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BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

How UP was conquered

BJP victory validates electoral mobilisation based on emotional appeals, religious identities and patriotism



GILLES VERNIERS

CONTRARY TO NEARLY all expectations, the BJP has succeeded in retaining Uttar Pradesh, the key to holding its majority at the Centre. The Mahagathbandhan, poised to challenge the BJP on the basis of a formidable caste arithmetic, has failed to deliver. The BJP has won 77 per cent of the seats (62), against a measly 19 per cent for the alliance (15). The Congress, in yet another humiliating defeat in the heart of the Hindi belt, has lost one of the two seats it managed to salvage five years ago.

The BJP vote share increased from 42.3 per cent to 50.7 per cent, while the SP and BSP did worse collectively than they did on their own (in combination) in 2014. Five years ago, the SP and BSP respectively obtained 22.1 per cent and 19.6 per cent vote shares, for a combined total of 41.7 per cent. In 2019, they scored 38.4 per cent and 40.8 per cent respectively of the vote share in the seat they contested, that is 39.6 per cent of the aggregate vote share. This data reveals that the Samajwadi Party dragged down the alliance. With 10 seats, the BSP strike rate is at 26.3 per cent, against 13.5 per cent for the SP (for 5 seats won). Both Ajit Singh and his son, Jayant, lost their seats, in Muzaffarnagar and Baghat, by small margins.

Despite the fanfare around Priyanka Gandhi's supposed debut in politics, the Congress managed to lose 1.5 per cent vote share and registered its worst score ever in UP. Did it dent the Mahagathbandhan's vote? Not as much as expected. Congress candidates finished second in only three seats: Fatehpur Sikri, Kanpur and Amethi. Besides, Congress candidates' vote share exceeds the BJP victory margin in only 6 seats. It scored above 10 per cent of the vote share in only 15 seats.

The strategy of poaching MPs and MLAs from other parties did not pay off. For instance, Nasimuddin Siddiqui, Mayawati's former Cabinet member two, received 2.3 per cent vote share. The strategy of engineering dissident factions did not pay off either. The PSP (Lohia), floated by Shivpal Singh Yadav a few months ago, crashed with less than half a per cent vote share, Shivpal scoring a meagre 8.6 per cent of the vote in Firozabad. BJP and Mahagathbandhan candidates received 88.5 per cent vote share on average. This was truly a bipolar contest.

What explains the verdict, then? One can

point to at least three main reasons. The first one, obviously, is Modi's popularity remaining intact despite the multitude of factors that should have gone against the BJP: Joblessness, a stagnant economy, rural distress, cow chaos, poor performance of the Yogi administration, individual anti-incumbency. None of these factors seemed to have affected the electoral appeal of the PM. It is too early to tell how much of a role the Balakot episode played, but one can surmise that even without it, the BJP would have remained ahead due to voters apparently not holding the PM responsible or accountable for their economic situation.

The second explanation, connected to the first, is that the variation in electoral behaviour between state and general elections is much greater than before. This is more striking in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, which the BJP swept after having lost the three state assembly elections not even six months ago. Increasingly, voters have no difficulty voting for different parties in different elections. In UP, this was reinforced by the fact that neither Akhilesh Yadav nor Mayawati had clear national ambitions, or at least a clear path towards a national role. The silver lining here for both regional parties is that their prospects could be better in the next state election.

The third explanation lies in the working of the alliance itself. The three parties of the Mahagathbandhan sought to defeat the BJP by combining their respective core support bases. Litres of ink have been consumed to describe how formidable a Jat-Yadav-Jatav-Muslim alliance would be against a heterogeneous electorate, variously affected during five years of the Modi regime. In their near-exclusive focus on their own core bases, the alliance parties neglected to seek the support of other voters — BJP and Congress supporters as well as of non-aligned ones. The SP and BSP did succeed, against many odds, in coordinating their ground campaign, not only through mega-rallies but also through ground-level mobilisation. They did succeed in making their organisations work together despite their acrimonious history. But this effort was primarily aimed at ensuring that the vote transfers between the two parties' bases would take place, rather than mobilising

other segments of the electorate. As such, they did not offer much to other voters.

