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## Issue Brief

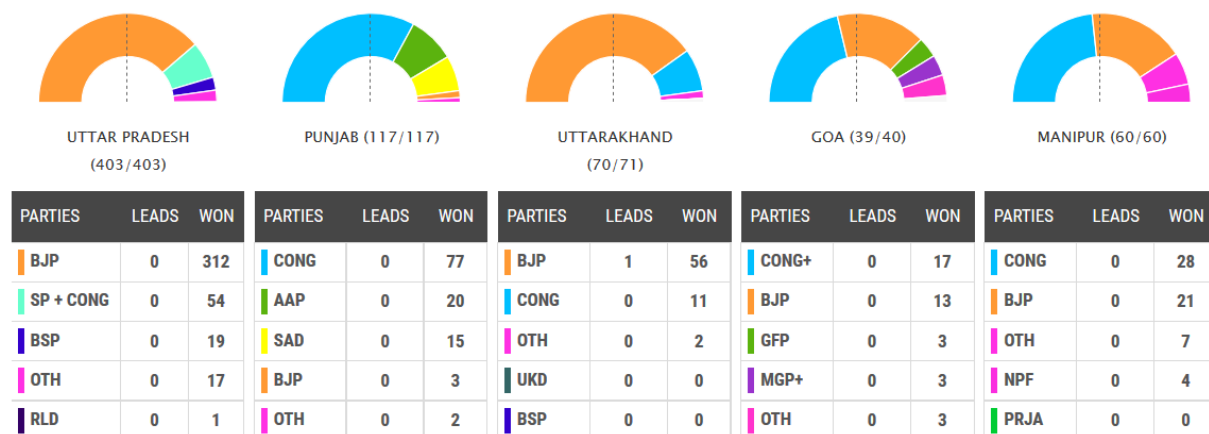
# State Elections in India: A Glimpse into 2019 General Elections

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The beginning of the year 2017 saw five Indian states namely, Goa, Manipur, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand going for Legislative Assembly elections from February 4-March 8 2017. The results were announced on March 11, 2017.

The results showed Congress emerging as a lead party in Punjab and taking first place in Goa and Manipur closely followed by BJP, whereas BJP took a convincing lead in Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh (UP). Though BJP landed second position in Goa and Manipur, but these results are still significant considering the fact that previously, BJP was hardly present in Manipur.



Following the results, BJP President announced that the party would form government in four of the five states.<sup>1</sup> The results have been termed by the party as people's confidence in the policies of the government. The party has also been hitting hard at the critics of the Modi government, particularly on the issue of demonetisation. The Legislative Assembly elections results are seen as an expression of confidence in the persona of Modi and his drive against corruption.

Of all the five states, it is BJP's victory in UP that is perhaps the most significant in terms of internal political dynamics of India. UP is one of the most populous state in India with a population of more than 200 million people.<sup>2</sup> Politically, this state sends the largest number of legislators to the Parliament. Hence, it is generally said that the road to New Delhi passes through Lucknow. The party was able to attract large number of voters who came forth in support of BJP putting behind the caste considerations. It is interesting to note that in the 2012 elections, BJP won only 47 seats, whereas now

in 2017, BJP was able to bag a massive 312 seats out of the total of 403 seats. This is the level of victory that has not been seen in the state in the last thirty years. Previously, it was in 1980 that Congress had managed to bag 294 seats out of 403 seats in the UP assembly. <sup>3</sup>This clearly shows the increasing popularity of Modi and his party. It is also interesting to note that regional parties in all these five states failed to make their mark. The results also clearly indicate continuous rise of right wing politics in India.

Different factors are highlighted by the analysts for this convincing victory for the BJP. As was the case during the 16th general elections of 2014, many people believe that it is the personality and the image of Modi in public perception that has again helped BJP further to consolidate its position. Modi's ability to connect with voters has also been a major factor. Modi government's demonetisation drive was successfully projected as being against corruption and creating a more equitable society. For others, his ability to infuse the sentiment of nationalism in general public also contributed to this victory to a great extent. Hence, his policies towards Pakistan and proclaimed surgical strike perhaps also played a decisive role in this success. Anti-incumbency in these five states was another factor. Voters discontent with the ruling parties in all five states was evident, as all ruling parties in these states had to step down from power. The results in Punjab where Akali- BJP government had to step down in favour of Congress is a testimony of this factor.

For other parties, particularly Congress, this is the time for some serious introspection and drastic changes within the party. The victory in Punjab is also mostly attributed to personal popularity of Amarinder Singh instead of a successful election campaign by the Congress. Nevertheless, forming government in Punjab would give it a chance to regain its lost ground and remain a strong force in the political arena of the country.

With BJP forming government in four of the five states, many observers believe that this not only makes Modi the most dominant political personality of India, but would enable Modi to pursue his agenda and policies more aggressively. The results also show that Modi is all set to win the next general elections which are due to be held in 2019. Such a scenario would be a cause of great concern for Pakistan. Since Modi came to power, the relationship between the two countries have been strained to say the least. The entire Modi government has made sure that the promises of pursuing a "muscular policy" towards Pakistan is seen as fulfilled by the public. Shying away from resuming the dialogue process on one pretext or the other and threatening Pakistan on one account or the other has been the policy of Modi government. The hatred and hysteria that the Modi government has been creating in the Indian people

is not only detrimental to bilateral relations, but also puts regional peace and security at a serious risk. The rise of Hindu nationalist forces will only work to incite further repression of minorities in India, particularly the Muslims in India. This fact needs to be realised by the Indian government. Hence, initiation of a sustained, meaningful and result oriented dialogue process with Pakistan is the need of hour.

#### Notes and References:

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- <sup>1</sup>. BJP will form government in four states, Says Amit Shah, Hindustan Times, March 11, 2017.
  - <sup>2</sup>. see Population of Uttar Pradesh, at <http://indiapopulation2017.in/population-of-uttar-pradesh-2017.html>
  - <sup>3</sup>. Assembly elections 2017: How the Opposition lost to Modi across India, Hindustan Times, March 13, 2017.