

Countdown to 2024 General Elections: A Critical Analysis of 2022 Assembly Elections in Uttar Pradesh

Alok Kumar Gupta & Khyati Pal

Abstract

UP is one of the most relevant states when it comes to shaping national politics. As a state it happens to be cynosure of all eyes and hence political analysis. An analysis of 2022 Assembly election results of UP clearly indicates that BJP did quite well in spite of the fact its seats got reduced over the previous elections. Nevertheless, it did get more of popular votes over its previous tally. Other aspects of elections also indicates most of the dynamics were either in favour of BJP or it did not favour considerably the SP. Therefore, BJP stands an excellent chance on the basis of its performance in UP to bag more seats of Lok Sabha in 2024 elections. UP being the bellwether state will be a determining factor in the formation of government at the centre. However, the anomalies that are obvious are not unique to UP, rather they are observed in most states of India.

Key Words: India, National Politics, UP elections, 2024 elections

It is often said, Uttar Pradesh (UP) determines the course of the general elections to Lok Sabha and highlights the mood of the people in general. However, it may not be generalised, in spite of the fact that UP Assembly elect highest number of members to its Assembly and sends highest number of Members to the Parliament. UP indeed is one of the most relevant states when it comes to shaping national politics. As a state it happens to be cynosure of all eyes and hence political analysis. Therefore, this paper endeavours an analysis of the UP, Assembly elections which were organised during February 10 to March 07, 2022 in seven phases and finally the results were declared on March 10, 2022 for all the 403 elected members of the 18th Legislative Assembly. BJP became the first incumbent party to get re-elected in more than 30

years. The paper also explores as to what extent the results were indications for the Lok Sabha election scheduled to be held in 2024.

Results of 18th Uttar Pradesh Assembly Elections

Total seats in UP Assembly are 404 in which 403 are elected and one is nominated from Anglo-Indian community. Results of the Assembly elections were announced on March 10, 2022. National Democratic Alliance (NDA) consisting of BJP, Apna Dal (Sonelal) and NISHAD managed to win a total of 273 seats. Samajwadi Party Alliance consisting of Rastriya Lok Dal and Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party together won 125 seats. BJP was victorious on 255 seats and SP on 111 seats. BSP was made to suffer the biggest loss thus far with managing one seat only.¹ Out of 75 districts of UP the 2022 Assembly Elections witnessed clean sweep by BJP in 23 districts² and SP in 5 districts³, whereas remaining 47 districts saw multi-corner contests.⁴ The party-wise details of seats are mentioned below in Table-I.

Table-I: Party Wise Seat and Percentage of Vote share 2017 and 2022 Assembly Elections

SN	Name of the Party	Seats in March 2017	Vote Share	Seats in March 2022	Vote Share
1	Apana Dal (Soneylal)	09	1.0%	12	
2	Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)	18	22.2%	01	12.88%
3	Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP)	312	40%	255	41.29%
4	Indian National Congress	07	6.2%	02	2.33%
5	Jansatta Dal Loktantrik Hamara Aam Dal (NISHAD Party)	—		02	
6	Nirbal Indian Shoshit	01		06	
7	Rashtriya Lok Dal	—	1.8%	08	2.85%
8	Samajwadi Party (SP)	49	22%	111	32.06%
9	Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party	04		06	
10	Independents	03		—	
11	Vacant	01		—	
	NOTA	—	0.9%	—	0.69%
	Total	403		403	

Source: Compiled from Elections Commissions of India website.

Most remarkable feature of the 18th Assembly elections is that half of BJP MLAs who have been elected are newly elected MLAs. This is a

clear sign of incumbency disadvantages for which UP has always remained infamous. BJP's 126 candidates won the seats out of 200 new candidates that it fielded. Samajwadi Party's (SP) 56 candidates won out of 199 new candidates that it fielded. Similarly, BSP's (Bahujan Samajwadi Party) 1 out of 346 new candidates could manage to win. Thus, BJP's 63%; SP's 28.1 % and BSP's 0.3 % new candidates could manage to win seats in the 18th Assembly. Overall, 4.9% of the total newly fielded candidates won the elections. Yogi Adityanath (BJP) and Akhilesh Yadav (SP), both are first-timer MLAs. As Chief Minister they were members of the UP Legislative Council.⁵ Another remarkable feature of the 2022 Assembly elections is that the incumbents proved to be reliable candidates for BJP and SP both despite UP's track record of anti-incumbency.

