



Elections Agenda Analysis India: A Study

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Abstract

Since democracy emerged in the city of Athens in 5th century B.C.E., elections have been one of the most important processes in a democratic society. In India, there were some sporadic forms of elections since ancient times. In the Vedic Period (1500s B.C.E. to 500s B.C.E), Rajas (Kings) were elected by ganas (common people), although the sons of previous kings were elected as Rajas in most cases. In the Chola Empire (300s B.C.E. to 1200s C.E.), palm leaves were used as ballot paper to vote for the village committee members. However, it was in the post-Independence India where the general mass election started to take place. After gaining Independence from the British rule in 1947, the first general elections to form the Lok Sabha (lower house of the Parliament) were held in February 1952. The Indian National Congress (INC) which played an essential role at the time of India's Independence struggle from the Britishers, continued to play a prominent role in the Indian political domain from 1952 until 1977. Within 25 years, under the leadership of prominent leaders including Jawaharlal Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Ms Indira Gandhi, and Rajiv Gandhi, India witnessed rapid changes in several domains. Right from the Nehruvian model of centralised economic planning (five-year plans) and development, laying the foundation of the Green Revolution, war with Pakistan and imposition of emergency across the country. After the 1977 general elections, the Bharatiya Jan Sangh (former party name of the current BJP) emerged victorious defeating the Congress for the first time. Low annual growth rate (popularly known as the Hindu growth rate) of 3.5% to 4% persisted from the 1950s till 1980s. Between the years 1984 to 1991, several riots broke out on account of the assassination of the Prime Ministers Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi which added uncertainty to the economy. In 1989, a hung parliament emerged for the first time, with no party getting a majority. The government formed in 1989 was short-lived forcing another general election in just over two years.

Keywords: Democracy, Economy, India, President of India, Chief Minister, Elections

Introduction

India is a country, divided into states and union territories, with a parliamentary system governed under the Constitution of India, which defines the power distribution among the federal government and the states. The President of India is the ceremonial head of the country and supreme commander-in-chief for all defence forces in India. However, it is the Prime Minister of India, who is the leader of the party or political alliance having a majority in the national elections to the Lok Sabha, that exercises most executive powers for matters that require nationwide affection under a federal system. India is regionally divided into States (and Union Territories) and each State has a Chief Minister who is the leader of the party or political alliance has won a majority in the regional elections otherwise known as State Assembly Elections that



exercises executive powers in that State. The respective State's Chief Minister has executive powers within the State and works jointly with the Prime Minister of India or their ministers on matters that require both State and Central attention. Some Union Territories also elect an Assembly and have a territorial government and other (mainly smaller) Union Territories are governed by a person appointed by the President of India. The President of India monitors the rule of law through their appointed governors in each State and on their recommendation can take over the executive powers from the Chief Minister of the State, temporarily when the elected representatives of the State government has failed to create a peaceful environment and has deteriorated into chaos. The President of India dissolves the existing State government if necessary, and a new election is conducted.

Types of Elections

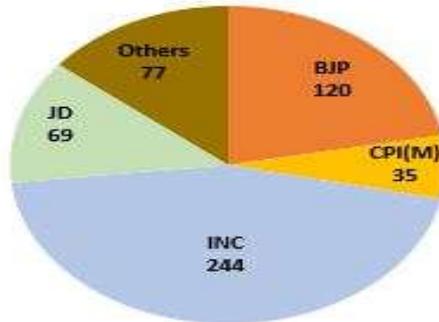
Elections in the Republic of India include elections for :

- Members of the Parliament in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha,
- Members of State Legislative Assemblies, (and also Assembly elections to some of the Union Territories like Delhi),
- Members of State Legislative Councils,
- Members in village panchayats or city corporation councils.
- By-election is held when a person of a particular constituent dies, resigns, or is disqualified.

