

1. **consequential** (adjective) – important/significant, major, serious.
2. **luxury** (noun) – blessing, benefit, advantage.
3. **storm** (verb) – move decisively & forcefully to a particular position in a contest.
4. **colossal** (adjective) – huge, massive, very large.
5. **dismal** (adjective) – bad, poor, awful/terrible.
6. **powerhouse** (noun) – a person/organisation/country with a lot of energy, power & influence.
7. **revival** (noun) – improvement, re-establishment; restoration/comeback.
8. **sanctify** (verb) – approve, justify, vindicate.
9. **overarching** (adjective) – all-inclusive, complete, all-embracing, comprehensive.
10. **landslide** (adjective) – decisive, runaway (victory), overwhelming majority.
11. **pretence** (noun) – (outward) appearance, impression/image, display.
12. **consolidation** (noun) – strengthening, reinforcement, stabilization.
13. **majoritarian** (adjective) – relating to a philosophy that states that a majority (sometimes categorized by religion, language, social class, or some other identifying factor) of the population is entitled to a certain degree of primacy (priority) in society, and has the right to make decisions that affect the society.
14. **triumphalism** (noun) – an attitude or a belief that a particular doctrine, religion, culture, social system is superior to and should triumph all over others.
15. **unprecedented** (adjective) – not done or experienced before.
16. **propagate** (verb) – spread, disseminate, communicate/promote (an idea).
17. **pluralistic** (adjective) – coexistent; (of people) exist in harmony irrespective of various differences.
18. **juggernaut** (noun) – powerful/overwhelming force.
19. **manifesto** (noun) – (policy) statement, declaration, pronouncement of a political party issued before an election.
20. **cult** (noun) – craze, fashion; mania.
21. **hyper-nationalist** (adjective) – relating to a person with extreme/excessive nationalism.
22. **advocacy** (noun) – support, backing, endorsement/promotion.
23. **persona** (noun) – image, public face, personality, identity.
24. **genial** (adjective) – friendly, affable, easy-going/good-natured.
25. **pit against** (phrasal verb) – compete against, compete with, vie with, grapple with.
26. **persist** (verb) – continue, carry on, keep going.
27. **dent** (verb) – diminish, reduce, lessen/weaken.
28. **scrupulously** (adverb) – religiously, consistently, constantly/regularly.
29. **shrewdly** (adverb) – cleverly, astutely, wisely.
30. **sidestep** (verb) – avoid, evade/dodge, escape.
31. **plank** (noun) – a fundamental point.
32. **downturn** (noun) – setback, upset/blow, decline (in business activity).
33. **derail** (verb) – obstruct, interrupt, impede/thwart.
34. **relentlessly** (adverb) – steadily, firmly/determinedly, continuously in a harsh way.
35. **munition** (noun) – weapons, bullets, shells.
36. **ceaseless** (adjective) – constant, continuous, unending/unrelenting.
37. **amplify** (verb) – intensify, magnify/raise, escalate.
38. **come off** (phrasal verb) – end up, finish up.
39. **timorous** (adjective) – lacking courage, fearful, apprehensive.
40. **resonate** (verb) – resound, reverberate; evoke some feelings/emotions.

41. **pertain to** (verb) – be related to, be connected with, concern.
42. **secularism** (noun) – the belief that religion should not have a strong influence in education or other public parts of society.
43. **inexplicably** (adverb) – in a way something can not be accountable/explainable/understandable.
44. **embark on** (phrasal verb) – begin, start, undertake.
45. **harvest** (verb) – obtain, gather in, gain.
46. **dividend** (noun) – benefit, advantage, gain.
47. **woo** (verb) – try to attract, pursue, court.
48. **well oiled** (adjective) – relating to an organisation which is operating smoothly.
49. **at someone's disposal** (phrase) – available for someone to be used at any time and in any way.
50. **breakaway** (noun) – separatist, secessionist, dissenting group.
51. **erstwhile** (adjective) – old, previous, former.
52. **bastion** (noun) – stronghold, bulwark, mainstay.
53. **estrangement** (noun) – disaffection, hostility; separation, division/break-up.
54. **decisively** (adverb) – conclusively, finally, once and for all.
55. **dwindle** (verb) – diminish, decrease, reduce.
56. **decentralise** (verb) – transfer of the power/control (of a department/organisation/government) from a single place to other locations.
57. **irreversible** (adjective) – unchangeable, invariable, irrevocable.
58. **stand up to** (phrasal verb) – defy, confront, challenge.
59. **rejuvenation** (noun) – revival, re-establishment, reorganization/overhaul.
60. **egalitarian** (adjective) – common, equal, fair.
61. **eternal** (adjective) – everlasting, continuous, permanent.
62. **verity** (noun) – veracity, truthfulness, sincerity/honesty; fact, certainty.

No easy solutions for the Congress

Its defeat now is far more consequential than it was in 2014; and it does not have the luxury of time

When the **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led by Narendra Modi stormed to power in 2014**, the Congress was reduced to 44 seats in the Lok Sabha. In 2019, the **Congress has suffered another colossal defeat**. It won 52 seats, still not enough to claim the post of the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha. This dismal result shows that the revival of the once-dominant powerhouse isn't happening any time soon.

Mr. Modi's re-election with an even larger majority sanctifies the structural shift to the right and the BJP's overarching dominance of the political system — that's why the Congress's spectacular defeat in this election is far more consequential than it was in 2014. The Modi landslide in 2019 is not based on any pretence of development, but on the basis

of Hindutva consolidation and majoritarian triumphalism. The divide-and-rule strategy has succeeded in securing an unprecedented electoral endorsement for Hindu nationalism as large numbers voted for the BJP as the party that best represents, protects and propagates Hindu interests and rejected the pluralistic vision of India.

