

National Security and Voting Behaviour in 2019 Elections

Nirmal Jindal

Voting in elections is one of the most viable forms of political participation in democratic countries. The voting behaviour of people is determined by opinion and attitude of voters. The election studies usually try to focus on various events that take place during elections but also try to scientifically identify and explain the recurring causal dynamics underlying the particular events of that election based on voters opinions and feedbacks. The studies of voting behaviour aim to understand the pattern of voting during elections, by probing key issues like why people vote or do not vote, how they arrive at voting decision and questions connected with voters engagement and participation in the elections. Voting behaviour and attitudes include the analysis of voting intentions of the voters, what were the issues that had an impact on their voting behaviour, voter satisfaction with the performance of the government and the popularity rating of leadership and the ruling party. The context of voting behaviour examination also enables us to analyse the voting behaviour of people in a particular election. , the voting behaviour of people can be analysed by the structure and motivations of people, operation and effect of the party, and impact of socio- political institutions on the voting behaviour. What does or does not influence voters is ascertained by comparing the behaviour and attitudes of one group of voters at a particular elections with that of another group at the same election. It is assumed that if we can understand what accounts for differences between voters at an election, we can understand what accounts for the outcomes and key characteristics of elections as a whole.¹

The rise in the voting percentage from 31% in 2014 to 37% in 2019 ² for BJP intrigues the scholars and they try to find out the reason or factors that influenced the voters behaviour in favour of BJP. In India the voters behaviour had been determined by several factors like preferences, ideologies, concerns, and alternatives. It is noted that in some of the countries various factors like Economic development or national security etc are the primary determinant of voter behaviour. In India which is a complex and heterogeneous society, the sociological

factors like communities, religion, language, caste, communities had been playing a significant role in determining the voters behaviour. Besides sociological factors, various other factors like ideology, personality of candidates, age, gender, subnationalism, money power, illiteracy etc had also been determining the voters behaviour apart from socio-economic and national security factors.

In the contemporary world, social media and electronic media also plays a critical role in influencing the thinking and behaviour of voters. The news channels debates play a significant role in arousing the emotions and throw more insight into the issues which in turn change the perceptions and behaviour of voters.³ Since elections are testing times for democracies, and political parties resort to a number of ways for vote gains and in the current scenario, the role of social media is ever growing. Regulation mechanisms pertaining to political ads, fake accounts, content monitoring including an audit by third parties supported by government and media are some of the ways to put a restraint on this issue. They also need to invest in public education campaigns that help users grow more skeptical of online content and more judicious about sharing it. Finally, at this election time, it is crucial that politicians restrain themselves and their operatives from spreading

fake news on their own.⁴ In 2019 elections the opposition parties tried to question the information about India's attack on terrorist camps in Balkot and sought some proofs. However, such news about air force action was proved authentic and real and public trusted BJP more whereas the opposition party congress started losing its credibility and confidence of people due to its opposition to Modi' government's acts on the issues of national security.

The demographic dividend is also one of the reasons that is changing the voting behaviour pattern in India. Article 326 of Indian constitution grants universal adult suffrage to all citizens above 18 years of age. About 60% of India's population ranging from 15 years to 59 years that constitutes the working class of the country also plays a significant role in determining the voting pattern. In the changing time and circumstances, youth tend to vote on the basis of their own perceptions and understanding than on the traditional family pattern as used to happen earlier.⁵ The youth and working class considers national security more important. It includes both internal as well as external security. The development factor is related to internal development and territorial security and integrity is related to external security.

In the fast globalising world on the one hand the state autonomy is

reducing as the world is integrating and getting interconnected , on the other hand the internal and external insecurities like ethno- religious conflicts, communalism and terrorism are reaffirming the state power. In this context realist approach focusing on political power and national security is still significant in the fast liberalising world. The issue of national security itself has become a serious issue that implicates the

behavior of voters. The biggest democratic country in the world like the US, Americans voted President Trump into power as he had put the issue of security on the forefront of his campaign. The issue of internal security, economic unemployment, terrorism, issue of migration were some of the issues which appealed the Americans to vote him into power. In a country like India which had always championed the principle of unity in diversity and peaceful coexistence and followed soft policy to deal with its neighbours like China and Pakistan had to shift its strategy to deal with its neighbours who pursued policies contrary to India's principles.

