

'Modi Wave' May Defy Electoral Gravity in Lok Sabha Elections 2019

EDITOR'S PICKS April 1, 2019, 1:30 pm Updated: April 1, 2019, 1:33 pm

Source :- <https://english.sakshi.com/editors-picks/2019/04/01/modi-wavemay-defy-electoral-gravity-in-lok-sabha-elections-2019?fbclid=IwAR2ykVihQ6hkEJHz0w0578riXyNYIVzFdLWJ0DOFUXSYa9fvfRzrbVIVrCQ>



The term 'wave' is a journalistic jargon that describes an electoral phenomenon, which leads to a major gain or loss for an incumbent political party, a manifestation of pro or anti-incumbency sentiments of the voters. A wave election provides a massive mandate to a party saddled in power or decisively defeats it, signaling a tectonic political shift in the power structure of a country. Its usage witnessed a metamorphosis in Indian General Elections 2014, idiomized as 'Modi wave', which not only captured the imagination of the citizens, but also propelled Narendra Modi (NaMo) into political folklore. The electoral broadcast of Modi as a strong leader, who can solve the multiple crisis plaguing India created a personality wave that initially appeared as surreal and media manufactured. However, the verdict was a psephological wonder, as the BJP riding high on real Modi wave scripted a spectacular victory in the national elections. It not only enabled the saffron party to cross the majority mark (282 out of 543 seats) for the

first time in the lower house of the parliament, but also marked the ascendancy of Modi in competitive politics of India.

The ‘Modi wave’, which altered the political and ideological spectrum of India in 2014, became a figure of speech and gained immense electoral traction as it defied political gravity to extend saffron foot prints in 22 out of the 29 states in the country. Modi magic was a game changer, as it saved the BJP from imminent defeats in several state elections. His electoral polemic combined with theatrical body language created a ‘Pied piper’ effect on the electorate in state election competitions, as they not only stepped into the voting booths, but also exercised their franchise in favour of the BJP. There is No Alternative (TINA factor) to Prime Minister Modi became self-embedded in the minds of the voters.

A quick and non-opinionated post-mortem analysis of the 2014 national elections and the state election results reveal that a two-dimensional electoral wave determined the majority of the mandates for the saffron party. The victory in state elections (barring Delhi, Bihar, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Punjab) has been mainly due to the simultaneous political streaming of Modi wave and an anti-incumbency wave against the Congress or the dominant regional party. The domino effect of the wave in electoral conquest of India is phenomenal and unparalleled, but it is subjected to political scrutiny and criticisms every time the BJP loses an election. The electoral reverses suffered by the saffron party in the five state elections, especially in the Hindi heartland states of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, once again brought Modi wave under the public scanner with critics pointing out that it has lost its steam. The answer, as to whether Modi wave will have a bandwagon political impact in 2019 General Elections, could be found in the origin and the political gravitas of NaMo.

Genesis of Modi ‘Wave’

The origin of Modi Wave as an electoral spectacle in contemporary Indian politics is rooted in the political ascendancy of Narendra Modi as the Chief Minister of Gujarat in 2001. Under his stewardship, the state on the western coast of the country witnessed an unprecedented economic growth rate, the highest among the Indian states between 2002 and 2012. The growth story is popularly known as the ‘Gujarat Model of Development’. The explosive economic growth of Gujarat had twin political impact: one it helped Modi in registering back-to-back victories in state elections and his political stature escalated from an honest and hardworking BJP chief minister to a charismatic and

firebrand Hindutva leader. Two, he crafted an electoral constituency in Gujarat, a majoritarian Hindu electoral support base that scaled the caste-community divide in the state. The Hindu voters not only remained steadfast and loyal to Modi, but also became the torchbearers of his novel brand of right-wing Hindutva politics.

The exemplary governance and development record of Modi in Gujarat resulted in a major change in his political trajectory, catapulting him from state to a national level leader in the BJP hierarchy of central leadership. The failure of the BJP led by L K Advani in uprooting the UPA government in 2009 elections, created a leadership crisis within the saffron party. The vacuum was filled by elevating Modi as the prime ministerial candidate in 2013, and his popularity that was localized to Gujarat, found a national platform to expand its political wings. The Modi wave that was instrumental in painting the electoral map of India saffron consists of three fundamental elements, which is absent in the existing political leadership in the country.