In 2017, the BJP came to power at the state level by campaigning on the promise to serve all groups not aligned with the SP or BSP. Their strategy targeted the 60 per cent or so of voters who did not belong to the regional parties' core support groups: Yadavs, Jatavs or Muslims.

In 2019, the BJP repeated that strategy (going by the caste composition of their candidates), which found further validation from the fact that the alliance did not seem interested in wooing anyone other than their traditional supporters. The choice of focusing on caste while the BJP focused on general interest issues (including national security), trapped the alliance into a losing binary. The BJP did play the identity card in this election through its candidate selection, but it had more to offer to voters than raw caste-based calculations.

There is a fourth possible explanation, which remains under a question mark until data can be obtained. The rise of the BJP in UP has been accompanied by a vast expansion of Sangh Parivar-related organisations and by the spread of ideas nurtured by the Sangh Parivar at the ground level, including in rural constituencies. There is no denying that the BJP's performance across the Hindi belt also has a strong cultural dimension, in the sense that the core ideology that animates the BJP and its parent organisation finds more acceptability. Sakshi Maharaj, the BJP's saffron mascot from Unnao, won with 56 per cent of the vote share.

What are the larger implications for UP and for our understanding of electoral politics? For one, this victory validates a mode of electoral mobilisation based on emotional appeals, drawing on religious identities and patriotism. Flagship schemes and Modi's personality did play their role, certainly. But the delinking of economic realities and political performance raises the thought that there is more to it than government performance and individual leadership.

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FAILURE AFTER DEBACLE

Yet another poor showing by the Congress. Yet again, no accountability, no turning the searchlight within?

VERDICT 2019 IS also a resounding vote of no confidence in the Congress, its leadership and the narrative it offered to voters. The party has barely managed to improve its tally from its all-time low of 44 seats and 19 per cent vote share in 2014 — it has now won 52 seats while the vote share indicates no change. Rahul Gandhi has been defeated in the family borough of Amethi and the Congress's success has been limited to Kerala in the south and Punjab in the north-west. Voters in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, who voted the party into office in assembly elections less than six months ago, have rejected the Rahul Gandhi-led party's bid for power at the Centre.

But is the Congress willing to read the verdict honestly and act on the message? Soon after the 2014 debacle, the party authorised senior leader, A K Antony, to study the causes of its defeat. Antony submitted a report to then Congress President Sonia Gandhi — nothing has been heard about it since. The leaders who led the Congress to defeat in 2014 continue to manage the party in 2019. It is unlikely that they will be held accountable for the 2019 defeat. And why would they, if the Gandhis who preside over the party's destiny are not compelled to engage its leaders and workers in a conversation on why the party has been on a downhill course since the 1980s. The absence of accountability, born out of a sense of entitlement of those at the party's top echelons, is an important factor in stalling the party's revival. It breeds complacency, reflected in the party leadership's failure to carve out a coherent poll strategy. The party was unable to firm up alliances in states including UP, West Bengal and Delhi. It seemed unable to decide if its primary task was to oust the Modi government in 2019 or rebuild itself for a future election. The Congress came up with NAYAY to project an alternative welfare narrative to the Modi government's schemes and financial handouts to farmers — but it came too late, only days ahead of polls. Prime Minister Modi could remain in command of the political narrative through his tenure also because the Congress could not seize the initiative at any point. Be it on demonetisation, farm distress and GST or the BJP's championing of a muscular nationalism, the Congress was in a reactive mode and its leadership appeared incapable of setting the agenda.

Young and aspirational India refuses to be awed by legacy and patronage. It is likely to reject a party that privileges dynasts and treats leadership as a matter of inheritance. The Congress must know that, in the final instance, a political party that is a family enterprise makes an uneasy fit in a democracy.

IDEAS, NOT NUMBERS

Opposition gathbandhans in UP and Bihar needed a political imagination. Social justice cannot be only arithmetic

BEFORE MAY 23, the logic that the gathbandhan in Uttar Pradesh could stall the march of the BJP appeared to be based on a simple political arithmetic. The SP, BSP and RLD which constituted the alliance were seen to have, over decades, cemented their hold over key social groups — Yadavs and Muslims, Jatavs and Jats. They assumed that an alliance that was shored up by these communities would be enough to combat the BJP's narrative of nationalism and Hindutva. This result has proved that assumption wrong. First, the communities that purportedly formed the core vote for the gathbandhan are no monoliths. Internal divisions and competition within them have impacted voting behaviour. Second, these parties that had emerged from people's movements that demanded social justice, seemed incapable of offering a narrative that could compete with the ideological and political machinery of the Modi-Shah combine.