India's National security in the region

Both Pakistan and China have been the chronic adversaries of India and had been threatening the peace and security of India for a long time. India despite being a powerful country with nuclear capability was unable to deter their aggressive moves for a long time. It was in Uri in 2016 and Pulwama in 2019 that India responded to the terrorist acts sponsored by Pakistan. Now the question is that is it only Pulwama that had changed the voting behaviour of people and led to mass sweep in 2019 elections? Was it the Indian Air force (IAF) strike in Balkot after the Pulwama terrorist attack that had shifted the campaign narrative and potentially the momentum? Is it for the first time that voters behaviour was motivated or influenced by the national security considerations.? In this context one needs to explore that how much national security issues resonate with voters historically? In this regard, one needs to review PM Modi's foreign policy that had consistently been aiming at the national security. In this regard PM Modi tried to develop diplomatic relations with most of the countries in the world to boost India's economy. Modi government also tried to boost India's defence capabilities by signing a defence deal with Russia to acquire S-400, Russia's most advanced long range surface to air missile defence system. In 2016, India had a deal of 7.87 billion Euro to purchase 36 new Rafale fighter jets to enhance its warfighting and deterrent capability.⁶ India has also signed \$18 billion defence deal with the US to acquire defence systems from there.⁷ These developments to

strengthen India's defence capabilities enhances India's deterrent capability and its seriousness about India's security issues. It boosted Public's confidence in Modi as a leader who appeared not only as charismatic but also patriotic leader. The social and electronic media played a significant role in enhancing Modi's national security credentials. He boosted the confidence of people by enhancing the image of India in their own perspectives. In case of Pulwama, Indians irrespective of religion, caste, language and other differences wanted India to respond to Pakistan's sponsored terrorism in Pulwama. India's airforce attack on Bolkot solidified Indians belief in Modi. People started believing in him- "Modi haitohmumkinhai" became a popular saying. People started perceiving him as protector of the country, the word "chokidar" became a buzzword in public and it instilled the feeling of nationalism and responsibility in the public. People started perceiving him as selfless leader, true patriotic, and strong protector of India. People started believing that India will be a super power if Modi continues. The negative publicity by the congress against Modi on the defence issues like Rafale and Bolkot attack had led to the weakening of congress credibility in public. All the corruption cases against prominent Congress leaders further shattered the confidence of the public in the historic congress party. Therefore, The election in 2019 had cut across caste, community and other sociological factors and had turned in favour of Modi.

Factor of Internal Security

Since 2014, the BJP government under Modi's PMship had focused on national security aspect. Kautilya mentioned in his Arthashastra that economic development, internal stability and good governance as essential for national security and empowerment. Internally, the Modi government has performed well on a number of fronts in the last five years. It has reduced government corruption and lifted the rate of economic growth from 5 percent in 2014 to between 7 and 8 percent over the past five years. It has also worked on developmental, infrastructure and clean energy projects such as its much-needed *Swachh Bharat* (Clean India) program and its 100 percent village electrification program. But it is on the national security front that the Modi government has delivered the most. Not surprisingly, Modi has been campaigning on his national security credentials. These include his government's zero-tolerance approach to terrorism, its response to China and Pakistan's aggressive posturing and the BJP's stated aim of India achieving its rightful place in the world.⁸

PM Modi's foreign diplomacy

During the first term of PM Modi's administration there had been significant changes that marked paradigm shift in India's foreign policy. PM Modi during his first term tried to develop diplomatic relations with neighbouring countries, different regions and also global powers as well as global institutions. When he became PM the country was grappling with serious issues like energy security, economic development, terrorism, environment and refugees problem which were of transnational character and could not be tackled individually. Therefore, from the day one PM Modi aimed at developing alliance with neighbouring countries like China and Russia, regional powers like Japan and Australia in Asian region and also the countries of European Union as well as Organisation of Islamic states.

India's Act East Policy is particularly significant due to the strategic significance of Indian ocean that holds 70% of the world trade. Since Indian ocean security is essential to ensure free trading routes and maritime security, India has adopted Act East policy in order to develop economic and strategic collaboration with East Asian nations. India is developing trilateral highway connecting North East of India with Thailand which can be further extended to Vietnam and Cambodia. India is collaborating with Indo Pacific nations in order to ensure maritime security and counterbalance the Chinese hegemonic designs in the Indian and Pacific oceans.

One of the objectives of Modi's administration has been to ensure energy security, and environmental security. In this regard he had established friendly relations with Gulf countries. India is building ports in Iran to ensure energy security by creating passage through Afghanistan. India is developing relations with Organisation of Islamic States (OIC) countries and this policy can be termed as North look policy. India's policy towards gulf aims at the protection of supply of oil. India's 65% of oil is imported from West Asia therefore, peace and stability of west Asia is essential for India. India is taking several measures to establish partnership with gulf countries in their investment in upstream and downstream sectors in third world India and gulf.

