

# An Analysis of the 2019 Indian General Election: Transition in Political Landscape and Its Implications\*

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The outcome of the 2019 Indian general election was unprecedented in many ways. For the first time in history, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government was re-elected. On the other hand, India's main opposition Congress party suffered a second consecutive humiliating defeat. How did this happen? Specifically, what are the major factors behind the success of the BJP? Drawing on survey data, this paper identifies a combination of factors that paved the way for the landslide victory of the ruling party, which are leadership, forging effective alliances, winning the caste equation, and attracting new groups of voters. Now, what is the major implication of this verdict on the Indian party system? Contrary to existing studies which point out that despite the unprecedented rise of the BJP, a new party system is not yet arrived, this paper argues that the electoral outcome of 2019 has contributed to the establishment of the one-party dominant system in India. This system can be characterized as the hegemony of the BJP and the lack of an opposition.

**주제어** India, General Election 2019, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), One-party Dominance System

## I. Introduction

Scholars of Indian politics have been very interested in examining the electoral outcome of India's general elections and its implications for the evolution of the Indian party system. Such scholarly studies can be broadly divided into three distinct periods. The first period can be identified when analysts called Indian polity as the one-party dominance system to describe

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the hegemony of the Congress party. For instance, whereas Kothari (1964) and Morris-Jones (1964)'s studies describe the political landscape of India in the 1950s and 1960s as a Congress-dominated one party system, Weiner (1982)'s scholarly work points out the electoral outcome of the 1980 general election as the restoration of the Congress system in Indian politics.

The second period can be marked when scholars started to argue that the Congress-dominated system no longer existed and a new system had taken over. For example, whereas Hewitt (1989), Pai (1990) and Yadav (1999)'s studies shows that the Congress system is dead as the party no longer dominate India's electoral politics as it did in the previous decades, Pai (1996), Seshia (1998), Verney (2003) and Sridharan (2005)'s studies imply that in the post-1990s era there was a transformation in the Indian party system from "the one party system to the multi-party system". Some studies such as Singh (2001), Kumar (2013) and Swain (2008)'s works on the rise of regional parties and regionalization of Indian Politics in the post-Congress era can also be included in the second period.

The third and the latest period can be identified when scholars began to ask whether the rise of the BJP has contributed a new transformation of the Indian political system in the post-2014 era. And, one conclusion of majority of these studies is a BJP-dominated system has not yet arrived. For example, whereas Jeffrelot and Verniers (2015) and Diwakar (2017) argue that "it is premature to conclude that the Indian party has shifted to a BJP-dominated one", Chhibber and Ostermann (2014) point out that the victory of BJP in 2014 is "somewhat fragile" and additional research "should reveal whether the BJP's recent success is durable". Schakel, Sharma and Swenden (2019) and Tillin (2015)'s studies also suggest that the rise of the ruling party has brought the current party system into crisis. However, they contend that this development does not yet define the consolidation of the BJP.

In continuation with this scholarly tendency, this paper examines the

electoral outcome of the 2019 general election and its implications on the India political system, which has not been studied in depth so far. The 2019 Indian general election was held in seven phases between April to May to constitute the 17th Lok Sabha. The outcome of this election was historic as Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was re-elected after winning a landslide election victory. His party, BJP won 303 seats, further increasing its substantial majority and the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance won 353 seats. On the other hand, the Congress party suffered second consecutive humiliating defeat. The grand old party, which was reduced to just 44 seats in 2014, didn't improve much on its tally in 2019, getting only 52 seats. As a result, India remains without an official opposition party for the second time in a row.

How did this happen? More specifically, what are the major factors behind the success of the BJP in the 2019 general election? The second and third sections of this paper will examine this questions and argues that a combination of factors such as 1) Leadership 2) Forging effective alliances 3) Winning the caste equation and 4) Attracting new groups of voters, has paved the way for the landslide victory for the ruling party. In order to support our arguments, this study employs data from CSDS-Lokniti poll survey and the Election Commission of India, which has been used by leading scholarly studies to explain India's electoral outcomes.

The fourth section of this paper will shed a light on the impact of the verdict of 2019 on Indian party system. In this section, we will first engage with academic discourse on the current party system in India, which mainly highlights that despite the unprecedented rise of the BJP, a new party system is not yet arrived. We challenge this view and argue that the electoral outcome of 2019 has contributed to the establishment of the one-party dominant system in India, which can be characterized as the hegemony of the BJP and the lack of an opposition. The final section of

this paper will provide concluding remarks.