Both the SP and BSP emerged from movements that recognised that caste is the primary axis of inequality and oppression in India, and that the Congress party (when it enjoyed political dominance) had sought to invisibilise these faultlines. In the wake of Mandal, Lalu Prasad in Bihar and Mulayam Singh Yadav in UP emerged as leaders who promised, and to a degree delivered, representation and dignity to those who had hitherto had leaders speak for them, rather than leaders from amongst them. For the BSP, following B R Ambedkar and Kanshi Ram, political power and education held the key to emancipation and prosperity. The idea of the "bahujan" was a powerful one — minorities, OBCs and Dalits form the majority in India and yet remain under-represented in most spheres.

However, with time, this narrative of social justice has thinned on the ground. The SP and the RJD in Bihar have come to be identified with one community's dominance — the Yadavs — and their organisational moorings seem to be tied to dynasties. While the BSP has gained since the 2014 elections, up 10 seats from zero, its political mobilisation seems to begin and end with Mayawati. The BJP has, clearly, gained from the resentment this decline has fostered: The NDA's near clean sweep in Bihar (39 out of 40 seats) and stellar performance in UP (64 seats out of 80) show that the BJP has cemented itself as the party of non-Yadav OBCs and non-Jatav Dalits. But the politics of social justice and dignity is still deeply relevant in a society riddled with inequality. What such a politics requires is a new imagination and idiom, and a leadership that is able to move beyond particular castes and clans.

WINNERS AND LOSERS

The suspense continues — on the cricket field

WHO WILL WIN? Verdict 2019 might be out but India will continue to ask that pesky question for the next couple of months. The season of suspense isn't over yet. The Anxious Indian will now be worried about the fortune of cricketers who are already in England, warming up for the World Cup that starts in a week's time. After those one-on-one bouts that only a democracy can throw up comes the thrilling cricketing race.

Like the political debates, cricket discussions too are expected to remain inconclusive till the final at Lord's on July 14. At a pre-Cup event, the 10 participating skippers agreed that this was "the most competitive tournament in history". World Cup 2019 doesn't have a firm favourite, nor an overwhelming underdog. England seem to have finally cracked the 50 overs cricket code. With their T20 mercenaries back, West Indies look impressive, at least on paper. As for South Africa, they have choked way too often at World Cups to freeze before the finishing line once again. Australia look organised, thus are dangerous. Pakistan look unorganised, thus more dangerous. India, under Virat Kohli, with the backing of NRI fans, look capable of repeating the 1983 story.

However, India's interest in the cricket World Cup goes beyond following the Men in Blue. Most fans have a second team that they ardently follow. And every World Cup has enduring stories of tight games or some miraculous moments that always stay in the mind. With the pitches in England expected to be dead and batsmen around the world in prime form, the World Cup is expected to see a lot of tall scores. T20 too has had a role to play in the increased six count in games. Since the last World Cup in 2015, England has put together a 300-plus score 36 times in just 86 matches. India, on second spot, has done that 21 times. So as the water cooler chats and chai pe charchas around the country seamlessly switch from politics to cricket, they will keep talking about 300-plus totals.



KHALED AHMED

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA Modi has won his election and now India will have to adjust to his worldview in the coming five years more completely, its judiciary a little more and the minorities quite a lot. Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan wanted Modi to win so that he could readjust to India, change policy from the ground up, because Pakistan is broke. Khan wants to docket Kashmir and open free trade with India, allow India a trade route to Afghanistan and Central Asia in order to secure his western border to prevent Pakistan from unravelling once again.

India will change. It will "seek its soul" to achieve recognition and dignity. The entire world is seeking this "thymos". Francis Fukuyama says: "Thymos is the part of the soul that craves recognition of dignity; isothymia is the demand to be respected on an equal basis with other people; while megalothymia is the desire to be recognised as superior. Modern liberal democracies promise and largely deliver a minimal degree of equal respect, embodied in individual rights, the rule of law, and the franchise."