India has also been striving to develop friendly relations with Central Asian countries to strengthen its energy security. India has initiated pipelines project including Turkmenistan, Afghanistan. India is also building ports in Iran to reach Central Asia via Afghanistan where it is building highways and roads. It is argued that due to its energy security its policy in Central Asia and Afghanistan be termed as Look North

policy. India is also developing relations with Caribbean and Latin American. India has also been trying to strengthen its relations with neighbouring countries. China is the biggest trading partner of India but India had differences on strategic and political spheres. India believes in policy to disagree but not disengage. Modi is trying to develop friendly relations with Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh to have stable and peaceful neighbours.

Both China and Pakistan are pursuing policies antagonistic and contrary to India's stand of cohesive relations to build peace in the neighbouring countries. China's increasing influence in India's neighbouring countries and expansionist designs there is a serious concern of India. Pakistan intends to keep Afghanistan destabilised and disturbed to prevent its relations with India. Pakistan is afraid that stable Afghanistan can give rise to Pashtun insurgency in Pakistan.

The PM Modi's policy of strengthening diplomatic relations with different countries in the world aim at strengthening India's security and enhance its image as a powerful nation. Indian PM Modi's foreign policy aimed to make India a global player, individually where necessary, bilaterally where required and multilaterally where relevant.⁹ It is due to his foreign policy that assured India's emergence as a power with an effective presence on the international stage. It is due to Modi's foreign and security policy that led to his victory for the second term.

Developments in defence technology

Since independence, India had been denied the rightful place in the world despite its being on the side of the victors and having had its soldiers fighting alongside the allied powers during the second world war. India's ambition to be recognised as one of the leading powers of the world is driven by a long history of subjugation by foreign powers and status denial. Historically, it dates back to the Muslim conquests of the Subcontinent in the 12th and 16th centuries, economic exploitation by colonial powers and an unjust discriminatory post-war international order in which India has often been constrained from regaining its past glory. India's quest for its rightful place in the world is not an end in itself but a means to secure the economic well-being of its people and to protect them from external security threats.

India's cultural and ethical values did not help India to attain a rightful status rather India became a victim of a discriminatory international regime. India was denied permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council and also nuclear power status, which was given only

to those nations that had built and tested nuclear devices prior to 1 January 1967. India conducted its first atomic test in (PNE)1974 and acquired declaratory nuclear posture in 1998. Though India had been in favour of comprehensive and complete nuclear disarmament but persued the policy of acquiring nuclear status in protest to nuclear asymmetry or apartheid. Moreover, India acquired nuclear capability to deter the nuclear adversaries. Despite initial resistance to India's nuclear activities, the United States and India eventually entered into a civilian nuclear agreement in 2008. But India is still facing challenges to its entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group due to strong opposition from China. The discriminatory global nuclear regime has hampered India's energy security efforts, its defence industry programme and denied it its rightful status in the world. The BJP is a revivalist party with the agenda of India achieving its rightful place in the world. In 1998, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and his BJP government challenged the dominant nuclear discourse and the discriminatory nuclear regime and went ahead with the atomic test to declare India a nuclear power. Clearly, Modi had a similar thing in mind. The "Anti Satellite Missile Test" (ASAT) test was conducted to demonstrate that India cannot be left out again if an international space regime is created in the future. Modi has taken the initiative to put India among one of the world's leading nations. On 27 March, just after the election date was set, Modi made a televised address to the nation in which he announced that India had conducted "Mission Shakti," an anti-satellite (ASAT) missile test in which it successfully shot one of its own satellites out of orbit. ASAT test demonstrated India's defensive and retaliatory power in space. Modi declared India a space superpower in the same league as the United States, Russia and China – a title it has long sought.¹⁰ India's larger objectives were largely 'demonstrative' and 'status-centric'. It enhanced India's image not only abroad but also at home. Space experts in India had expressed fear that in the eventuality of war, China may 'blind' India by numbing its satellites in space. The new anti-satellite technology is likely to work as a deterrent for China as India can also retaliate. India claimed that it was not intended to threaten any country, but in a domain of perpetual hostility, any technological breakthrough becomes an imminent threat to the other nation, especially if it has a military component. The timing of the test and Modi's address to the nation was aimed at galvanising electoral support for the upcoming parliamentary elections. The primary objective of highlighting its achievements in the field of space satellites that India wanted to demonstrate that it has a latent desire to be recognised as the leading state of the world, and it feels that its rightful place has been denied due to its colonial history and discriminatory regulatory

regimes of the Cold War period. It believes that this new technology, similar to the nuclear test of 1998, will enhance its status and place it in the privileged club of space leaders.¹¹The PM Modi and the BJP continue to push their national security credentials. They clearly perceived it as a key issue for Indian voters and one on which Modi and the BJP can dominate the entire opposition.