## II. The Election Results: Total Sweep for BJP

The outcome of the 2019 general election results was unprecedented. For the first time in history, the BJP-led government was re-elected; on the other hand, India's main opposition Congress party suffered second consecutive humiliating defeat. As table 1 shows, The BJP-led NDA won 353 (65%) seats, a gain of 17 seats compared to its 2014 results. The BJP itself improved its seats tally and again achieved a majority on its own, winning 303 (55%) seats, 21 seats higher than in 2014 election. The party and its alliance' vote share also improved significantly: while BJP increased its all India vote share to 37%, 6% higher than in 2014, the NDA secured 45% of the total vote share. This was indeed an another remarkable outcome of this election, given that BJP's seat majority in 2014 election was described as 'fragile' (Chhibber and Ostermann, 2014: 148) and 'tenuous' by scholars arguing that the party won that election "on the basis of the lowest vote share (31%) achieved by a party winning a majority seats" (Diwakar, 2017: 337).

On the other hand, the Congress performance was very poor again. The grand old party, which was reduced to just 44 seats in 2014, didn't improve much on its tally in 2019, getting only 52 seats. As a result, India remains without an official opposition party. As per the rules, any Opposition party must have at least 10% of the total Lok Sabha seats (543) to be eligible for the Leader of Opposition (LOP) post. With just 52 seats, the Congress for the second time was unable to become the LOP. It should also be highlighted here that till 2019, the Congress was never out of power for two complete consecutive terms. Hence, the outcome of the 2019 general election proved

**Table 1** Outcome of the 2019 Indian General Elections

Alliance/Party	Seat Won		Seat Share (%)		Vote Share (%)	
	2014	2019	2014	2019	2014	2019
BJP-led NDA alliance	336	353	62	65	39	45
BJP	282	303	52	55	31	37
Congress-led UPA Allies	59	91	11	16	23	24.5
Congress	44	52	8	9	19	19
Other Parties	148	99	27	18	37	29.5

Source: Prepared by Author based on data from the Election Commission of India

a disaster for India's grand old party, which ruled India for decades after independence. Other parties' seats also declined drastically from 148 (27%) seats in 2014 to just 99 (18%) seats in 2019.

The outcome of 2019 general election has also been remarkable given that many scholars and political pundits predicted that it would be hard for BJP to return to power as the party lost the grip in key states where the party swept in the 2014 election (Vaisnav, 2018). As table 2 shows, in the 2014 general elections, the BJP won all seats in Gujrat (26), Rajasthan (25), Delhi (7), Uttarakhand (5) and Himachal Pradesh (4). In Uttar Pradesh (80), Bihar (40), Madhya Pradesh (29), Jharkhand (14) and Chhattisgarh (11), the NDA won 72, 31, 27, 12 and 10 seats respectively. The alliance's performance in other strongholds such as Maharashtra (48), Karnataka (28) and Assam (14) was also remarkable as it won 41, 17 and 7 seats. However, the BJP faced many reverses in state assembly elections held since. For example, the BJP was defeated by the regional parties in state assembly elections, which were held in Delhi and Bihar in 2015. Its strength dipped in Gujrat in 2017 state assembly election. It could not form the government in Karnataka in 2018. Above all, the outcome of state assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh in 2018 was very disappointed for the ruling party. Analyzing above developments, many analysts predicted that

Table 2 BJP's Complete Consolidation in its Stronghold

	Vote Share (%)		Seats	
	2014 Election	2019 Election	2014 Election	2019 Election
Gujrat	59	62.2	26 (out of 26)	26 (out of 26)
Rajasthan*	54.8	58.4	25 (out of 25)	25 (out of 25)
Delhi	46.4	56.5	7 (out of 7)	7 (out of 7)
Himanchal Pradesh	53.2	69.1	4 (out of 4)	4 (out of 4)
Uttarakhand	55.6	61	5 (out of 5)	5 (out of 5)
Haryana	34.9	58	7 (out of 10)	10 (out of 10)
Bihar**	38.8	53.1	31 (out of 40)	39 (out of 40)
Maharashtra***	47.9	51	41 (out of 48)	41 (out of 48)
Madhya Pradesh	53.8	58	27 (out of 28)	27 (out of 28)
Karnataka	43	51.3	17 (out of 28)	26 (out of 28)
Chhattisgarh	49.7	50.7	10 (out of 11)	9 (out of 11)
Uttar Pradesh****	43.5	50.5	73 (out of 80)	64 (out of 80)
Assam*****	40.2	46.7	7 (out of 14)	9 (out of 14)
Jharkhand*****	40.1	55.2	12 (out of 12)	12 (out of 12)

Note: For 2019 General Election:

\*In Rajasthan, BJP contested on 24 seats and has alliance on one seat with Rashtriya Loktantrik Party (RLP).

