



## Facing the debacle

Congress's stocktaking must be deeper than an off-the-cuff take on Rahul Gandhi

In light of the Congress's dismal defeat in the 17th general election, Congress president Rahul Gandhi's offer to resign from his party post at the Congress Working Committee on Saturday was on expected lines. What came as a surprise is the indication that he was seemingly unmoved by the CWC resolution that urged him to continue as president and restructure the party. Either way, whether Mr. Gandhi finally insists on quitting or allows himself to be persuaded otherwise, the party cannot look away from a dilemma that has shadowed it for long: the double-edged sword of the dynasty. Devoid of a coherent ideology or organisational structure, especially over the past two decades, the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty has remained the party's cementing glue. The family is projected as the party's emotional currency with the public and the Gandhi surname is invoked to hark back to the formative years of modern India. However, now in 2019, facing its toughest crisis, the Congress must address the question unflinchingly, and in depth, if it is to refresh itself as a political force. The decline of the Congress is symptomatic of the fading appeal of the old ways of conducting politics and of the disenchantment with opaque and unaccountable power-wielding by political dynasties. Also, as with the Left and Mandal parties, the Congress has collectively failed to upgrade its message, modes of outreach and organisational structures. But the Congress's success in nimbly facing up to the rout is vital if India is to have a coherent political opposition that keeps the government of the day democratically accountable.

Of course, Congress leaders argue that the party would disintegrate if Mr. Gandhi were to quit. Mr. Gandhi, who had once likened power to poison, must take full responsibility for his party's debacle. However, figuring out the form that this account-taking must assume is what makes it a difficult moment for him and the Congress. Whether Mr. Gandhi sticks to his resolve to quit or not, the party will have to go through a process of revitalisation that deals with the hollowing out of its intra-party democracy. Any organisational reform that does not decentralise decision-making and fix accountability at all levels is bound to fail. It must involve a frank assessment of the Congress's risk of failing to cohere if Mr. Gandhi were to abruptly leave his post as party president. True, the Congress may well be able to sustain itself without a dynast. But unless the new leadership emerges through a truly democratic exercise, and is truly independent of the dynasty, any half-hearted restructuring will only lead to the enfeeblement of the party. A dynasty-free Congress will surely invigorate the Indian polity, but a Congress-free polity could well prove dangerous for Indian democracy.

## Fire and laissez-faire

Fix accountability for Surat tragedy, and update the fire safety protocol countrywide

The deadly fire in a Surat coaching centre that resulted in the death of 22 young people highlights the gap between India's dreamy visions of smart cities and the cruel reality of urban chaos and lawlessness. Images of students leaping from the blazing building in a bid to escape will remain imprinted on the public consciousness; many more teenagers were hopelessly overpowered by the flames within the premises, while a lucky few escaped with their lives. These young Indians are the latest victims of a culture of laissez-faire urbanisation that city governments have bred and which the courts allow to be pursued without severe penalties. India's abysmal record on fire safety is reflected in the death of 17,700 people countrywide in fires in both public and residential buildings during 2015, according to the latest available data from the National Crime Records Bureau. Periodically, high-profile cases such as the Uphaar cinema blaze in Delhi that killed 59 people in 1997, and the Kumbakonam school fire in Tamil Nadu in 2004 in which 94 children perished shock the nation, but even these are not strong enough to persuade governments to make fire safety the priority it should be. Neither has prolonged, aggressive litigation by the affected families in the Uphaar case made a difference, because the criminal culpability of the administrative machinery and officials who sanctioned unsafe buildings, often in return for bribes, remains largely unaddressed.

The Surat fire cannot be called an accident, since there are reports of notices having been served to the builder on the risks, but not pursued by the Fire Department. Civic officials have displayed unforgivable indifference, since two deaths occurred in another coaching centre in the city late last year. That tragedy should have led to a comprehensive review of public buildings. The present inquiry into the disaster should go into any deviations from the sanctioned plan for the commercial building housing the coaching centre, and the role of urban planning officials in allowing it to come up. Ultimately, litigation on fire disasters goes to the courts, and it is essential for the judiciary to send out the message that there will be no tolerance to corruption and evasion in the enforcement of building rules and fire safety. Beyond suspending a few officials and filing cases against the building owners, there is a need to make an example of sanctioning and enforcement authorities. The unwavering message must be that Indians demand accountability. Mandating compulsory insurance for all public buildings against fire risk and public liability can bring about a change to the way architects and builders approach the question of safety, since the insurer would require a reduction of risk and compliance with building plans. At least, that would be a start to rewriting India's shameful record on fire safety.