Zero tolerance stand on Terrorism

The Pakistan sponsored cross border terrorism had been a serious problem for India's security since 1980s. Pakistan strategy in Kashmir has been one of the most serious challenges to India's security since 1947. Pakistan having failed to grab Kashmir despite fighting three wars had resorted to the policy of cross border terrorism. After acquiring nuclear capability, Pakistan had intensified terrorism in Kashmir. Pakistan had been successfully deterring India's conventional attack by its nuclear capability. India's no first use strategy had further emboldened Pakistan

to continuously intensify its terrorism in Kashmir. India had been yielding to the pressure of terrorists earlier but it was for the first time that India under Modi's administration had responded to the terrorist attacks with surgical strikes. It had boosted the confidence of Indians that India can deal with Pakistan more firmly and decisively.

In 2019, the PM Modi administration dealt with the challenge of Pakistan sponsored terrorism in Pulwama with tough and firm position. The release of Abhinandan further enthused the youth of the country. Modi made the decision to conduct an airstrike on terror camps in Pakistan. In doing so, he highlighted the threat of terrorism and Pakistan's failure and passivity in allowing operations to occur across the India-Pakistan border in Kashmir. He also sidelined Pakistan diplomatically in international fora. Such measures have allowed Modi to demonstrate his government's national security credentials.

By contrast, the previous UPA government failed miserably on national security issues. Its counter-terrorism strategy failed to tackle domestic terrorism, such as that backed by Pakistan-based terror organisations which sought to indoctrinate Muslim youths in India to unleash terror attacks at home. Between 2004 and 2014, India was one of the most terrorism affected¹² countries in the world, behind only Iraq and Pakistan. The Congress-led UPA government failed to curb terrorism and provide security for Indian citizens. Indian cities faced the wrath of Jihadi terrorism in incidents such as the horrendous Mumbai terror

attack in which more than 300 people were killed.

In the past five years, not a single terrorist attack has been carried out in an Indian city. Many terror attacks were foiled, including one on the eve of Republican Day which was masterminded by the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM). However, JeM has been able to carry out terror attacks on the borders in Punjab and Kashmir. The September 2016 surgical strike after the Uri terrorist attack on terror camps in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir and the Pulwama terror attack

response by air strike on JeM terror camps in Balakot indicate a significant shift from the previous Congress government's response. India's evolved the strategy to respond to Pakistan sponsored terrorism and not let it go unresponded. India decided not to give in to Pakistan-sponsored terrorist attacks or Pakistan's nuclear blackmailing. India's retaliatory actions have increased the Modi government's credibility to deliver on matters of national security and resulted in a surge in the Modi government's popularity.¹³

China factor in national security

The growing power of China in Indian ocean and Indo- Pacific ocean is perceived as a serious threat by India. China's development on One belt one road initiative and China Pakistan economic corridor(CPEC) and China's installation of nuclear submarines in Gwadar to protect its trade routes is a main concern of India. Various countries like the US, Japan, Korea, Vietnam and South East Asian countries are also troubled by China's hegemonic designs in the region. India's "Act East Policy" as well as collaboration with US, Japan and Australia aim at checking China's expansionist designs in the international waterways.

India since 1962 has been facing territorial dispute with China and has been bothered by China's policy of India's encirclement. However, under Modi's administration India is dealing with China more firmly. For instance India's victory to push China beyond Doklam and checking its constant attempts to intrude into Indian territory is projecting Modi as a strong leader who can protect the country and enhance its image.

Though India's action in Balkot in response to Pulwama is considered the basic or immediate factor in mobilising peoples opinion in favour of BJP, the govt had been following India's security issue more comprehensively, consistently as reflected in the statement that India intends to have "Assuming the rightful place in global affairs, achieving a secure neighborhood, peaceful resolution of internal conflicts.

protecting our people and strengthening our capabilities.” However the link of BJP victory is established with India’s response to Pakisansponsored terrorism. The India’s surgical strike across the LOC in Kashmir in response to terrorist attack in Uri is considered one of the dominant reasons for BJP’s victory in UP in 2017 elections though we can not rule out the significance of other factors like triple talaq. The Indian air force strike on Pakistan and release of Abhinandan had further boosted the morale of Indians that how India can deal with Pakistan more firmly and from the position of strength and superiority.

