi.”<sup>6</sup> **SKPandeyji** EPW

Renewed debate on nationalism post Balakot-strike was also doing its round in UP Lok-Sabha election 2019 like the other parts of India. Apart from it the question of Hindu identity and its new-champion in the form of Narendra Modi, the nature and character of secularism and its consequent degeneration into minority appeasement, were other prominent issues dominating the elections. The unambiguous messaging and a direct connect with the masses and a very effective communication skill of campaign leader in chief Mr. Modi, who himself was seeking his re-election from Varansi, Uttar-Pradesh, also richly contributed to the electoral success of BJP.

We may discuss the diminishing presence of casteism, which is not only inimical to the growth of civil-society but also justifies nepotism and corruption. The same charge is not applicable to the very existence of caste as system. We may tomorrow move towards a caste-less society, which is definitely an ideal situation like a class-less society. This should be a welcome narrative in a democracy, where people rise above their primordial connect and elect their representatives on the basis of their individual merit, their capability to perform and their ability to deliver than simply choosing them on the basis of one’s caste or religion. In pursuit of this ideal of democracy and ethical citizenship, it is natural for us to evaluate the role of categories such as caste and religion, after every election. But it would be too early to write obituaries to caste-system on the basis of one or two elections and which are also not free from the influence of caste-politics. Right from selection of candidates keeping in view of the presence of her caste numbers or its dominance in the constituencies, to the deployment of leaders to campaign in the constituencies, it is the caste and caste only which is the paramount consideration.

Like all other systems in the world the caste-system has also undergone changes. It is by acknowledging these changes in the institution of caste that one needs to begin and see how caste prevails in politics or has an impact on the electoral outcomes. “The politics based on caste identity still thrives and in fact it has been in favour of the traditional upper castes under the rule of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). To prove this point, we just need to look at the number of chief ministers, ministers and other important public representatives coming from the upper castes. Not only this, the state machinery and local bureaucracy too have been drawn overwhelmingly from the traditional upper castes in the BJP-ruled states like Uttar Pradesh (UP). Another measure to check the prevalence of caste in politics is that only two members of Parliament who belong to Scheduled Caste (SC) have won from an unreserved constituency on a BJP ticket, whereas the Bahujan Samaj Party fielded 15 SC candidates from the unreserved seats. The above three examples are sufficient to suggest that caste still prevails in our electoral system.”<sup>7</sup>

Examples can be multiplied to buttress the claim that the caste still remain the larger optic for reading the Indian elections. Despite getting almost 50% of votes in almost 16 states and union territories, we see an overwhelming majority of cabinet ministers and junior ministers coming from two–three “upper castes” only. However, this is not new and such alliance between castes has occurred in the past like during the reign of Charan Singh between the Ahirs, Jats, Gurjars and Rajputs under the rubric of “kisan” and during the reign of Kanshi Ram in the form of Bahujans.

This power-sharing gets reflected in the popular slogans of people when they say “ye to apnisarkarhai” (This is our own government), knowing that there are their fellow caste people who get heard and get things done in this or that government. According to Vishesh Pratap Gurjar “Further, mutual repulsion could also not deter castes to vote collectively for a single party or candidate when a narrative has been stitched such that it provides the ideological canvas for coming together to the mutually repulsive castes. Like in this election as well, the canvas prepared by the mix of nationalism, development and Narendra Modi’s personality cult has brought the mutually repulsive Jats and Gurjars together to vote in favour of the BJP in western UP. These repulsive castes could come together because along with the narrative set by the BJP, it also invested heavily in raising new and non-elite leadership among these castes, who successfully popularised the narrative and brought votes of their own castes into the BJP’s kitty.”<sup>8</sup>

We can understand the defeat of Mahagathbandhan by another way also. The BSP-SP combination, which was otherwise looking formidable and all set to halt the BJP's march to Delhi, could not generate mutual-understanding between their cadres, and this led to the more division of votes. "It is generally believed that the BSP is a party that ensures the maximum transferability of its votes, especially of the Jatavs, in favour of the party/candidate it wants. In this election, this myth also got broken, as the Jatavs did not fully transfer their votes to the mahagathbandhan candidates belonging to the SP. In the BSP contested seats, three-fourths of the Jatavs voted for the mahagathbandhan, but in SP contested seats only a little over half of the Jatavs voted for it. This may be one of the reasons along with other factors, for the significantly large number of defeats of the SP candidates."<sup>9</sup>

The post-poll survey conducted by the CSDS clearly indicates that only six of every 10 Yadavs voted for the alliance's BSP candidates. For the SP candidates, their number stood close to two-thirds. It was, thus, the loss in the numbers of their core voters that made the difference.

