

UP Elections and its National Impact

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Abstract

The spell of electoral success in a State spilling over to the national level is limited considering the past experience, particularly for a national party. State elections are fought on State-centric or local issues. National issues rarely capture the imagination of state voters. Political parties bear a disproportionate amount of responsibility for the smooth operation of parliamentary government. The government is run through political representation and political parties. Political parties formulate policies to be implemented for the public. Political parties also attempt on a constant basis to educate the public to have an opinion. Without strong political parties, both at the Centre and in the States, we cannot have political stability. This paper studies the repercussions of consecutive success in the State elections by a party and its impact on the national scene from many perspectives over the decades

Key Words-National Party, Electoral reforms, UP elections

Introduction

In 2022, in UP, an incumbent government retained power in the hustings. It was a rare event in UP if go by the statistics of four decades of State elections in UP. A party bounces back to power consecutively. No government of any party or coalition returned to power after back-to-back State elections in UP. What were the reasons for this rare feat by a party in power in UP? Is it the good governance, better law, and welfare schemes, the fruits of which had reached the poorest of the poor for whom they were intended, that it provided in the final five years of its first dispensation? Or is it the party's astute campaigning by infusing social engineering or cobbling up the parties astutely keeping the caste calculations of UP in mind? Or purely the arithmetic of caste equations in play by stitching and arriving at an understanding by different political parties in their coalition that led to the success in the elections?

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the smooth operation of parliamentary government. The government is run through political representation and political parties. Political parties formulate policies to be implemented for the public. Political parties also attempt on a constant basis to educate the public to have an opinion. Without strong political parties, both at the Centre and in the States, we cannot have political stability.

This paper studies the repercussions of consecutive success in the State elections by a party and its impact on the national scene from many perspectives over the decades. How does the performance of national parties and regional parties in State elections impact the elections at the national level? Has a State election result impacted national politics? Or is it limited to or consigned to only that particular State even if it were to the resounding success registered by a national or regional party in the State elections? Political change keeps taking place. As is said often, in politics, a week is, by any stretch of imagination, a long time. Following the BJP's pathbreaking success in UP, the developments at the turnstiles would be swift and to the surprise of political parties both in UP and elsewhere.

Need for Electoral Reforms

Electoral reforms need to be put into place. The Election Commission of India needs to play a major role in convincing the government of the day to bring in much desired and much needed electoral reforms in Parliament, the fountainhead of the world's largest democracy. Editorials have been written on bringing political parties under the umbrella of the Right to Information Act (RTI), which would go a long way in ensuring accountability of the political class, political system, and political parties. Public scrutiny of parties and political candidates is an essential and inalienable part of a free and fair democratic process.¹ While lamenting about the helplessness of the Central Information Commission (CIC), it had stated that the apex court of the country should be able to bring in the political parties under the RTI so that, like any other entity, they are also held accountable. According to the editorial, the petition before the court argued that the right to information is part of the freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution. Hence, that freedom cannot be undermined.²

Parties that get crores of rupees from unknown sources should be asked to reveal the source. According to a report, almost 50 per cent of the funds received by top parties during the financial year 2017–18 came from unknown sources.³ Laws concerning registration and de-

registration of parties should be strengthened. Efforts in this regard have been made repeatedly by the Election Commission and the Law Commission.⁴ Political will is required to move ahead and that would be possible only by the political dispensation. Consensus among political parties is the first step in the right direction in this regard.

The BJP's success in the 2022 UP elections

There is no doubt that the success of the incumbent party in Uttar Pradesh in the hustings recently is unique in a sense if we look back at the history of four decades in Uttar Pradesh. Having said that, much has been written about this rare feat. But the part which has recaptured power in UP is known for its successful infusion of party machinery right down to the block level. Its meticulous planning on a regular basis well before the elections, or should we say all year, or 24/7, is on display. Their track record in many States is a testimony to their success repeatedly for three or four terms. For example, in Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Chhattisgarh. Hence, no one can say that it is a flash in the pan. It worked out to be a success that way. The success in UP has emboldened it to replicate it in the 2024 general elections, and in Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat in 2022, and in 2023 in Karnataka, Tripura, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh.