\*\*In Bihar, BJP contested on 17 seats and has alliance on 23 seat with Janta Dal United (JDU) and Lok Janshakti Party (LJP).

\*\*\*In Maharashtra, BJP contested on 25 seats and has alliance on 23 seat with Shiv Sena.

\*\*In Uttar Pradesh, BJP contested on 78 seats and has alliance on 2 seat with Apna Dal.

\*\*\*\*In Assam, BJP contested on 10 seats and has alliance on 3 seats with Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and Bodoland People's front (BPF).

\*\*\*\*\*In Jharkhand, BJP contested on 13 seats and has alliance on one seat with All Jharkhand Student Union (AJSU).

the BJP will be unable to repeat its 2014 electoral performance.

Nevertheless, the BJP overcome these reverses in the 2019 general election. As Table 2 shows, the BJP was able to increase its vote share in all aforementioned states, which are known as a stronghold of the party. What is more, the ruling party not only maintained its dominance, but also

**Table 3** BJP's Expansion in New States

	Vote Share (%)		Seats	
	2014 Election	2019 Election	2014 Election	2019 Election
West Bengal	17.2	40.2	2 (out of 42)	18 (out of 42)
Odisha	21.3	38.3	1 (out of 21)	8 (out of 21)
Telangana	11.2	19.8	1 (out of 17)	4 (out of 17)

Taken all together, it can be argued that the BJP swept the 2019 general election, which is historic in many ways.

improved its seat tally in many of these states. For example, the BJP again won all the seats in Gujrat, Rajasthan, Delhi, Uttarakhand, and Himanchal Pradesh, wiping out the Opposition completely. It swept Haryana this time by winning all seats. In addition, the ruling party improved its seats tally in Madhaya Pradesh and Karnataka. The BJP-led alliance improved its seats tally in Bihar and Assam. The BJP regained its ground in Chhattisgarh after suffering heavy election defeat in the 2018 assembly election. The alliance' s seats in Maharashtra and Jharkhand is same as in 2014, whereas its vote share crossed 50% for the first time ever. In Uttar Pradesh, it improved its vote share from 43.5% in 2014 to 50.5% in 2018, although its seat tally slightly down from 73 to 64. The point here is this ruling party not only maintained its dominance but also improved its electoral performance in its stronghold in 2019.

In addition to this, the ruling party also succeed to expand its support base in crucial states, where the party was not even a major player until recently. For example, in West Bengal where the party had negligible presence just few years ago, it not only improved its seat tally from only 2 seats to 18 seats, but almost conquered it by securing more than 40% vote share, 23% higher than in 2014 (see Table 3). Similarly, in Odisha, where the BJP was not even the main opposition party until recently, won 8 out of 21 seats, which is 7 seats higher than in 2014. The vote shares of the

party also increased from 21% to 38%. In Southern state Telangana, where nearly 80 BJP candidates lost security deposit in the December 2018 state assembly election, the party registered a surprising result in the 2019 General Election. It won four seats and its vote share increased from 11% to almost 20%.

### III. Explaining the Electoral Outcome

Now question is: How did this happen? What are the major factors behind the success of the ruling party in the 2019 general election? In this section, we shall seek to answer this question systematically. We argue here that though a variety of factors influenced the electoral outcomes in 2019, a combination of four factors—a strong prime ministerial candidate, the formation of effective alliances, winning the caste equation and attracting new groups of voters—were the most crucial factors, which played major roles in the success of the BJP's landslide victories. We consider these factors in successive sections.