# The making of the 2019 verdict

Voters want someone who will protect them from insecurities flowing from the new economy and globalisation



NEERA CHANDHOKE

A great deal has been already said and written on the spectacular victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), or rather Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the 2019 general election, why he won, and why the Congress lost so badly. Still the results occasion surprise. Mr. Modi headed the government during a period of major job losses, a serious agrarian crisis, marginalisation of the minorities, and polarisation of society. And yet he was re-elected to power. What is the secret of his appeal to voters across class and caste?

### A worldwide trend

Over the past five years we see a worldwide trend – for example in the U.S., Russia, Turkey, the Philippines, Hungary, Poland, and Brazil – of a shift to a mode of politics known as authoritarian populism. Populist leaders are not anti-democratic, they are elected often with huge mandates. Once they are elected, authoritarian populists disdain institutions and processes that act as brakes on the exercise of power – civil society, a free media, separation of powers, and a judiciary. They are impatient with the intricate and laborious processes of democratic governance. They prefer to concentrate power in their corporeal person.

Two, authoritarian leaders garner power by attacking existing elites as corrupt. They themselves might be a part of this elite – recollect a wealthy Donald Trump or a

Narendra Modi who had held power for more than 12 continuous years in Gujarat before he became Prime Minister. Three, authoritarian populist leaders prefer to speak directly to an inchoate and slippery entity called 'the people' than through reported speeches and questioning in Parliament or press conferences. Four, populist leaders dismiss groups, such as immigrants and minorities, as non-people. Five, authoritarian populists eschew the niceties of public debate, which is expected to be civil and heedful of the sensibilities of other participants. They have contempt for politically correct language. They provoke and insult. They delight in breaking every taboo.

Because they speak as they will and how they will, authoritarian populists are disorienting. Opposition leaders found it impossible to keep pace with Mr. Modi's rapidly changing rhetoric. Despite the many errors that he committed when campaigning, the Opposition simply could not respond adequately, or in time. He shifted from "chowkidar" to Balakot, and non-BJP leaders had just no time to ask an important question, how on earth did the Pulwama attack happen? Mr. Modi raised his arms, all fire and brimstone, and practically threatened the use of nuclear weapons. Everyone kept quiet. The quintessential authoritarian populist rides rough shod over consistency or decorum. He presents himself as a strong leader, breaks conventions and makes his own rules.

Why do electorates in democracies opt for rule by a strong man? Perhaps they look for someone who will protect them against the continuing insecurities that liberalisation and globalisation have brought in their wake. In India



G. RAMAKRISHNA

both processes were formally launched in 1991. The process that was initiated in the late 1980s was marked by the rollback of the welfare state by Ronald Reagan in the U.S., and Margaret Thatcher in the U.K. For them an unfettered market was the answer to all problems. The mythology of the market was once again reasserted, its injustices were forgotten.

### Checking the market

Karl Polanyi had in *The Great Transformation* (1944) told us that the market is based on exploitative social relations, it dislocates people and leads to misery. The counter-movement to suffering caused by the market was the rise of working-class struggles. These movements managed to re-embed the market in the state. Someone had to be in charge of the market, someone had to be responsible for the depredations wreaked by this institution. The market could not be left alone, it would destroy social and economic life.

Postcolonial elites tried to control market processes that had been monopolised by imperial powers. But in the 1990s the market acquired dominance and legitimacy. This time there was no working class to counter the ideology and the practices of this system. It had been decimated. In In-

dia, contract labour was introduced in the organised working class. This generated tremendous insecurity. Public enterprises were privatised and workers were thrown onto the street. Here they joined the ranks of the unorganised working class whose lives are blighted by anxiety. Where is the next mess of porridge going to come from? India transitioned to the service sector, but in the lower levels of these enterprises, young people are not promised security of jobs, they can be sacked at the drop of a hat. On balance, the working people live in unstable conditions.