"The BJP's success, especially in the Yadav, Kurmi, and Jat belts of UP helps one gauge the breadth of its stellar performance. In the 12 parliamentary constituencies of the Yadav belt in the Doab area, the mahagathbandhan could win only one seat and that too Mulayam Singh Yadav's seat. In 2014, the SP had won three seats in this belt. In the Kurmi belt of 26 constituencies of eastern and central UP, the BJP, like in 2014, won all seats, except that of Sonia Gandhi in Raebareli. In the Jat belt of western UP comprising of seven seats, the BJP replicated its performance of 2014 and won all seats."<sup>10</sup>

Like the evolution of liberalism, Indian caste-system is evolutionary in character. By adopting the positive elements, adapting to the changing situation and adept at learning the right lessons at right times, it has obviated any chance of violent change. UP Lok-Sabha results surprised us simply because we are unable to relate it the larger perspective. There is a grain of truth in the assertion of Prime-Minister Modi post elections, that it is the victory of caste-chemistry over caste-arithmetic.

We tend to demonizing the caste-system with the allegations of caste being stagnant and non-associative in character. It has acquired an axiomatic character. The champions of this infallible theory have refused to renounce their principled stand. But the facts tell us a different story. There is ample proof of emergence of a community cutting across the caste and religious lines. In the normative text of Brahmanism, the Dharmashastras, it is conceded that there were a variety of communities,



determined by location, occupation and caste, and none of which were necessarily, writes Romila Thapar “bound together by a common religious identity. In urban centres craftsmen of the same profession or of related profession formed organizations and guilds, such as ‘Gosthi’ and ‘Sreni’.”<sup>11</sup>

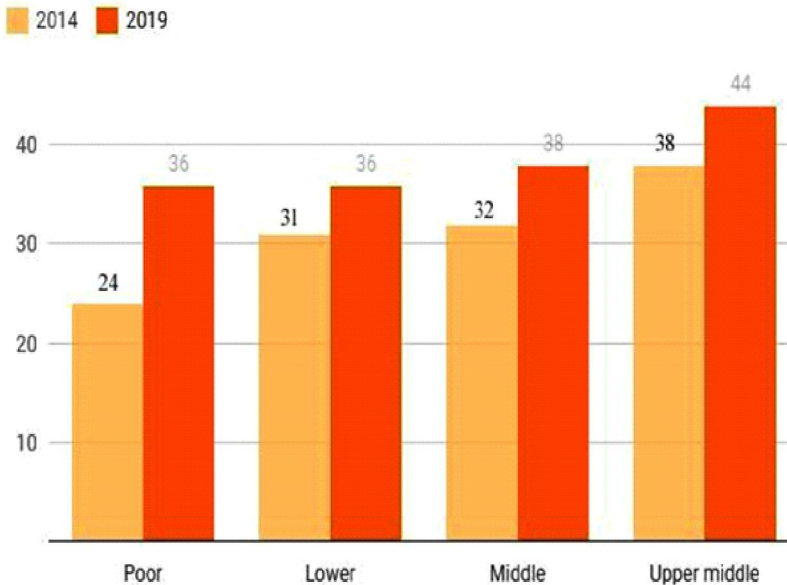
Hinduism has been more associative and open to adjustment than has been recognized. The presence of a uniform cultural-pattern across the length and breadth of India which may be termed as ‘Hindu-Civilization’ is not without significance. RomilalaThappar underlines the positive contributions of caste “it was again the assimilative character of caste which was fundamental to major social and economic changes from the late first millennium AD onwards, particularly in periods of state formation. It could be argued that the nature of caste underwent a historic change during this period- a change which has not been fully recognized by historians and sociologists. 10. This prowess cannot be brushed aside as merely “the capacity to eat dung and digest it”<sup>11</sup>. The exchange between the high-culture of Brahmanism and the low-culture of local cults is generally known as the Sanskritization of the latter. But there is another way round also. The high-culture has to bend in order to embrace the so called low-culture. The Viththala at Pandharpur and the Jagannath of Puri suddenly acquire centrality in Hinduism. This adaptability is seldom recognized in more positive ways. Prof. Dipankar Gupta writes, “India is probably the most stratified society in the world, and, to top it all, it also has caste, that ultimate social curio, which no society anywhere else has. This is what makes otherwise cautious people become captives of an exotic frame of mind. It is this that distorts our understanding of the relationship between caste and politics”.<sup>12</sup>