#### 1. Leadership Matters

One of the most significant factors for BJP's landslide win is it had a prime ministerial candidate who has mass appeal among the Indian voters. In previous electoral studies, scholars have tried to demonstrate the positive impact of a strong prime ministerial candidate on electoral performance (Jaffrelot, 2015; Chhibber and Ostermann, 2014; Chhibber and Verma, 2017). Such scholarly explanation is also useful to understand the outcomes of the 2019 General Election. Indeed, BJP's prime ministerial candidate, Narendra Modi's charismatic leadership influenced the voters to incline towards BJP



**Table 4** Preference for Narendra Modi as PM among voters of various parties

	April-May 2014 (%)	April-May 2019 (%)
BJP voters	80	87
BJP allies' voters	60	73
Congress voters	4	7
Congress allies' voters	12	8
Mahagathbandhan voters	8	11
Left parties' voters	21	29
Other voters	16	26

Source: CSDS-Lokniti pre-poll survey

vis-à-vis Congress, which opted for not announcing its prime ministerial candidate. It is significant that in comparison with 2014, in 2019 Modi's appeal increased among BJP voters, BJP allies' voters, and even non-BJP voters, including voters of Congress party Mahagathbandhan alliance and left parties (see Table 4). Hence, the preference for Mr. Modi as prime minister among both BJP and non-BJP voters significantly contributed to a landslide victory for the ruling party. Such leadership factor was widely endorsed by many analysts as one noted "the 2019 election may have driven by personality" (Mishra, 2019).

States-level analysis reinforces the above claim. For example, the leadership factor played a major role to overcome anti-incumbency factor in BJP-ruled Hindi-speaking states in North India, where the party won the majority of parliamentary seats in 2014. For example, due to the popularity of Narendra Modi, the ruling party was able to increase its vote share in Uttar Pradesh from 43.5% to 50.5 % and won 64 out of 80 seats, even though the BJP-led state government to be fast losing popularity. Apart for prime minister's mass appeal among BJP supporters in this state, he was also popular in the state's anti-BJP alliance camp. It is manifested as preference for Mr. Modi as prime minister among voters of

anti-BJP alliance, namely *Mahagathbandhan* increased from 8% in 2014 to 11% in 2019 (see Table 4). In Jharkhand also, the popularity of Mr. Modi, combined with nationalism, defied the current anti-incumbency against the BJP-led government (Dayal, 2019). In addition, the Modi factor was also a deciding factor in Haryana, where the BJP-led government was facing anti-incumbency. For example, despite anger against the state government, about six of every 10 voters wanted to see BJP's Narendra Modi again as Prime Minister (Pal and Jain, 2019). As a result, The BJP for the first time won all seats in the State, securing a 58% vote share, 11 % higher than in 2014.

The popularity of Prime Minister was also a decisive factor in other major states. For example, in Bihar, where BJP-led alliance won almost all seats, the Modi's appeal among the voter was one of the major factors behind the unprecedented outcome in favor of the alliance. It can be understood from the fact that six out of ten voters wanted to see Modi as the next Prime Minister. Moreover, over half of those (51%) who voted for the BJP and over one-fourth (28%) of those who voted for the BJP's allies, namely the JDU and LJP were of the opinion that they wouldn't have voted for the BJP-led alliance had Mr. Modi not been the prime ministerial candidate of the alliance (Ranjan, Singh and Alam, 2019). In Karnataka, Mr. Modi was the major reason for the BJP's surge in the state. For example, in post-poll survey more than half of the respondents in the State hoped that Prime Minister Narendra Modi would be reelected. 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 (Veenadevi and Nagesh, 2019). This explains how the Modi factor was crucial in winning these states.

The Modi-factor also helped the ruling party to bounce back in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, just five months after losing power

to the Congress in 2018 state assembly elections. For example, in Madhya Pradesh, where the BJP won 28 out of 29 parliamentary seats in 2019, there was a strong desire among voters to see Narendra Modi back as Prime Minister. As one post-poll survey indicated that close to three-fifths (59%) of the respondents say that they would like to see Mr. Modi back as Prime Minister whereas only about a third (31%) said they favored Congress president Rahul Gandhi (Sisodia, 2019). Similarly, Modi factor played an important role in winning 25 out of 25 seats for the BJP in Rajasthan, where the BJP-led government was voted out of power just five months ago. According to one post-poll survey, over three-fifths wanted to see Mr. Modi return as Prime Minister as opposed to just one-fifth who wanted Rahul Gandhi as the next Prime Minister (Lodha, 2019). In Chhattisgarh also, most people (48%) wanted to see Narendra Modi as the Prime Minister once again, which resulted in the BJP's landslide victory in the state.

In sum, it can be said that the Modi-factor was one of the most significant factors behind the success of the ruling party in the 2019 general election.

## 2. Forging Effective Alliances

Scholars tell us that the formation of effective alliance has been key to winning general elections in India since the emergence of a multi-party system in the 1990s (Sridharan, 2005; Kumar, 2013). Forging effective alliances also mattered in 2019. Indeed, a close examination of this dynamic suggests that the ruling party had upper hand vis-a-vis the main opposition party, Congress in terms of forming strong and effective regional alliances to win more parliamentary seats.