Though national politics is a different game, there is a nexus between national and regional politics. A party which has been performing well in a State has a good chance of spreading its wings in other States or neighbouring States. For example, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), after five years of its governance, could claim and convince the people of Punjab. Though it is an exception, it cannot be brushed aside, keeping in view the vast changes that are taking place, particularly when a discernible decline is seen in the Congress' fortunes in different States. For regional parties to spread their wings in other States is still in the infant stage. These regional parties may have been emboldened by the stupendous success of AAP in Punjab and have created a hallucination of good performance in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh, like it did in Goa recently. For that matter, the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) did in the very same Goa Assembly elections. It is easier said than done.

Dominance of Regional Parties

Regional parties are usually State-centric parties. Their aim is to cater to the hopes and aspirations of the State and its people. Their focus and attention are to address the problems being faced by the people of

the State and that the Centre or the national parties are not addressing the problems of the State. It takes time to build a party. That too in a State or a region. The resources available with the regional party of a State is limited. A regional party needs to capture the imagination of the people of the State or area by showcasing its manifesto, ideology, and blueprint which it would implement when given an opportunity to rule in that particular State. It is easier said than done. Moreover, it is not going to happen in a few months or a couple of years. It takes a long period of time. There are exceptions to this. For example, MGR of Tamil Nadu started winning bye-elections immediately after he floated his party, All Indian Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), ultimately culminating in capturing power in Tamil Nadu Assembly elections in 1977, defeating a formidable Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), which was considered the best cadre-based party at that point in time. Now, the tag of best cadre-based party has gone to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). It took almost five years for MGR to register a real success. The same is the case with AAP. It took over five years to capture power in Delhi and then in Punjab.

Some regional parties, such as the Janata Dal (United) (JD(U)), have MLAs in other states; similarly, some regional parties may win MP seats in states other than their own state of influence. It may be called an aberration but not be concluded as a rule. Nonetheless, regional parties always aspire to spread their area of influence to other States. It is a natural corollary for any regional party to aim at adding to its numbers in Parliament (Lok Sabha), or for that matter, in Rajya Sabha, which would help them to influence the policies of the government of the day. This is a scenario we had during the coalition governments at the Centre in the past. Whether it was the United Front Government of Deve Gowda or I.K. Gujral, or the National Front Government of V.P. Singh, or the National Democratic Alliance government from 1999 to 2004, or the United Progress Front government from 2004 to 2014. In all the coalition governments at the Centre, regional parties played an important role not only in the formation of the government but also in the conduct of governance with their checks on Central policies. For example, regional parties in alliance with the BJP-led NDA restrained the government from saffronizing education during the Vajpayee government.

By merely having the numbers in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, regional parties get the required heft to not only become part of the governance at the Centre but also fight for and get the important portfolios at the Centre. When regional parties gain power at the Centre

in alliance with national party-led alliances such as the UPA or NDA, they become assertive and play a dynamic role in the Central Government's policies and activities. Personal agendas and issues of the regional parties were given prominence in the coalition governments at the Centre. While developing national policies, regional parties prioritised regional interests. These aspirations have invariably helped the regional parties to aim high and to improve their spread of influence across the country, in general, and in their States, in particular.

Before I could delve into the influence of regional parties transgressing the national scene, national parties performing better or capturing power in the States, like the BJP getting reelected in UP, had an indelible impact on the national scene. There cannot be any doubt about it. With the success in the States which send 80 MPs to Parliament, the BJP has rightly planned to replicate its success in UP in the ensuing Lok Sabha elections in 2024. Its campaign of "double engine" has found acceptance, it seems, in Uttar Pradesh and some other States, where it is planning to capitalise like Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat, which are going to elections this year.