But the era of the liberal democracy is gone. The Muslim world or the "umma" has collapsed seeking "democracy", thinking Islam means democracy. America is seeking thymos under Trump; India seeks it under Modi. Fukuyama, *End of History*, thought that Trump was a "fantastically ambitious individual whose desire for recognition had been

AFTER THE POLLS, PEACE

It is time India and Pakistan address Kashmir, restore bilateral relations

India and Pakistan have both changed because of social change. And both have returned to religion. If Modi represents Hindutva, Khan represents the new wave of middle-class faith, penetrating the Pakistan army as well. The rise of the middle class in South Asia has ignited religious fires and changed regional politics.

safely channelled into a business and later an entertainment career". Little did he realise that Trump will lead the entire American nation to a new seeking of thymos.

India and Pakistan have both changed because of social change. And both have returned to religion. If Modi represents Hindutva, Khan represents the new wave of middle-class faith, penetrating the Pakistan army as well. The rise of the middle class in South Asia has ignited religious fires and changed regional politics. Between 1999 and 2012, those spending between \$2 and \$10 per capita per day in India doubled and became a part of the middle class that forms nearly half the Indian population today.

Economist Nadeemul Haq says: "Pakistan is now more urbanised with a larger middle class than India as percentage of the population. In 2007, Standard Chartered Bank analysts estimated that there were 30 to 35 million Pakistanis earning an average of \$10,000 a year."

If you think the entire world is going crazy hear this from the Brookings, Washington DC: "Something of enormous global significance is happening almost without notice. For the first time since agriculture-based civilisation began 10,000 years ago, the majority of humankind is no longer poor or vulnerable to falling into poverty. By our calculations, just over 50 per cent of the world's population, or some 3.8 billion people, live in households with enough discretionary expenditure to be

considered 'middle class' or 'rich.'"

In Pakistan, Imran Khan must succeed in "normalising" relations with India by not frontloading Kashmir in the coming negotiations with his Indian counterpart. Both states are nuclear powers and given the new "thymos", the two religions can go to the final Armageddon. Once the Indian Constitution informed the attitude of the Indian middle class, which was tolerant of secularism. This is no longer so.

In Pakistan, the constitution still inclines the middle class to desire sharia and consequently prefer the "harder" sharia of the al Qaeda and Islamic State to state ideology. For once, however, the Pakistan army, path-dependent so far on India despite defeats, is allowing PM Khan to change the India policy on a permanent basis. Now is the time for PM Modi to add another "victory" to his electoral triumph: Get Pakistan to allow bilateral free trade including cross-border investment. Of course Imran Khan will have to play ball by delaying the "peace talks" on Kashmir as "normalisation" with India proceeds.

It is time India and Pakistan put Kashmir to rest, allowing the people there — both Hindus and Muslims — to lead normal lives together as they did before Kashmir became a "dispute".

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MAY 25, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO



NEPAL REFERENDUM

A REFERENDUM WILL be held in Nepal "as soon as possible" on whether the people wish the present panchayati system to continue with "suitable changes" or if they desire a multi-party democratic set-up with universal adult franchise and secret ballot, a royal proclamation stated. The historic proclamation follows weeks of violent student demonstrations which spread to various parts of this mountain kingdom, climaxing in rioting and arson in the heart of Kathmandu last night which resulted in troops being called to control the situation. Whether the proclamation, which could well mean the beginning of real democracy in

Nepal, will defuse the situation, is not yet clear because of competing political interests that have joined the agitation.

NO FOREIGNERS

THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT has refused to "make any exception" in case of foreigners wanting to enter protected or restricted areas. Some time ago, Kohima wanted New Delhi to relax restrictions on foreigners visiting Nagaland for religious functions or educational seminars. The central government said that it will not be possible to depart from the standing rules because "this would impinge on the security interests of the State." For many years, certain areas in the north and

north-eastern India have been declared as restricted or protected areas for reasons of security. Foreigners have to obtain special permits to travel to these areas.

