

THE SIXTEENTH GENERAL ELECTIONS (2014) AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN INDIA

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India is considered to be the largest democracy of the world. It takes great pride in its incessant ,uninterrupted journey of democratic governments. Its stable political system has been a big achievement .From 1951 to 2014 it has witnessed sixteen general elections.From One Party Dominance to Coalition Politics, from over powering majority to hung parliaments,from stable governments to a decade of political instability India has seen many ups and downs but still held firmly to its democratic ideals and principles. It has upheld to the ideology enshrined in its constitution, despite undergoing nearly hundred constitutional amendments. The 21st century in India too has indicated a major shift of political inclination of its voters-from the Congress's liberal, moderate, and adoption of western model of governance to a some what Swadeshi, right wing populism and the growing popularity of BJP since the late 90s has urged political analysts to review its electoral journey. In this study, an attempt is made to briefly describe a short summary of all 15 General Elections held from 1951 to 2009 at the same time elaborating on the Sixteenth General Elections of 2014 and its significance in Indian Politics.

Brief description of Prior General Elections held from 1951 to 2009

After independence, for the newly formed government the rooting of democracy and the initiation of the electoral process in India seemed the most important task among the several areas of progress and achievement. Thus democracy took a giant step forward with the **first general election in 1951-52**. These elections were the biggest experiment in democracy anywhere in the world. The elections were held on the basis of universal adult franchise, with all those twenty-one years of age of older having the right to vote. The years from **1951 to 1964,(a term of Three General Elections)** during the prime minister ship of Nehru, were those of maturity and achievement. They were marked by high hopes and aspirations, optimism and confidence. J. L. Nehru remarked “ Even though we have a multitude of problems, and difficulties surround us and often appear to overwhelm, there is the air of hope in this country, a faith in our future and a certain reliance on the basic principles that have guided us thus far. There is the breath of the dawn, the feeling of the beginning of a new era in the long and checkered history of India’. This phase saw One Party Dominance of the Congress party.

The **Fourth general elections** to the Lok Sabha and the state assemblies, held in February 1967, had a radical impact on Indian politics. It has been called as “the turning point of Indian political scene”. It has been named as “the First Real General Elections” “the Second Revolution” and even “Revolution by Ballot”. These elections marked the end of one-party dominance,(only temporarily though) a process that had been under way for sometime and ushered in a new era of political instability, coalition politics and uncertain political alignments.However,this period saw the split of Congress into two organizationally separate parties , thereby placing in grave jeopardy the Congress majority in the Lok Sabha itself. In December 1970 Mrs. Gandhi whose New Congress government depended on parliamentary support from other parties, chose the issue of the purses and privileges of the erstwhile princes as the occasion to dissolve Lok Sabha and to go to the country – for the Lok Sabha’s first mid-term election.

The **Fifth General Elections 1971** gave Congress a two-thirds majority which it hadn’t achieved even during the times of Nehru. It restored the Congress party to its dominant position in Indian politics and with it the One Party dominance. However this period saw some anti-democratic and fascist measures, in June 1975 Mrs. Gandhi

imposed national emergency and the economy, the polity and the credibility of Indira's leadership and Congress government started going downhill. The emergency concentrated unlimited state and party power in the hands of the prime minister to be exercised through a small coterie of politicians and bureaucrats around her. During the emergency the term of Lok Sabha was extended by one year so the fifth Lok Sabha continued till 1977.

The **Sixth general elections of 1977** brought the First Non Congress Government of India, the Janata Party, apparently a single party but in reality a combination of many parties, formed the government. The political momentum of the regime was lost by the end of 1977 and the uneasy coalition that was Janata Party began to disintegrate, though the government, remained in power till July 1979. Thus the Janata party experiment which lasted for two and a half years had failed.

The **Seventh General Election 1979** once again brought Indira Gandhi on the post of the prime minister and Congress was restored to its old position as the dominant party. On October 31st, 1984, Indira Gandhi was assassinated and Rajiv Gandhi became the new Prime Minister.

The **Eighth General Elections 1984** held under the shadow of Indira Gandhi's assassination, the 1984 elections gave a three-fourth majority to the Congress. In spite of the highest ever majority in Lok Sabha and the One party dominance of the Congress Rajiv's government could not keep up to the public expectations. His relative lack of political experience, unfamiliarity with nuances of grass-root mobilization, party organization once again made the political wind flow in the opposite direction of Congress, in the impending General Elections.

The **Ninth General Elections : 1989-1991** initiated era of coalition politics in India and under the prime ministership of VP Singh National Front formed the government. It was again for the first time that after elections no single party was able to form a government of its own at the Centre. For the first time, there was the issue of 'hung parliament and the president's role in the immediate aftermath of the election attained an unprecedented prominence. And it was for the first time a minority government was instituted at the Centre.