Despite a spirited campaign, the Congress has not been able to revitalise its organisational base, find fresh young candidates or spread its message of NYAY. In a state where identity remains important, the party does not have a single lower backward caste or Dalit leader; or young upper caste leaders to match those in the BJP. In many places the candidates put up by the Congress cut into the vote share of the alliance, and the introduction of Priyanka Gandhi came too late to make an impact on the ground. There was a no clear message on whether Rahul and Priyanka were fighting to win in 2019 or for a longer-term revival of the party. Clearly, the Congress has not stepped out of the existential crisis that enveloped it in 2014, at least in UP. More-over Congress could not match the pace of BJP in reaching out to different sections of society. The given table highlights that even after winning most of the

state-level elections, BJP incessantly aligned with different sections of society, which fetched a rich dividend to it.<sup>13</sup>

## BJP increased its vote share across classes - but the most among the poorest

Vote share for the BJP by class (%)



*The economic class categorization is based on a multi-dimensional (occupation, income, locality, and household assets) class index prepared by Lokniti-CSDS. The survey data is adjusted for the actual overall vote share of respective parties*

Source: National Election Study 2014 and 2019 • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

However, a key reason for the victory of the BJP in UP has been a highly personalised and plebiscitary-like electoral campaign by Modi to build his brand image as a strong leader and performer. Three-strategies used by him were effective in mobilising the electorate. A majoritarian type or to be more precise a Hindutva oriented campaign that attempted to consolidate the Hindu vote by attracting the lower backwards and smaller Dalits into the saffron fold; the use of nationalism by constant reference to the Balakot strike against Pakistan in a state which is a major recruiting ground for the army; and third, the BJP

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ably marketed Ujjwala Yojana, PM Awas Yojana and Swachh Bharat schemes through a huge personal and digital outreach programme; among the seats that experienced the most outreach, 19 were in UP. BJP not only won the election but in fact it increased its previous margin hugely. As stated at the very beginning that the development was not an effective issue in this election.

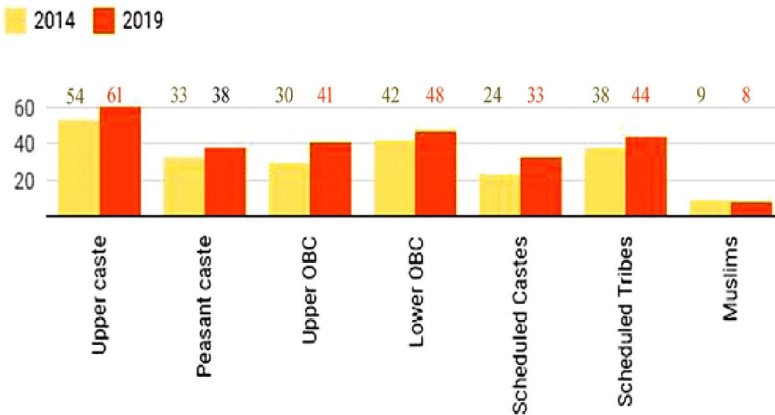
“When a party wins an election with an increased vote share (the BJP’s vote share in 2019, increased from 31.1% to 37.4%), it usually gains votes across the board. Yet, an analysis of the National Election Studies 2019, a post-poll survey conducted by Lokniti-Centre for the Study of Developing Societies immediately after polling in each phase of the election, reveals that the BJP made disproportionate gains largely among groups where it has traditionally lacked support. Contrary to claims that the party would find it difficult to maintain its cross-caste Hindu coalition due to brewing social friction and inherent contradictions, the BJP managed to increase support among most social groups. The party successfully overcame resentment among Dalits over various issues like the amendments to the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes Act and local incidence of inter-caste violence. Support among Dalits for the BJP deepened further in this election: more than one-third (34%) Dalits voted for the BJP in 2019 as compared to around one-fourth (24%) in 2014. A similar change also occurred among the upper OBCs. Traditionally, the BJP has received higher support among lower other backward class (OBC). The difference in support for the BJP between lower and upper OBCs decreased from 12 percentage points in 2014 to 7 percentage points in this election. This was primarily due to a relatively higher increase in support for the party among upper OBCs. The only social group among which the BJP failed to make gains were Muslims: the party’s vote share among Muslims remained almost the same at 8%.