For example, the BJP, which is known for the upper caste party in Bihar, formed an effective alliance in the state, with influential regional parties like Janata Dal United (JDU), which has a stronghold in non-Yadav

Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and Most Backward Castes (MBCs) and Lok Janshakti Party (LJP), which has a stronghold in Dalit, especially numerically significant Paswan community (Thakur, 2019). The ruling party rightly sensed after the defeat of the 2015 state assembly election that without an effective alliance in the state, it would be thought for the party to retain power. Hence, in order to accomplish its ultimate aim to win more seats for NDA, the ruling party bent over backwards to accommodate its allies in the state by agreeing to contest a less number of seats than what it won in the 2014 general election. The electoral result was unprecedented given that the NDA was able to win 39 out of 40 seats, a gain of 8 from the 2014 tally. It also claimed nearly 53 % of the vote share, which is higher than last time.

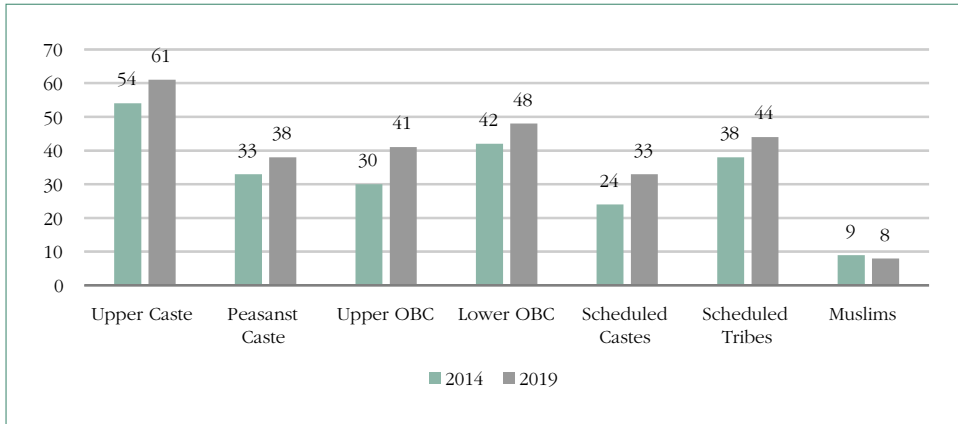
Equally significant, the BJP also resolved differences with other key allies on time which helped the party registered massive win the crucial states. For example, in Maharashtra, after an impressive NDA's win in the 2014 general election, the BJP and its ally – Shiv Sena – parted ways for the state assembly election, which was held five months later in that year. Since then, their relationship deteriorated. However, the BJP was still able to form an alliance in Maharashtra for the 2019 general election, in spite of its serious differences with the Shiv Sena. Due to this alliance formation, the NDA registered a landslide win, given that the alliance was able to win 41 of the 48 seats and claimed nearly 51% of the vote share, which is higher than last time. In Assam also, the BJP retained its alliance with the Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) and the Bodoland People's Front (BPF), in spite of serious differences over the Citizenship Amendment Bill. And, the result was unprecedented, given that the ruling was able to win 9 out of the 14 seats in the state, a gain of two from the 2014 tally.

One the other hand, the Congress failed to build a strong and effective pre-poll alliances to ensure that the anti-incumbency vote did not split among different parties. For instance, the party failed to forge alliance with

anti-BJP parties, such as Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and Samajwadi Party (SP) in Uttar Pradesh, All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) and Left Parties in West Bengal and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Delhi. The major reason behind the absence of Congress-included alliances in these states was the grand old party didn't show much enthusiasm to accommodate its allies. Even where the party formed alliances, as some scholars put it, "the chemistry among workers and party supporters was not positive, resulting in a shaky alliance on the ground and limited vote transfer" (Palshikar et al., 2019). This happened in states like Karnataka, Maharashtra, Bihar, Jharkhand, where the party had pre-poll alliances, but it failed to yield the desired result. Hence, the effective alliance formation was another factor which has impacted the electoral performance significantly.