The **Tenth General Elections 1991** verdict was significant as it portrayed the transitional politics that India had been through since 1990s. A phenomena of hung parliament, coalition politics and emergence of multi-party system had evolved. After Rajiv's death, the Congress party opted for non-charismatic leaders like Sharad Pawar, Arjun Singh and P.V.Narsimha Rao who was unanimously elected as the leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party and invited by the President Mr. Venkatraman to form the government. Initially a minority government was formed by him but soon he was successful in breaking alliances of other fronts and parties like Shiv Sena, Janata Dal (Ajit), Telugu Desham, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha came to his aid and the Congress got the majority it required to continue in Office and it did last a full five year term.

In the **Eleventh General Elections 1996** the Indian voter once again did not give clear majority to any political party and there was again a Hung Parliament in India for the third time consecutively. But the poll verdict gave a remarkable success to BJP which secured 162 seats and emerged as the biggest party in Lok Sabha. The President invited Atal Bihari Vajpayee, to form the government but it could not get the desired majority, hence before facing the vote of no-confidence Motion, Vajpayee government resigned. Thus the BJP government lasted for only 13 days i.e from 16 May to 1st June '96, followed by a United Front government with H.D. Deve Gowda as prime minister supported by Congress and CPM. The eleventh Lok Sabha was again short lived with its tenure being only one year, six months and nineteen days. Its dissolution led to another mid-term election, which also happened to be the fourth mid-term election of Lok Sabha.

The **Twelfth General Elections 1998** again brought a hung parliament. The BJP emerged as the largest party in India with 182 seats. Its pre-poll allies like Shiv Sena, Shiromani Akali Dal, AIADMK, Trinamool Congress and many others helped it to win 255 seats and with support of Haryana lok dal, parties from North Eastern states it acquired 274 votes in the Confidence Motion to continue in office. Jayalalitha's withdrawal of support in April 1999 led to the government losing the vote of confidence just by one vote and dissolution of Lok Sabha.

In the **Thirteenth General Election 1999** the BJP's alliance with other parties was named National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and 24 parties joined hands to form this coalition. A new government was formed with Vajpayee again at its helm. Though the coalition politics of 'mere existence' continued in this phase too and the crisis of 'good governance' continued. No party seemed to be in a position of gaining absolute majority to provide the much desired change. Analysts professed that the period of one party dominance was over and a period of coalition governments had begun.

The **Fourteenth General Elections (2004-2009) and Fifteenth General Elections (2009-2014)** returned the Indian National Congress, to power after being out of office for eight years, and its alliance was named United Progressive Alliance. Sonia Gandhi, leader of the Congress party and Chairperson of the Steering Committee of

UPA, surprised the nation by denying the prime minister ship. She nominated Manmohan Singh to be the UPA prime minister.

Sixteenth General Election (2014)-An Overview of its impact in Indian Politics-

The Sixteenth Indian general election has been a landmark in the annals of Indian political system. From 2004 to April 2014 the UPA government ruled the nation for a decade. The first tenure of Manmohan Singh government proved to be quite successful despite some controversies with its allies. Some major landmarks were achieved in its name like the US Nuclear Deal, the defeat of the No Confidence motion against it, due to withdrawal of support by the Left against the US Deal, the successful and popular MNREGA Scheme, the Right to Information Act -all won the appreciation of the Indian public and government was hailed by the voters to bring it back to office for a second term. Manmohan Singh became the first prime minister since Jawaharlal Nehru, to be re-elected after completing a full five-year term.

However things changed rapidly and this journey proved to be a rough ride for the Congress led UPA government in this tenure. It weathered one storm after another. Its allies from the beginning started falling out. DMK, Trinamool Congress, VCK, AIMIM and JVM - pulled out support one after another. The main achievement of the government was that it survived till its full term despite all withdrawals. Despite its best intentions, the Congress has failed to erase the impression of a government under siege. Just two months after the UPA II was formed, Many Congress leaders criticised Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for rushing into the flawed " joint Indo-Pak statement " at Sharm-el-Sheikh in Egypt. Even before Singh was able to settle down, a slew of scams in the form of Commonwealth Games, Adarsh Housing Society, 2G Spectrum, Coal block allocations came as a bolt from the blue. Perhaps for the first time in Parliament history, an entire session was washed out following the deadlock between the government and the Opposition on the latter's demand for a Joint Parliamentary Committee probe into the 2G scam. The government was also criticized for its failure on foreign policy front with Pakistan, China, Sri Lanka and Maldives taking New Delhi for granted. BJP chief Rajnath Singh summed up the situation saying: " The UPA has failed on all fronts, be it economy, national security or foreign relations. The only thing the government will be remembered for are the scams that took place in its reign." The first tenure of the Manmohan Singh government was largely successful, but the UPA-II government seemed to have undone the good work done in the past. It delivered a healthy 8.5% GDP growth rate for most of his tenure. However, the corruption scams tainted the legacy of this government.

