

Uttar Pradesh Election 2022: 'Is it a Paradigm Shift from Caste to Class'?

Sanjay Kumar

Abstract

Perception has got a very deep-rooted meaning in the electoral system of democracy; more especially in the caste-ridden society of Uttar Pradesh. Amid such stark and dark realities, elections have been fought and contested over the last 40 years or so. The Assembly election of February - March 2022 has unfolded certain questions before us. Nobody anticipated, in certainty, a repetition of Yogi government. Despite Corona pandemic and Kisan andolan unrest, BJP won comprehensively. None could anticipate the massacre of the Congress and BSP. Despite the best performance ever, Samajwadi Party could not muster the required majority numbers and missed the golden opportunity. But the performance of allied marginal parties was far more satisfactory. How could all these electoral results be analysed and comprehended? Is there a definite pattern in the peoples' mandate or just a simplification of numbers? Is there any perceptible shift in the choices of the electorates or simply a matter of number game?

Keywords: Sandwich coalition, Rainbow coalition, Hindutva, Class-voting, Reverse Social Osmosis, Rainbow Identity

Introduction

The *Centre for the Study of Society and Politics (CSSP)*, Kanpur conducted a Post-poll Electoral study. The study was carried on in 28 assembly constituencies of Uttar Pradesh. And a total of 1722 Respondents were interviewed. The methodology used was 'Systematic Random Sampling'. The current papers based on the above study

Theoretical underpinnings

After the second democratic upsurge in 1989, only the SP and BSP had formed governments in Uttar Pradesh before 2014 except for some intermittent BJP governments on four different occasion. The result of

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the assembly election 2022 has been historic. No body anticipated for a clear-cut majority for the incumbent party; and that too without any dent in the support base of BJP. But it doesn't necessarily mean a heart-breaking loss for Samajwadi Party either. But, no doubt, the Congress support base has been completely wiped out. It has been routed to the extent beyond imagination and its revival seems very bleak. BSP didn't fight it out openly or rather it was fighting for its own defeat; reason nobody knows better than Mayawati herself.

Table 1: Performance of Parties in 2022 U.P. Assembly election

Party Votes	Congress	BJP	SP	BSP	Apna Dal (Sonelal)	Nishad Party	SBSP	RLD	Other Small parties	Total voters' turnout
Number of votes got	2151234	38051721	29543934	11873137	1493181	8405841	252925	2630168	4390882	9 crore 21 lakh 63 thousand
% of Votes got	2.33%	41.29%	32.06%	12.88%	1.62%	0.91%	1.36%	2.85%	4.7%	100%
% of Vote on the seats fought	2.36%	44.15%	37.25%	12.88%	40.76%	36.48%	29.77%	33.88%	4.7%	—
Victory on seats	2 (-5)	255 (- 57)	111 (+64)	1 (-18)	12 (+3)	6 (+5)	6 (+2)	8 (+7)	2 (-1)	403

Source : Election commission of India

But for Samajwadi Party, they missed the golden opportunity for regaining power after a gap of five years. The whole political scenario and circumstances were favoring for its possible victory. Even most of the surveys were predicting for a very close fight between the two parties. The issues of Corona, *Kisan* agitation on farm bills, unemployment were very much there to haunt BJP and assisting the opposition causes but SP failed to break the social coalitions that enabled BJP for four consecutive victory. Moreover, people were fast losing faith in the government's governability to weed out all despair and hopelessness. The period from April to November 2021 was the most crucial one when BJP was fast losing the ground and SP was marching ahead with full speed. But after that, both parties started their journey in the opposite direction. During the next three to four months, BJP snatched the victory from the jaws of SP. So, what went wrong for the SP? Was it over-confident for its victory and didn't do the basics in the ground? Or could it not co-opt the political engineering formula with the social engineering one? Could we blame Akhilesh for his faulty political strategy? Or what is the actual factor which played its role decisively? Is it Hindutva based class politics ultimately? Following table will illustrate the voter's preference for parties in the 2022 election.

What does data say?