BJP has successfully bridged the erstwhile gap its urban and rural vote share. There has been a sharp increase in the BJP’s vote share in rural constituencies of 7.3 percentage points. There is only 3.5% gap between its rural and urban votes.

BJP secured its biggest gains among rural voters **wala Bar diagram**<sup>14</sup>

## In the 2019 elections, the BJP increased its vote share across groups, apart from Muslims

Vote share for the BJP among different groups (in %)



*Peasant castes are middle castes like Jats, Marathas, Patels etc; The survey data is adjusted for the actual overall vote share of respective parties*

Source: National Election Study 2014 and 2019 • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

### Concluding Remarks

The conclusion, emanating from the above data-analysis and the analysis of several view-points, is very clear that Indian politics has undergone a tremendous change post 2019 general elections. The Caste calculations alone cannot ensure success. The sweeping victory of the BJP lies in its ability to recognise various fault-lines in castes and sub-castes. BJP worked-upon those fault-lines by propping and grooming up the leaders of different backward castes. This has made it easier for BJP to connect and assuage the feeling of deprivation in these sections against the domination of Yadav-Jatav combine in the UP politics as well as in Mahagathbandhan. Along with this, BJP has tried to cater to the rising social and economic aspirations of the poorer sections and has reaped the handsome dividends from it. The Mahagathbandhan remained wedded to its past glories and patron-client relations of the Mandal era, which has lost relevance at present. Dynasty cannot help the Congress in the absence of strong and credible leadership and a well-

oiled organisation on the ground. We can understand the plight of Congress by the fact that at present it has got a few booth-level workers, whereas BJP has injected a new entity called 'Panna-Pramukh' at booth-level. There are as many Panna-Pramukhs as the number of pages of the voter list at one booth. Therefore, in front of the lethal micro-management of BJP, Congress and the other political parties are finding it difficult to even macro-manage their affairs.

The most important factor, besides many others, has been the successful projection of Mr. Narendra Modias a strong, charismatic leader and its resonance and acceptance by the voters. Despite many negatives on the score-card like unprecedented unemployment as severe as almost five-decades ago, farm distress across India, rising NPAs and absconding failed business tycoons

While UP is undoubtedly plagued by joblessness, farm distress, sugar crisis and poverty, Modi's image and message that he can fix these problems, if given one more chance, seem to have resonated among the electorate, particularly the younger generation.

## Reference

- \* Loknit-CSDS: Source of the data presented in the article.
- [1] Source: Election Commission of India.
- [2] Mirza Asmer Beg, Shashikant Pandey, Sudhir Khar., **EPW**, Vol. 54, Issue No. 31, 03 Aug, 2019
- [3] **Table 1**, **EPW**, Vol. 54, Issue No. 31, 03 Aug, 2019
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- [6] Mirza Asmer Beg, Shashikant Pandey, Sudhir Khare: **EPW**, Vol. 54, Issue No. 31, 03 Aug, 2019
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