There is no doubt that the deregulation of the economy benefited sections of people who managed to make the transition to new modes of technology and new ways of working. But in the process, inequality between classes deepened to an alarming extent. Among those who had been left out, it generated both aspirations for better lifestyles and resentment at the glittering life styles of the affluent. Insecurity, combined with aspirations and resentment, engendered the politics of desire and social envy.

It was a mixture of these combustible sentiments that were articulated by new forms of music, such as rap. This mix was also tapped by authoritarian populist leaders. They drew upon rage against elites, and they initiated a backlash against inherited privileges. Above all, we saw that populist leaders drew upon resentment to build up xenophobic nationalism. And we witnessed with some sadness the retreat of progressive politics.

### Firaq's caution

Fuzzy class positions and insecurities, desire for a better life and so-

cial esteem, the politics of frustration and social envy have been harnessed to a project of xenophobic nationalism. In this mood of nationalism anyone who is not like us becomes the enemy who has appropriated land and resources. Even if a majority of Indians are not directly involved in hate crimes against minorities, they do not sympathise with the victims of these crimes against humanity. And the few who carry out candlelight processions to protest against any intolerance are labeled in perverse ways. Our own people became strangers in their own land. The poet Firaq Gorakhpuri had famously written: *Sar Zamine-e-Hind par aqam-e-alam ke Firaq/Kafle baste rahe/Hindustan banta gaya* (India was created as a plural society by successive waves of migration). Today people whose ancestors settled in this land, whose labour was mixed with the land to create wealth, and who became a part of the earth when they died are characterised as foreigners.

Mr. Modi's strongman image is reassuring to people wracked by both anxiety and aspirations. It is the same case in other parts of the world. Researchers tell us that today the working class votes for right-wing populists. Matters are not very different in India. Once we had a social democratic state, now we have an authoritarian populist leader who might protect his people, but who has no patience with the tedious processes of parliamentary democracy. Thomas Hobbes had written in the 17th century that all people want self-preservation. They are willing to give up their rights to a Leviathan in exchange for security. We continue to vote for Leviathans.

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## FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

# Electoral outcomes don't alter the purpose of journalism

Journalists should regain their sense of pride to pose probing questions and to speak truth to power



A.S. PANNEERSELVAN

This newspaper's editorial, "For a rediscovery of India" (May 24, 2019), was not only about Narendra Modi's return to power but also about the fundamentals of journalism. The editorial pointed out the most important retreat we are witnessing in the body polity: "In recess, if not in irreversible decline, is the idea of India that had grown from the freedom movement, and had prevailed for most part of the history of the Republic."

There is a disturbing retreat in the information and media sphere too. For instance, the World Press Freedom Index for 2019 compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has documented "how hatred of journalists has degenerated into violence, contributing to an increase in fear". It points to a steady decline in the number of

countries regarded as safe, where journalists can work in complete security, even as authoritarian regimes continue to tighten their grip on the media. The Index also downgrades India by two ranks – from 138 to 140 – because "critics of Hindu nationalism were branded as 'anti-Indian' in online harassment campaigns and six journalists were murdered in 2018".

### Some of the basics

On the question of governance, the editorial was unequivocal in expecting the Prime Minister to walk the talk of "sabka saath, sabka vikas (with all, development for all)". It hoped that "Mr. Modi's second term will be more inclusive than the first, which was marred by arrogant pride and hateful prejudice". Before attempting to address the crucial question of what we, as citizens, expect from the media in general, and *The Hindu* in particular during Mr. Modi's second term, I would like to list out some of the fundamentals of journalism. Media scholars identify two major functions for the news media: the credible-informational and the critical-analytical-investi-



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gative. And there is an often conflicting demand between what is in public interest and what the public is interested in. Hence, it is important for not only journalists but also citizens to know the purpose of journalism.