National Parties' Influence Is Declining

When we look back over the past few decades, we can see how the influence of regional parties and electoral outcomes in states have influenced the national parties and the Centre. There are many instances where we can see this leaving its imprint in their area of influence. The political clout of the national parties was severely affected—in 1984, the BJP could muster only two seats; and in 2014 and 2019 General Elections, the Congress could win only 44 and 52 respectively.

It is pertinent to recall here what G.V. Mavalankar, the first Speaker of the Lok Sabha of Independent India, has said on the importance of having two parties. According to him, for democracy to grow on proper lines, no more than two major parties are needed, which can balance each other. National parties blame the regional parties for their parochial mindset and can't think of the nation as a whole, while regional parties are of the firm view that national parties ignore the regional aspirates. The other glaring aspect of some of the national parties is that their area of influence is limited to a particular region or a few States.

To win a state election, various factors play a role. If an incumbent government is voted out, the prime reason may be anti-incumbency. The factors differ between regional and national parties holding sway

in different States. Though the ruling party at the Centre has a well-oiled machinery at its disposal, with a massive win in the 2014 Lok Sabha Elections and later a massive success at the hustings in UP, there is no guarantee that it will sweep the elections in other States. In his article dated December 2020, an expert highlighted that the BJP had fared badly in 11 of the last 12 states in elections in Karnataka, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Haryana, Jharkhand and Delhi, before winning narrowly in Bihar.⁵ Likewise, it was not an easy path for the BJP after its success in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, particularly in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, where it could not win any seat and its percentage of votes was a mere 0.84%.

Coming back to the grand success of the BJP in UP, there is no denying the fact that people perceived the performance by applying the yardstick of good governance while casting their vote during the elections. The schemes and programmes the UP government implemented during the five years of its term and its success led to the stupendous success of the BJP in the elections, resulting in its coming back to power. Apart from law and order, there are various other reasons for the people to vote for a party to bounce back to power. Law and order are one of the great expectations people have from the government.

The return of the BJP to UP, which is happening after 37 years, will certainly have implications for the policies adopted by it during its first tenure and the pattern of governance it has implemented. Not only would the BJP try to replicate the UP model in other States, but other regional and national parties would try to emulate such a successful venture and showcase it during the campaigning for the State elections. There are a couple of States that are ruled by regional parties that have been successfully running for three or four terms. To quote an example, Odisha under the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) has been successfully administering the State for decades now. People are happy to vote BJD back to power repeatedly. Welfare schemes do play an important role in making people vote for a particular party. Of course, law and order are given top priority in the scheme of things by both the current government and the people of the state.

There is room for improving administration. The connection between the ruler and the ruled has to be bridged. As is reported, the UP government has already taken an initiative in this regard to address the neglected aspects of governance in UP. When a party delves deeply into the empirical problems of the people, analysing them while keeping various dimensions in mind, it can come up with solutions that can

help it spread its reach, resulting in more seats in the Assembly or Lok Sabha elections.

Ascendancy of Regional Parties

In the past decade, a couple of parties have seen ascendancy, while many national parties and regional parties have faced descendancy. The BJP, AAP, and ALD(U) could be said to have expanded their reach, whereas the Congress and JD(U) failed to do so in consecutive elections. To succeed in elections, there is a need to focus on party and organization right down to block level. A direct connection on a constant basis is what helps a party to win the confidence of the voters. When a party loses the elections at any level, one can go back to the real problem, and that is not having connected with the voters, resulting in the party's fortunes declining. The breakdown of parties can be avoided by conducting introspection with the workers on the ground. Orientation of parties and their cadres needs to be addressed on a regular basis. If a party is waiting to see the fall of the other party, ruling a particular State on its own is not going to help any party. Vote-seeking should be combined with policies that the party would implement if elected. Parties should put people at the Centre of their manifestos or policies by soliciting their advice and the current economic conditions in which they are experiencing problems on a daily basis, whether it is unemployment or price increases.

