# ELECTORAL PERFORMANCE OF INC IN NATIONAL ELECTION OF INDIA 2019: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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**Abstract**

Elections play a pivotal role in any democratic country. It is an important democratic process of the citizen to elect their ruler. Political parties are a political association with specific goal and agenda which seeks political power through elections. One such party is Indian National Congress. Indian national congress (INC) is one the oldest political party in India which was formed in the year 1885. The party had played a major role in India's independence movement. After independence also INC continued to playa vital role in Indian politics and it had ruled the country continuously from 1952 to till 1967. After 1967 the influenced of INC was gradually declined and itstarts losing various state legislative elections. Presently the role of INC in Indian politics is very pathetic at both state and national levels. In the general elections of 2019 the performance of INC was very poor. It won only 52 seats which shares only 19.01 percent of the total vote polled. Therefore, the present study will focus on the electoral performance of INC in general elections of 2019, also it will discuss about various factors that have influenced on the electoral performance of INC in this election. The study will be historical, descriptive, and analytical in nature and will be based on secondary data.

**Keywords:** Election, INC, Political party and India.

## INTRODUCTION:

Indian National Congress (INC) is oldest and largest political party in India which has been playing a crucial role in Indian politics since pre-independence period. A. O. Hume a retired British officer established the party on 28th December 1885. Initially, INC performed its role as a public organization and act as a channel between people of India and colonial rulers. The party was remained loyal to the colonial rulers in its first two decades due to lack of strong organizational structure and a public support (Diwakar 2017:38). Prominent role of INC was noticed only after 1915 when Gandhi joined the party. Under the leadership of Gandhi, the party started to play important role as a strong political organization and also represented broader interest of the people of India. It played a pivotal role in anti-colonial movement against British from 1920s to 1947and after independence it became the largest political party of India.

After independence, the INC played a unique role in Indian politics. Because of it's prominent role in freedom movement the party used to get mass support from the people and it continuously played a dominant role in Indian politics till 1967. The INC won around three-fourths of the seats in the general elections of Indian in 1952, 1957 and 1962. Apart from that it also ruled almost every states of India until 1967 (Jayal, Mehta, 2010: 242). Kothari stated that phase as of congress regimes as a "system of one-party dominance" (Diwakar, 2017:45). After 1967 the dominant role of INC gradually declined and it start losing power in both centre and the state. Thus, this study has made an attempt to discuss about the Electoral performance of INC and the various socio-political factors that effects on the Electoral performance of INC in national elections of India 2019.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The objectives of the present study are follows
- ➢ To understand the electoral performance of INC in Indian general election 2019
- ➢ To highlight the major factors that influenced the electoral performance of INC in 2019

## METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY:

The study is historical, descriptive and analytical in nature. The information is collected from secondary sources such as Books, Journals, Newspapers, articles, reports of the ECI and other available literatures. The statistical tools are also used to make the study fruitful.

**DISCUSSION:**

The election 2019 was the 17th general election of India and it was held in seven phases across the country. This election became a historic because in this election India hadexperienced highest percentage of voters turnout with 67.4 percent(Laskar, 2019:4058). Moreover, this election was alsoa historic because for the first timeafter 1974 this election gives absolute majority to same Prime MinisterCandidatesfor second consecutive term in Indian politics. As per the reports of the ECI total 673 political parties and 8026 candidates were contested for 542 seats in this election and the result was declared on 23rd of May. In this election the Hindu nationalist inclined party BJP alone won 303 seats and BJP led NDA won 353 seats which consist of 45 percent of total poll.

**Table: 1**
**An overview of General Election of India 2019**

| Total political parties participated | Total Candidates contested | Total polling Percentage | Total Seats Won BJP | Total Seats Won NDA |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 673 | 8026 | 67.4 | 303(37.36%) | 353(45%) |

Source: Election Commission of India

The Indian National Congress shows very poor performance in this election; In the election INC contested for 421 seats and won only 52 which shares only 19.01 percent of total poll and the INC led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) won 91 seats. The party improved its performance in compare to the previous general election of 2014 and remains as a main opposition party in the house. However, in this election the party failed to recognize as an opposition party likein the general election 2014.