For years, Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, the authors of the defining textbook, *The Elements of Journalism*, have been exploring the purpose of journalism. For them, the purpose is not defined by technology, nor by journalists or the techniques they employ. The principles and purpose of journalism are defined by something more basic: the function news plays in the lives of people. They write: "News is that part of communication that keeps us informed of the changing events, issues, and characters in the world

outside... The purpose of journalism is thus to provide citizens with the information they need to make the best possible decisions about their lives, their communities, their societies, and their governments."

The political climate is not hostile to the idea of the credible-informational function of the news media. But, there is a chilling intimidating environment when it comes to the second function – of being critical-analytical-investigative. From SLAPPs, (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation), to draconian criminal defamation laws and denial of crucial access, multiple devices are deployed to blunt efforts to hold those in power accountable. Let us not forget that India has the ignominy of figuring in the Global Impunity Index, which is computed by the Committee to Protect Journalists every year, over the last decade.

### What would be welcome

As Prime Minister during his first term, Mr. Modi may have developed a direct communication channel with the people through his social media handles and his

periodic broadcast, "Mann Ki Baat", and this is obviously yielding political dividends. But, as the head of the largest democracy in the world, there is a need to constantly interact with the larger news media and not some select players alone. An open press conference in which unscripted questions are encouraged would be a welcome departure. There is a need to reverse tendencies to undermine the salient features of the Right to Information Act. Pulitzer-Prize winning historian Ron Chernow summarised, in one sentence, the prevailing media environment during a White House Correspondents Association dinner last month: "We now have to fight hard for basic truths that we once took for granted."

Journalists should not be apologetic but instead regain their sense of pride to pose probing questions, to demand accountability, to seek answers, and to speak truth to power. Because that is not only the purpose of journalism but also the reason for journalism to survive as a discipline.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Getting off the ropes

The Congress has been decimated but there is still hope for revival (Editorial page, "No easy solutions for the Congress", May 25). The base of the grand old party has been chipped away by the BJP and regional parties over a period of time and the party has made absolutely no effort to rebuild the organisational base. The situation has become so dismal that even when it formulated an attractive welfare scheme, the party failed to communicate its significance to voters. Going forward, it needs to rebuild the party from the village level. State and district level leaders who are in touch with the people should be encouraged rather than parachuting 'Made in Delhi' leaders. The party president should tour the country extensively in the next five years and understand the problems of the common people. Further, the party should eschew its soft Hindutva strategy to counter the BJP and re-embrace secularism,

which has been its primary strength right from its origin. It may be a bit too much to expect the Congress to relinquish its dynastic leadership (Page 1, "CWC rejects Rahul's offer to quit, asks him to overhaul party", May 26). The leadership should get rid of its coterie-guided functioning and develop a regional-local leadership.

KOSARAJU CHANDRAMOULI,  
Hyderabad

■ The time has come for the Congress party to regain its political legacy. The party lacks leadership. In the current political scenario, there is no leader in the Congress who can match Mr. Modi in terms of oration and presence. Moreover, the Congress's secularism has taken a beating. Unless there are new ideas and ideals, the Congress, or for that matter any other Opposition party in India, cannot even dream of dislodging the BJP.

C. SAMBASIVAM  
Mettur dam, Tamil Nadu

■ It is evident from some of the letters that have been published ever since the

BJP's jaw-dropping victory that there is still a lot of latent support for the Congress, at least among many of us old-time readers of this daily (I am 88) who grew up with the Congress. I wonder whether Rahul Gandhi is even aware of his party's great legacy. The Congress does not belong to the Nehru-Gandhi family alone. It belongs to the rest of India too as it represents values that are still dear to us in this great country. If the Congress is to rebuild itself, it needs to stay away from 'power-point presentations'. There must be mass contact programmes in parliamentary constituencies. This is the strategy that the BJP has fine-tuned to its advantage. It also needs to have a strategy for the short, medium and long term. Finally, I feel Amethi was lost after Mr. Gandhi announced his decision to contest from Wayanad. Whatever the spin being given to the decision, the perception was that he was "running away". Priyanka Gandhi Vadra should have also contested against the Prime Minister.

