

From nationalism to corruption, 10 talking points of 2019 Lok Sabha campaign

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From nationalism to corruption and Varanasi to Wayanad, leaders discussed a host of issues and debated raging controversies in the high-pitched campaign for the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Some stirred political storms and some fizzled out quickly, but not before shaping the great Indian political debate in what has been a gruelling election season. HT takes a look at some of the key talking points:

NATIONALISM
The terror attack on a convoy of the Central Reserve Police Force in Pulwama in February and the Indian Air Force's subsequent action against a Jaish-e-Mohammed training camp inside Pakistan at Balakot dominated the campaign narrative. Even as the ruling BJP and PM Narendra Modi stressed that the government has zero-tolerance towards terrorism, the Opposition asked for the proof of casualties in Balakot, sparking a fierce debate. The Election Commission issued a directive asking leaders to exercise caution while making any reference to the armed forces in their campaigns. At rallies, Modi warned Pakistan that India's nuclear arsenal was not for show. On several instances, the Opposition alleged that the PM violated the poll code by focusing on the army in his speeches. In an attempt to bolster the Congress in the national security debate, former PM Manmohan Singh said that several such operations had

been carried out during the UPA rule.

WELFARE OF THE POOR
The Congress's campaign, to a large extent, revolved around its proposed minimum income guarantee plan, or Nyay, that promises to give an annual support of Rs 72,000 to the poorest 20% families if the party came to power. The opposition party accused the NDA government of failing to keep its promises, and alleged that the BJP was siding with only rich businessmen while ignoring farmers and the marginalised. BJP leaders trashed the charges, reiterating its commitment to kisans, highlighting its cash transfer scheme for farmers.

CORRUPTION
Congress President Rahul Gandhi targeted PM Modi's government over alleged corruption in the Rafale jet deal, a charge rejected by the ruling dispensation. Ahead of the fifth phase, Modi termed former PM Rajiv Gandhi "Corrupt No 1", apparently referring to the Bofors gun deal that was mired in allegations of corruption and bribery. Rahul and his sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra hit back.

ANTI-SIKH RIOTS
Congress leader Sam Pitroda's "hua to hua (it happened, so it happened)" remark on the 1984 anti-Sikh riots grabbed headlines and sparked a political firestorm. PM Modi accused the Congress of arrogance and the BJP lashed out at Pitroda. The Congress president said it was "completely out of line", and senior party leaders distanced themselves from the remark. Pitroda later apologised and said his

remark was misinterpreted because his Hindi was not good.

CONTROVERSIES
The BJP's decision to field 2008 Malegaon blast accused Pragna Singh Thakur from Bhopal Lok Sabha seat stirred a row. Thakur, 48, who is out on bail, remained in news throughout the election season. She got two notices from the EC for her remarks over demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya and for saying that her "curse" killed former ATS chief Hemant Karkare, who was shot dead by terrorists during the 2008 Mumbai terror attack. Karkare probed the Malegaon blast case. Her remark describing Mahatma Gandhi's assassin Nathuram Godse as a "patriot"—for which she apologised later—drew criticism.

WILL SHE CONTEST?
Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's appointment as a Congress general secretary and the party's eastern Uttar Pradesh incharge triggered speculations over her possible candidature in the elections. Even names of high-profile seats such as Varanasi and Allahabad started doing the rounds. Priyanka said she would be happy to contest if her brother and Congress chief Rahul Gandhi asks her to. The buzz subsided after the party gave a ticket to Ajay Rai from Varanasi.

ALL EYES ON WAYANAD
Rahul Gandhi's decision to fight the polls from Wayanad in northern Kerala, apart from the traditional Congress stronghold of Uttar Pradesh's Amethi, emerged as another talking point. While the Congress said the move will boost the party's prospects in southern India, Kerala's ruling Left leaders sounded upset at the decision.

VARANASI: HIGH-PROFILE SEAT

A grand roadshow, a huge crowd during PM Modi's nomination filing made it clear. The BJP is not just looking to win Varanasi, the prestigious seat held by the PM. It is out there to secure a record margin in the victory. Former BSF jawan Tej Bahadur Yadav, who was hoping to contest against Modi on a Samajwadi Party ticket, had to return empty-handed after the poll watchdog cancelled his papers.