While in the 2017 state polls, the BJP swept Uttar Pradesh, winning 312 of the 403 seats and picking up nearly 40% of the popular votes; it won 255 seats in the 2022 state elections managing 41.29% of votes. This reveals that while the number of popular votes went up, the number of seats that it won went down. In 2017 of the 312 winning legislators, only 19 had won a seat twice or more previously. Of these 19, the nine candidates had defected from other parties.⁶ Thus, it makes it quite obvious that in spite of BJP's rise in popularity it failed to a brief extent towards converting its popularity in number of seats. Therefore, there was no set-back to BJP so far as its popularity is concerned. The mandate may also be understood to mean positive results of its performance of the last regime. Therefore, it is a clear positive sign for the ensuing Lok Sabha elections in 2024. UP may reward the BJP with a greater number of seats in the Lok Sabha elections.

Background of Elections

As usual like it happens on the eve of most elections that many leaders who think themselves to be stalwarts and are confident of changing the wave of campaign shift sides. They abandon their erstwhile political party and join the other party which according to them have fair chances of sweeping the elections. Accordingly, ten BJP state legislators including three ministers left the Bhartiya Janata Party and joined Samajwadi Party in January 2022. One of them was Swami Prasad Maurya, a veteran five-time legislator, who may have believed that his shift will cause an 'earthquake' in the BJP. Most of them joined the main rival, the regional Samajwadi Party (SP).⁷ Samajwadi Party's patron and former Chief Minister, Mulayam Singh Yadav's daughter-in-law Aparna Bisht Yadav joined BJP in January 19, 2022.⁸ The very

next day on January 20, 2022 Mulayam's Singh's brother-in-law Parmod Gupta too joined BJP.⁹ This was followed by Congress leader Ratanjit Pratap Narain Singh who joined BJP on January 25, 2022.¹⁰ Therefore, all such shifts from ruling party to opposition and vice versa took place on the eve of elections to provide matters to analysts and they kept calculating impacts of shifts and the prospects of different political parties during the course of election. Most such calculations proved miscalculations as the ruling political party riding the wave of incumbency won a thumping majority and formed the government, disproving all pre-election calculations and miscalculations.

Popular Votes Vs Number of Seats

This election turned out to be SP's best performance. In 2012, when SP formed the government in UP, it had won full majority with 224 seats getting 29.15 % of the total vote share. In 2017 SP got 21.82% of the total vote share. On the other hand, in this election its vote share went up to 32.1 %, though it could not convert it into seats to win a comfortable majority on floor of the Assembly. However, the party got double the seats than it got in 2017 Assembly Elections. SP's tally of 49 in 2017 touched to 111 seats in 2022.¹¹

On the other hand, BJP's vote share too increased from 39.67 in 2017 to 41.3 % in 2022; yet the number of seats fell from 312 in 2017 to 255 in 2022.¹² Therefore, SP's both the vote shares and number of seats went up; whereas the BJP though got more of popular votes, but a smaller number of seats over its previous tally. BSP's vote share was 25.91% in 2012, 22.23% in 2017 that came down considerably to 12.9% in 2022.¹³ Therefore, it seems that both the rivals BJP and SP could improve upon their vote share making huge dent in BSP's vote bank.

Congress received 11.63% of the total vote share in 2012 and won 28 seats, which went down to 6.25% vote share in 2017 with seven seats. Congress performance went further down to 2.3% of the total votes with only two seats in the 2022 Assembly elections.¹⁴ Loss of voters by Congress also suggests that the gain may have been to BJP and SP.

Therefore, it is quite obvious that the seats won by different political parties are not in proportion to the votes polled by those parties. It gives rise to complexity as to how a party which could manage to win more of popular votes got less seats, in spite of the fact that it has improved upon its votes tally over the previous elections. Therefore, it makes it imperative to rethink about the kind of electoral methods that are adopted in Indian context.

The above discrepancy is certainly on account of 'First Past the Post' (FPTP) system of elections that are followed in India's general elections to Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. Simple meaning of FPTP is that the candidates who manages maximum number of votes is declared elected. This is atrocious as a candidate winning on the basis of 30% of the total seats would mean he has been opposed by 70% of the people in that constituency. He could manage to win just because those 70% of the votes were divided among his opponents. FPTP as an instrument of electoral methods then turns out to be instrument of "tyranny of majority". Hence, some kind of proportional representation of a second ballot system is being demanded by many from time to time.