Even if she had lost, it would have still sent a powerful message to the party rank and file that she is willing to pick up any gauntlet. Life is about fighting the odds, which the BJP's Smriti Irani has proven. The Congress must remember that in 2024, 10 crore new voters will be added. Can it connect with them in terms of its great legacy?

C.H. SUBRAMANIAN,  
Pune

### Mandate and after

The editorial, "For a rediscovery of India" (May 24), has tossed a new catchword into the BJP's camp: "sabka vishwas (the trust of all)". Despite the editorial's attempt to strike a balance between uncritical praise and fair criticism, one feels that the purported objectivity seems marred by two sweeping and unambiguous assertions. One is attributing the outcome to an "electoral endorsement of Hindutva or Hindu nationalism". I don't think many people who voted for the BJP will even remotely be aware that such an ideological world view

exists in the first place. It will be a mistake to seek and confirm the existence of an overarching pull factor that drew voters towards the ruling party. The pre- and post-poll surveys pointed to the high level of trust that large segments of society reposed in the leadership of Mr. Modi. The other troubling finding is the claim that Mr. Modi's first term was "marred by arrogant pride and hateful prejudice". This appears to be a sweeping denunciation that can be countered. Despite his popularity, no Prime Minister in independent India has been as viciously targeted by his opponents as Mr. Modi, sometimes overstepping the boundaries of decorum.

V.N. MUKUNDARAJAN,  
Thiruvananthapuram

### Surat fire

The fire accident at a coaching centre in Surat reminds me of a similar incident in 2004 at Kumbakonam, Tamil Nadu ("Surat coaching centre owner held after fire, toll now 22", May 26). It is common practice in India to

flout safety norms in almost every field and occupation. One needs to praise Ketan Jorawadia for his quick thinking.

A. JAINULABDEEN,  
Chennai

### The precursor

I wonder why the captioned article, "When rage became terror" (Magazine, May 26, pp 6-9), did not find it relevant to make even a passing reference to the role played by majoritarian policies (in the name of democracy) followed by successive governments in Sri Lanka for decades. Wasn't this directly the cause of Tamil dissatisfaction which severely rocked the country and in all probability created a fertile breeding ground for those macabre and destructive thoughts to enter the minds of those whose motivations and actions the article seeks to analyse? It has profound lessons for how we in India manage our society and politics.

SUSHIL PRASAD,  
Hyderabad

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# One saffron, four outliers

Barring Karnataka, the BJP has been halted by a different political vehicle in each of the southern States

SANDEEP SHASTRI

The 2019 Lok Sabha election results in the south present an interesting contrast to the rest of the country. Apart from Karnataka, where the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) decimated the Congress-Janata Dal (Secular) alliance, the south has withstood the efforts of the BJP to increase its national footprint. Yet, developments indicate that the BJP has gained ground elsewhere in the south too. It is now in close competition with the Congress as the key competitor to the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) in Telangana. In Kerala, the BJP was unable to make a dent in the bipolar contest between the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the Left Democratic Front (LDF). In Tamil Nadu, the winner-takes-all trend was repeated by the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)-led alliance. Andhra Pradesh is a direct fight between two State-based parties; the two national parties are out of the competition.



"The DMK alliance's victory shows that DMK supporters recognise M.K. Stalin as the true inheritor of his father's legacy." Supporters of the party celebrate in Chennai after the alliance's victory in the Lok Sabha election. —AFP

## The outlier

The BJP has been a key player in the politics of Karnataka, the outlier in the south this time, since the 1990s. This time, the Congress and the JD(S), which together formed the government in the State last year, came together to challenge the BJP. Over the last three decades, the Lok Sabha elections in Karnataka have witnessed dramatic swings, but never a total rout of any party or alliance. In this election, the Congress and the JD(S) have just one representative each in the Lok Sabha from Karnataka. The BJP did not merely consolidate its position in northern and coastal Karnataka, but also made significant inroads into old Mysore, the bastion of the Congress and the JD(S). Three factors seem to have been at play in the State. First, the support for Narendra Modi as Prime Minister

propelled the BJP nominees to victory. Second, the failure of the Congress and the JD(S) to unite at the ground level cost them dearly. Third, the intense infighting and factionalism within both the Congress and the JD(S) also contributed to the defeat of their candidates.