ASIAN GAMES HURDLE

THE PREPARATIONS FOR holding the prestigious Asian Games in New Delhi in 1982 have received a serious setback with the Works and Housing Ministry having withdrawn its cooperation to the organising committee. The housing minister, Sikander Bakht, said that he was constrained to take this action as he was extremely unhappy at the way the organising committee was handling matters connected with the Games.

13 THE IDEAS PAGE

Diplomacy amid disruption

PM Modi had a predictable international environment in his first term. In the second, he must deal with the turbulence unleashed by Trump's challenge to the global trading order



C RAJA MOHAN

IN HIS FIRST term as prime minister, Narendra Modi helped re-energise Indian diplomacy that had begun to lose momentum in the final years of the UPA government. But Modi did not have to alter the essential foreign policy tenets that were developed by his predecessors, Manmohan Singh, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and P V Narasimha Rao after the end of the Cold War. He simply had to build on them.

If Modi had a predictable international environment in the first term, he must now deal with a far more dynamic external situation. The instabilities that have been visible over the last two years are now becoming acute by the day. But the moment of great global disruption — marked by the structural changes in great power relations and the global economic order — also presents strategic opportunities for Delhi.

But first, to Indian diplomacy in Modi's first term. If there is one word to describe it, "bold" comes readily to mind. Delhi's ability to take full advantage of the many opportunities that came India's way — with the US, China and Pakistan — during the UPA years were undermined by the Congress leadership's ambivalence and self-doubt.

Modi, in contrast, was ready to take decisive steps on all three fronts. Modi ended India's "historic hesitations" towards the US by expanding the strategic partnership with Washington, confronted the sources of terrorism in Pakistan and was ready to stare down at China in the military stand-off in Doklam.

Equally important was Modi's emphasis on resolving problems that the UPA government had left behind. These included the ratification of the land boundary agreement with Bangladesh and wrapping up the civil nuclear initiative with the US. The Modi government sorted out the messy Italian Marines Case that was undermining India's engagement with Europe as a whole and blocking India's quest for membership in various international bodies like the Missile Technology Control Regime. The government also took a more practical approach to climate change negotiations by ending India's negativism and initiating the International Solar Alliance.

Delhi will need all of Modi's problem-solving skills in coping with the new foreign policy challenges confronting India. None of them are more important than the return of the great power rivalry and the crisis in the global trading order.

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 had liberated India from the multiple constraints of the Cold War. This left India free to salvage ties with Russia from the debris of Soviet Union, and expand ties with the US and its allies in Europe and Asia, and normalise the relationship with China.

While the rhetoric of Non-Alignment endured in the discourse in Indian foreign policy, it was replaced, in practice, by a multi-directional engagement of all major powers. India was happy to be best friends forever with



CR Sasikumar

all powers. That will be hard to sustain as great powers begin to squabble among themselves.

Until recently, you could buy advanced military aircraft from America and air-defence missiles from Russia. Now the purchase of S-400 missiles from Moscow invites sanctions from Washington. This is just the beginning. If the US-Russia relations deteriorate further, the problem of navigating between them will get more demanding.

The scope and consequences of US-Russia rivalry pales in comparison to the gathering conflict between America and China. Few countries watched the normalisation of US-China relations in the 1970s and the expansion of economic and political ties over the last four decades between Washington and Beijing with greater anxiety than India.

A section of the Indian foreign policy elite in Delhi could never stop griping about America's strategic preference for Beijing during the last decades of the 20th century. As the US looked to India to balance China in Asia and the Indo-Pacific in the 21st century, the UPA government seemed reluctant to cash in India's new geopolitical leverage. Modi has certainly ended a lot of that timidity by opening up to a stronger partnership with the US. The US, in turn, has been more responsive to India's concerns about cross-border terrorism and its aspirations for a larger regional role and the quest for a seat at the global high table.