Dynamics of UP Election 2022

Relative decline of BJP from 312 seats to 255 is something that requires a detailed analysis, even though it may have no bearing upon the 2024 Lok Sabha elections or rather would have positive impact as its tally of popular votes have gone up. However, one needs to understand that when a multipolar party system becomes more bipolar, the votes of parties on the decline usually get distributed between the two ascending parties, lifting both boats.¹⁵ This seems to be quite obvious in case of UP 2022 Assembly elections. Both Congress and BSP which ruled the state for good number of years was almost washed out during the last elections as its vote's share dwindled further down considerably. This makes it imperative to decipher the victory margin of candidates in different constituencies.

ictory Margins

Victory margins are a useful indicator of the degree of competitiveness of elections. The number of closely fought contests tells us to what extent small vote swings could have affected the overall distribution of seats. In 2022, 131 MLAs won with a victory margin inferior to 5% which is considered a close election. Ninety-one MLAs won with a margin between 5% and 10%, which is comfortable, 68 won with a margin between 10% and 15%, which is large, and 113 MLAs won with margins superior to 15% which are very high margins.¹⁶ Therefore, it makes it imperative to understand the same in absolute terms. Below-mentioned Tables provides the victory margins, though it is not for all the seats of the UP Assembly, nevertheless it provides indications as to how many constituencies were there which may have faced close contest.

Table-II: Victory Margin Less than 1000 votes

Serial no	Constituency	Party Won	Party Lost	Vote Margin
1	Nakur	BJP	SP	315
2	Dhampur	BJP	SP	203
3	Nehtaur	BJP	RLD	258
4	Chandpur	SP	BJP	234
5	Moradabad Nagar	BJP	SP	782
6	Bilaspur	BJP	SP	307
7	Baraut	BJP	RLD	315
8	Jasrana	SP	BJP	836
9	Katra	BJP	SP	357
10	Isauli	SP	BJP	269
11	Dibiyapur	SP	BJP	473
12	Kursi	BJP	SP	217
13	Ramnagar	SP	BJP	261
14	Domariyaganj	SP	BJP	771
15	Shahganj	Nishad	SP	719

Source: Compiled from Election Commission of India Website

Table-II reveals the constituencies where the victory margin of votes was less than 1000 votes. BJP won in 8 constituencies with less than 1000 vote margin; Nishad party (which is also an ally of BJP) won in one constituency; and SP won in six constituencies with less than 1000 votes. Also, SP lost in 7 constituencies; BJP lost in 6 constituencies and RLD lost in 2 constituencies with less than 1000 votes. This indicates that both the rival parties lost and won almost equal number of seats with less than 1000 vote margin. Accordingly, swing on any side may not have affected much of their tally in terms of seats. This also does not provide any indication in terms of decisive trends for 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Table-III: Victory Margin Between 1000 and 2000 votes

Serial no	Constituency	Party Won	Party Lost	Vote Margin
1	Sultanpur	BJP	SP	1009
2	Manikpur	ADS	SP	1048
3	Chhibarmanu	BJP	SP	1111
4	Mariyahu	ADS	SP	1206
5	Pharenda	Cong	BJP	1246
6	Sitapur	BJP	SP	1253
7	Badlapur	BJP	SP	1326
8	Bijnor	BJP	RLD	1445
9	Shrawasti	BJP	SP	1457
10	Aurai	BJP	SP	1647
11	Itwa	SP	BJP	1662
12	Ghazipur	SP	BJP	1692
13	Basti Sadar	SP	BJP	1779
14	Bisauli	SP	BJP	1834
15	Salon	BJP	SP	1511

Source: Compiled from Election Commission of India Website

Like the above Table-I here again there were only 15 constituencies where the victory margin of votes was in between 1000 to 2000 votes. BJP won in eight constituencies; SP won in 4 constituencies; ADS (Apna Dal) won in 2 constituencies and Congress won in one constituency. Also, SP lost in 9 constituencies and BJP lost in 5 constituency. Here again any swing in favour of either BJP or SP would have just facilitated them to win a greater number of seats without impacting the strength of either in terms of formation of government.

Table-IV: Victory Margin between 2000 to 3000 votes

Serial no	Constituency	Party Won	Party Lost	Vote Margin
1	Kithore	SP	BJP	2180
2	Raniganj	SP	BJP	2649
3	Phulpur	BJP	SP	2732
4	Bacchrawan	SP	ADS	2812
5	Kalpi	SP	NSHD	2816
6	Faridpur	BJP	SP	2921
7	Zaidpur(SC)	SP	BJP	2982

Source: Compiled from Election Commission of India Website

Table-IV above indicates the constituencies where the victory margin of votes was in between 2000 to 3000 votes. SP won in 5 constituencies and BJP won in 2 constituencies. BJP lost in 3 constituencies; ADS and Nishad party, again both being an ally of BJP lost in one constituency each. Thus, once again the above results do not indicate the victory margin as a decisive factor, either in favour of BJP or SP. A swing in favour of either of the rival parties would not have facilitated SP to form a government.