History repeated

It is worth noting that it was not the first time that voting behaviour was so drastically influenced by the factor of national security. The issue of national security has always been a dominant factor in determining the voting behaviour in India. Earlier also people had been voting in favour or against the congress on the national security issue. After 1971, Mrs. gandhi won a clear support of people of India in 1972 elections. India’s stand on Bangladesh to enable Bangladesh to achieve its objective of self determination and its recognition to Bangladesh against the stand of the most powerful countries like the US had enhanced India’s image in the perspective of Indian voters. Even the leaders of the opposition party appreciated Mrsgandhi for her action in Bangladesh and Bajpai had called Mrs Gandhi as Durga, the goddess of power to kill the evil force. The same public voted against Mrs Gandhi who declared emergence and infringed the security of people in 1975. Therefore , the internal as well as external security has been one of the most significant determinants of voter behaviour. In 1962 after China war, the party image was fading but at that time there was no clear cut opposition party to stand against congress. The 1965 war was inconclusive. And congress was on week footing in 1967 elections. It was 1971 war that crystallised the image of Mrs Gandhi. And she was perceived as a strong leader.

Similarly in the 1999 general elections which took place three months after the Kargil crisis, the BJP led coalition turned to power, but the party did not gain additional seats and lost vote share. Both of these could be attributed to the party contesting fewer seats, but its seats tally in its stronghold of UP was also halved. But it is questionable whether the party had not won elections without Kargil taking place. In 2009 general elections which took place less than five months after the 2008 Mumbai attack, the opposition criticises PM Manmohan Singh led coalition for incantation, however the coalition was reelected. with

the congress party winning an additional sixty one seats.¹⁴ It is viewed that the elections of 1999 and 2009 took place after a gap of few months whereas the election of 2019 took place just after Pulwama. The party demonstrated its position of strength. It enhanced the image of PM Modi as well as India. Modi had been projected as an indispensable guardian (chokidar) rakshak, protector of India .

Concluding Remarks

Therefore, PM Modi's position and policies on security issues in general and Pakistan sponsored terrorism in Kashmir in particular have been no doubt the determining factors for BJP's clear cut victory in 2019 elections. But it was not the only or the first episode in the history of Indian voting behaviour.

Reference

- [1] Sanjay Kumar and Parveen Rai, 2013. *Measuring Voting Behaviour in India*, N.D.Sage . p 9
- [2] <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/FMfcgxwDrHqVMDnNGqsJXLzBnBnLwgCL?projector=1&messagePartId=0.1>
- [3] <https://www.gktoday.in/gk/determinants-of-voting-behavior-in-india/>
- [4] <http://www.kiiips.in/research/upcoming-elections-in-india-and-indonesia-the-role-of-social-media/>
- [5] <https://www.drishtias.com/to-the-points/paper1/india-s-demographic-dividend>.
- [6] <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/indias-buying-of-s-400-from-russia-will-have-serious-implications-on-defence-ties-us/articleshow/69592036.cms>
- [7] <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/et-explains/what-is-special-about-rafale-fighter-jet-heres-all-the-lowdown/articleshow/65072353.cms?from=mdr>
- [8] <http://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/indias-election-2019-modi-bets-national-security/>
- [9] Chintamani Mahapatra, Modi 365, Pioneer. 31/5/ 2015
- [10] Raj Kumar, India's ASAT missiles test established partial parity with China and superiority with Pakistan: here's how. Delhi, April 1, 2019. <https://www.financialexpress.com/defence/indias-asat-missiles-test-established-partial-parity-with-china-and-superiority-with-pakistan-heres-how/1534525/>

National Security and Voting Behaviour in 2019 Elections

- [11] <https://www.financialexpress.com/defence/indias-asat-missiles-test-established-partial-parity-with-china-and-superiority-with-pakistan-heres-how/1534525/>
- [12] <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-among-most-dangerous-places-in-the-world/articleshow/31357766.cms>
- [13] Dr Ashok Sharma, India's general elections 2019: Modi Bets on National Security. 25/4/2019 **Australian Outlook**
<http://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/indias-election-2019-modi-bets-national-security/>
- [14] cfr.org/blog/national-security-and-indian-elections