Decoding Modi's Charisma

a) Political Appeal

There has been plenty of charismatic leaders in the political spectrum of India with exceptional powers or qualities. While the charisma of Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was cultivated in the independence movement, Jaiprakash Narayan and Arvind Kejriwal developed their appeal in social movements against corruption in public life. On the other hand, the charisma of Indira Gandhi and Rajeev Gandhi emanated due to political dynasty, as they inherited the proud legacy of Nehru. The iconic status attained by Mayawati in Uttar Pradesh was due to Dalit caste identity assertion, while C. N. Annadurai was worshipped in Tamil Nadu for his Dravidian pride and cultural politics.

On the contrary, the charismatic leadership qualities of Narendra Modi was nurtured through sheer hard work and vision of alternative politics, which resulted in the development of Gujarat and a perceptible improvement in the standard of living of its inhabitants. The self-made credentials of Modi created an instant connect with the aspirational citizens of the country, making him one of the most compelling political leader in India. The media opinion polls conducted for measuring the leadership ratings in India, reveals that Modi continues to be people's first choice as Prime Minister, a vindication of his charismatic personality transcending the normative structure of party politics.

b) Transformational Governance

The characteristic of governance in India before the advent of Modi was transactional and routinized in nature, which pursued an agenda that was narrow in vision and lacked political foresight. The welfare schemes pursued by the Congress were short-term alleviations for people in the margins with no serious attempts for structural reforms. However, Modi government's emphasis was on transformation, as his vision of 'New India by 2022' aimed to make Indian democracy more participatory and inclusive, a partnership of equals with citizens, with a new paradigm of nation building. It completed several infrastructural upgradation initiatives, the prominent being full electrification of India and modernization of India's armed forces, while others are work in progress awaiting fruition. The foreign accolades and awards won by 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan' initiative is a testimony of international recognition of Modi's idea of transforming India.

c) Political Rhetoric

The political astuteness of Modi emanates from his strong oratorical skills, first person narrative and facts, which is a binary of quasi-official facts and negative rhetoric. His political appeal combined with electoral rhetoric decimated the principal parties opposed to the BJP in state electoral competitions and stamped the dominance of the saffron ideology in contemporary Indian politics. The rhetoric of Modi selectively highlighted the negative track record of the Congress and regional parties in state elections, which included allegations of corruption, dynastic politics and minority appeasement. It led to the consolidation of Hindu votes in favour of the BJP, with supporters of other parties shifting their loyalty and became votaries of Modi.

The advent of Modi marked the beginning of a new era of mediatization of Indian politics. The policies and programmes of his government was messaged through various media channels and its impact mass monitored through social media platforms. The 'Modi wave', which had reached its pinnacle in 2014 general elections, seemed to have lost it winning intensity, as the BJP suffered a severe loss in 2015 Bihar elections. The BJP failed to make electoral inroads in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, raising red flags within the party. The decision to demonetize the Indian economy in 2016 for ending black money and the surgical strike on terrorist camps in Pakistan provided the opportunity to arrest the saffron decline. The electoral rhetoric of Modi on the twin issues changed the political narrative and the BJP won a massive mandate in state elections in UP and Uttarakhand, resurrecting the Modi wave once again.

The political playing field in the country has changed significantly in the last five years, but Modi continues to exhibit his political élan and electoral vitality in the battle of supremacy. Unlike 2014 elections, the BJP faces the weight of incumbency and the political onslaught from a resurgent Congress. The **BJP** is banking on Modi's governance record and his electoral rhetoric of national security, patriotism and hindutva as a flank defense strategy to win the elections. However, the BJP's quest for power received a jolt from the Congress, which threw a spanner in the political discourse by announcing a 'Minimum Income Guarantee Scheme' (NYAY). It involves a bank transfer of Rs.6000 per month to 5 crore poorest of the poor (20 percent) families in India. The snub by regional parties in UP, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh, the votaries of 'Grand Alliance' against the BJP, forced the Congress to shift narrative goal post to NYAY promise. The poll issue may have a localized winning advantage for the grand old party and limited impact on the Indian electorate.

To conclude, Modi continues to be the tallest political leader and miles ahead of others in the race for Indian premiership, with the BJP in a pole position in General elections 2019. The myopic alliance of non-saffron parties and the exclusion of the Congress in some states due to the political ambitions of regional satraps has weakened the index of opposition unity. This not provides the BJP an ample scope to leverage it electoral prospects, but also reignites the possibility of another 'Modi wave' in 2019 hustings.

About the author

Praveen Rai is a Political Analyst at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi.