

Governance and Voting Pattern; A Case Study of March 2022 Assembly Elections in Uttar Pradesh; Positive Narratives for National Politics

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Abstract

Voting patterns remain significant for the smoothness of any vibrant democracy. Voting pattern in India has been dominated by many factors. Since 1952 when election after independence started in India, voting behaviour remained influenced with the independence struggle's legacy. 1967 became the maiden election both parliamentary and state assemblies when governance started influencing voting behaviour. 1977 election was influenced against the onslaught on democracy and Indira Gandhi led Congress was punished by the people led to the victory of Janta Party. 1989 election again influenced by corruption. 1996, 1998, 1999 elections were influenced by governance. Again 2004 and 2009 elections were influenced by parochial considerations. 2014 onwards elections, governance came on the fore as major propelling factors of voting behaviour. UP remained bastion of caste and communal politics after Mandal implementation. In 2017 assembly election in UP, governance became major force of voting behaviour but in 2022 assembly elections, governance has overshadowed other factors and became major propelling factor of voting behaviour. It will leave positive imprint on national electoral politics. It makes 2022 assembly result of UP as historic.

Key Words: Governance, India, UP Elections, Voting Pattern

Introduction

India has completed 75th years of her independence. Since independence, Indian voting pattern was dominated by single party dominance system. It was the situation when Congress was ultimate dominant but opposition parties had their parliamentary presence but

at the electoral level, they had minimum presence. This one-party dominance had been successfully challenged in 1967 when majority of provincial elections were won by regional and social variant of parties. Almost all northern Indian states were captured by non-Congress regional and socialist parties. Congress remained able to rule at the centre in the backdrop of 1967 general election with small support of the Communist parties. The political situation started worsening and PM Indira Gandhi was forced to impose 'Emergency' in June 1975. It was a brazen attack on democratic order. In March 1977 general election, Janata Party which came into being while merging all anti-Congress parties defeated Indira Gandhi led Congress party. Indira Gandhi herself lost election from Raebareli. Janata Party could not run the government in cohesion and fractional disputes dented the functioning of this government and finally it collapsed due to internal contradictions. However, Morarji Desai led Janata Party government became maiden non- Congress government at the centre.

After the collapse of the Janata Party government, Indira Gandhi led Congress again won the heart of the Indian people and returned into power. It proved that governance and stability matter for the public. Indian people are not ready to tolerate any iota of dictatorial tendencies. People of India punished Indira Gandhi led Congress for their anti-people and anti-democratic stands like imposition of emergency and infringement of the fundamental rights of the citizen but the same set of people brought Indira Gandhi into power again because they punished Janata party for the infighting and lack of governance skills. In October 1984, PM Indira Gandhi was assassinated and, in this backdrop, general election took place in December 1984 in which Congress party led by Rajiv Gandhi broken all previous electoral records and won 411 Lok-Sabha seats with impressive over 48 percent votes. In 1989 general election, Rajiv Gandhi could not sustain the tempo and lost against V.P. Singh led National Front. It was unique experience because both the BJP and the Left parties which are at odds against each other as per their ideological commitments supported National Front government led by V.P. Singh from the outside. This government also could not sustain and collapsed due to internal contradictions. During 1991 elections, Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated and it helped Congress a lot and again Congress won over 200 seats and formed its own government at the centre led by P.V. Narsingh Rao.

In 1996 general elections, BJP emerged as single largest party but only with 161 seats with unstable political scenario. It formed government which sustained only 2 weeks then United Front formed

its government led by Deve Gowda. Few months later, internal leadership changes had taken place and Indra Kumar Gujral became the prime minister. It collapsed due to internal contradictions and mid-term elections were called in September-October 1998. BJP formed its coalition government led by Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee. This government also collapsed due to internal contradictions in the ruling coalition after 13 months. Again, mid-term election was called in later half of 1999 and Vajpayee led BJP formed another government which continued till April 2004. In 2004 elections, Congress party performed better with 144 seats and formed coalition government under the newlyinvented political umbrella called 'UPA'. This government won 2009 elections too with Congress crossed 200 marks first time after 1991 election.

