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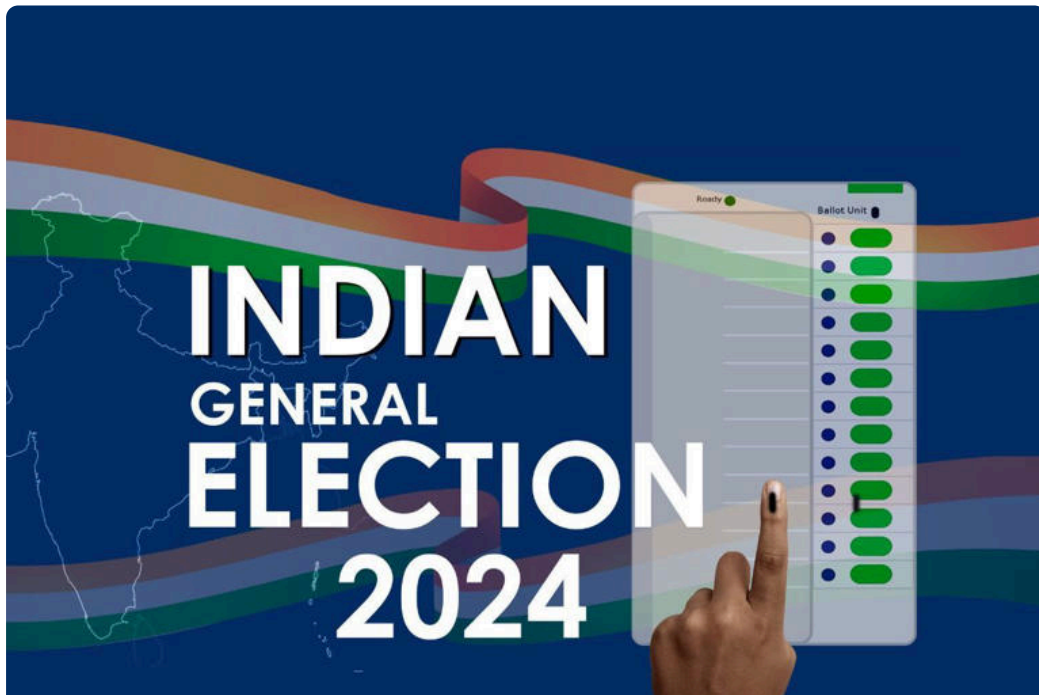
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Opinion | What We Learned from Lok Sabha Elections 2024



Opinion by Jagdish Batra • 1w • 4 min read



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L The politicians seem to have realised that the Indian people are yet to shun the attitude of worshipping heroes rather than judging a party by its policies and actions. (Getty)
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Now that the election results are out and Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been entrusted with the reins of power for the third time in a closely contested election, some takeaways from this election seem important.

For one, it is clear that the personality cult continues to loom large in Indian politics. The politicians seem to have realised that the Indian people are yet to shun the attitude of worshipping heroes rather than judging a party by its policies and actions. It's not only dynastic parties like the Congress or the SP, but also the BJP which can be faulted for projecting Prime Minister Modi's face to the detriment of the party.



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Surprisingly, in this game of building the image of a leader, both – one's own party as also the opposite party – are on the same page. While the Opposition chanted 'Modi, Modi' ad nauseum, thus constricting the election theme to an individual, the prime minister too referred to singled out one Opposition leader endlessly in his speeches, thus projecting a larger-than-life image of Rahul Gandhi.

These elections, apart from showing the world the fairness of elections in the world's largest democracy, also send the message that the country is far safer than it was some years ago. The G20 meeting of world leaders was the first instance that proved it. During these elections, the whirlwind tour of PM Modi meant very heavy burden on the shoulders of the security forces. Not a single episode of mischief meant to harm the prime minister was reported, even though the threat perception from inside and outside of the country was at its peak.

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Besides, barring West Bengal with its unique history of violence, elections all over the country, particularly in Jammu and Kashmir, were quite peaceful. I am sure the people abroad, fed on tales of acrimony and violence in India, would have been taken aback, and the vested interests (read 'deep state' somewhere) disappointed. Our security forces and the government deserve a resounding applause for it.

Another takeaway is even as we know that public memory is proverbially short, it has to be updated to include the fact that petty local issues can cloud the big ones concerning society or the nation. To that extent, our voters are not enlightened enough to make the distinction. It happened in the case of Ayodhya where the civic issues and the issue of compensation by the state to displaced persons relegated the gift of Ram temple to the Hindu community, besides catapulting the city into a big tourist attraction.



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It has the other lesson that the religious acts or monuments seem to be moving towards a proposition of diminishing returns. While Prime

Minister Modi made symbolic gestures toward the people of Tamil Nadu, such as the installation of the Sengol in the new Parliament building and visits to Tamil Nadu temples, these actions did not translate into electoral success for the BJP. This suggests that appealing to a shared Hindu identity may not be as politically unifying as some might believe. Conversely, the prime minister's strong criticisms of the Congress and other parties regarding their approach to Muslim communities seemed to alienate some Muslim voters. The BJP will be hard put to do a tight ropewalk in future.

A lesson to be learned is that the freebies that people have been enjoying for some time become a part of their rights for which no gratitude should be expected. So, initiatives such as free ration for 80 crore people or provisions for housing, land, and sanitation became irrelevant. Immediate concerns hold greater sway during elections. The Opposition alliance capitalised on present economic woes like unemployment which, in any case, is an evergreen problem. The Agniveer scheme, perceived as an imposition due to the government's inadequate explanation of its rationale, provided further ammunition for the Opposition.



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And finally, the issue of corruption which should have been a burning issue seems to have had little effect on the electorate. The huge money accumulated by almost all political parties through electoral bonds did not retain appeal to the voters. Probably all parties were involved and so it was better to keep mum on the issue. Besides, people seem to have reconciled to the fact that politicians and political parties have the divine privilege to roll in wealth.

Now that the NDA government has assumed power, it's crucial to address several shortcomings within the system and the electoral process. One pressing concern is the allegation that the Congress party employed an Israeli AI firm (ironically, despite the party's

disseminate fake social media posts and construct a false narrative against the BJP. This claim warrants a thorough investigation.

Equally concerning are the televised reports depicting Muslim women queuing at Congress offices, hoping to cash in cards supposedly promising the first installment of the pledged one lakh rupees. This situation reflects a cynical trend in our political landscape where parties make extravagant promises to entice voters, who, in turn, often naively believe them. Similar is the news about such cards having been given to unemployed youth promising permanent jobs to them.

These are serious matters and need to be probed thoroughly. Probity demands that the Election Commission should conduct re-polls in the constituencies where these unethical means have been adopted, apart from disqualifying the candidate concerned and punishing the concerned party as well.

Jagdish Batra is an academic and writer, presently working as Professor & Executive Dean at O.P. Jindal Global University, India. Views expressed in the above piece are personal and solely those of the author. They do not necessarily reflect News18's views.

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