BUSY SCHEDULE FOR EC

In the high-pitched poll season, the EC had to sweat it out. From complaints about poll code violations and EVM

malfunctioning, and poll-related violence, the EC was pretty busy in handling the world's biggest election. The poll watchdog gave clean chits to PM Modi in seven cases and BJP president Amit Shah in two cases. Rahul Gandhi got one clean chit and a notice.

'MAJBOOR' VS MAZBOOT'

PM Modi set the tone for the elections, saying it's an election to choose a mazboot (strong) government, and not a majboor (helpless) government, a reference to the coalition of different opposition parties. Modi also called the Opposition alliance a "mahamilawat (adulterated)". His war of words with West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee, who he called "speed-breaker didi", made news. Bengal was one of the states that witnessed one of the most violent election processes, with the BJP trying to gain foothold in the TMC bastion.

2019 is more like 1977 and 1980 than 2014 elections

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The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has firmly established itself as the dominant pole of Indian politics in the 2019 general elections.

If the current trends hold, the 2019 verdict will have a close resemblance to the results of the 1977 and 1980 elections in terms of the dominance of one political party in India. Data scaped from the Election Commission of India (ECI) website shows that at 11:03 am, around 19% of the total votes had been counted in the country. The BJP is leading in 288 parliamentary constituencies (PCs) with a vote share of around 40%, nine percentage points more than what it had in 2014.

No political party in India has had such a high level of vote share after the 1984 elections, which were held in an extremely polarised environment months after the assassination of the then Prime Minister Indira

Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards. The Congress had a vote share of 48.1% and it won 415 PCs in the 1984 elections.

The 2019 results, if the current trends hold, will be closer to what the Janata Party and the Congress achieved in the 1977 and 1980 elections. In 1980, the Congress won 353 PCs with an all-India vote share of 42.7%. In 1977, it was the Janata Party which got 295 PCs with a vote share of 41.3%.

The 2019 verdict, or what it looks like as of now, also has some regional exceptions to the overall trend, like in 1977 and 1980. Even though the Janata Party swept the northern region of the country in 1977, the Congress performed really well in Andhra Pradesh (41 out of 42 PCs) and Karnataka (26 out of 28 PCs). Similarly in 1980, the Congress could win only 4 PCs in West Bengal despite winning the majority of seats in almost all major states.

As of now, the BJP and its partners in the National

Democratic Alliance (NDA) are either leading or making major advances in all major states except Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, which are voting clearly for the Dravida Munnetra Kazhgam (DMK) led alliance and YSR Congress Party respectively.

The Congress, despite adding around four percentage points to its 2019 vote share has not been able to make any significant gains in terms of seats. Also, the party has suffered major reverses in the Hindi heartland states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh where it defeated the BJP in the 2018 assembly elections.

After the 2014 elections, when the BJP crossed the half way mark in the Lok Sabha with just 31% vote share, lack of opposition unity was seen as a key factor behind the party's victory. With the BJP all set to cross the 40% vote share mark, the opposition will have to reinvent its chemistry with the electorate rather than just arithmetic.

Ruling LDF stares at rout in Kerala, massive gains for Congress

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Riding on the Sabarimala wave, the Congress-led United Democratic Front is set to win big in Kerala. The front is leading in all 20 Lok Sabha seats and the ruling CPI(M) has been pushed to third spot in at least two constituencies. In the outgoing Lok Sabha, the UDF has 12 and LDF eight seats.

Trends show the BJP, which led a violent agitation on Sabarimala, failed to cash in on the issue. Congress president Rahul Gandhi's Wayanad gambit has also paid off and the ruling Left Front's fears proved to be right. It seems his candidature has helped the Congress-led UDF enthuse the party machinery.

Kerala had witnessed violent protests after September 28 verdict of the Supreme Court



which allowed women of all ages to worship at Sabarimala. Both, BJP and Congress, blamed the state government for the present stalemate. The hurry in which the government tried to implement the verdict angered a large section of the Hindu community, say political pundits but the Left parties had said it hurt their prospects.

Trends show the majority community has voted large numbers to teach the left a lesson, say political

observers. In some Left bastions like Palakkad and Kasargode, the UDF established a clear lead after the first round itself.

The ruling CPI(M) seemed to have taken a calculated risk on Sabarimala. At one point, CPI(M) state secretary Kodyeri Balakrishnan even said even if the party loses one or two seats due to its stand it won't matter and it will help the organisation in the long run. But the calculations seem to have gone awry.