The Modi Wave

In 2014, Narendra Modi led BJP won 273 seats in the Lok-Sabha and formed its own government with partners under the ambit of NDA. It became maiden government after 1984 elections which got its own majority. In 2019 elections, Narendra Modi led BJP won 303 seats in the Lok-Sabha with improved vote percentage. State election results during this period remained mixed but the BJP swept its heartland in Northern India and made inroads in North- East and South India also. Many electoral pundits believes that this unprecedented electoral mandate is based on the assertive wave of Hindutva. It is partially true. The reality is that Modi led BJP government prepared a combo of governance and assertive wave of Hindutva. We need to believe that in contemporary India an exclusive zone of Hindutva has been emerged which is interestingly believes in toleration of other faiths but it is not willing to tolerate any version of appeasement of any religion at the cost of Hindus. After emerging victorious, Modi has given the slogan of '*SabkaSath and Sabka Vishwas*'. This version of assertive Hindutva believes in diversity but asserts that they will not permit anybody to infringe the basic interests of the Hindus. It was reflected in the outcome of parliamentary election in UP. When SP and BSP forged an alliance, many electoral pundits have declared that BJP will not be able to capture more than 20 Lok-Sabha seats out of 80 seats of the state but the electoral outcome was entirely different. BJP and its allies won 64 seats and defeated SP-BSP alliance decisively. Poll pundits had asserted that SP-BSP alliance will finish the BJP in 2019 parliamentary election as they dented BJP in 1993 assembly election in the backdrop of the demolition of Ram Temple. 1993 assembly electoral result was against BJP and based on caste-based alliance. After that BSP formed many governments with the support of the BJP. In 2007 assembly election,

BSP crossed magical 200 numbers and formed its own maiden state government. In 2012 the SP got its own majority and formed its own government. During this time people of UP witnessed 'Mandal Era' which was coincided with corruption and caste preference. Both SP and BSP conveniently forgotten that their positive electoral mandate was given due to the support of neutral voters who were dedicated for the urge of good governance. Both SP and BSP interpreted their electoral victory in these assembly elections as the price of their preferred caste plus Muslim support. These parochial electoral understanding of the SP and the BSP got rejected by the people of UP in 2014 parliamentary election, again in 2017 assembly election, again in 2019 parliamentary election and finally in February-March 2022 assembly election.

The historic 2022 Results

The emergence of Yogi as honest and dedicated CM contributed positively for the BJP victory in addition to the fact that Modi led central government pro poor policies also helped BJP. The March 2022 assembly election result remains historic for above mentioned reasons. Within this span of 37 years many political parties ruled the state and pledged notion of welfare state but could not satisfy the people of Uttar Pradesh. In 1985, Congress party which won over 300 seats in 1980 scale down to 267 despite the prevailing reality that 1985 assembly election took place in the backdrop of the assassination of then PM Indira Gandhi. In the Lok-Sabha election in December 1984, people of Uttar Pradesh gave massive majority to the Congress party and it won almost entire 85 seats. This wave of the Congress party in the December 1984 Lok-Sabha election could not replicated in the 1985 assembly election. Congress party won 1985 assembly election mainly because of the sympathy wave in the backdrop of Indira Gandhi assassination.