### 3. Winning the Caste Equation

Caste equation has also been played a major role in the electoral outcome of the Indian general election (Varshney, 2000; Jaffrelot, 2013). In the 2019 general election, the BJP won this caste equation. The BJP, which is known to be an upper-caste party (Chhibber, 1997), was not only able to consolidate its vote share, but also managed to increase support among most social groups. For example, the ruling party enhanced its vote share in its traditional stronghold in upper caste from 54% in 2014 to 61% in 2019 (See figure 1). In addition, the party was able to make gains in peasant castes such as Marathas and Patels, who are dominant in crucial states like Maharashtra and Gujarat: its vote shares in this social group increased from 33% in 2014 to 38% in 2019. What is more, the BJP also consolidated its vote share in upper OBC (from 30% to 41%), which are known to be the powerful force behind the mobilization of anti-BJP and anti-Upper Caste votes, especially in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (Jaffrelot, 2000). The party also



Source: National Election Study 2014 and 2019.

Note: Peasant caste is middle caste like Jats, Marathas, Patels etc.

**Figure 1** Vote Share for the BJP among different groups (in %)

secured 41% vote share of lower OBC, 11% higher than in 2014. Above all, the party made deep inroads into social groups, including Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), which had long been known to vote mainly for the Congress or other regional parties. Indeed, the ruling party significantly improved its vote share in SCs from 24% in 2014 to 33% in 2019 and in STs from 38% in 2014 to 44% in 2019 (See Figure 1).

Equally significant, there was a consolidation of Hindu votes in favor of the BJP. For example, as table shows 5 the BJP was able to enhance its Hindu votes in Hindi heartland states such as Uttar Pradesh (from 48% to 60%), Bihar (44% to 65%), Madhya Pradesh (54% to 62%), Rajasthan (57% to 63%), and Delhi (52% to 66%). Equally significant, the BJP-led alliance increased its vote share in its stronghold western coast states such as Maharashtra (54% to 62%) and Gujrat (64% to 67%). In southern Indian state like Karnataka the alliance's vote share increased from 46% to 58%. Above all, the ruling party was also able to enhance its vote share in India's eastern coast, where the party has not been a major political force. For example, BJP enhanced its Hindu

**Table 5** Hindu Vote for BJP-led Alliance

State	2014 Election	2019 Election
Utter Pradesh	48	60
Maharashtra	54	62
Bihar	44	65
Gujrat	64	67
Madhya Parades	59	60
Rajasthan	57	63
Karnataka	46	58
West Bengal	21	57
Odisha	22	40
Assam	58	70

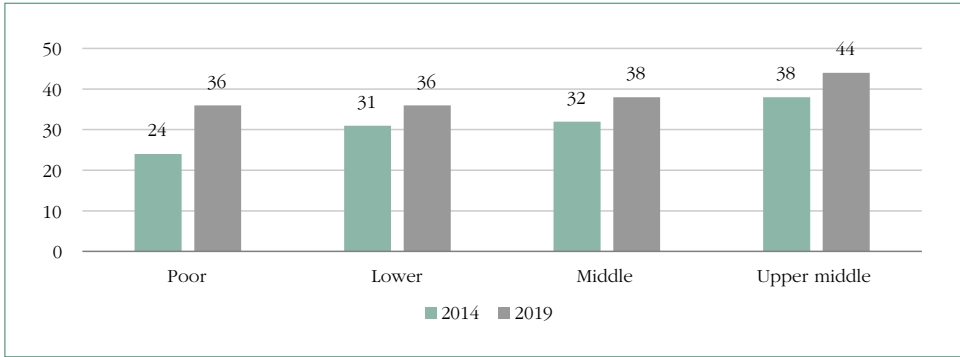
Source: Lokniti Post Poll Surveys in 2014 and 2019.

vote share in West Bengal from 21% to 57%, in Odisha 22% to 40%, and in Assam 58% to 70%.

Such consolidation of the Hindu vote share resulted in the maintenance of the BJP's dominance in its stranglehold as well as the winning significant number of parliamentary seats in those states where BJP was a minor player. In sum, the ruling party's caste arithmetic was better than its opposition party, which in turn led to a remarkable victory for the party.

#### 4. Ruling Party's New Vote Bank: Women, Poor and Youth

Apart from leadership, alliance formation, and caste arithmetic, as we saw in the previous sections, other factor which significantly influenced the electoral outcome was the emergence of particular groups as a vote banks for the ruling party. Previous national election studies show that the BJP has traditionally received less support from female voters than male voters (Deshpande, 2009). However, the party relatively overcome such dilemma



Source: National Election Study 2014 and 2019.