1991 elections

In 1991, elections were held across 545 constituencies to form the Lok Sabha (lower house of the parliament). Results of the 1991 elections did not give a clear majority to any party. Congress won 232 seats emerging as the single largest party. P.V Narasimha Rao headed the minority government, and is credited for ushering in several economic reforms. The Indian economy was facing a turmoil in the run-up to the 1991 election. The sharp rise in crude oil price, brought about by the Gulf War (1990-91), led to a sharp deterioration in India's Balance of Payment and nearly depleted India's reserves. The BoP crisis led to a sharp fall in INR, and a fiscal crisis ensued. The consequent need to seek a loan from IMF and the World Bank forced the Indian government to implement a set of landmark structural reforms. Under the leadership of P.M Narasimha Rao and his Finance Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, reforms introduced in this period included opening its market for foreign investments, privatization of state-owned industries.

Distribution of seats of 1991 elections



1996 elections

Indian National Congress (INC) party were witnessing many factions within the party due to several government scandals and accusations. The results of the 11th general elections led to a hung parliament in which no party gained a clear mandate. The BJP was the single largest party with 161 seats. President of India invited the leader of the BJP party to form the government in a hung house. However, BJP failed to form a strong coalition and its leader Mr. AtalBihari Vajpayee had to step down within 13 days. Many regional parties (Shiva Sena, DMK, TDP) also rose to power at the time 1996 elections, with a total tally of 129 seats. The Congress (with 140 seats) also had declined to form the government but had provided support to other regional parties such as the Janata Dal (JD). JD and other smaller parties together formed ‘United front’ or National front. The National front led government under the leadership of Mr. DeveGowda had to step down within a span of 18 months. On the economic front, growth had started to move in a positive direction with economic indicators showing improvements compared to the 1991 crisis (twin deficit crisis) situation. But as political uncertainty emerged after 1996 elections, economic growth saw a slowdown as the average growth stood at just over 5% YoY in FY97 as well as in FY98.

Distribution of seats won from 1996 general elections

Political Parties	Seats Won
BharatiyaJanata Party (BJP)	161
Shiv Sena affiliated with BJP	15
Indian National Congress (INC)	140
National Front	79
Janata Dal (JD)	46
Samjwadi Party	17
Independent Parties	9
Total	545

Note: Figures may not add up due to omission of some regional parties



1998 and 1999 elections

At the time of 1998 elections, India was witnessing changes at both internal and external sides. Externally, the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997 had led to devaluation of currencies and decline in stock markets across Southeast Asian nations. India was spared from the horror of the crisis due to the role of stabilization policy including intervention in the foreign exchange market by the central bank, tightening of monetary policy and restrictions on capital flows. Internally, the domestic political dynamics looked indecisive as no single party got a strong majority in the 1998 general elections. BJP emerged as the largest party with 182 seats, whereas the Congress secured 141 out of 543 seats. The BJP formed the National Democratic Alliance with other small parties. Mr. AtalBihari Vajpayee took over as the Prime Minister of India. Within a year, the party focused on promoting private sector and on improving consumption for growth. In 1998, India received acknowledgments from around the world for being able to establish itself as a nuclear weapon state.

After 13 months, due to unforeseen circumstances, the BJP government had to step down as it lost by one vote in the vote-of-confidence motion in the lower house of the parliament. It was the first time that a party had to step down in a no-confidence motion. As a result of this, new round of elections took place in October 1999. The results from the elections held in 1999 continued to be a big win for the BJP. The BJP-led NDA secured 299 seats and Congress and its allies won 134 of the 543 seats. Mr. Vajpayee is credited with taking on India's telecom revolution, laying focus on infrastructure projects and on establishing fiscal discipline. He is also known for introducing many social security reforms including making education a fundamental right.

Distribution of seats won from 1999 general elections

Political Parties	Seats Won
National Democratic Alliance (NDA)	270
BharatiyaJanata Party	182
Shiv Sena	15
Other allies in NDA	69
Indian National Congress and allies	134
Indian National Congress	114
AIADMK	10
Other allies with Congress	11
Total	545

Note: Figures may not add up due to omission of some regional parties. BJP formed the National Democratic Alliance in 1998.

