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**The real winners**

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The BJP-led NDA/JD-U alliance succeeded in retaining a majority in the Bihar assembly elections. NDA won 125 seats out of 243 seats, more than what was needed to form a simple majority of 122 seats.

The RJD-led Grand Alliance finished with 110 seats. The Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) emerged as the largest single party in the state by winning 75 seats with 23.1 percent of vote share.

The three-phase Bihar Assembly Election 2020 was the first election to have been held amid the Covid-19 pandemic – which did not thwart voters. According to Election Commission data, the overall turnout this year was 57.05 percent, marginally higher than that of 2015’s 56.66 percent.

The extreme right-wing Hindu nationalist BJP emerged as the real winner in the NDA alliance. The saffron party, which had contested 110 seats, won 74. This is an increase of 21 seats compared to the 2015 elections in which it won 53 seats.

The central government played an important role to plug the gaps that exist in state revenues. The Bihar state depends heavily on the share of resources from the central government. The BJP went into the polls with the advantage of having a BJP government in the centre.

Both the BJP and the RJD promised jobs in their election campaign. The BJP also campaigned on the issue of development in the state. Development and employment are the major issues of voters in Bihar.

Data from the National Sample Survey showed that Bihar’s unemployment rate rose in 2018-19 to 10.2 percent, as against 7.2 percent a year ago. At the same time, the overall unemployment rate for the entire country fell to 5.8 percent from 6.1 percent the year before.

But, more worryingly, the data showed that Bihar had one of the highest unemployment rates in the age-group of 15-29 years – 30.9 percent in 2018-19, as against 22.8 percent in the year-ago period. It might be higher now since the economy has been hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Nitish Kumar failed to address the issue of unemployment despite the double-digit economic growth of more than a decade. Bihar is the least industrially developed state with just 1.70 percent shares in the industry. The poverty rate is around 33.45 percent. Bihar is still largely an agriculture-based economy.

Care Ratings, in an October 30 report, estimated that the per capita GSDP of Bihar was at Rs46,664 in 2019-20, only 35 percent of the national average of Rs1,34,226. In Bihar, the share of manufacturing in the total GDP was as low as 8.7 percent, while the national was 17.4 percent.

The current Chief Minister Nitish Kumar is the real loser in the alliance as his party lost 28 seats. Its tally of seats reduced to 43 in this election from 71 in 2015. The JD-U which fought 115 seats won only 43 seats.

The BJP is the main beneficiary of this loss. Much of Kumar’s plight can be blamed on the damage Chirag Paswan’s LJP inflicted on his JD-U. Down in the dumps with just one MLA, the party spoiled the JD-U’s chances in at least 30 seats.

Nitish Kumar might be able retain the office of the chief minister for time being, but he is no more the dominating force in the alliance. He will be more dependent on the BJP to remain CM since the BJP has become the dominant force within the NDA.

The RJD-led Mahagathbandhan (grand alliance) gives a tough time to the NDA. The young Tejashwi Yadav led RJD secured 75 seats, giving the BJP-JDU partnership a tough fight through the day. It also won the highest vote share at 23.1 percent.

The results could mark a watershed in Lalu Prasad Yadav’s 31-year-old son Tejashwi Yadav’s career as a year ago in the Lok Sabha election 2019; Rashtriya Janata Dal did not win a single seat. The NDA has won 39 of the 40 seats and one had gone to the Congress.

Its defeat notwithstanding, the RJD, whose campaign Tejashwi Yadav helmed, emerged as the single largest party with 75 seats. It lost five seats in this election as it won 80 seats in the 2015 elections.

The biggest gainer in the Grand Alliance was the CPI-ML, which clinched 12 seats, followed by the CPI and CPI-M two each. CPI-ML (Liberation) increased its tally of three seats in the last elections to 12 in 2020 elections.

Congress proved to be a weak link in the opposition alliance. Congress lost eight seats it won in 2025. Congress just won 19 seats out of 70 seats it contested. Congress dominated the Hindi speaking heartlands for more than 50 years as the most powerful political force.

Congress has lost its popular support base to the BJP and regional parties in different states over the last two decades. Congress lacks a charismatic leader with a national support base like Narendra Modi for the BJP.

Rahul Gandhi has failed so far to become a charismatic leader to revive the party and to stop erosion of its support. Congress seems out of touch with the changing dynamics of Indian electoral politics.

A lackluster show by the Congress in Bihar seems to have proved costly for the opposition grand alliance, as it dragged down the RJD too from the government formation in the Hindi heartland state.

While Congress lost ground in Bihar, it also suffered significant electoral losses in Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat, losing a majority of by-polls in key states that saw the BJP surging ahead.

Asaduddin Owaisi’s AIMIM emerged as a surprise package of the election, winning five seats.

The resurgent Left parties in Bihar have done exceptionally well in the assembly elections. The decision to field young working-class candidates including students, farmers and community leaders is paying back. Three Left parties – CPI (M-L), CPM and CPI have won 16 seats out of 29 seats they contested this time. The Left parties have, in fact, showed the highest winning rate among all parties, poll analysts said. Left parties won almost 60 percent of the seats they contested.

The CPI (M-L), the biggest Left party in Bihar has won 12 of the 19 seats it contested. The CPI-M has won two out of the four seats it contested while the CPI also won two out of the six seats it contested.

It looks like the Left has helped the MGB while Congress has emerged as a weak point within the MGB. The poor showing of Congress has given an edge to the BJP-led NDA/JD-U alliance. Instead of increasing its tally of seats in this election, it has failed to defend at least eight seats it won in 2015. Congress is just winning 25 percent of the seats it contested.

In the 2015 elections, CPI (M-L) was the only Left party that won seats – three of the 98 it contested. It won six seats in 2000, seven in the February 2005 Assembly polls, and five in the elections held in October 2005. It could not win any seat in the 2010 elections when the NDA won 206 of 243 seats.

This time, the Left parties contested elections as part of the Grand Alliance comprising the RJD and the Congress.

“This was a different kind of election. This was more a people’s movement. We banked on young candidates, student leaders, candidates who were part of farmer struggles, working class people. That seems to have worked,” said Dipankar Bhattacharya, general secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist–Leninist) Liberation.