In Telangana, it was expected that the TRS would repeat its impressive performance in the 2018 Assembly polls, but the voters gave the party a less celebratory victory. The BJP emerged with four seats and the Congress won three. Thus, the tussle in the State is now for the second position. Over time, as the BJP attempts to enlarge its footprint in south India, it will look towards Telangana.

Andhra Pradesh witnessed simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and State Assembly. The trend in the Assembly poll has been replicated in the Lok Sabha verdict. The victory of Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's YSR Congress Party is both a triumph of his 18-month tour of the State and a vote against the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) government. The two national parties have been sidelined for different reasons. The Congress has virtually been replaced by the YSR Congress, its own splinter group. The BJP's break with the TDP cost it dearly and has pushed it to the sidelines.

Kerala has traditionally seen a face-off between the Congress-led UDF and the Communist Party of In-

dia (Marxist)-led LDF. Vote share differences between the alliances are just a few percentage points. This time, the UDF got more seats. The LDF faced anger for its stand on the Supreme Court judgment on Sabarimala. The Congress had skillfully appropriated the BJP's stand on the issue. The BJP was thus not able to benefit from the unhappiness with the way the LDF State government handled the issue. Kerala is likely to see this bipolar alliance competition for some more time.

## A crucial election

Tamil Nadu witnessed its first election after the two stalwarts of its main parties, M. Karunanidhi and Jayalalithaa, passed away. The victory achieved by the M.K. Stalin-led DMK alliance showed that DMK supporters recognise him as the true inheritor of his father's legacy. It is unclear who is seen as the political heir of Jayalalithaa as the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) is divided and its government in the State is unpopular. The AIADMK alliance and government seem to have the BJP in the driver's seat. The drubbing the alliance received in this election is indicative of the public mood in the State.

The most critical question for the near future will be whether the rest of the southern States will follow the Karnataka pattern or States like Tamil Nadu and Kerala will continue to throw up political competition that is rooted in State-specific socio-cultural and historical factors. The five articles on the south by the State coordinators of Lokniti provide detailed empirical proof of the electoral trends in these States and explain the people's verdict. The BJP has been halted by a different political vehicle in each of the four southern States where the party has found much less acceptance compared to other parts of the country.

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## How castes and communities voted in Karnataka

	Cong-JD(S) (%)	BJP (%)	Others (%)
Upper Castes	31	63	6
Vokkaligas	33	60	7
Lingayats	10	87	3
Other OBCs	46	47	7
Dalits	49	42	9
Adivasis	36	54	10
Muslims	73	18	9
Others	36	55	9

## Attracting young voters

	Cong-JD(S) (%)	BJP (%)	Others (%)
Up to 25 years	37	56	7
26-35 years	42	48	10
36-45 years	41	51	7
46-55 years	38	57	5
56 years & above	48	48	4

# Heading towards political uncertainty

The BJP's victory in Karnataka could impact the State government's stability



VEENADEVI & NAGESH K.L.

Karnataka provided the only southern comfort for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). It was the only State in south India that followed the national trend of endorsing a second term for the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance. The scale of the victory that the BJP achieved in the face of a Congress-Janata Dal (Secular) alliance was truly spectacular. Never before has the BJP achieved such a high strike rate in the State. Nor has Karnataka seen a victory of such a big scale in the competitive party system which has existed in the State since the 1980s. By winning all but three seats, the BJP swept all regions of the State. The Congress and the JD(S) were left clutching on to one seat each, and an independent backed by the BJP completed the Karnataka contingent.

## Reasons for the BJP's surge

What explains the surge of the BJP in Karnataka? First, the CSDS-Lokniti post-poll data indicate that the level of satisfaction with the Central government was reasonably high. Close to three-fourths of the respondents said they were satisfied with the BJP-led government's performance at the Centre. As opposed to this, only two-thirds said they were satisfied with the Congress-JD(S) government's performance in the State.