2004 elections



Nearly after eight years, Congress (INC) formed the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) with the support of other parties headed the government. The Congress-led UPA held 218 seats in the parliament. The BJP despite launching an 'India Shining' campaign, could not win votes from the middle class and poor sections of rural India. This was an important election in India because India had started to grow at a faster pace, reaching a four-year high of 7.9% in FY2004 compared to 3.5% growth in FY97. Under the leadership of Dr. Manmohan Singh, in the initial years reforms related to social security for lower sections of the society such as National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), 2005 and Food Security Bill in 2006 were introduced. The government also initiated rural infrastructure development programme (Bharat Nirman) in 2005.

Distribution of seats of 2004 elections

Political Party	Seats Won
National Democratic Alliance (NDA)	181
Bhartiya Janta party (BJP)	138
Janata Dal (JD)	8
Shiv Sena	12
Other allies with NDA	23
United Progressive Alliance (UPA)	218
Indian National Congress	145
DMK	16
Left Front	59
Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPIM)	43
Samajwadi Party	36
Rashtriyajanata Dal (RJD)	24
Others	56
Total	543

Note: Figures may not add up due to omission of some regional parties. INC formed the United Progressive Alliance in 2004.

2009 elections

The Congress-led UPA had implemented many of the promises made including enactment of Right to Information (RTI), waiving off farm loans along with rural infrastructure programs. When India went for general elections against this backdrop, Congress managed to win 206 seats, a huge improvement from 2004. The BJP could win only 116 seats. Regional parties won over 146 seats. Although internally the political scenario was stable, the impact of Global Financial Crisis was felt in India's financial sector, exports and exchange rates. In the stock market, net equity investment inflows from FIIs turned into net disinvestment of USD 13.3 billion during January 2008 to February 2009. Consequently, the value of rupee against dollar



fell by more than 20% for nearly 6 months in 2008. This led to a drop in the forex reserves to a low of 252 billion in 2008. A consequence of this led the growth rate falling to 3.9% YoY in FY2008. In the pre-election year, the government had also increased subsidies for farmers along with INR 71,600 crore farm loan waiver in the Union budget for 2008-09. This worsened the fiscal balance (5.9% of GDP in FY09) and an increase in average inflationary levels (10.83% in FY09). Though the government was trying to resolve farmers' distress, in the eyes of the public the Congress-led UPA government were charged with several allegations including public scams (2G, 3G telecom scam) and other corruption charges in the last year of the 5-year term.

Distribution of seats of 2009 elections

Political Party	Seats Won
National Democratic Alliance (NDA)	159
BhartiyaJanta Party (BJP)	116
Janata Dal (JD)	20
Shiv Sena	11
Other Allies of NDA	12
United Progressive Alliance	262
Indian National Congress	206
All India Trinamool Congress	19
Other allies in UPA	37
National Front	79
Communist Party of India (Marxist)	16
BahujanSamaj Party (BSP)	21
Other allies in National Front	42
Right Front	27
Samajwadi Party (SP)	23
RashtriyaJanata Dal	4
Others	16
Total	543

Note: Figures may not add up due to omission of some regional parties.

2014 elections

The elections held in 2014 witnessed one of the biggest turnouts for general elections till date at 66.4%. It was a historic win for the right-wing BJP party as it secured a commanding lead of over 282 of the 543 seats in the lower house of the parliament. India's impressive growth averaging above 8% over ten years of Congress-led UPA term, saw a sharp slowdown to below 5% in 2012 coupled with inflation rocketing into double digits. With the frequent corruption scandals, the country's oldest party (INC) faced massive crisis of confidence in the eyes of the public. This led the congress party to win just over 44 seats out of 543 seats. With Modi



government taking charge in May'14 the government has implemented a series of economic policies including inflation-targeting monetary policy framework, demonization, GST rollout, introduction of the bankruptcy code to address loan defaults and subsidy reforms. Currently, in the pre-election year, Modi government has lost in the five state assembly elections, pressures on the fiscal balance is increasing and GDP growth is likely to decelerate due to domestic and global uncertainties. The government will also be bound to focus more on social and economic schemes for farmers and lower income groups.