While Modi's Delhi may be well positioned to cope with the current geopolitical disruption and is open to coalition building with the US in the Indo-Pacific, it appears utterly unprepared to deal with the turbulence on the geo-economic front, generated by President Donald Trump and his challenge to the global trading order. At the turn of the 1990s, India opened up its economy and began to adapt, kicking and screaming, to the prevailing "Washington Consensus" on economic globalisation. But central to Trump's

Realists in Delhi would see the world is at a new juncture on trade. They would recognise that India's dharma is not about defending the WTO to death. With its annual trade in goods and services now at more than one trillion dollars, Delhi's duty is about protecting India's trade equities that are now so critical for the economic well being of its population.

worldview is the proposition that the "Washington Consensus" has been bad for American people and other nations have taken unfair advantage of America's open markets. Over the last two years, he has sought to undermine the WTO, restructure the North American Free Trade Agreement with Mexico and Canada and walked out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership. To top it all, he has now embarked on a full-blown trade war with China — the world's second-largest economy. He has not spared the most important US allies — including Germany and Japan — from his confrontationalist trade policies.

India is very much at the top of Trump's list of trade targets; it is no secret that Trump has been waiting for the new government to take charge. For the traditionalists in India, the answers lie in affirming the mantra about "multilateralism" and mobilising the mythical G-77 to counter the US "unilateralism".

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Modi needs to take a strategic view of India's foreign trade, purposefully explore the possibilities for give and take with the US, and seize on the rearrangement of global production chains in the wake of the US-China trade war. No other set of issues will shape India's future global trajectory more than a pragmatic reorientation of India's trade strategy and the reformation of its negotiating structures.

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WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"For the world's largest democracy, the writing is on the wall: communal politics in India has triumphed in an age that will define the future of the republic."

— DAWN

Earthquake Modi

This election was about the past record of the Modi government, and expected performance



NO PROOF REQUIRED

BY SURJIT S BHALLA

WHAT WAS EARTHQUAKE Modi all about? I know that there are several descriptions (wave, tsunami, Black Swan, Rashomon, 2.0, etc) but I prefer earthquake for the following important reason — the foundations of what we think the democratic vote is all about has been shaken, stirred, and perhaps dispensed with. And only an earthquake can do that.

There will be time again to discuss what we think the objectives, and policies, of the new Narendra Modi government should be. Today, I want to discuss what history, and economics, tells us about what this vote was all about — and what not. I believe that history has a lot to teach us — the only problem is that often, historians let ideology structure their interpretation of reality, that is, they suffer from the Rashomon effect, a subject I talked about in one of my earlier articles. How best to avoid Rashomon? By filtering ideology with data reality checks.

On the history side, the refrain from most analysts has been that caste matters, that people caste their vote. On May 23, my copanelists on CNN News18 had a semi-heated discussion (normally we are restrained but an earthquake does get emotions high) on whether caste mattered in this election. I repeated what I have said numerous times, and also discussed in detail in my book *Citizen Raj*. (It contains a good and possibly prescient forecast about the determinants of Earthquake Modi).

Briefly, my argument is not that caste does not matter — of course it is one of the factors determining your vote. But it does not allow me to forecast or analyse what, why, and who you will vote for in any meaningful way. If it did, and given that caste composition is known, and constant like the North Star, then everybody will be able to call all elections perfectly.

But I have repeated myself enough. I want to quote an email that Anil Maheswari (author and journalist) wrote to me on April 20: "In 1971 caste permutations and combinations were shattered in the wake... of Mrs Gandhi's clarion call Garibi Hatao; in 1977, it was again demolished in the wake of anger against Mrs. Gandhi; in 1984, it was the phoenix of Majority communalism in the wake of the assassination of Mrs Gandhi; then in 2014 in the wake of Modi's aspirational call, and now in 2019, it is poised to be shattered again in the wake of developmental activities during the Modi regime" (emphasis added).

Let us settle, the contributions of historians and sociologists notwithstanding, that Indian elections are not about caste. Neither in 2014 (split opposition) nor in 2019 (joint opposition in the important caste states of

Haryana, Bihar and UP) did caste matter much for winning. Indeed, one prominent caste leader, Lalu Prasad, did not win a single seat in 2019 after winning four in 2014.

Was this election about Modi? Of course it was, but we need to get beyond that description (similar to that people vote their caste). What was it about Modi that people voted for him in such large numbers? And in even larger numbers than the record-breaking 2014 election. Recall that many "experts" wrote off the 2014 election as a minority 31 per cent vote election. In 2014, the BJP fought only 424 of 543 constituencies. If the BJP had fought all, this translates into 40 per cent of the national vote share; incidentally, the NDA in 2014 garnered 39 per cent of the vote. In the six elections between 1952 and 1980 (excluding 1977) the Nehru-Indira Gandhi Congress obtained an average vote share of 44 per cent.