The INC showed a very poor performance in various major states. Even it couldn't open account in 13 major states likeAndhra, Pradesh Rajasthan Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland,Tripura, Uttarakand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh and it wononly one seat each from 9 states-Bihar, Goa, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh. Moreover, the party also won 2 seats from West Bengal and Chhattisgarh each and 3 seats from Assam and Telangana each. The performance of the INC was also not satisfactory in Union Territories; out of 13 seats INC won only 2, 1 from Andaman and Nicobar Islands and 1 from Puducherry and again in the remaining Union Territories it fail open its account. However, a satisfactory performance of congress was seen in the state of Kerala, where it won 15 seats out of 20, likewise it also won maximum number of 8 seats from Tamil Nadu and Punjab each.

**Table: 2**
**An Overview of Electoral Performance of INC in General Election 2019**

| State/UTs | Total Seats | INC Won |
|---|---|---|
| Andaman & Nicobar | 1 | 1 |
| Andhra Pradesh | 25 | 0 |
| Arunachal Pradesh | 2 | 0 |
| Assam | 14 | 3 |
| Bihar | 40 | 1 |
| Chandigarh | 1 | 0 |
| Chhattisgarh | 11 | 2 |

| State/UTs | Total Seats | INC Won |
|---|---|---|
| Dadra & Nagar Haveli | 1 | 0 |
| Daman & Diu | 1 | 0 |
| Delhi | 7 | 0 |
| Goa | 2 | 1 |
| Gujarat | 26 | 0 |
| Haryana | 10 | 0 |
| Himachal Pradesh | 4 | 0 |
| Jammu & Kashmir | 6 | 0 |
| Jharkhand | 14 | 1 |
| Karnataka | 28 | 1 |
| Kerala | 20 | 15 |
| Lakshadweep | 1 | 0 |
| Madhya Pradesh | 29 | 1 |
| Maharashtra | 48 | 1 |
| Manipur | 2 | 0 |
| Meghalaya | 2 | 1 |
| Mizoram | 1 | 0 |
| Nagaland | 1 | 0 |
| Odisha | 21 | 1 |
| Puducherry | 1 | 1 |
| Punjab | 13 | 8 |
| Rajasthan | 25 | 0 |
| Sikkim | 1 | 0 |

| State/UTs | Total Seats | INC Won |
|---|---|---|
| Tamil Nadu | 38 | 8 |
| Telangana | 17 | 3 |
| Tripura | 2 | 0 |
| Uttar Pradesh | 80 | 1 |
| Uttarakhand | 5 | 0 |
| West Bengal | 42 | 2 |
| All India | 542 | 52 |

Source: Election Commission of India

The General election 2019 proved to be worst for INC because in this election the INC experienced various surprises. The defeat of the party president Rahul Gandhi fromAmethi constituency gave big shocked to Congress, which arose questions on the future of congress in Indian politics. Because, the Amethi is considered as a bastion of INC. The constituency is previously represented by former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi from 1984 to 1991.Furthermore former party president Sonia Gandhi has also represented this constituency from 1999 to 2004 and after that Rahul Gandhi continuously represented this constituency from 2004 to till 2014. But in 2019, Rahul Gandhi lost Amethi to prominent BJP leader Smriti Irani by 30,000 votes (Reports of ECI 2019).

Apart from Rahul Gandhi, many famous congress leaders had to face defeatin this election. Joytiraditya Scindia a young and prominent leader of INC lost this election from Guna constituency. He was a former minister of state with independent charge for power in Manmohan Singh's cabinet from 2012 to 2014 and he represented Guna constituency from 2002 to 2014 but in 2019 he lost the seat to BJP leader Krishna Pal Singh Yadav. On 10th of March 2020 Scindia quit INC because of dissatisfaction with top leaders of the party and joined BJP. The defeat of Milind Deora from Mumbai South Lok Sabha constituency was also a big lost that Congress had to face in that election. Milind Deora is a famous leader of Congress and he represented Mumbai south constituency from 2004 to 214. Moreover, this constituency was also represented by his father Muruli Deora for four times in 1984, 1989, 1991 and 1998.