About Rahul Gandhi

Congress president Rahul Gandhi put up a spirited fight but it was not good enough to slow down the Modi juggernaut. The Congress campaign was well-crafted and well-supported by a progressive manifesto promising jobs and a minimum income, but it just didn't appeal to voters. Many strategic and tactical reasons will be given for the Congress's failure; yet, we must begin by noting that the odds were heavily stacked in the BJP's favour: the government's use of instruments of state power, its money power and the media's building of the Modi cult.

The 2019 outcome was powered by a hyper-nationalist agenda and Mr. Modi's strong advocacy of it. This election was all about the political persona of Mr. Modi and what he symbolised: a strongman standing against a divided Opposition. Mr. Gandhi is a genial and affable figure, but that seems to put him at a disadvantage when pitted against Mr. Modi's muscular leadership in 'new India'. The Congress made a strategic mistake when it decided to focus its attack entirely on Mr. Modi. Many voters had said that although they felt that the BJP had not delivered on its promises, they would vote for him because they believe a strong decisive leadership can solve India's numerous problems.

Mr. Gandhi appeared to see the danger of personalising the campaign, but even then he persisted in repeating the slogan 'chowkidar chor hai' to dent Mr. Modi's image as a scrupulously honest leader, rather than remake his message. In almost every speech he would begin and conclude with the Rafale issue. But it didn't excite anyone except possibly the committed Congress voters attending his rallies.

The real gains for the Congress would have come from disappointment in the Modi government's economic performance and policies, but the BJP shrewdly sidestepped its governance record by diverting to a three-point campaign of nationalism (national security,

Pakistan and terrorism), Hindutva (Hindus everywhere, minorities nowhere) and anti-corruption (blasting the Congress's record, ignoring its own). Mr. Modi did not run on his track record but on teaching Pakistan a lesson. He has been re-elected on this plank. The economic downturn and shrinking employment opportunities didn't matter in this election.

After the Pulwama terrorist attack and India's response with the Balakot airstrikes, the BJP mixed national security with a muscular nationalism, which completely derailed the Opposition as Mr. Modi used this narrative to project himself as the strong leader of a 'mazboot sarkar (solid government)'. The Congress couldn't counter this narrative. It tried to change the subject by returning the focus to people's issues. The Nyuntam Aay Yojana (NYAY) income guarantee proposal was part of this attempt, but it came too late and the party didn't carry it to the people. Consequently, NYAY did not become a talking point in the campaign; it did not even figure prominently in Mr. Gandhi's speeches.

Throughout the election campaign, Mr. Modi relentlessly attacked the Congress; in fact, he reserved his munitions for the Congress and generally spared other Opposition parties. In response to this ceaseless attack, amplified by the mainstream media, the Congress leadership came off looking timorous and defensive. The Congress did not counter him. It did not list the achievements of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) or previous Congress governments.

Mr. Gandhi said the right things but often did not connect with the voters, perhaps because he did not address them in an idiom or vocabulary that resonated. The failure of Mr. Gandhi and his sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, whose last-minute induction in the campaign made no impact, is obvious. Apart from the leadership crisis, two other issues are important. These pertain to the Congress's ideology and organisation.

Ideology-lite

During the past five years, secularism has been pushed to the margins of Indian **politics**, and the Congress did not strongly defend secular nationalism. The party remained inexplicably silent on subjects ranging from secularism to the rights of minorities, to name just two of the most important ones. Mr. Gandhi chose to embark on a series of visits to Hindu temples but his party didn't care to make a distinction between

Hinduism and Hindutva, which is a political ideology and a political project. The Congress could not harvest electoral dividends from this competitive wooing of the Hindu vote because people chose the more strident option.

Besides, and critically, the Congress lacks an organisation; it failed to rebuild its organisation during UPA rule (2004-14) and it failed to push this process during its years in opposition (2014-19). The BJP, in contrast, has a well-oiled political machine at its disposal. It is also closely connected to a network of Hindu religious organisations that spring into action in every election and provide vast numbers of volunteers for campaigning and booth management. The nationwide branches of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and its affiliated organisations clearly helped the BJP to build a second Modi wave.

Complicating the Congress's hopes of returning to its old strength is that its decline has coincided with the rise of smaller regional parties, most of which are breakaways from the Congress. These parties are fighting intensely for a larger share of the political pie. The Congress has drawn a zero in its erstwhile bastion of undivided Andhra Pradesh, where it won a sizeable proportion of seats in 2009. As Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy gets ready to take over as the next Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, the Congress leadership must be ruing its decision to deny him the CM's post a decade ago, leading to a bitter estrangement.

The Congress has lost Maharashtra, done poorly in Karnataka, West Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh — which means it lacks the geographical base of a pan-India party. The BJP has decisively reversed the trend of the 2018 Assembly elections in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, where it had lost to the Congress, and has now surged ahead in these crucial States. Punjab and Kerala are the only two big States which continue to lean towards the Congress.

Ability to retain supporters

The Congress now lacks a distinct social base, and its ability to retain its supporters is dwindling. To regain its influence, it needs to decentralise and build broad-based social coalitions at the State level. The party's decline is not irreversible. But in the long road ahead, it has to figure out what it actually stands for, and what it will take to stand up to Mr. Modi's BJP. The real key to rejuvenation lies in mass contact, a distinctive and far



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savvier campaign on an egalitarian platform and the leadership's ability to communicate this to the people — rather than depending on the eternal verities (and varieties) of dynastic leadership.

The Congress does not have the luxury of time; it must start today.

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