Second, the Modi factor appears to have played a key role. More than half the respondents in the State hoped that Prime Minister Narendra Modi would be re-elected. He led Congress president Rahul Gandhi by over 20 percentage points. More importantly, over half of those who voted for the BJP said that they would not have voted for the party if Mr. Modi had not been its prime ministerial candidate. This explains why all 27 BJP candidates sought votes in Mr. Modi's name.

Third, the Congress-JD(S) alliance stitched by the leadership did not really work on the ground, whether among party cadres or party supporters, especially in the old Mysore region of Bengaluru and southern Karnataka. In this Vokkaliga heartland, the traditional fight has been between the Congress and the JD(S). In this election, by fighting together, the two parties opened up the space for the BJP to emerge. The post-poll data indicate that six out of every 10 Vokkaliga votes went this time to the BJP. In the recent past, this Vokkaliga vote was divided among the three players. With two of them joining hands, the BJP thus became the beneficiary of those Vokkaliga votes which were not in favour of the alliance. Commentators had suggested that the combined vote share of the Congress and the JD(S) would trump the BJP. This did not work as political developments since the last election have swayed the mood in favour of the BJP. The belief that the alliance came together to merely deny the BJP a chance to come to power may well have caused sympathy among a segment of voters in favour of the BJP. Further, at the constituency level, the rivalry between the cadres of the Congress and the JD(S) led to a lacklustre campaign. Within both the Con-

gress and the JD(S) there was unhappiness with the choice of candidates. All the infighting within these parties could also explain their collective poor performance.

Fourth, in northern Karnataka, the BJP ensured a consolidation of the Lingayat, upper caste and non-dominant Other Backward Classes (OBC) vote in its favour. Post-poll survey data indicate that close to nine of every 10 Lingayat voters endorsed the BJP, and the party was able to do well both among the non-dominant OBCs and the Dalits. The Hyderabad-Karnataka region was considered a strong base of the Congress. Its prominent national leader, Mallikarjun Kharge, who has never lost an election was defeated this time.

Finally, the Congress-JD(S) alliance failed to present the voters with a positive agenda. This explains why it could not garner the support of younger voters, the educated segments of society, and those who have high exposure to the media. Among these sections, the BJP secured a much higher percentage of votes. The defeat of prominent leaders of the alliance including Mr. Kharge, JD(S) patriarch Deve Gowda, former Congress Union Ministers Veerappa Moily and K.H. Muniyappa, and Chief Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy's son Nikhil Gowda indicate the intensity of the sweep of the BJP.

## Impact of the result

This election result might directly impact the stability of the alliance government in the State. It is only a matter of time before the blame game for the election defeat is out in the open. The Congress will need to deal with factionalism within the party.

Meanwhile, the BJP must be on the horns of a dilemma. It would



## The Modi factor

	2014 LS (%)	2019 LS (%)
BJP voters who would not have voted for BJP had Modi not been PM candidate (all India)	27	32
BJP voters who would not have voted for BJP had Modi not been PM candidate (Karnataka)	57	54

like to go in for a mid-term poll if the government were to fall. Yet, given the fact that the House has barely completed a year, there could be stiff resistance from the sitting MLAs who may not be keen to go back to the voters to seek a fresh mandate. The State is clearly heading towards a phase of political uncertainty.

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# When schemes translate into votes

The BJP was able to attract more women voters compared to 2014

VIBHA ATTRI & ANURAG JAIN

The 2019 Lok Sabha election saw not only the highest number of women candidates contesting (724), but also the highest number of women winners (78). For the first time in India's electoral history, the voter turnout for men and women was almost equal — 66.79% and 66.68%, respectively.

## The gender disadvantage

Previous National Election Studies show that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has traditionally received less support from female voters than male voters. Despite the BJP's spectacular victory in this election, the party continues to have a gender disadvantage of three percentage points among women voters at an all-India level. The Congress, a party that is traditionally favoured by women, was supported by more or less an equal percentage of men and women, and so were the Bahujan Samaj Party and its allies and the Left.