The success of regional parties is very important because regions are best served by a party that works within the State. For example, the DMK and AIADMK have ruled Tamil Nadu since 1967, and people vote for them solely on the basis of their performance on the ground. We can very well say that the DMK and AIADMK are the two most successful regional parties in the country. There are some others too, in the political firmament. The other aspect of national parties is that, in the case of an impending issue, the national party ruling in a State sometimes has to seek the advice of the Central leadership, which is time-consuming. For example, all national parties, be it BJP, Congress or AAP, when it comes to undertaking changes in the Cabinet at the State government level, need to approach New Delhi or seek their guidance to give effect to their State Cabinets.

Regional parties dreaming of expansion always face the hurdle of the cost of building their parties outside the influence of States. Simply put, the cost of spreading the influence of regional parties outside or nationally is too high and it is time-consuming. Many regional parties

attempt it due to their confidence, but it is easier said than done. During M.G. Ramachandran's (MGR) time, AIADMK fought the Assembly elections in Karnataka in the late 1970s and early 1980s and won a couple of seats. Later, the ambition of spreading the parties outside their domain of influence in Tamil Nadu died a natural death.

But the influence of regional parties in their area of influence in a particular State cannot be denied. Regional parties have painstakingly built them since their emergence, and the growth is seen to this day. Major national parties are willing to have an alliance with one or the other main regional parties of the State to be in contention and to get some seats in the Lok Sabha elections. This cannot be denied. Regional parties also assert themselves when negotiations take place with the national parties because they showcase their performance.

Relationship between National and Regional Parties

National parties look down upon the regional outfits as a normal phenomenon, which comes to light at regular intervals. So much so that when there is talk of family politics in the states or regional parties have a myopic view of the state's development and cannot look beyond the state. On the one hand, we come across national parties' claims that they are the parties that look after the country as one entity and work for its growth, development and well-being. Regional parties, on the other hand, claim that while their policies are State-centric and aimed at respective states, they have national interests in mind. They also put forth the plea that how can we see the nation grow without witnessing growth in the States when we have a federal structure in place? India is a union of States. National parties often claim that family politics or regional parties, in a sense, are a threat to democracy. To buttress their point of view, they give the names of regional parties that are ruling the States. For example, Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS), Biju Janata Dal (BJD), DravidaMunnetraKazhagam (DMK), just to name a few. The claim of the regional parties is that they are elected by the people, hence the legitimate claimants of power to rule the States.

Recently, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister has counted Tamil Nadu's contribution to the nation – leading state in economic growth, rural health facilities, educational facilities, social justice and women's empowerment.⁶It is not farther from the truth. Southern States have always been ahead of rest of the States specifically in the realm of education and health. Taking a cue from the southern States, or in particular, Tamil Nadu, AAP has replicated it in Delhi with greater push and effort, and to some extent successfully, which has received accolades

internationally and nationally too. In many States, particularly in the South, regional parties have come back to power for over four or five decades, keeping the national parties at bay in capturing power in the States. The Congress, in particular, was ousted from power in Tamil Nadu way back in 1967. Since then, it either fights the elections alone or with one or the other regional parties of the State. We can also point to Gujarat, Odisha, and Bihar as states where the Congress failed to retake power after being defeated in hustings by regional or national parties three or four decades ago.

Impact of Success of BJP in UP

Cut to the topic – the impact of the success in the State elections by a national party on national politics. Regional parties are galvanising themselves to stop the juggernaut of a party whose success has threatened the existence of regional parties across the country. TRS intends to expand its influence beyond Telangana; AAP has already experimented in Goa and will test the political waters in Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat after seizing power in Punjab. Emboldened by the AAP's successful experiment in Punjab and having stolen the tag of “only party which is in power in more than one state”, naturally it is aiming high by taking out nationwide the ‘Delhi model’. How far will AAP go for the future elections in States and at the national level to decide? Undoubtedly, it has come as a boost or envy for both the national and regional parties to try hard to rekindle the people's imagination by either showcasing their model being implemented in their States or spreading its reach outside their respective States.

