

## ➤ Important Vocab for the Editorial

- ***next best (adjective)*** – related to something not preferred as a first choice, but second in order.
- ***adept (noun)*** – expert, genius, master.
- ***averse (adjective)*** – opposed to, against, hostile to.
- ***rider (noun)*** – conditions, constraints, restrictions.
- ***amount (verb)*** – become, develop into, turn upto.
- ***pointer (noun)*** – indication, hint, signal.
- ***implicit in (adjective)*** – inherent, intrinsic, incorporated/inbuilt.
- ***shrunk (past participle of shrink) (verb)*** – lessen, reduce, decrease.
- ***to the core (phrase)*** – to the depths; completely, totally.
- ***assorted (adjective)*** – mixed, various, diverse.
- ***first-past-the-post (phrase)*** – it is an electoral system in which a candidate with the most votes in each constituency wins and becomes the MP/MLA for that seat.
- ***pact (noun)*** – agreement, treaty, deal.
- ***guard (against) (phrasal verb)*** – beware of, be alert to, take care for.
- ***multi-pronged (adjective)*** – having different aspects/elements.
- ***fragmented (adjective)*** – divided, fractured, separated.
- ***outreach (noun)*** – the level of reaching out/activity/effort; involvement.
- ***consolidate (verb)*** – strengthen, secure, reinforce/fortify.
- ***pragmatism (noun)*** – realism, practicability, logical thinking.
- ***replicate (verb)*** – copy, reproduce, duplicate.
- ***churn (noun)*** – disorder, confusion, mess up.

## The next best: on Mayawati's support to SP

### Mayawati is testing BSP's alliance options by supporting the SP in UP by-elections

If politics is the art of the next best, then Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati is slowly becoming adept at it. She has been averse to pre-poll alliances, opting instead for post-poll tie-ups with either the Bharatiya Janata Party or the Samajwadi Party, depending on the nature of the electoral outcome. For her to now [extend support to the SP in the by-elections](#) to the Phulpur and Gorakhpur Lok Sabha constituencies in Uttar Pradesh is therefore a serious departure from practice. True, the support comes with riders. She made it clear this does not amount to a formal alliance and is no pointer to a tie-up for the 2019 Lok Sabha election. But implicit in her declaration of support is a recognition that the BJP is the party to beat, and that the BSP needs to back the strongest opposition party in elections where it is not a contender. If the Lok Sabha election in 2014 and the Assembly

election in 2017 are any indication, the BSP has shrunk to its core, unable to win support outside the Dalit caste of Jatavs. Earlier, with the backing of an assorted group of Dalits, non-Yadav backward classes and minorities, the BSP was able to win a substantial number of seats in the first-past-the-post system. Ms. Mayawati's reasoning against entering into any pre-poll electoral pact with other parties is not hard to understand: It is not a desire to guard against ideological compromises or the arrogance of an undisputed leader of a dominant party, but a tactic to force a multi-pronged contest and make the most of a fragmented vote. This worked most spectacularly in the 2007 Assembly election, when her outreach to social groups outside the BSP's core support base, especially the upper castes, combined well in a multi-cornered contest. Since then, however, the BSP has been on the decline, failing to win even a single Lok Sabha constituency in 2014, a loss of 20 seats in Uttar Pradesh.

The BSP's shrinking vote-bank now leaves Ms. Mayawati with little option but to make new alliances, and consolidate the anti-BJP vote. The same pragmatism that made the most of a fragmented vote will likely suggest to her that she take the pre-poll alliance route in the changed situation today. The SP has always been open to poll pacts, positioning itself as the principal opponent of the BJP. If the BSP takes a step forward, the SP will surely take two towards it. The Congress, with a geographically limited area of influence in **Uttar Pradesh**, would gladly try and replicate the grand alliance of Bihar 2015. Ms. Mayawati might be testing the benefits of an alliance with the SP in Phulpur and Gorakhpur. If the SP does well, the end-result might be more than an additional two members in the 16th Lok Sabha. It could be the beginning of a political churn.