



NEW TRENDS IN THE ELECTORAL POLITICS OF UTTAR PRADESH: AN ANALYSIS OF LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS 2017 & 2022

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ABSTRACT

Uttar Pradesh is regarded as the most populous, giant in size and has been characterized as one of the most determining states in terms of political changes and development since independence. The political changes and development in the state politics can be considered as the greater impact on the national politics. In the recent times, the state has also been experiencing major changes and developments from the people's voting behaviour and in politics and dominance of the political party. The formation of government of BJP in 2017 and retaining the same in 2022 has led to the new trend in the electoral politics of UP. This paper aims to understand the new trend in the electoral politics of Uttar Pradesh initiated by the Bhartiya Janata Party by breaking long tradition and pattern of changing government in Uttar Pradesh. By analysing the politics of BJP and its impact on the determinant of the voting patterns of the people in the state, this paper also analyses the reasons for this new trend of sustaining incumbency and government in the state.

Keywords: Electoral politics, anti-incumbency, voting behaviour, Uttar Pradesh

INTRODUCTION

The Uttar Pradesh is one of the most important states out of 28 states in India. It has historical relevance in terms of its role played for the national movement and fight for the freedom of India. Many important movements, including the Indian Rebellion 1857, social reforms, educational and religious movements borne on the land of Uttar Pradesh (Bandyopadhyaya, 2004). After Independence, Uttar Pradesh has always been remained the core area of electoral politics as it has most number of seats of the Lok Sabha – lower house of the parliament of India. In addition, it has been argued that the party which succeeds in gaining the maximum of the Uttar Pradesh is likely to succeed in securing majority in the parliament. Similarly, the state politics of Uttar Pradesh is also peculiar in terms of many aspects. It has largest strength legislative assembly consisting 403 seats which is also important for the number of members elected for the Rajya Sabha (Upper house) of the parliament. Therefore, parties take keen interest in the state politics of Uttar Pradesh. The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), Indian National Congress (INC), Samajwadi Party (SP), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and Rashtriya Lokdal (RLD) are some of the major political parties of Uttar Pradesh.

The identity politics has always been deeply rooted in the politics of the state. Traditionally, the caste was the most dominating factor from the selection and distribution of the tickets by the parties and to the casting vote by the people in election. In the 1990s, however, the religion as a factor for political behaviour of the people of Uttar Pradesh became influential due to changing nature of the politics after the Babri Masjid and Ram Mandir controversy. Since, the caste and religion remained the most important factors in the state politics.

As far as the trend of the electoral politics of the Uttar Pradesh is concerned, any party could hardly succeed in defending anti-incumbency and party in opposition seemed to take advantage to come into power. However, the Indian National Congress was remained in power in the state from independence to 1967. In 1967, the state got its first non-congress government in the state. But the trend of the circulation of the power from one to another party can be seen after the emergence of the two dominant regional parties of the state – Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party. At the same time, the alliance of these two parties was equally important for gaining power in the state. In the context of the nature of anti-incumbency and continuation of one party to retain in power in succeeding elections, the recent two assembly elections of the state – 2017 and 2022 are very peculiar and demands for revisiting the nature of the politics of the state.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To understand the recent developments in the electoral politics of Uttar Pradesh.
- To study the changing nature of anti-incumbency and emerging determinants of voting behaviour in Uttar Pradesh.
- To analyse the consecutive victory of Bhartiya Janata Party in 2017 & 2022 Assembly elections.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is primarily based on secondary data. The qualitative data is taken from the prominent writings including books, journals, magazines, newspapers which used for understanding the nature of electoral politics of Uttar Pradesh. The quantitative data retrieved from the website of the election commission of India is very helpful in figure out the distribution of the voting percentage and number of seats. By using descriptive and analytical methods, this paper tries to understand the consecutive victory of BJP as the new trend in the electoral politics of Uttar Pradesh and also outline the factors responsible for it.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UTTAR PRADESH

Uttar Pradesh was formerly known as the United Provinces. It was renamed in January 1950 from United Provinces to Uttar Pradesh. It is the most populous state among all the Indian states and presently, it holds the maximum number of Lok Sabha seats. Indeed, Uttar Pradesh is one of the largest states of India and has always been remained politically most important in many aspects. For example, it is one of the major regions that constitute ‘Hindi Heartland’s of India and many Prime Ministers have been elected from the constituency of Uttar Pradesh. In this way, the electoral politics of Uttar Pradesh play a significant role in the national politics of India. The electoral politics of the Uttar Pradesh can be divided into two phases. In the first phase, the Congress Party remained in a dominant position (1952-1989) while the second phase can be characterized as a non- Congress phase of the coalition governments (1989-1999). On the basis

of the prolonged rule of the Congress Party, the first phase of Uttar Pradesh politics is divided into two different phases; politics from Independence to 1967 and from 1967 to 1989. Till 1967 the Congress Party had a dominant position in Uttar Pradesh politics. However, the political scenario changed when the party lost its dominance in 1967 and a non-Congress government came into power in this state (Verma A. K., 2003, p. 249). It has been argued that the defections and split in the party were the foremost reasons behind the weakening of the party or loosing of the Congress's dominance.