Distribution of seats of 2014 elections

Political Party	Seats Won
National Democratic Alliance	341
BhartiyaJanta Party	268
Shiv Sena	18
Telugu Desam Party	15
Other allies with NDA	74
United Progressive Alliance	60
Congress	45
Other allies with UPA	16
AIADMK	36
BijuJanta Dal	19
Others	114
Total	545

Note 1: The number of seats BJP held in 2014 was 282. They currently have 268 seats in the Lower House. For more please click [here](#).

Note 2: With changes in number of seats held by each party, the figures may not add up to the total and due to omission of some regional parties.

2019 Elections

In the 2019 general elections, the alliance led by BharatiyaJanata Party (BJP) swept a landslide victory for the second term against the Indian National Congress (INC) and its opposition allies. The BJP won 303 seats in the LokSabha, the lower house of India's parliament, bettering the 282 seats they had won in 2014. In the 2014 LokSabha elections, it was the first time in three decades that a party other than Indian National Congress had been able to won that number of seats on its own. The overall vote share for BJP alone stood at 37.4%, and with its allies the vote share was 45% much higher than 38% garnered in 2014. The Indian National Congress led by Mr Rahul Gandhi, put up a good fight this time but were still unable to make any meaningful gains. Around the time of 17th LokSabha elections, despite economic issues such as joblessness crisis, falling consumption, and a slowdown in growth, the voters were still in favour of the current government. Given the clear mandate for the new government, introspection of the



existing policies in sectors such as Make in India, power sector reforms as well as in the financial sector is needed.

Political Parties	Seats Won
National Democratic Alliance (NDA)	353
BharatiyaJanata Party	303
Shiv Sena	18
Janata Dal (United)	16
Other Allies with NDA	16
United Progressive Alliance (UPA)	91
Indian National Congress	52
DravidaMunnetraKazhagam	23
Other Allies with UPA	16
Federal Front	67
All India Trinamool Congress	22
YuvajanaSramikaRythu Congress Party	22
BijuJanata Dal	9
Total	543

Conclusion

Studying elections in the largest democracy in the world is bound to be a challenge: given the size of the country and of its population, Indian national elections have been the largest electoral exercise in the world ever since the first national elections in 1952. Moreover the cultural, linguistic, ethnic and religious diversity of the Indian society, as well as the federal nature of the Indian state, make this event a particularly complex one. What, then, have been the methodologies and approaches deployed to study this major political event? What have been the disciplines and foci of election studies? Who have been the main authors? In what form have these studies been publicized, and what type of readership have they targeted? Reading the available literature with these questions in mind, I have tried to identify some major shifts over time, and to grasp their meaning and implications; a few interviews with specialists of the field have allowed me to test some of the interpretations suggested by the readings. Through a review of the literature on Indian elections since the 1980s, this paper aims at mapping the scientific and political debates around election studies.² Election studies are here defined as scholarly work focusing on the major phases of the electoral process, i.e. the campaign, the vote, the announcement of results and subsequent government formation.¹ This is a restrictive definition: elections are obviously a central institution of representative democracy, and as such they are connected to every aspect of the polity. Yet election studies constitute a distinct sub-genre of studies on democracy, which focuses, so to speak, on the ‘mechanics’ more than on the ‘substance’ of representative democracy.² This sub-genre, being relatively more visible than other studies of representative democracy, has specific implications, in the academic but also in the political arena, which will be the focus of this critical review. This paper will argue that



election studies are really in between science and politics, and that it is important, therefore, to contextualize them.³The paper starts with a quick overview of the different types of election studies which have been produced on India, and goes on to analyze a series of dilemmas and debates attached to election studies, which highlight the intricate nature of the political and scientific issues at stake.

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