Hindutva nationalism as embodied by Narendra Modi has remained the dominant narrative of the Lok Sabha polls.

Ramesh and Rajesh, two brothers in Atari Khejra, around 50 km from the Madhya Pradesh capital Bhopal, could be counted among the so-called aspirational generation that supported Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014. In their mid-20s and wiser by five years now, they laboured to explain their continuing support for Mr. Modi, who they want in office for a second term. The brothers run a tea shop by the highway and their backward caste Kurmi family owns some land. Their farm incomes remain non-remunerative, material life remains as tough as ever, and they are not beneficiaries of the several welfare schemes launched by the Modi government. But finally they came up with one reason that they sounded fully convinced about: “India has become number 1 in the world under Mr. Modi.”

**Jettisoning economic issues**

A widely popular explanation for Mr. Modi’s 2014 success was that he had jettisoned Hindutva for reforms/development. There was no evidence to support this theory — in fact, evidence suggested the opposite, as he declared himself a “Hindu nationalist” ahead of the campaign and repeatedly raised cow slaughter, “infiltrators”, etc. through the 2014 campaign. But this had become justification for a segment of his elite supporters. Mr. Modi never promised a list of reforms, though he did promise jobs. So the difference between 2014 and 2019 has not been that Mr. Modi has returned to Hindutva, but the complete removal of jobs and development from the agenda by systematically blocking or contaminating official data on these topics. If 2014 was about seeking economic progress through Hindu consolidation, in 2019 national glory was itself the end.

Core Modi voters are convinced that India is a superpower, that his strident rhetoric has scared Pakistan and China. In a particularly jaw-dropping moment of adulation for Mr. Modi, a young tourist guide in Agra, a Jat, who by conventional wisdom should be a supporter of the anti-BJP coalition of the Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party and Rashtriya Lok Dal in Uttar Pradesh, said: “Who in the world knew Manmohan Singh? Donald Trump stands up when he meets Narendra Modi.” His financial situation is worse than it was in 2014, but he believes that demonetisation has done a world of good for the nation. To ask about the promises of 2014 itself has become an anti-national act. “To talk about jobs, we need to have a country first, right?” Mr. Modi’s supporters retort. This suspension of logic and rational thinking and the intangible abstract of national glory can be found across the Hindi heartland. This is not to deny the existence of a cohort of transactional voters who rooted for Mr. Modi — the recipients of the subsidised cooking gas and houses, for instance.
This *euphoria* disconnected from self-admitted reality is borne out in the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies’s pre-poll survey, in which more people thought employment opportunities had reduced, prices had gone up, welfare had shrunk, social disharmony had risen and corruption had spiked, but still wanted a second term for Mr. Modi. Only on one question, more people thought Mr. Modi has done well: ‘India’s image in the world’.

This kind of support for Mr. Modi cuts across caste, though upper castes are its *fulcrum*. But this support could be mobilised only when the question was specifically framed whether they want a second term for Mr. Modi, sidestepping all local questions and daily experience. Mr. Modi’s attempt has been to make the entire election into a referendum on him, and his success will depend on whether or not he managed to push a critical mass of the voters to look beyond their material well-being.

**The Congress challenge**

The Congress under Rahul Gandhi challenged this *delusional* populism by questioning the militarism and ultranationalism underlying it and promising a minimum income guarantee for all under a scheme called NYAY (Nyuntam Aay Yojana). While this fuelled some hope for the party’s *resurgence*, its impact as a *pan-India* alternative to Hindutva has been limited. This is primarily due to the *patronising* tone of the party’s messaging, as opposed to the empowering tone of Hindutva.

Therefore, the Congress’s performance will depend largely on its ability to amplify local factors, the performance of its governments where they exist, and better management of elections compared to 2014. In Chhattisgarh, the Congress has achieved this objective in significant measure. “Mr. Modi’s campaign in 2014 was economy plus emotions, but this time he was only emotions. Our campaign was only economy and lacked emotions,” a Congress functionary summed it up. “In 2004 we beat the BJP when we both talked about material aspects.”

**The U.P., Bihar narrative**

The Hindutva narrative has been challenged the most in U.P., followed by Bihar, and among two communities everywhere: Muslims and tribals, who were not vocal. West Bengal is in a different category as the BJP is still trying to expand its footprint. Bihar and U.P. are extremely critical in 2019: 93 of the BJP’s 282 seats in 2014 came from these two States. The critical mass of the Muslim *electorate* and the deep-rooted history of social justice politics that has offered a counter-polemic to the Hindutva agenda make these States *distinct*. This unique combination of demographic and historical factors makes the Gujarat model of Hindutva — to reduce to irrelevance Muslims and tribals, and win an *overwhelming* majority among the rest — difficult in these States.