The defeat of renowned congress leader and also former Chief Minister of Delhi Sheila Dikshit also gave a big setback to the INC in Lok Sabha elections 2019. Sheila Dikshit was the longest serving CM of Delhi. She served for a period fifteen years from 1998 to 2013and in January 2019 Dikshit was appointed as a president of Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee. In 2019 Lok Sabha election she contested from North Delhi constituency and lost to BJP candidate Manoj Tiwari. Moreover, Vaibhav Gehlot son of Rajasthan's CM Ashok Gehlot also lost the seat from Jodhpur Lok Sabha constituency to BJP leader G.S. Shekhaw, This constituency was also represented by Ashok Gehlot for a period of 25 years from 1980 to 1999 (Reports of ECI).

**MAJOR FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED THE ELETORAL PERFORMANCE OF INC IN GENERAL ELECTION 2019:**

Many internal and external socio-political factors have influenced the performance of INC in Indian General Elections 2019 and some of them are discussed below:

**a.   Modi Factor:**

The popularity of Narendra Modi among the masses was seen as a major factor behind the poor performance of INC in the general election of 2019. Like 2014, in this election also the role of Modi was seen very effective which a big challenge for INC. The widespread slogans like "Ayega toh Modi hi", Modi Nahi toh Kon?", "There is only Modi", "Modi Hai Toj Mumkin Hai" and "Fir Ek Ber Modi Sarkar" clearly shows how Modi wave spread across the country during the general election. It was noticed that Modi is the only PM to have occupied a space in the heart of people after Nehru and Indira Gandhi. According to the post-poll survey data of Lokniti

center for the study of developing societies, 32 percent of BJP supporters were voted BJP just because Modi was the prime-ministerial candidates. Another survey report published by Axis my India, Modi was the mere reason for 29 percent voters choosing BJP in 2019 general elections (Sardesai, 2020:9).According to the report of Economic Times, in this election Modi addressed 142 public rallies and directly reached around 1.5 corer people (Economic Times, May 19, 2019). Hence, the personality and popularity of the PM Modi was seen as a major barrier for the Congress in General election 2019.

**b.    Lack of strong Leader:**
         The leader of a political party always plays a vital role in the success of the party. His personality and popularity provides a crucial contribution in every election. The absence of strong and popular leader was seen as a major barrier behind the pathetic performance of the INC in General election 2019. It was noticed in this election that the then party president Rahul Gandhi fail to win the heart of the people. His personality, strategies and way of delivering speech was seen very poor. Although he addressed rallies for around 145 constituencies across the country he lost in most of them. It was seen that Gandhi spends ample amount of time in bringing the Rafael issue within the people instead of emphasizing on others issues which could have help him in gaining support from the masses. During the time of election, Congress brought an anti-poverty scheme called Nunyatam Aay Yojana (NYAY), but fail to attract the attention of the people towards this scheme. Apart from this Gandhi's strategy to question about Air strike in Balakotalso did notwork. "Chawakidar Chor Hai" the famous slogan of Rahul Gandhi in this election, also couldn't givemuchgain to the party rather it was seen as a personal attacked to the Modi. Some leaders of Congress admitted that this slogan had done ultimate damage to the party in this election because most of the people in India saw Modi as an honestleader (Tandon, 2019).