Table-V: Victory Margins between 3000 to 5000 votes

Sl.No.	Constituency	Party Won	Party Lost	Vote Margin
1	Baheri	SP	BJP	3355
2	Meja	SP	BJP	3439
3	Handia	SP	NSHD	3543
4	Bindki	ADS	SP	3797
5	Sareni	SP	BJP	3807
6	Aliganj	BJP	SP	3810
7	Etawah	BJP	SP	3984
8	Patiyali	SP	BJP	4001
9	Baharaich	BJP	SP	4078
10	Jalesar	BJP	SP	4441
11	Mahuban	BJP	SP	4448
12	Jalalabad	BJP	SP	4572
13	Tirwa	BJP	SP	4608
14	Bhongaon	BJP	SP	4767
15	Mohammdi	BJP	SP	4871
16	Badohi	SP	BJP	4885

Source: Compiled from Election Commission of India Website

Table-V above indicates the constituencies where the victory margin of votes was in between 3000 to 5000 votes. BJP won in nine constituencies, ADS in one and SP in six constituencies. BJP also lost in five constituencies, Nishad party in one constituency and in rest of the 10 constituencies SP lost. This again do not provide any indication that a swing in favour of either of the parties would have impacts the BJP's prospects of forming the government.

Therefore, there were around 53 constituencies where the results revealed that the winner candidate could win on the basis of less than

5000 votes. Out of these SP already won in 21 constituencies. Therefore, even if the votes would have swung in rest of the 32 constituencies it would not have been in a position to form the government. Thus, the dynamics of the electoral process and election results are suggestive enough the BJP has an absolutely fair chance of winning decisively in 2024 Lok Sabha elections, unless something unwarranted happens in the state that leads to tarnishing of the image of BJP or its Chief Minister over the next one and half year.

Many other dynamics of elections went unnoticed as the entire focus was on the BJP-SP contest. Most commentators forgot about NOTA, an option which was introduced in 2013 that allows voters to reject all candidates. As it happens, most voters too forgot about it.

Uttar Pradesh—A Bellwether State

Uttar Pradesh is a bellwether state as it is next door to national capital, Delhi. It is the most populous state of the country with about 200 million of population in India. It also sends maximum number of Members to Lok Sabha i.e., 80. The state is also honoured to have elected Prime Minister Narendra Modi from Varanasi. It also has the highest number of members in the State Assembly. Therefore, the above-discussed electoral dynamics are clear indications that BJP stands a fair chance of winning a greater number of seats in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Lessons for Analysts

Firstly, political defections especially before regional and national ballots are not uncommon in India. Most political leaders are like “*aayaraamgayaraam*” (they come, they calculate their fortune and then they go). Politics has thus turned increasingly transactional¹ with leaders routinely crossing over on account of: (i) if they are denied ticket by the ruling party; (ii) if they calculate that the chances of opposing party winning and forming government is better; (iii) if they sense that the ruling party is suffering from anti-incumbency factors; (iv) if they are lured by the opposition party with either money or ministerial berth. Therefore, “politics of opportunism” is the rule of the game in contemporary politics both at the national and regional levels.

Secondly, over the last many years a new trend has been emerging that assemblies are often packed with newcomers after the elections. This has happened as the tradition of time-tested candidates has withered away. This also helps parties to ride well the anti-incumbency factors as the old guard which may have earned the wrath of the people for

their non-performance are eliminated during the course of ticket distribution itself. It is quite helpful for ruling party if it calculates its strengths and weaknesses well in advance.

Thirdly, parties like BJP work hard on collecting feedback from voters to find out whether their candidates have become unpopular. If they realise that a particular candidate is non-performing-one, they deny ticket to such candidates. Thus, the political parties when on the treasury benches, have learned the art of assessing the winning probabilities of their candidates on the basis of their performance over the last five years or so.

Fourthly, the stature of the Legislature had been diminishing over the last so many years. It is on account of political culture that favours concentration of power in the hands of state chief ministers. Therefore, even though it is unhealthy for democracy and democratic process, the political parties have gradually developed the culture of 'personality cult'. They groom a personality around which election campaigns are organised. Therefore, the stature of the person is on first position, of the party on second position, and the stature of the legislature comes last.