Amidst this tainted image of the UPA government and its ministers, the extra constitutional role of Sonia Gandhi in the government's integral matters, the blackmail politics of its allies, the silent, ever loyalist, non charismatic image of Manmohan Singh, led to the disillusionment of the masses with the Congress. Simultaneously the emergence of popular, fiery orator, charismatic leader, the three time successful Chief Minister of Gujarat Narendra Modi just swept the crowds and lured the youth as well as the economically backward section of society to a new hope of bringing "Aache Din" a new beginning for India. The masses believed that he could change India's destiny and brighten its future just like he did with his state Gujarat. It appeared the nation was enveloped with a Modi wave and in all his election rallies crowd just turned out in huge number.

The Sixteenth Indian general election, 2014 was held in nine phases from 7 April to 12 May 2014. As per Election Commission records 814.5 million people were eligible voters. Around 23.1 million or 2.7% of the total eligible voters were aged 18-19 years. The average election turnout over was around 66.40%, the highest ever in the history of Indian general elections. The election results were declared on 16 May 2014. The National Democratic Alliance won a sweeping victory, taking 336 seats. BJP achieved an absolute majority with 282 seats and it was the first time since the 1984 General Elections that a party had won enough seats to govern without the support of other parties. The UPA won 59 seats, out of which 44 were won by the Congress, its worst defeat in a general election. The Indian National Congress was unable to attain even 10% of the seats to become the official opposition party in India.

On 26th May 2014 Narendra Modi took office as the 14th prime minister of India, the first ever sitting C.M.(Gujarat) who became Prime Minister of India. These elections have been hailed as "historic" and "epochal"²³ by Political Analysts.

Significance of this election:-

- Resounding Victory of BJP With a clear majority
- Emergence of BJP as a truly National Party, winning seats throughout the country
- Worst defeat of Indian National Congress, almost wiped out
- Election was not a structural shift but realignment in Indian Politics.
- Denotes a transformation of Voter's loyalties.
- Historic turnout of Voters-66.4%,with the highest number of youth voters turnout.
- BJP made significant inroads into a number of states like Gujrat,M.P., Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand etc.
- BJP strengthened its base in not only its traditional vote bank of Upper Castes, Middle Class but also widened it to OBC,SC,ST category too which was earlier affiliated with Congress Party
- Anti incumbency, economic is governance, charges of corruption in multi scams against UPA-2 went in favour of BJP which in turn highlighted Congress government as "inept", "leaderless" and "paralyzed".
- Emergence of Narendra Modi as a powerful leader who inspired and instilled a new faith, confidence and optimism in the youth as well as the masses. The "Modi Wave" was undeniable and the huge turnout of voters and success of BJP can only be attributed to his persona.
- BJP's strategy, election agenda and the "crest of Hindu Nationalism" it rode on , along with no alternative from Opposition all paved way for the government formation by NDA.

The NDA government under the leadership of Narendra Modi started with a promise of bringing Social, Economic and Political Change in the country. It emphasized on job creation and skill development. The Swachh Bharat Campaign focussed on cleanliness and hygiene. The Smart City Projects was launched to redevelop and revitalize the urban cities. The Make India ,Start Up India was initiated to encourage manufacturing in India. The Jan Dhan Yojnato connect more and more peoples from the banking services.Apart from the above domestic policies, Modi government has given considerable attention to foreign policy and relations. He travelled extensively in this period and revitalised terms with many foreign leaders. He took tough stands at World Trade Organisations. The highlight of his foreign trips was his public speeches to Indian diaspora. The initial goodwill gesture of inviting Pakistan prime minister Nawaz Sharif to the oath ceremony suggested Modi 's desire to improve relations with Pakistan. His success and popularity overseas and with major nations leaders has boosted nationalism and a sense of pride in the minds of common man.

At present the NDA government under Modi's leadership is gripping the nation with generally mixed emotions from different sectors. A huge section of society looks up to the dynamic, bold, honest leader who in the present scenario seemed to be the only hope to change their lives by bringing development and prosperity to the nation. But on the other hand a group of social scientists, economists and opposition leaders criticize the governmentfor undermining democratic institutions and bleaker picture of economic state than the government projected in its records.

Thus the sixteenth general elections proved to be a watershed in the Indian Politics.The Congress regime,which for so long had dominated the Indian politics, was badly mauled and humbled. It has shown signs of re emergence of One Party Dominance, with BJP playing the shots at national level and spreading its wings to even those states which had not accepted it earlier. Its impact on Indian politics cannot be denied and it would be interesting to see its outcome in years to follow.

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