**c.    Dissatisfaction and Defection:**
      The dissatisfaction among the top congress leaders was also a major factor responsible for the poor performance of Congress in recent Lok Sabha election 2019. After crushing defeat in 16th Lok Sabha election 2014, many top congress leaders were expressed their dissatisfaction over the high command and many of them were left the party. Take for instance, Jayanthi Natarajan, former union minister for Environment resigned from the party after defeat in the 2014 general election.  In her resignation letter she clearly stated that she was unhappy with leaders of the party and its functioning (Kumar & Yamunan, 2019). Apart from Natarajan, G.K. Vasan the former union Minister, Krishna Tirata former union minister, Choudhury Birender Singh and Jagment Singh Brar were also left the party after the general election of 2014 by expressing that they were not satisfied with the central leaders of the Congress.

      Dissatisfaction among the prominent leaders was also seen just before the General election of 2019. Prominent leaders of various state units of the Congress also left the party because of their dissatisfaction with other leaders of the party. Asha Patel, a prominent congress leader of Gujarat and also a former MLA of Gujarat legislative assembly left the party just few days before of the General election of 2019. According to the report of India Today, she was totally dissatisfied with Party president Rahul Gandhi. In her resignation letter she has mentioned that Rahul Gandhi was failed to resolve the Party's issues and he promoted caste and division politics (India Today, 3rd Feb 2019). Another veteran leader and also a six-time legislator Kunvarsi Bavaliya also resigned from the party on 3rd July 2018 which was a huge setback before the general election of2019. He accused central leader Rahul Gandhi of playing caste politics (Times of India, 3rd July 2018). As per the report of The Hindu, he was also quite unhappy with Central leaders of the party because of overlooking his position as a leader of opposition (The Hindu, 3rd July 2018). A big challenged that Congress faced before General elections 2019 was the defeat of six-time MP and also former union mister Kishore Chandra Deo, who was also the member of Congress Working Committee. On 10[th]February 2019 he resigned from the party due to dissatisfaction with the working of central committee. According to the report of The Hindu, Deo was totally dissatisfied with Congress leaders and he didn't see any intention among the top echelon of congress leaders in strengthening the party (Nair, 2019). Hence, dissatisfaction among top leaders and defection were the major challenges that influenced the electoral performance of the Congress in the Lok Sabha election of 2019.

**d.    Fail to Fulfill the Promises by Newly formed Congress Government in Some States:**
         Before General election of 2019, the Congress party able to form Government in some major states of India such as, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. The success of the Congress in these states created a serious concern to BJP. But it has been seen that the people of these states gradually became dissatisfied because of the incompetency of the Government to fulfill their promises. During the election of Madhya Pradesh legislative assembly, Chief Minister Kamal Nath has promised to provide allowances to the unemployment educated youth of the states under Yuva Swabhiman Yojana but is was seen that after coming to power they fail to fulfill its commitment and because of this people of the state were seens unhappy with the Nath's Government. Likewise, in

Rajasthan also Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot promised the people to introduce an initiative for the unemployment youth during the election campaigning and he promised to provide RS 3000 to men and RS 3500 to women youth of the states. But government fails to fulfill its promises. Therefore, the people of theses concerned states lost its confidence on Congress and started to criticize the party. The incompetent nature of Congress to fulfill its promises in some states was among the major reasons for the poor performance of the party in General elections of 2019.

**e.   Weak Party Organizations:**

The Partyorganizations are considered as a backbone of the political party. It plays a vital role in the successful electoral performance of the Party. According to Professor Branden Van Dyk University of Miami, the role of party organizations is not disappeared; despite growing role of mass media where party organizations are playing a very crucial role in providing electoral benefits to the parties in contemporary politics (Dyk, 2014:5). Party organizations are directly linked with thepeople of grassroots level and act as a channel of communication between the public and the political parties.

In the Lok Sabha elections of 2019, the Party organizations of Congress were seen quite weak and it highly impacted on the electoral performance of the Party. The party organizations mainly in major states such as Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh were seen very inactive and there was also no communication between central and grassroots level organizations.  According to the report of The Tribune, the Congress had lots of messages in the Lok Sabha elections 2019, but due to the weakness of the booth level party organizations Congress was fail to circulate these messages among the people of grassroots level. Moreover, Congress party also went to contest election in Haryana without having block and district level party organizations (Tandon, 2019).