The gender disadvantage for the BJP was not uniform across the country, however. Among the Hindi heartland States, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan saw the highest gender disadvantage for the party, where the gap between men and women was seven and five percentage points respectively. However, in Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand and Haryana, the party saw more women voting for it. In Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, the number of women and men voting for the party was the same.

## Social profile

The Congress support base among women was more or less balanced across all social groups, except among the upper castes, Muslims and Adivasis. On the other hand, the BJP enjoys much higher support among young women voters as well as upper caste, educated and rich women voters. Across most social groups, more men voted for the BJP than women from the same group. This was not the case with Congress voters, where gender-wise support for the party across different social groups was more balanced.

A higher proportion of men wanted to give the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance another chance as compared to women. The preference for Narendra Modi as Prime Minister was five percentage points

## How men & women voted this time (%)

	Congress	Congress allies	BJP	BJP allies	BSP+	Left	Others
Women	20	7	36	7	6	2	22
Men	19	7	39	7	7	2	20

## Support for BJP among Hindi heartland States (%)

	Voted for BJP			Gap between men and women
	Men	Women		
Bihar	27	26		1
Chhattisgarh	29	38		-9
Delhi	46	42		4
Haryana	58	60		-2
Himachal Pradesh	74	74		0
Jharkhand	45	44		1
Madhya Pradesh	54	47		7
Rajasthan	58	53		5
Uttarakhand	71	72		-1
Uttar Pradesh	46	46		0

## Social profile of Cong. and BJP voters by gender (%)

	Congress		BJP	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Rural	19	19	36	38
Urban	21	21	37	41
Poor	17	17	34	38
Lower class	21	21	35	36
Middle class	22	20	37	39
Rich	20	20	43	45
Non-literate	20	21	34	35
Up to primary	20	21	33	37
Up to matric	21	20	36	39
College and above	18	18	41	42
Dalits	20	20	32	35
Adivasis	30	32	41	46
OBCs	16	15	43	44
Upper Castes	12	12	50	55
Muslims	33	32	8	8
18-25 years	20	19	40	41
26-35 years	19	19	38	40
36-45 years	20	20	36	39
46-55 years	20	20	35	36
56 years & above	19	19	32	37
Average	20	19	36	39

## More women are voting for the BJP (%)

	Congress			BJP		
	Men	Women	Gap between men and women	Men	Women	Gap between men and women
2014	19	19	0	33	29	+4
2019	19	20	-1	39	36	+3

higher for men compared to women. While 44% women preferred to see him as Prime Minister, 49% men wanted to see him leading the country.

Although the overall gender disadvantage for the BJP persists (i.e., less

support among women than among men), the disadvantage is less compared to what it was in 2014. Back then, 29% of women had opted for the party. This rose to 36% this election. The gap between men and women voters who voted for the BJP was



## Shift among party voters (%)

	Women	Men
Voted for Cong in 2014 but BJP in 2019	11	12
Voted for BJP in 2014 but Cong in 2019	7	7
Voted Cong in 2014 and 2019	67	68
Voted BJP in 2014 and 2019	71	71

seen a marginal decline from four percentage points in 2014 to three percentage points in 2019. We also see that more women (along with men) have shifted from the Congress to the BJP than vice-versa between 2014 and 2019. A considerable rise in the Prime Minister's popularity among women voters since the 2014 election could have affected this shift.

## Benefiting from schemes

Another reason could be a result of the various schemes launched by the Modi government. When voters were asked to name one policy or programme of the Modi government that they liked the most, the Ujjwala Yojana, which is directed at women, was most popular. This was followed by Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Jan Dhan Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao. An equal proportion of men and women (34%) in our study reported to have benefited from the Ujjwala Yojana. Among women beneficiaries of this scheme, more women voted for the BJP compared to those who did not benefit from it (41% and 33% respectively). Among women beneficiaries of the Jan Dhan Yojana, 42% of women beneficiaries opted for the BJP compared to 34% of non-beneficiaries.

There is thus some strength to the argument that despite its overall gender disadvantage, the BJP was able to attract more women voters to it this time as a result of a rise in Mr. Modi's popularity and the impact of his government's schemes.

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