In the first election in 1952, Jawaharlal Nehru obtained 45 per cent of the vote; the next election, 47.8 per cent. In his first national election, Modi obtained 31 per cent of the vote; in 2019, the figure is close to 38 per cent — an increase of 7 percentage points. The NDA as a whole is likely to average above the Nehru-Gandhi benchmark of 44 per cent. Hence, the nutting nawabs of negativism (with due apologies to William Safire) should stop carping about Modi's victories not being a reflection of liberal (in the true sense of the word) democratic forces.

This election was about economic reforms, and primarily the economic hope for the future. A favourite complaint of the Modi detractors (and several very good friends of mine) is that Modi erred in not implementing economic reforms like privatisation and in implementing negative reforms like demonetisation. Indeed, demonetisation and its perceived ills was a favourite slogan of the Congress. What I have shouted hoarse for the last nearly three years (and been pilloried even by objective commentators) is that demonetisation was an integral part of Modi's economic agenda against corruption and tax evasion. It did not succeed perfectly and instantly — what does? But it, along with other reforms like Jan Dhan bank accounts, was necessary to provide direct benefit transfers to the poor (PM-Kisan, health insurance, etc), to provide public services like sanitation (toilets), LPG cylinders, and free housing to the bottom 50 to 70 per cent of the population. Not everyone got the benefits but the eligible beneficiaries believed in Modi's promise that all those eligible will eventually receive the benefits.

Add to these reforms (imperfect but well-begun and well-intentioned) GST and the bankruptcy code, and initial attempts to reform agriculture, and you have achieved more inclusive economic reforms than any other regime in Indian history. The stage has been well and truly set for the next generation of economic reforms. There is no going back and the people believe Modi and trust Modi to deliver. That is why this election was about the delivery, and promise, of the Modi government.

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Double-check that data

Sample surveys are important to validate administrative databases



P C MOHANAN

THE NATIONAL SAMPLE Survey Organisation's Technical Report on the survey of services sector enterprises is in the news for its findings on the accuracy of the list of companies in the services sector, sourced from the Ministry of Corporate Affairs. In the atmosphere of mistrust of official data following the suppression of the employment report, the conclusions of this technical report are not surprising. The clarification from the government has done little to clear the air. Some misgivings expressed by experts overlook the usual weaknesses of administrative data, though some questions still need to be answered by the Central Statistical Office (CSO).

A regular annual survey of manufacturing establishments using the list of registered factories has been in vogue since long. There was no similar survey for the services sector. The need for a regular system of surveys of enterprises in the services sector was strongly articulated by the Rangarajan Commission. The reason for not conducting this survey was the absence of a dependable list of enterprises in the service sector for drawing samples.

Successive Economic Censuses have failed to produce a reliable list of establishments. The NSSO did a large pilot survey in selected states and metros during 2012-13 using a "list frame" of enterprises having 10 or more workers from the 2005 Economic Census. This survey showed almost 50 per cent substitution of the original units at-

tributed to the imperfect coverage of establishments in the Economic Census. Around this time, the MCA-21 data came to be used for the new GDP series. Subsequently, the National Statistical Commission (NSC) suggested a fully list frame-based survey of the services sector enterprises in the NSS 74th round (July 2016-June 2017), as a prelude to a regular Annual Survey on Services Sector (ASSSE). This survey was expected to generate estimates of various operational and economic characteristics of services sector enterprises.

Three types of lists were used for data collection in 74th round viz, the 2013 Economic Census (EC) list, Business Register (BR) available with 11 states and the list of active private non-financial companies of 2013-14 sourced from the MCA database by CSO, and updated for 2014-15. Postal addresses of the companies in the MCA database available from the Ministry of Corporate Affairs were used by matching the Company Identification Number.

In the first phase, the units selected from the EC and BR lists were verified through field visits. Out of the 1.35 lakh establishments from this, only about 63,000 were found eligible for the survey. Out of the 3.5 lakh enterprises in the MCA list, the survey was to cover 35,456 units. Of all units selected for the survey, only 67 per cent were found to be in operation causing a major setback to the survey. This happened due to non-response, closure of units, units out

of coverage or units non-traceable.