A famous newspaper Hindustan Times, stated that the weak organizational structure, lackluster and disconnected campaign and failure to communicate its poll promises were the major factors responsible for pathetic performance of Congress in General elections 2019 specially in Hindi speaking states (Naqshbandi, 2019). Hence, the weakness of party organizations is also a factor that highly influenced the electoral performance of Congress in General elections 2019.

**f.   Pulwama Attack:**

On 14th Feb 2019, a deadliest terror attack was happened in Pulwama district of Jammu and Kashmir which created a war like situation between India and Pakistan.  As per the report of The Times of India, a convoy of vehicles carrying security personnel on the Jammu and Srinagar national highway was attacked by a vehicle-borne suicide bomber where 40 soldiers of Central Reserve Police Force were martyred. This painful incident that occurred just before the Lok Sabha elections created a serious tension in Indian politics. The opposition parties were started to asking questions to Modi Government over this incident. Rahul Gandhi, the then party president of Congress accused the Modi Government for doing politics over Pulwama attack and politicizing the sacrifices of armed forces. He also criticized Modi for not taking any immediate action against the terrorists involved in the Pulwama attack. On 26th of February 2019 the Modi Government conducted Airstrike to take revenge of Pulwama attack and it claimed of killing around 300 terrorist and damages several camps of Pakistan based terror organization Jiash-e-Mohammed. It was seen that the PM Modi got huge support from the people of India because of this airstrike. It was also seen that in several rallies he asked vote from the people in the name of soldiers who carried out the Balakot airstrike (Economic Times, 16th April 2019). But the Congress leaders questioned on the reality of the airstrike and demanded for a proof. A famous congress leader Sam Pitroda raised questions that "Did we really attack" and he also asked the BJP Government to prove it (Hindustan Times, 24 April, 2020). Rahul Gandhi also raised questions on Balakot airstrike and sought proof from the Modi Government. He also blamed Modi for misusing armed forces for electoral gain.  It was seen that some news channels presented Congress's questioning on Airstrike in a different way because of which the Congress got huge criticism from the people of India and it also influenced on the electoral performance of INC in General elections 2019.

Therefore, it has been seen that the Congress a grand old party which ruled India for 55 years, faced a crushing defeat in General elections 2019.However, the performance of Congress was improved in compare to the previous General elections 2014. The performance of INC in 2019 General elections give a setback to the congress and it also create serious tension about the political future of the party. The different scholars gave their opinion about the future of the INC in Indian politics. According to Prof. Purushottam Agrawal "The election results have been a setback for the Congress, but it doesn't mean that the Congress has no future. Losing elections is a part of democratic politics. Let's not forget that in 1984, a party as well organized as the BJP won only two seats and even Atal Bihari Vajpayee lost to Madhab Rao Scindia in Gwalior". Furthermore, he also stated that "The Congress needs to start reasserting the inclusive idea of India and reclaim the narrative of nationalism. The problem with Congress is that it does not talk of seemingly good issue like NYAY.It has failed to weave a narrative at the national level" (The Print, 24th may 2019). Another scholar Prof. Suhas Palshikar said that "Congress can still have

a future, but there are many ifs" (The Print, 24th May 2019). Hence, though the abysmal performance of Congress in recent General elections 2019 raised questions regarding the political future of the party however, the party still has many chances to revive itself.

Although some scholars admitted that the INC gradually losing its significance in contemporary Indian politics, but the importance of the party cannot be ignored completely. Though party continuously faced pathetic electoral debacle in General elections2014 and 2019, but still it plays a crucial role as an opposition party. In the context of important of INC, Prof. Ashutush Varshney said that "India needs congress to fight BJP's overreach because of smaller parties wouldn't wilt under pressure" (The Print, 24th May 2019). Therefore, revive of INC is vital for check and balanced of the Government and also protect to the democratic values and norms in the country.

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