**Figure 2** The Improvement of the BJP's Vote Share across all Economic Classes

in this year election. It is significant that for the first time in the Indian general election, the voter turnout for women and men was almost equal – 66.68% and 66.79%, respectively. And, with the impact of the government's schemes such as the Ujjwala Yojana, which is directed at women, the BJP were able to attract more women voters to them in 2019. It is evident is a post-poll survey, which reveals that more women voted for the ruling party (36%) in 2019, compared to the 2014 election (29%) (Attri and Jain, 2019).

Equally significant, the ruling party also increased its vote share across all economic classes- but the most among the lower and poor-class voters, which had long been known to vote mainly for the Congress (Jaffrelot and Verniers, 2009). As Figure shows 2, in the 2019 general election, the BJP witnessed a surge in support for the party among the poor and lower economic classes. For example, the BJP not only increased its vote share in its traditional strongholds, the middle and the upper middle class voters from 32% and 38% in 2014 to 38% and 44% in 2019, but also significantly enhanced its vote share among the poor and lower-class voters from 24% and 31% in 2014 to 36% in 2019 respectively. Accordantly, it can be said that while 2014 election witnessed a surge in support for the BJP among



poor voters (Sridharan, 2014), the 2019 election saw further bridging of the class divide (Kumar and Gupta, 2019). Indeed, poor emerged as a new vote bank for the ruling party.

Last but not least, youth voters emerged as a crucial vote bank for the BJP in this election. Prime Minister Modi and his party especially focused on youth voters by initiating several campaign programmes—such as a digital program ‘Youth with Modi’—to attract the youth before the 2019 general election. Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself started focusing on the youth much before the election. For example, in his independence day speech in 2017, he said that 2018 would be an important year as all those who were born at the start of the century would turn 18 and should get registered as voters. The point is that the BJP was keenly aware of the importance youth voters and tried hard to get support of this group. And, the result was in the favor of the ruling party as the youth voted for the BJP in large numbers. For example, in the 2019 general election the BJP emerged as the most preferred party among the first-time young voters, which accounted for around 84 million in this election. It is evident in one post-poll survey which shows that in the 18–22 age group, 41% voted for the BJP in the 2019 general election, which is four percent higher than the party’s national vote share of 37.4% (Mishra and Negi, 2019).

Taken altogether, it can be argued that the emergence of particular groups, including women, poor and youth as crucial vote banks for the ruling party also contributed to the massive win for the party.

#### IV. Implications: Towards One-party Dominant System?

In the previous section, we have explained the verdict of the 2019 general election. In this section, we will examine the impact of this

election results on the Indian political system. Here, we argue that while BJP's victory in 2014 paved the way for the emergence of the one-party dominant system, the 2019's verdict has contributed to further development of such system. Indeed, the outcome of 2014 was a watershed moment for Indian politics, given that it was the first time since the 1984 general election that a party had won majority of seats to form the government without the support of other regional parties. However, despite the massive win of the BJP, many scholars argued that the party's 2014 victory was not a complete triumph. (Jaffrelot and Verniers, 2015: 28). They argued despite the landslide victory, the BJP is not yet a "system-defining" party (Diwakar, 2017: 340). Some suggests that the party's 2014 victory is "somewhat fragile" (Chhibber and Ostermann, 2014: 148-149).

These scholarly arguments were mainly based on three following notions: First, the BJP's victory is not a complete triumph, given that the party formed the government in 2014 on the basis of the lowest ever vote share, which was 31% (Diwakar, 2017: 337; Jaffrelot and Verniers, 2015: 28). Second, the BJP's 2014 victory was concentrated in the so-called Hindi belt states such as Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Himanchal Pradesh, and Delhi – plus the western states of Gujrat and Maharashtra (Sridharan, 2014: 21; Diwakar, 2017: 332). So the argument goes, despite a significant increase of vote share in non-Hindi speaking states like West Bengal, the party failed to expand its seats share, which demonstrates the limitations of the party. (Jaffrelot and Verniers, 2015: 29). Third, the ruling party could face a serious challenge to sustain its electoral success, if its opponents establish a strong secular pre-poll alliance against it (Chhibber and Ostermann, 2014: 148; Diwakar, 2017: 340; Varshney, 2014: 35; Farooqui and Sridharan, 2014). So the argument goes, in future elections, the BJP dependence on the support of regional parties is likely to increase as it will face anti-incumbency (Schakel et al., 2019: 345).