All these machinations of the national and regional parties to stop the impact of the success in the 2022 elections in UP by the BJP from being replicated nationally in different States need Machiavellian manoeuvres and strategies by the other national and regional parties. The effort has begun in right earnest. TRS intends to launch a national party to compete in elections across the country.

The most important aspect to stopping the spread of the successful BJP electoral machine across different States where it can certainly capture power is the coming together of all opposition parties. It is easier said than done. Ego clashes among regional satraps; one-upmanship among themselves; not ceding too many seats out of their quota to other opposition and friendly parties in the States dent their aspiration of forming a “Mahagatbandhan”, a grand pan-India alliance to take on the ruling BJP-led NDA at the time of the 2024 General Elections or

the State elections in the interregnum. There is a need to follow the philosophy of 'give and take' letting go of egos for the cause of opposition unity and stopping the forward movement of the BJP spreading its tentacles in the States where it hadn't left an imprint in the State elections.

There are many facets of issues that can be flagged in the elections in the States in order to stop the BJP from registering success like it did in UP for the second consecutive term. The issues can be as varied as price rise, unemployment, inflation, waiving off of outstanding loans, social polarization, bringing back black money, bringing in women's reservation bill, spiralling fuel prices, farmers' issues, growing economic disparities, political centralization et al. What is stated is obvious and is in the public domain, and it can also be said that they are just a tip of the iceberg. There are many other issues which affect the day-to-day lives of people. The Opposition is duty-bound to raise them in order to bring them to the notice of the ruling dispensation with the intention of redressing them to bring solace to the lives of the teeming millions of poor and downtrodden people of the country. So far, the opposition has been unable to mount a one-on-one and formidable challenge to the mighty BJP in general or state elections.

Funding of Parties

From time to time, State funding is advocated to cleanse the political system and to bring in transparency and accountability. Over the years, it has had no takers as it was found not to be viable. The talk of state funding has been going on for decades. No concrete movement has taken place. It is no secret that one of the major problems of the regional parties is funds. National parties like the BJP, the Congress, the Trinamool Congress, the Communist Party of India (CPI), the Communist Party of India (Marxist), CPI(M) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) are better placed. The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) analysis of income-tax returns and donation statements of national parties reveals that 67 per cent of donations to national parties are by unknown sources.⁷ This was the report for March 2020. From 53 per cent of donations to national parties coming from "unknown sources" in 2017-18, now it has increased to 67 per cent.

The ruling dispensation, by being in power, has an advantage as it receives funding through electoral bonds, the source of which is not known. Almost to the tune of over 80 per cent of the electoral bond money goes to the kitty of the ruling dispensation. This blatant and

glaring disadvantage puts other national and regional parties which are in power and those which are not in power, like the Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party of UP, at a huge disadvantage as they can't campaign in an effective way, nor can they publicise their programmes and manifestos in an efficient manner. This disadvantage is showing in the not-so-effective campaigning in comparison to the BJP nationally and regionally across India. But still, some parties like the All India Trinamool Congress Party could win the State elections in West Bengal in March-April 2021, convincingly beating the BJP and decimating the Congress and the CPI(M).

Opposition's Resolve – Past and Present

In 1977, when Indira Gandhi faced elections to defeat her Indian National Congress (INC), four opposition parties, the Indian National Congress (Organisation), the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the Bharatiya Lok Dal, and the Praja Socialist Party, came together to form the Janata Party. It is an altogether different matter that the Janata Party could not continue for long and it withered away within three years. Nevertheless, it could come together to give a formidable fight, it is to be noted.

Regional parties in power, such as the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal, the DMK in Tamil Nadu, the TRS in Telangana, the AAP in Delhi and Punjab, the Congress in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha in Jharkhand, and the RJD and JD(U) in Bihar, are working to prevent the BJP from repeating its stupendous success in the 2022 UP elections. Yuvajana Shramika Rythu *Congress Party* (YSRCP), Bija Janata Dal in Odisha, etc. should forego their egos and forge an alliance by adopting the policy of give and take to take on the mighty BJP. It is going to be a tall order. No doubt about it. But it is not an impossible proposition, so to say.