As per data, certain features emerge before us. They are as the followings–

1. Vote difference between BJP and SP is 9.23% overall and 6.90% on the seats contested. It got 85 lakhs more votes than SP. It means SP strike rate is better than BJP. But the won seat difference is 144 which is a huge gap between the two parties.
2. Despite an increase in the vote share by 1.62%, BJP lost 57 seats. On the other, SP was able to add 64 seats with an increase in its vote share by 10.24%. Therefore, the loss of BJP is the gain of SP in seats terms. Till date, this has been the best performance of Samajwadi Party. Still it was defeated by a huge 144 seats. This is definitely the biggest enigma in the *first-past-the-post-system*. No party could be sure enough of getting seats merely on the basis of vote share. Ultimately, constituency matters most. Therefore, the nurturing of core constituencies becomes the most important function of political parties in electoral politics.
3. BJP with its poll partners Apna Dal (S) and Nishad Parts, has been able to capture a hefty 43.82 per cent of votes, while SP together with RLD and SBSP could get only 36.27 per cent of votes. That means a difference of 7.55 per cent between the two competitors.
4. Congress vote bank has been totally wiped out. BSP is the biggest loser by an erosion of 9.35% in its vote share. Therefore, the loss of BSP is the gain of BJP in vote terms. Had the situation reversed, SP would form the government. In other words, if BSP didn't lose the numbers and remained more or less static, SP could easily be victorious.
5. In a bipolar contest, difference of 10 percentage of votes is more than enough to capture power. But in a triangular contest 30 percent of total votes is enough to get majority which has happened in the past elections of 2007 and 2012 when BSP and SP made their respective governments by getting majority seats.
6. Performance of BJP allies Apna Dal (S) and Nishad Party were better than the SP allies of SBSP and RLD. And their individual and cumulative performances are better than the Congress and BSP for the first time.
7. Statistically, the victory of BJP looks so spontaneous to fizzle out any organizational, polarization and nationalistic issues. But, as

usual, politics is more governed by perception than by aspiration. And the perception of the voters keeps on refreshing and refining with the passage of time and political behavior of parties.

Background

As per common understanding and popular beliefs, Uttar Pradesh is generally touted and tagged as a caste-ridden state. And there is no misconception either in this belief. Over the last forty years or so, politics of the state was primarily governed by caste equations exclusively. But, now the time has come to comprehend the 2022 poll results simply not on caste basis alone. There are several nuances which need to be scrutinized and explained. For the last 30 years, no government was repeated in the state simply because of caste calculations and equations. But what exactly happened in the latest election, that despite stiff opposition, BJP plus was able to garner two third of seats? How could it be explained?

Uttar Pradesh politics used to be defined in the nomenclatures of AJGAR, MAJGAR, MY, DM, BAMCEF, DS4etc. In the pre-independence era, Sir Chhotu Ram coined the term AJGAR comprising the castes of Ahir, Jat, Gurjar and Rajput for opposition against the British rule. During 1970's Muslim factor was added to the term Ajgar, thereby making it Majgar. *Former Prime Minister Chaudhary Charan Singh who stitched together the alliance of MAJGAR, representing the interests of the middle peasantry which had economically benefited from the Green Revolution. It challenged the Congress's hegemony in U.P. Though of five different social groups, the Jats and Muslims were the cornerstones on which the edifice of MAJGAR was erected.*⁴ BAMCEF was founded by Kanshi Ram on Oct 6, 1978 for the rightful claim of backward and minority people in the administrative and political affairs of the country.

After Mandal in 1990's, MY factor comprising Muslim and Yadav gained very fast momentum and recognition in the north Indian region especially of U.P, Bihar and 'Jat plus Gurjar' factor in Haryana. On this two-caste-basis alone, Mulayam Singh, Lalu Yadav and Devi Lal rode to historic and mesmeric political rise in their respective states for a decade without much of a meaningful and fruitful opposition. Almost all of their victories were scripted on this caste-based electoral arithmetics. The concept of DM comprising Dalit and Muslim became a hot cake in Bihar. With the leadership of Nitish Kumar, coalition of *Mahadalit* and *Muslim* fructified after 2005. Due to this calculation of caste synchronization, criminalization of politics became the buzzword. Caste leaders rose like anything. It was a matter of proud to be a caste leader

than being a leader of a particular party. Nobody could think of politics beyond caste line. Caste became the punch-liner of political victory. Even in 2012, by getting only 29.13 percentage of votes, Samajwadi Party was able to garner majority by bagging 224 seats. This was possible only because of extreme polarization of two-caste votes. Almost 80 percent of these two castes polled for the party; in return leaving no scope for other parties. Simply speaking, in a situation of quadrangular contest, thirty percent turns out to be a big number.

Before that in 2007, Mayawati created history by becoming the first ever majority won Dalit Chief Minister by cliquing the social engineering formula of *Dalit* and *Brahmin* through '*Sandwich Coalition*'. This phenomenon, as A. K. Verma puts in, symbolizes the political process of '*Reverse Social Osmosis*'.⁵ BSP was able to capture 207 seats by getting a meagre 30.4 percent of votes. This could be possible only because of a workable formula between two castes – Brahmin sitting at the top and Dalit sitting at the bottom of the hierarchical system of Indian society. Keeping in view of the sour historical experiences, this was almost unthinkable seemed to be impractical. Happily enough, this not only happened, but this kind of enigmatic political understanding based on social understanding kept opposition parties on tenterhooks also. The experiment seemed to be succeeding till the initial stage of 2012 election time. But by her own faulty decisions by Mayawati herself, the cracks in the sandwich coalition started surfacing. This caste coalition lacked inner strength as a cohesive group and was missing a common symbol, from where both could inspire themselves to move ahead for a more pragmatic understanding. Finally, after 2017, on the backdrop of *Hindutva* and *Rashtravad*, BJP has started walking a different kind of political journey in the state under the leadership of Yogi Adityanath.

