

# Review of: "Indian National Congress's Hits and Misses in General Elections 2024"

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**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.

This is an interesting paper that analyses the performance of the Congress party in the 2024 elections. The author provides a detailed analysis of various factors that have contributed to the decline of the Congress party and also impacted its performance in the 2024 elections. The data which establishes a relation between parliamentary constituencies that were a part of Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra and winning strike rate is quite interesting. This enables one to establish a cause-effect relationship between campaign practices and voter behavior. In the conclusion, the author distinguishes between 'political revival' and 'temporary electoral gimmick.' This distinction alerts us to the need to probe electoral verdicts carefully. It urges us to look at party ideology, organizational shifts, and leadership changes rather than benchmark a singular election outcome as reflective of party characteristics.

## General comments

While the paper focuses on the Congress party, a brief comparative analysis that includes the BJP/NDA would provide a larger context for locating these arguments.

Secondly, as the author mentions, the Congress party performed well in this election when compared to earlier elections. Following from that, one would also like to know what worked for the party in this election. This could be a different/alternative narrative, campaign effort, manner of conveying the message, or maybe riding the wave of anti-incumbency. Whatever the reasons may be, these can be added in greater detail.

The author could revisit the use of phrases. Often, these do not convey the intended meaning. These may be construed as assumptions that need to be qualified by detailed explanations.

## Some suggestions regarding clarity of terms, phrases, and arguments

### *In the introduction*

- When we say, 'due to disadvantages of two-term incumbency,' how does this compare to the disadvantage of single-term incumbency, which would have been the case in 2019? Can we compare the relative disadvantage?
- How was the 2024 election a 'referendum'? One may argue that every election is a referendum on the incumbent government.
- Please clarify 'Triumphant déjà vu'.

- '[F]alse perception of victory or a reflex action of its historical domination of politics.' The words and language need to be simplified so that the meaning is clear.

#### *Paragraph 1*

- The author might consider rephrasing the following, 'Congress, after independence, initiated one-party dominance.' The argument seems to suggest that the Congress of its own volition initiated a one-party dominant system. The author may include other factors that shaped the party system.
- '[R]uling both at the Centre and in the majority of the provinces until the 1980s. Its supremacy ended in the 1990s.' Some more details regarding this shift would enable the reader to understand the change. (The author may look at Yadav, Yogendra "Electoral Politics in the Time of Change: India's Third Electoral System, 1989-99." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 34, no. 34/35, 1999, pp. 2393–99)
- What is meant by the term 'snowballing downslide'? Prior to 2014, the Congress, as a part of the UPA, was in power at the center. It would be helpful if the author could contextualize the shift.
- 'It failed to revive in the 2019 national elections, as populist demagoguery and promising the moon did not appeal to the voters.' I would request the author to clarify the phrases, 'populist demagoguery' and 'promising the moon'.
- 'The **debacles raised red flags**, but did not **stir up a hornet's nest** in Congress, and its **myopic course corrections** failed mainly due to a **lack of correct political strategies** and widespread **erosion of the party system**.' The highlighted phrases come across as assumptions. Some explanation could be advanced regarding what the 'myopic course corrections' were, why there was erosion of the party system, or which were the incorrect political strategies.
- 'It becomes relevant to situate the revival of Congress in the new evolving political party system and analyse the impact of dynasticism on the high command, leadership conundrums in the provinces, and self-decimating intra-party dissents.' There is a lack of clarity due to the use of multiple phrases. The author could consider reducing these.

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- 'The failure to transform from domination to adaptation was mainly due to the dominance-oriented leadership of ex-Prime Ministers (PM) Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi. It showed signs of party weakening, fluidity in party competitiveness, meltdown of organizational hierarchies, could not achieve a critical mass of institutionalization, and failed in formalizing the political process.' There are too many adjectives, phrases, and assumptions. This makes the arguments non-persuasive. Please explicate in greater detail. There are too many undefined terms.
- '[A] trivial Congress-led combine of 30 parties.' What is meant by 'trivial'? Was it ideologically trivial? Trivial in terms of the number of parties or some other way? Please clarify.
- Please also elaborate on 'The 'Band-Aid strategies.'
- 'Deinstitutionalization' has different conceptual connotations. These could be delineated.

- A clarification is needed for the phrase ‘electoral erraticism.’ Advancing claims for why a party lost or won an election is tricky. Usually, there would be multiple variables and combinations thereof that could have shaped or determined the electoral outcome. Hence, one needs to be cautious while advancing specific reasons as explanations for electoral verdicts.
- The author could expand on what is meant by ‘other negative inherencies.’
- While arguing that Rahul Gandhi’s candidature as prime minister was unacceptable, the author could cite some opinion polls or data from the NES that compares leader popularity.
- ‘[G]rowth of grassroots state leaders and subaltern party torchbearers.’ The author could consider substantiating these points with relevant examples.
- In the section on ‘Party Leadership Transitions in Provinces,’ the author mentions ‘Fratricidal feuds.’ Fratricidal refers to killing one’s kin. It would be helpful if some examples could be cited. This seems to be an extreme and rare event.
- ‘The Congress high command’s ‘taken for grantedness’ of regional and grassroots leaders and general apathy in dealing with their genuine grievances is a major reason for desertions from the party.’ Please cite examples and reasons that help explain this observation.
- Please explain the term ‘faction chains.’ How were ‘traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution’ different from ‘mediation by impartial arbitrators’?
- ‘[M]ostly pacified by adhocism and temporary improvisations.’ Please elaborate on the nature of these conflict management/resolution measures taken by the party.
- In the conclusion, the author mentions ‘The ghost of dynasty remains omnipresent, but the sublimity of the dynast’s personal qualities and inherited family legacies can neutralize its political negativity.’ It seems that dynastic politics have opposite effects. Please do explain if that is what you are saying.