The BJP achieved that feat in 2014, and hopes to repeat it in 2019. A shared existential threat from the BJP united Yadavs, Dalits and Muslims in U.P. and Bihar and their numerical *heft* offers the strongest pushback to Hindutva in 2019. The BJP has the solid backing of the upper castes and non-Yadav backwards, and a section of Dalits in Bihar. That may not be good enough to match the 2014 figures in U.P., but Bihar offers better prospects for the party. The BJP’s performance therefore will depend on whether and to what extent it has *lured* Yadavs, and in U.P. non-Jatav Dalits and Jats. That will depend on the extent to which Mr. Modi could make it a *referendum* on himself in U.P. and Bihar. Unlike the Congress, the BJP has been *relentlessly* reaching out to all backward castes and tribals.

Traders, the traditional social base of the BJP, expressed *resentment* over demonetisation. Muslims and tribals offered but did not as much vocalise their opposition to Hindutva. There were no fatwas calling on the Muslims to vote in any particular direction in 2019. BSP chief Mayawati, representing Ambedkarite Dalits, mobilised her supporters on a *staunchly* political platform, but her refusal to *accommodate* the Congress in the U.P. alliance may have cost the alliance. Trinamool Congress chief and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has fought the Hindutva plans for West Bengal in the streets. All told, in regions where the BJP is strong, Hindutva nationalism *personified* in Mr. Modi remained the dominant political force in 2019. Any public desire for his
removal from his office, if it exists, has not been an outcry. The Congress’s gains will be proportional to the impact of local factors, and not on account of any national alternative that it has put forward.

Courtesy: The Hindu (National)

1. **Strident** (Adjective): Meaning: (of a sound) loud and harsh; grating. (श्रुतिकठोर)

   **Synonyms**: Harsh, Raucous, Raspig, Shrill, Piercing

   **Antonyms**: Soft, Dulcet, Mellifluous, Mellow, Honeyed

   **Example**: The bickering grew more **strident** during the visit.

2. **Adulation** (Noun): Meaning: excessive admiration or praise. (अतिप्रशंसा)

   **Synonyms**: Adoration, Exaltation, Glorification, Veneration

   **Antonyms**: Disparagement, Belittling, Derision, Vilification

   **Example**: He found it difficult to cope with the **adulation** of the fans.

3. **Retort** (Verb): Meaning: say something in answer to a remark, typically in a sharp, angry, or witty manner. (करारा जवाब देना)

   **Synonyms**: Counter, Rejoin, Riposte, Retaliate, Respond, Return

   **Antonyms**: Question, Enquire, Ask

   **Example**: Others **retort** that strong central power is a dangerous thing in Russia.
4. **Intangible** (Adjective) : Meaning: difficult or impossible to define or understand; vague and abstract. (अगोचर)

*Synonyms*: Indiscernible, Imperceptible, Impalpable, Obscure  
*Antonyms*: Comprehensible, Explicit, Lucid, Perspicuous, Clear  
*Example*: She has that **intangible** quality which you might call charisma.

5. **Euphoria** (Noun) : Meaning: a feeling or state of intense excitement and happiness. (उत्साह, उल्लासोन्माद)

*Synonyms*: Elation, Jubilation, Exhilaration, Rapture, Ecstasy  
*Antonyms*: Misery, Depression, Distress, Heartache  
*Example*: They were in a state of **euphoria** after the baby was born.

6. **Resurgence** (Noun) : Meaning: an increase or revival after a period of little activity, popularity, or occurrence. (पुनरुत्थान)
**Synonyms**: Renaissance, Resurrection, Rejuvenation, Reappearance, Reemergence

**Antonyms**: Disappearance, Extinction, Failure, Expiration

**Example**: The creation of independent states has led to a **resurgence** of nationalism.

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**Distinct** (Adjective): Meaning: recognizably different in nature from something else of a similar type. (अलग, विशेष)

**Synonyms**: Clear-Cut, Discrete, Diverse, Distinctive, Separate

**Antonyms**: Indistinct, Fuzzy, Inarticulate, Slurred, Imprecise

**Example**: The patterns of spoken language are **distinct** from those of writing.

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**Lure** (Verb): Meaning: tempt (a person or animal) to do something or to go somewhere, Especially By Offering Some Form Of Reward. (लुभाना, प्रलोभित करना)

**Synonyms**: Entice, Coax, Persuade, Inveigle, Allure

**Antonyms**: Deter, Dissuade, Daunt, Discourage

**Example**: He felt the **lure** of distant places.
9. **Resentment** (Noun): Meaning: bitter indignation at having been treated unfairly. (नाराजगी, अप्रसन्नता)

**Synonyms**: Indignation, Pique, Dissatisfaction, Discontent, Acrimony, Rancor

**Antonyms**: Contentment, Happiness, Fulfillment, Cheerfulness

**Example**: The feelings of hurt and **resentment** lingered on for years.

10. **Staunchly** (Adverb): Meaning: in a very loyal and committed manner. (दृढ़तापूर्वक)

**Synonyms**: Firmly, Determinedly, Persistently, Resolutely, Tenaciously, Stubbornly

**Antonyms**: Docilely, Waveringly, Changeably

**Example**: She **staunchly** defended the new policy.
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