The current debate is on the large number of MCA companies that could not be surveyed. Of the 35,000 companies, data could be collected from only 54.5 per cent. Of the remaining, 7 per cent did not respond or did not agree for the survey. About 12 per cent could not be traced at their registered addresses. Four and half per cent were found closed and over 21 per cent were not in the survey coverage i.e. were not non-financial service companies. In view of the large truncation of the planned sample, the NSC under this writer's chairmanship recommended that no meaningful estimates can be prepared. Only a short technical report giving the survey experiences along with the sample based indicators was recommended.

Administrative data from government databases are notoriously imperfect. It requires sustained cleaning to make them usable.

The use of MCA database was a major shift in the compilation of GVA in the new national accounts series, besides the shift from the establishment approach to the enterprise approach. This has implications for economic activities under different sectors. For instance, trade carried out by manufacturing companies becomes part of "manufacturing", but was earlier covered in "trade" because of the establishment approach.

While non-responding units and not

traceable units will not impact GDP computation based on the data actually filed by them, the presence of over 20 per cent of units in some other business other than services raises questions. Computing GVA from filings done by these companies, may not impact the overall GVA, but the sectoral GVA will be wrong if the companies are not put in the correct activity category. This is important when the new GDP series has changes in the shares of manufacturing and services sectors.

A major drawback of using the MCA data has been its inability to produce regional estimates for computing state level GDP as GVA estimates for the private corporate sector based on MCA cannot be readily distributed among states, but has to be allocated to states using other information. A field survey based on the MCA list of companies can help identify the geographical distribution of establishments and strengthen the computation of GSDP.

Administrative data are only as good as the administration that produces them. The report shows the importance of sample surveys to validate administrative databases and the need to restrain the tendency to be overly confident on administrative data — be it EPFO data or MCA-21 data — without adequate scrutiny of the processes that generate the databases.

The writer is the former acting chairman, National Statistical Commission

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

LEADER OF YOUNG

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The leader is the truth' (IE, May 24). Narendra Modi does have flaws. However, there is no second guessing his hard work and sincerity. His rise from a RSS pracharak to the Prime Minister of India is a testament to the fact that he Modi knows the pulse of the younger generation.

Veena Shenoy, Thane

MESSAGE IN VERDICT

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Staggering dominance' (IE, May 24). The article offers a complicated reasoning. But a simple yet forgotten fact is that the country has an effete Opposition both at the top and at the cadre-level. We must ask the hypothetical question: How would Modi have fared with a Narasimha Rao, Pranab Mukherjee or L K Advani at the helm of the Opposition. The victory does not imply a marginalisation of the minorities. The minority question is a problem in the homogenising societies of the West. This problem is not germane to India.

Charu Vaid, Lucknow

FALL OF CONGRESS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A remarkable victory, a great responsibility' (IE, May 24). The country has said a resounding "yes" to a second term for Narendra Modi. India is set to return to an era of one party dominance, with BJP occupying the position once held by Congress. That will have its own spin-off effect on the country's politics, governance, social dynamics and constitutional functioning India's Grand Old Party has been confined to Kerala and

LETTER OF THE WEEK

PM'S STRATEGY

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Politics from the pulpit' (IE, May 21). There is no doubt that Narendra Modi can strike a chord with the masses. However, in the age of the social media, the press conference is losing its relevance. In press conferences, often the impromptu replies are taken out of context. The PM's strategy to avoid press conferences may be to avert controversies.

Deepak Singhal, Noida

Punjab and has piggybacked on DMK's popularity in Tamil Nadu.

Vandana, Chandigarh

PEACE POSSIBLE

THIS REFERS TO the the editorial, 'Try respect' (IE, May 22). The US-Iran relations have sunk a new low with the sending of two US aircraft carriers to the Strait of Hormuz and the Trump Administration has declared the Republican Guard as terrorists. In turn, Iran has declared US forces in the region a terrorist group. Iran has now shown moderation and insisted on mutual respect and dialogue to end the crisis. If the US and North Korea could solve some of their issues, it's certainly possible in Iran's case also.

Sauro Dasgupta, via email