A Way Forward

Transparency is the key. The sources of income of national and regional parties are not known. How to bring about transparency in political parties when they deal with funds and donations? The Election Commission needs to work on this, bringing political parties across the table to work out a consensus. Unless and until we fix political funding on a war footing, there will be no transparency in the political parties and electoral politics.

By the way the BJP has been successfully contesting elections in the States in the past eight years, there has been talk of a one-party state in the offing. But with regional parties entrenched in the States and the Congress party and AAP making renewed efforts to capture power in State elections, it is not going to be an easy task. As has been stated earlier, the electoral fortunes of the BJP have been fluctuating in the past eight years. For that matter, every party has to face such unpredictable results or outcomes in the hustings with anti-incumbency playing its destructive and debilitating blow during the elections. If a party is in power for more than one turn, that much anti-incumbency accumulates, and it becomes more daunting to overcome that. Then, it becomes a Herculean task for the ruling dispensation to ward off it.

The transparency of political party finances should be improved in order to cleanse politics. The electoral expenses of political parties should be monitored to ensure that they spend well within the cap set by the Election Commission. It may be recalled that the former Chief Election Commissioner, V.S. Sampath, in his interview touched upon various aspects and stressed that it is definitely a priority item for the Election Commission to check expenses of parties.⁸ This should be the priority. Electoral reforms would go a long way in cleaning up the electoral process comprehensively. People with criminal cases should be barred from contesting polls. According to the Supreme Court, the onus of enacting a strong law to cleanse politics is on Parliament.⁹ When former Chief Election Commission S.Y. Qureshi was asked whether political parties should come under the ambit of the Right to Information Act (RTI), his response was, "That is a good idea."¹⁰ Another Chief Election Commissioner, Nasim Zaidi, has lamented that there is no transparency in 80-85 per cent of party funding.¹¹

Political reforms too are the need of the hour. Political parties should come forward to field candidates who stand for their integrity. Criminalisation and corruption have become an obstacle in the political process. The criminalisation of politics should stop. For this to happen, political parties must step in to cleanse. Parties should deny tickets to candidates with criminal antecedents if they choose to cleanse politics. Political parties need to decriminalise politics. While choosing its candidates to face polls, it has to ensure that they are clean and have no criminal antecedents. There is a need to reform politics by bringing in inner-party democracy. Likewise, legislative and constitutional reforms are also required. As we move ahead in furthering our democratic ideals, after 75 years of Indian Independence and over 70 years of legislative and constitutional experience, we need to address

these reforms in order to provide a transparent and accountable political process.

Conclusion

Political parties play a central part in the working of the political system of the country. They have the responsibility to ensure that they have accounted for the bulk of their funding. Currently, political parties report on Form 24A that only about 20% of their total income is accounted for.¹ The proliferation of parties should be stemmed. The Election Commission need to be provided with more teeth. Political parties have to cooperate and arrive at consensus among themselves to move ahead in registration of non-serious political parties which enter the electoral fray. As per the 2019 report, India had 2,293 parties as per the Election Commission data. Parties that are there just on paper and have become redundant long ago, must go. These parties invariably lose deposits in elections after elections, from Parliament to State to Panchayat to Civic Polls. If that has been the case for decades, why should we have hundreds of parties in the electoral fray when the serious parties are just a handful or the competition is between the two major parties? There is an urgent need to cleanse politics. To make this happen, political parties need to work together and arrive at a consensus, which has always been elusive. A method has to be evolved to ensure that no criminal elements do not enter the electoral fray or the echelons of Parliament or State Assemblies.

The spell of electoral success in a State spilling over to the national level is limited considering the past experience, particularly for a national party. State elections are fought on State-centric or local issues. National issues rarely capture the imagination of state voters. In short, it is not easy for the BJP to carry on its impact of consecutive wins in UP to spread outside UP.

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