The ruling party's electoral performance in 2019 has compelled to reconsider all three above notions for the following reasons. First, the BJP has remarkably improved its vote share from 31% in 2014 to 37% in 2019 (See Table 1). A 6% percent increase in ruling party's vote share is first since 1984. Second, the party not only maintained its dominance in the Hindi belt and the Western region, but also succeed to expand its support base in crucial Eastern states like West Bengal and Orissa, where BJP won 42% and 38% seat share respectively (See Table 3). The BJP's landslide win in Karnataka and its impressive performance in Telangana also demonstrates that the party has cultivated a pan Indian appeal. Above all, the 2019 election also proved that even if BJP's opponents build a strong pre-poll alliance against it (as in case of Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Karnataka), they cannot defeat the ruling party easily.

In addition to this, two other developments are also contributing to the establishment of one-party dominant system in India. First, the rapid decline of the main opposition party in comparison with the ruling party. As Table 6 shows, the Congress party's electoral performance in 2014 and 2019 was so poor in comparison to the BJP and hence, the gap between the main opposition party and the ruling party was too big. Consequently, like in 2014, the Congress party has once again fallen short of the required number to stake claim to the post of LOP in 2019. That happened for a first time in Indian electoral history, which shows the BJP's complete hegemony. What is more, the scale of the main opposition party decline in 2019 is further illustrated by the fact that while the Congress party failed to open account in 17 states-union territories, it just won one seat each in many crucial states such as Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, and Karnataka. This development indeed led to the one-party dominance in India.

Equally significant, the poor performance of the regional parties has

**Table 6** A Comparison of Electoral Performance of the Largest Party and Runner-up Party, 1991-2019

Year	Largest Party			Runner-up Party		
	Party Name	Number of Seats	Seat Share %	Party Name	Number of Seats	Seat Share %
1991	Congress	232	45	BJP	120	23
1996	BJP	161	30	Congress	140	26
1998	BJP	182	34	Congress	141	26
1999	BJP	182	34	Congress	114	21
2004	Congress	145	27	BJP	138	25
2009	Congress	206	38	BJP	116	21
2014	BJP	282	52	Congress	44	8
2019	BJP	303	55	Congress	52	9

Source: The Election Commission of India

demonstrated that their impact on national politics has decline drastically, which in turn has also paved way for the establishment of the one-party dominant system. It is significant to mention that regional parties' influence on national politics had been predominant from 1989 to 2014, when they played a major role in the formation of coalition governments at the national level (see Table 7). Scholars described it as a transition toward a new “regional-based” multiparty system in which the major all-India parties compete for power at the center (Pai, 1996; Sridharan, 2003). However, this system is no more relevant at the current political landscape of India. The BJP has formed the two successive majoritarian governments since 2014, where the role of regional parties is marginal. What is more, the dramatic decline of powerful regional parties in Hindi-belt such as BJS, SP, RJD and the long and steady demise of the left parties in India has further contributed to the emergence of the BJP as a dominate party in the country.

**Table 7** Government Formation, 1989-2019

Elections Year	Government formed	Dependency on Regional Parties
1989	National Front coalition	Yes
1991	Congress (minority government)	minority government
1996	United Front coalition	Yes
1998	BJP (coalition)	Yes
1999	BJP-led NDA coalition	Yes
2004	Congress-led UPA coalition	Yes
2009	Congress-led UPA coalition	Yes
2014	BJP-led majority government	No
2019	BJP-led majority government	No

## V. Concluding Remarks

This article has so far analyzed the outcome of the 2019 Indian general election. It examined that how Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government was re-elected and India's main opposition Congress party suffered second consecutive humiliating defeat. In doing so, the paper demonstrated that a combination of four factors such as leadership, ruling party's formation of effective alliances, winning the caste equation and attracting new groups of voters paved the way for the landslide victory for the ruling party. It also explained the major implication of this verdict on the Indian party system and argued that the electoral outcome of 2019 has contributed to the establishment of the one-party dominant system in India, which can be characterized as the hegemony of the ruling party and the lack of an opposition.

Now what the future holds? The second massive victory of Narendra Modi-led BJP is indeed a sea change in the Indian politics. The 2019's election outcome has significantly contributed to a transition in the Indian political landscape. Hence, I suggest future research should investigate

how this development influence India's domestic economic policy and foreign relations. It is expected that at domestic level, a strong majoritarian government-led by the right wing party will continue to implement its pro-business economic agenda. On international front, New Delhi is likely to embark on a policy of more pro-active engagement in the international affairs. Future research needs to analyze these issues.

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