The second phase of Uttar Pradesh's electoral politics is known as the non-Congress phase. It is mainly characterized by the emergence of the political parties' viz. the Bahujan Samaj Party and Samajwadi Party. This phase witnessed a political competition among the political parties. The electoral politics of this era is marked by the communal polarisation of the electorate (Verma A. K., 2003, p. 245- 60). There were numerous issues and events such as the Mandal Commission Report and issue of Ayodhya that affected the electoral politics of Uttar Pradesh during this time.

After the implementation of the Mandal report and demolition of the Babri Masjid (controversial structure), the electoral politics of Uttar Pradesh experienced multifold changes. In 1990s, the author points out two important developments in the context of the electoral politics of Uttar Pradesh. Firstly, the Bhartiya Janata Party succeeded in making its relevance in the electoral politics by forming government with majority in the state for the first time. In the same decade, the Bhartiya Janata Party could not prove its credibility and Uttar Pradesh came under the Presidential rule due to the occurrence of the communal riots in the state. However, the party, at the same time, also experienced the decline of the support of the people as it could not get the same number of the seats in next couple of elections. Secondly, the same period is also marked by the political instability in the state. No party could form government with majority and the coalition government could not successfully complete its tenure. The real issues of the people were also neglected and the state went into the socio-economic crises. In addition, the party system was collapsed and parties in power showed poor governance and failed to give stable government (Pai, 2002).

In the beginning of two first centuries, the situation remained unchanged due to the lack of majority of any party. The coalition politics remained in fashion. There is rising influence of regional parties, particularly Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party, observed in the period. Both SP and BSP had the most number of seats and support of people. In 2007, the BSP, headed by Mayawati, got majority in the election and form the government. Mayawati, as a chief minister of the state, tried well to give the good governance and restore political stability by completing full tenure of the government. However, the BSP let government surrounded by anti-incumbency and the party lost its base vote in 2012 election. One of the main reasons of this anti-incumbency was caste favoritism and politics of BSP government. The opposition alleged on the then existing government for caste discrimination and the BSP has lack of "inclusive politics"(Verma A. , 2012). Therefore, the BSP had to face the defeat in 2012 assembly elections. Defending anti-incumbency and continuation of the same party government for the consecutive tenure was the 'rarest of the rare' in the state till 2022 assembly election.

STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTION, 2017

The Samajwadi Party government led by Akhilesh Yadav, son of the Mulayam Singh Yadav, was ruling in the state. The five years period of government often characterized by the many developmental projects from the distribution of Laptops to the bringing service of Metro in the capital and improvement of road transports and infrastructure facilities. Being the new young face in the politics, Akhilesh Yadav was himself propagated as the new era of youngster politics and his vision of developments & policies were praised and left no chance for the opposition to criticize him on the ground of corruption & failure government. Yet the opposition found the ground of criticizing the incumbent government. Akhilesh Yadav was criticized for the Muzaffar Nagar Riots and empowering only Yadavs and failed to stop “Gunda Raj” in the Uttar Pradesh politics.

The incumbent SP government made alliance with Congress & Rashtriya Lokdal for defending its government (Farooqui & Sridharan, 2017). The alliance was formed under the leadership of Samajwadi Party. The Alliance was stick with the slogan of “*Kaam Bolta hai*” and vehemently promoted the youth leadership on the face of Akhilesh Yadav and Rahul Gandhi. On the other hand, the BJP also made alliance with some small regional parties. Importantly, the BJP fought the election on the name of Narendra Modi’s face and leadership (the then prime minister) and avoid declaring name of Chief Minister Candidate.