Unemployment was made an issue by the opponents of the BJP since 2014 election. In March 2022 assembly election, it was a major issue because of the fact that in March 2017 election BJP won with a thumping majority with over 300 seats. BJP like other political parties have also promised for better employment opportunities. March 2022 assembly election took place after Yogi government completed 5 years of its constitutional term in March 2022. According to eminent political scientist, Paul Brass, who contributed enormously on Indian politics, unemployment remains major reason for caste and ethnic conflicts in India and other developing countries.¹

Corona pandemic also came during 1st term of Yogi government and diverted good governance measures towards the containment of the

pandemic. It has also prevented job opportunities despite government efforts. But the people perceived that whatever was possible Yogi government has done. It is significant to mention here that no such sympathy wave was blowing before March 2022 assembly election in favour of the BJP. It was an election which was fought mainly because of the governance performance of the Yogi Adityanath government. Interestingly many political parties pledged gamut of freebies but people of Uttar Pradesh rejected them and gave historic mandate to Yogi Adityanath led BJP. Congress party which ruled UP and the entire country for many decades reduced to historic low in March 2022 assembly election with just over 2 percent votes and 2 seats despite the reality that Priyanka Gandhi put her all efforts to revive the Congress in the state. Right from Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru till Rahul Gandhi all scions of the Congress have represented UP in the parliament. BSP reduced to 1 percent votes despite securing over 12 percent votes. In 2017 assembly election, BSP got 22 percent votes and 19 seats. March 2022 mandate vindicates that the social engineering launched by BSP founder Kashiram and nurtured by Mayawati is crumbling now. SP has increased its votes but given the fact that the BJP has increased 1.6 votes by her own and with the allies 2 percent reflects that deepening of the BJP support base. Out of 36 percent votes which SP has received, half came from the Muslim community.

Muslim community gave consolidated support to the SP and its allies but it must be remembered that Muslim vote bank is not a fixed deposit of any political party. Muslims gave solid support to the SP and its allies merely because it was only visible opposition of the BJP. In next parliament or assembly elections, Muslims could shift their support to any political party or parties who could oppose BJP effectively. But one reality has been revealed through the electoral outcome of 2014 parliamentary, 2017 assembly, 2019 parliamentary and 2022 assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh that even consolidated Muslim vote has little imprint on electoral outcome and despite SP-BSP alliance in 2019 parliamentary election they could not defeat the BJP. In 1993 and other assembly elections, BJP remained politically weak till 2014 parliamentary election due to mosaic of factors. After 2014 parliamentary election due to meticulous social engineering and assertive Hindutva BJP has emerged powerful enough and defeat SP-BSP together in 2019 parliamentary election. March 2022 election was an acid test for Yogi Adityanath and the BJP. We have witnessed that any incumbent government had been facing uphill task to return in power in UP. For Yogi Adityanath, honesty, zero tolerance for crime and corruption and delivery of governance at the doorstep of the people

helped a lot to return into power after competing 5 years of constitutional term.

The narrative of Welfarism

Yogi Adityanath became maiden incumbent Chief Minister who became CM again after completing his 1st constitutional tenure of 5 years. BJP became first ruling incumbent political party after 1985 assembly elections to return into power. During this stipulated 37 years not a single political parties returned into power. There may be gamut of visible and invisible factors which contributed to this historical mandate for the BJP. BJP got 255 seats and its allies Apna Dal and Nishad Party together got 18 seats and final tally of the BJP led alliance stood 273 seats in the 401 seats assembly. Some of the major reasons are law and order front where Yogi government performed much better than their previous governments. Clean and honest personality of Yogi became major reasons for the pro-incumbency tilt of the public for the BJP. Delivery of governance at the doorstep of the people also contributed immensely. Hindutva became major reason for this mandate because BJP core Hindutva vote not only further consolidated but also accelerated the process. Women massively supported the BJP due to many reasons including for better law and order situation and this has also contributed positively for this mandate. Modi government pro poor policies and schemes also contributed positively. Free ration since the eruption of the Corona pandemic to the larger chunk of the people also contributed positively. There may be some other small factors also which combinedly helped for this historic mandate. The topmost among all was transparent governance. Yogi government has ensured delivery of services to the people at their doorstep. They also tried their level best to ensure that it should be corruption free.

