A fundamental shift in electoral behaviour

Role of the intermediary in Indian politics stands fundamentally decimated with welfare delivery and political attribution and power—centralised in party leaders. This was most pronounced in UP.

The Samajwadi Party (SP) did everything it promised it would do in the Uttar Pradesh (UP) election. Its alliance touched a vote share of almost 35%, it achieved caste consolidation among the groups it said it would, but this still wasn’t nearly enough.

With a crumbling Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) shedding votes, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) improved on its 41% vote share from 2017—breaking the trend of party alternation that has characterised UP’s politics over the past few decades.

In UP, the AAP’s core challenge in Punjab was the ubiquitous boots on the ground problem. In Noida, we met an AAP supporter who could not even recall the name of the party’s candidate (though he knew the others). In a long interview with an AAP booth worker, we saw little semblance of party structure or coordination. This was in sharp contrast to its competitors, the Congress and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), who had well-developed networks of polling booth workers, and local financial power. Yet, despite all this, time and again we heard voters pining for Arvind Kejriwal’s governance and the “Delhi Model.”

In UP, too, there was talk of the frustrations of local caste leaders and candidates who had a base in the constituency, leading to “local anti-incumbency.” But when we spoke to voters, it was clear that local legislators were no longer the guarantors of welfare benefits that they once were. As a young man outside Lucknow told us, “We are three brothers, and each one of us gets 6,000 a year, plus some of us even got an extra 1,000 under e-shram. Our ration has also doubled since last December.” They had been BSP supporters in 2017, but now, they added, they would switch to the BJP. Naturally, they were supportive of both CM Yogi Adityanath and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as they were the new guarantors of welfare benefits.

What explains this shift of loyalties away from local intermediaries? Fundamentally, this is attributed to the nature of change in the Indian State, and its increasing focus on direct cash transfers to citizens.

What explains this shift of loyalties away from local intermediaries? Fundamentally, this is attributed to the nature of change in the Indian State, and its increasing focus on direct cash transfers to citizens.

Rakesh Bhatia

Bhanu Joshi

Ashish Ranjan

Neelanjana Sircar

What explains this shift of loyalties away from local intermediaries? Fundamentally, this is attributed to the nature of change in the Indian State, and its increasing focus on direct cash transfers to citizens.