NDA heads for massive victory in Bihar

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The NDA was heading for a massive victory in Bihar where it was leading in 38 of the 40 Lok Sabha seats in the state.

The BJP and the JD(U) which contested 17 seats each were leading in 16 seats each. Another NDA ally, Ram Vilas Paswan's LJP was leading in all six seats it contested. The Opposition's Grand Alliance where the RJD and the Congress were the dominant partners failed to make any impact.

The Lok Sabha election results will set the stage for another electoral battle in Bihar a year later, when chief minister Nitish Kumar will seek his seventh term. The 2019 general elections were seen as a big test for 'brand Nitish' as he remained the pivot around which the entire campaigning revolved in the state after making the BJP concede significantly for a respectable seat sharing formula. That the BJP agreed to climb down to treat JD-U at par was an admission of Nitish's clout. The BJP also did not have

much choice in Bihar, a State where it has failed to evolve as the main force as it did in neighbouring Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand despite the Narendra Modi magic. It found in Nitish Kumar just the right man to get its poll arithmetic accurate to revive the old NDA magic riding the Modi factor.

The BJP seemed well-assured in his company, even at the cost of two old allies, Jitan Ram Manjhi's HAM-S and Upendra Kushwaha's Rashtriya Lok Samata Party (RLSP), who switched over to the Grand Alliance (GA). Bihar deputy chief minister Sushil Kumar Modi even went to the extent of saying midway through the general elections that the NDA would get two-third majority even in the 2020 assembly elections due to the wide social base it covers and wave of development in the last 13 years.

For Nitish Kumar also, it was an opportunity to shrug off any anti-incumbency tag that the Opposition has been trying to attach with him. He has consistently compared the dazzling lights in villages with the 'lantern age' of the

RJD era and four-lane roads across the length and breadth of the state against the dilapidated ones before his tenure.

But issues did not matter much in the state, though apparent development did get people's acknowledgment. Nitish countered Opposition's criticism of prohibition without getting defensive and extolled its virtues for the poor. "Yet, as it turned out to be on the ground, it was basically a fight between 'Modi-yes' and 'Modi-No' all the way, something that suited the BJP," said Prof Vijay Kumar of BRA Bihar University. Bihar has always been crucial in national politics and it remained so, going by the attention it got from top national and regional leaders. While Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP president Amit Shah addressed ten election rallies each, the tallest Bihar BJP leader Sushil Kumar Modi slogged across the length and breadth of the state with 89 rallies and 43 road shows, while Kumar alone addressed 171 election meetings.

The Grand Alliance (GA), which did phenomenally well in 2015 assembly polls to stop the BJP, tried a new combination without JD-U by roping in smaller allies and focused on the old narrative of incarcerated Lalu Prasad with an eye on similar result. RJD leader Tejaswini Prasad spearheaded the campaign in the absence of his father and the results will also be crucial for him, with his elder brother breathing down his neck for political space. Despite the exit polls predicting a huge victory for the NDA, the RJD is keeping its fingers crossed. "We know the kind of feedback we got from the ground. It was encouraging. Let the results come," said RJD's Rajya Sabha MP Manoj Jha. However, a noticeable part of the election in Bihar was that NDA remained organized from day one and was early to settle seats and had well-defined leadership both at the central and state levels. The Grand Alliance had initial hiccups due to seat-sharing issues. Lalu Prasad was not there to steer the campaigning as only he can do and above all, the campaigning appeared disjointed with allies apparently more focused on their own seats. "The results will have far-reaching implications for Bihar. It will be curtain raiser for assembly elections a year later," said Shaibal Gupta, member secretary of the Asian Development Research Institute (ADRI).

Singhat Battalion Felicitates Class 10 passed Students



IT News
Imphal, May 23,

Singhat Battalion under the aegis of Churachandpur Sector felicitated the class 10 students of Hill Model School, Singhat who passed their class 10 Board Exams. The school authorities approached Singhat Battalion to provide assistance to

organise the felicitation programme.

The first three students were also given cash prize by the Singhat Post Commander. During the interaction with the students and teachers the post commander also enlightened the young enthusiasts about various career options open to all in today's time and the importance of hardwork and

being punctual, qualities which are a must especially in a soldier.

The students asked various questions about the courses and avenues outside and also as how to become an army officer. Overall the students rejoiced during the felicitation ceremony and seeing smiles on their faces their parents were also very proud.