Addressing party workers at the state headquarters in Lucknow in the backdrop of this historic mandate, an assertive Yogi Adityanath said people have buried the politics of caste and religion by ensuring the victory of BJP and its allies in Uttar Pradesh under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.²

These elections were not only seen as a trendsetter for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections but also as a litmus test for the Yogi government, which analysts perceived facing the anti-incumbency factor coupled with Opposition's charge on issues like the alleged mishandling of the COVID-19 situation and farmers' protest, Lakhimpur Kheri violence.

Yogi further stated in his victory speech ;

“The BJP is set to create history under PM Modi’s leadership. This is a mandate for development and a blessing from the people. The double engine government created a safe environment,”.³

In terms of overall percentage of votes BJP and its allies secured 43.8 percent, SP and its alliance got 36.6 and the BSP got 12.9 percent votes. The gap between the BJP and SP remained comfortable 7.2 percent. BJP and its allies Apna Dal and Nishad Party together got 4,03, 85, 487, SP and its allies Lok Dal and Rajbhar Party 3,34,71,407 votes. The gap is roughly of 69,00,000 (sixty-nine lakhs’ votes) BJP and allies together increased 2% votes and SP and its allies enhanced 8.25 percent votes and 71 seats.⁴ The victory margin of roughly 7 million is historic by all counts. In November 2020, Nitish Kumar of NDA secured the return of their government in Bihar with few MLAs above the majority magic number of 122 but the victory margin was in thousands between the NDA and the RJD led UPA. (Nitish Kumar withdrew from NDA in July 2022 and formed fresh government with the rival RJD, which he also did in 2015 but broken again with the RJD in 2017)

BJP performed much better than its ally Nitish Kumar’s JD-U in Bihar in November 2020 assembly election. PM Modi had campaigned massively in Bihar. But the margin of victory remained historic low. In contrast, March 2022 assembly election result has been unique. It has far reached consequences. Governance has become major factor for determining voting pattern of the people. When Indira Gandhi was voted into power in 1980 mid term election in the backdrop of humiliating defeat of the Congress in 1977 election, governance issues played a major factor. People of India brought Janata Party into power in 1977 general election with the aspirations of comparatively better good governance than the Congress party. But the Janata party government at the center led by Morararji Desai collapsed only after two years after coming into power due to internal contradictions. It dismantled the hope and aspirations of the people. People voted Indira Gandhi into power in 1980 mid-term election because people of India are well aware about the fact that political stability is required for the good governance. But at the state level parochial issues were dominant since inception of our present democratic system. There were examples of good governance before March 2022 UP assembly elections. In 1985, people of Karnataka gave positive mandate in favour of Ramkrishna Hedge led Janata Party government. But we need to keep in our mind that Karnataka is smaller than UP. Karnataka has 28 Lok-Sabha seat and UP has 80.

Conclusion

March 2022 assembly result in UP has set a new narrative for the state politics and it is loud and clear. It vindicates that if any political party wishes to return into power on positive issues of governance, then it need delivery of welfarism at the grass root level. Honest leadership and his/her strong vision and command over the administration is also required. Before it incumbent governments have returned into power in Orrisa and West Bengal. Again, we need to remember that in both Orrisa and West Bengal, regionalism dominates the political narratives and governance remains on the background. It is not the case in UP. Since the arrival of the Mandal Era, UP and Bihar voting pattern have been influenced by the parochial consideration. Governance remained at the back stage during this period both in UP and Bihar. March 2002 UP assembly results therefore is all set to put new benchmark for the state politics at least in northern India and of course if it will be emulated into other parts of the country it will further purify our polity and strengthen its roots.

Assertive Hindutva provided crucial background support to the BJP. Yogi Adityanath dedication for clean governance and honesty played major role in this mandate. Yogi Adityanath has become very powerful now not only in UP but for the entire country. His demand for the election campaign in various incoming assembly elections are set to accelerate. Within public at large particularly at the national level his graph has gone up and set to increase in foreseeable future.

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