Caste politics is basically an *Identity Politics*. It has limitations too, but was not visible to a larger chunk of electorates till recent times. It was somewhat hazy and blurry until the benefits of caste equations and equilibriums worked in favour of the leaders and followers. But inner-caste rivalry among numerous leaders on one hand and the lack of vision by top leadership on the other started the process of division in the parties. Therefore, the unfinished agenda of identity politics kept on rolling. The rise of '*Hindutva*' in conjunction with '*Rashtravad*' has given some kind of political space to the disgruntled leaders and caste groups for a more meaningful inning on the political turf of the state. The *identity with caste* is fast taking the shape of *identity with group*. Following table clearly show the voter's willingness to a pattern called *group voting* instead of *caste voting*. How long will this pattern work

and last is still in its nascent stage? But some more empirical studies will further elaborate the pattern swing in a specific direction. To be sure enough, the '*double engine Sarkar*' is letting no stone unturned for changing the colour and mind of the voters in particular and people in general.

In the first stint as PM, Modi took some bold and uncommon decisions like *demonetisation* and *GST*. But his second stint is filled with historic decisions like abrogation of Article 370 and making J&K and Ladakh two separate Union territories, law regarding *Triple Talaq*, CAA and NRC Act, act of Balakot strike, the Supreme Court verdict on the five hundred years old dispute of *Ram Janbhoomi*, the erection of the world tallest statue of Sardar Patel called *Statue of Unity*, recognition of women as a group thereby paving several welfare schemes in their favour, the world's largest vaccination program during Corona, on and off his puja offerings in several temples and finally his strike on tainted politicians are all making his stature as a great Hindu leader. In the same mould, Yogi is shaping the course of political trajectory of Uttar Pradesh. Therefore, the *jod* of Modi and Yogi is being touted as harbinger of revival of Hindu Politics'. People are desperate enough to co-opt with this kind of politics and are fast renouncing their old political habits of caste equations. Instead of old ones, a new but very effective and penetrative slogan of '*Jai Shree Ram*' has evolved. Opposition parties are still not in a frame of mind to accept the changed contour of political landscape. But the AAP leadership of Kejriwal is sharp enough to counteract this by its own model of *hinduism*. Anyway, for the last eight years or so, voters' choices have changed drastically and aligning fast with *emotional issues*. And ultimately perception plays the key role in the political process of a democracy.

Post-poll findings

The table shows the preference of the voters to parties. The caste factor is still playing its role, but the strategy of BJP for garnering peoples support is more effective and sustainable. Some conclusions could be drawn from these mandates.

1. First group of Forward castes comprising Brahmin, Thakur, Vaishya and others are all voting on a class pattern to BJP on *hindutva* plank. Almost 80 percent of forward caste voted for BJP, 15 percent to SP and 5 percent to other parties.
2. Second group of Backward castes seems to be divided on two choices – *hindutva* and *reservation*. 68 percent of Jat, Kurmi,

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Maurya & Kushwaha and other backward castes including Teli, Nishad, Kahar voted for BJP, 18 percent to SP and 14 percent to BSP and others.

Table 2: Voting percentage by different caste groups in 2022 election

Party	BJP+	SP+	BSP	Congress	Other
Caste Voting					
1. Rajput (4%)	89	9	1	1	
2. Brahmin (8%)	85	10	5		
3. Vaishya (4%)	66	27	7		
4. Other Upper Castes (3%)	79	14			7
5. Jat / Gurjar (2%)	70	23	7		
6. Yadav / Ahir (11%)	18	80	1		1
7. Kurmi (6%)	86	10	2		2
8. Koiri / Maurya(6%)	72	20	6		2
9. Rajbhar (4%)	36	63			1
10. Nishad (3%)	43	14			43
11. Other OBCs (9%)	70	22	4	3	1
12. Jatav (11%)	41	21	38		
13. Pasi / Dhobi (6%)	63	29	6	1	1
14. Other SCs (2.7%)	77	11	11	1	
15. Ashraf Muslim (2.2%)	8	80	2	2	8
16. Pasmada Muslim (17%)	16	82		1	1
17. STs (0.6%)	14	71	1		14
18. Others (0.5%)	45	43	10		2

Total – 100 %

Source : CSSP Post-poll Survey,2022. All data in percentage term.