Major Issues During the Elections

Farmer's Protests: Preceding the 2022 election, year-long protest by farmers over the 'Three Farm Bills' were being considered as a decisive factor in the election. Government withdrew the Bills in toto amidst the ongoing protest by the farmers. Probably the withdrawal was to please the farmers in view of impending elections. It was being argued that the farmers from UP are also angry over the Bills and are in support of protest by Punjab farmers. However, whereas farmers of Punjab did show their anger by voting out most parties including BJP and Akali Dal; it did not affect elections in Uttar Pradesh. Reason may be that the farmers from UP were not into the protests with same number and might as those from Punjab. Hence, they did not bore much brunt of the hardships of protests and accordingly they did not create any impact upon the UP Assembly elections.

Jat Angers: First phase of election began in Jatland consisting of 58 constituencies spread over 11 districts (Shamli, Muzaffarnagar, Harpur, Baghpat, Meerut, Ghaziabad, GB Nagar, Bulandshahr, Aligarh, Mathura, and Agra). It was there in the media as news and analysis that after Muzaffarnagar riots, Jats and Muslims were scheduled to vote together during the first phase. Ajit Singh's son Jayant Chaudhary who was a

contestant was said to have had all the sympathy of Jats. However, the results were otherwise. Surprisingly, areas in which the voting took place during the first phase, BJP won 46 seats out of 58 and almost 50% of the total vote share. The combined vote share of SP and RLD, which were expected to sweep the region, was just 31%. This made it clear that a large chunk of Jats did vote for BJP on the campaign of improved law and order situation that went well with the people, especially the women. In fact, out of 24 Jat-dominated districts in the first phase, BJP won 18, just one less than 2017. RLD, the party of Jats, could win just four and SP two.² Thus the issue of Jat angers had no notable impact.

Muslim Factor: Muslims make up about 19.3% of UP's population, they make up only 8.3% of the new MLAs. All are from SP and its allies. BJP did not field a single Muslim candidate, and the only Muslim given a ticket within NDA was by Apna Dal (S).³ Phase II of election was in 55 constituencies spread over nine districts (Saharanpur, Rampur, Bijnor, Amroha, Sambhal, Moradabad, Bareilly, Badaun and Shahjahanpur). There were keen contests in these constituencies as six districts with highest Muslim population fall in this phase. SP-RLD alliance had unflinching support of the community with a fair chance of winning well. Out of nearly two crore voters in this phase, over 35% or nearly 70 lakhs were Muslims. Five out of nine districts had more than 40% minority population while Rampur was a Muslim majority district. SP could manage a larger vote share with 40.8 % against BJP's 40.3%. However, SP-RLD alliance could not convert it into larger share of seats. BJP won 32 seats and SP 23.⁴ Yet, this was SP's second-best performance out of all the seven phases of elections in UP. Muslim voters make up a considerable portion of the population in 59 Assembly constituencies. SP and its allies won more seats but the BJP combine was also not far behind in terms of votes share in these seats.⁵ Therefore, it is difficult to conclude that Muslims favoured only non-BJP candidates. Otherwise also, Muslim factor did not play any decisive role in the election. A segment of Muslims also were found to be in favour of BJP.

Conclusion

An analysis of 2022 Assembly election results of UP clearly indicates that BJP did quite well in spite of the fact its seats got reduced over the previous elections. Nevertheless, it did get more of popular votes over its previous tally. Other aspects of elections as discussed above also indicates most of the dynamics were either in favour of BJP or it did not favour considerably the SP. Therefore, BJP stands an excellent

chance on the basis of its performance in UP to bag more seats of Lok Sabha in 2024 elections. UP being the bellwether state will be a determining factor in the formation of government at the centre. However, the anomalies that are obvious are not unique to UP, rather they are observed in most states of India. Under such circumstances, India needs to think of electoral reforms in the larger interests of strengthening the democracy. It would also help towards purging the politics of all ills.

India needs to rethink about its electoral process. It is high time that India should adopt incremental voting system on the philosophy of John Stuart Mill, “while all should have one vote, some should have more than one vote.” Another, electoral reform that is needed to be adopted is that in place of simple majority system in ‘single member constituencies’ India should adopt ‘Absolute Majority’ system where a candidate may be declared elected from a particular constituency only when he or she is able to muster more than 50 percent of the total votes cast. This may be reformed through a ‘second ballot system’ where only those candidates may be allowed to participate in run off to the election who are able to get at least 15% of the total votes cast.

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