SC, ST and Muslim population as per 2011 data. Other castes data based on secondary sources

Table 3: Percentage voting by caste groups during last three elections in U.P

Castes	BJP+			SP+			BSP		
	2022	2019	2017	2022	2019	2017	2022	2019	2017
1. Brahmin	85.7	84	78.8	9.5	6	9.7	4.8		4.1
2. Rajput	88.9	89	66.4	8.7	6	16.4	0.8		9.6
3. Vaishya	66.7	74	72.1	26.7	4	16.3	6.7		3.5
4. Jat	69.8	91	34.5	23.3	7	16.1	7.0		2.3
5. Yadav	18.2	24	10.3	80.4	62	75.9	.7		5.6
6. Kurmi	86.4	80	58.3	10.4	14	19.4	1.6		15.3
7. Koiri/Kushwaha	71.7	80	58.3	20.2	14	19.4	6.1		15.3
8. Jatav	40.9	17	8.6	21	75	3.9	38.1		85.8
9. Ashraf	8.3	8	8.6	80	74	60.2	9.9		20.1
10 Pasmanda	16	8	8.6	82.4	74	60.2	7.7		20.1

Sources: 1. CSSP Kanpur Post-poll data 2022.

2. In 2019 BSP was a part of Mahagathbandhan with SP
3. CSDS Delhi data of 2017 &2019
3. Third group of Schedule Castes voters did the trick for BJP. The once designated '*Achhor*' voted 60 percent for BJP, 20 percent for SP, 18 percent for BSP and 2 percent for others.
4. The fourth group of Muslim voters, on the wave of polarization, 12 percent voted BJP, 81 percent to SP and rest 7 percent to BSP, Congress and other parties.

In comparison of Table 2 with Table3, certain features emerge before us. They could be analyzed as the following: –

Between 2017 to 2022, three elections took place in the state – two Assembly and one Lok Sabha. In comparison with Assembly to Assembly election, Brahmin and Rajput voted 7 and 22 percent more, while Vaishya voted less by 7 percent to BJP. A huge jump of 35 percent in Jat vote, 8 percent in Yadav vote, 28 percent in Kurmi vote and 12 percent in Koiri and Kushwaha vote increased for BJP. But the most notable and spectacular jump is in Jatav vote. They voted 32 percent more for BJP. Even 7 percent more Pasmanda Muslim voted for the party. For Samajwadi Party too, there was an increase in the vote share of Vaishya, Jat, Jatav and Muslim. But Rajput and Kurmi votes decreased slightly for the party. Voters rejected BSP across the table and the biggest surprise is the sharp fall of its core vote bank of Jatav by a very huge 47

percent. And herein lies the answer of the riddle of BJP victory. Across all section of the society, people voted for the party despite stiff and meaningful challenge from SP. Therefore, the whole voting pattern could be classified as '*class-voting*'. This is more apt to term it an 'umbrella coalition' of all castes minus Muslim. In fact, the loss of BSP is the gain of BJP. That's why the slogan of 80:20 was hurled during election period.

In comparison with the Lok Sabha poll of 2019, there seems to be a pattern following for Modi, which is slightly lacking for Yogi. That's why NDA (BJP, Shiv Sena, JDU, AIADMK, SAD) poll percentage jumped around 45 percent, which is a difference of almost 7 percent from 2014 LS poll, while a 10 percent difference for BJP in comparison with 2017 poll. In other words, ten percent more U.P. voters voted for BJP due to Modi factor and BJP alone garnered the highest ever 37.4 percent of votes. Modi and Yogi as incarnation of *hindutva heroes* has slowly but steadily transformed the political and administrative culture of the state.

Therefore, finally, 2022 election is a bigger and extended example of inclusive politics which is based on class and not caste identity. The only difference is that 2022 represents a very wide array of identities, while 2007 was forged on two caste identities. 2012 was also connected on caste lines through the MY formula, thereby meaning that even below one third of the electorates were able to dictate the political terms of the state. So why should have Akhilesh thought in an inclusive manner since caste equation was paying him rich dividends? From his point of view, being inclusive could be a futile exercise. That's why he always remained emphatic about caste equations and its credibility. But he was unable to understand the limitation and fragility of *exclusive politics*. In a way, 2022 is more a class and inclusive mandate. Conclusively, a bigger *Rainbow Identity* has emerged on the political scene of Uttar Pradesh. The 2007 model could not last long due to its inner weaknesses. But 2022 model is going to sustain for a very longer period of time. It does not necessarily mean always a BJP victory, but the party which offers more class-oriented alternatives will always be in an advantageous position.

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