The Uttar Pradesh Assembly Election brought many important changes for the incumbent Samajwadi Party. The Indian National Congress Party was in power at Centre when Samajwadi Party came into power in 2012 but now the Bhartiya Janata Party has replaced Congress in the General Election 2014. Secondly, the Uttar Pradesh played an important role for the victory of BJP because it has succeeded to win 72 seats out of the 80 Lok Sabha seats in the state (The Economic Times, 2014). Thirdly, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself contested and won by huge margin from Varanasi. It has been argued that it was not only communal agenda of the BJP that worked for the victory of the BJP but the politics of the development also remained the explicit factor for mobilizing people during the General Election 2014 (Verma, Beg, & Kumar, 2017). All these changes dramatically strengthened BJP in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly Election, 2017. After setting victory in the General Election, 2014, the Uttar Pradesh is at the top list of BJP for capturing power of the state which would definitely further empower the position of the BJP's power and governance. The Muzaffar Nagar Riots in 2013, in which more than 60 people were killed and 40,000 people were displaced (The Hindu, 2021), was one of the issues for BJP to propagate the communal politics. In addition, the BJP also highlighted the issue of migration of the Hindu families from Muslim dominated areas in Kairana (a district of western part of UP) (Hasan, 2016).

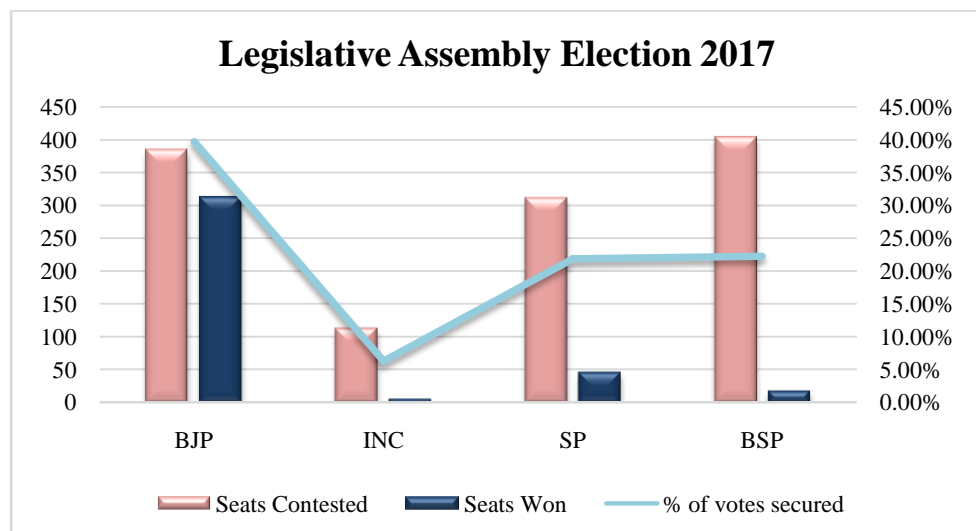
The BJP’s allegation on the Samajwadi Party for the Muzaffar Nagar Riots, Muslim appeasement politics created grounds for the BJP in communalizing the electoral battle between BJP and incumbent SP government. During the election campaign, Amit Shah, the then national president of BJP, said that UP's development is not possible under the existence of its three rival parties, Indian National Congress, Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party. In addition, the leaders of BJP also greatly emphasized on the “Double Engine Government” for the greater development of the state. Similarly, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi further blamed SP for discriminatory treatment between Muslims and Hindus (Lalmani Verma, 2017, The Indian

Express). The Uttar Pradesh has also been very communally sensitive because of "Babri Masjid-Ram JanmBhoomi" issue. The promise of *Ram-Mandir* construction in the manifesto released by the Bhartiya Janata Party also made greater impact on the voters of the state. Therefore, the entire campaigning of BJP greatly focused on highlighting such religious and identity issues which shaded not only acclaimed achievements of the government and propagated leadership credibility of Akhilesh Yadav led government. In the election result, the BJP alone won 312 seats with more than 39 percent of the votes of the state. However, Samajwadi party could only get 47 seats with 21 percent of the votes. Even along with Indian National Congress, the Samajwadi Party alliance got 28 percent of the total votes. In addition, Bahujan Samaj Party, even though got 22 percent votes, could only secure 19 seats (See Table 1 & Figure 1). It shows that the Bhartiya Janata party succeed in shifting the voters' attentions from the issues of state and performance of the government to cast their votes on religious identity.

Table: 1 Results of Legislative Assembly Election 2017

Party	Seats Contested	Seats Won	% of votes secured
BJP	384	312	39.67%
INC	114	07	6.25%
SP	311	47	21.82%
BSP	403	19	22.23%
Others	2179	15	6.59%
IND	1462	03	2.57%
NOTA	403	--	0.87%
Total	5256	403	100 %

Figure: 1



The election result shocked not only political pundits but also leaders of the political parties. The Samajwadi Party led alliance faced miserable defeat. Both Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samajwadi Party faced the greatest loss in this election. The strength of both parties in Uttar Pradesh was severely hit as they could win least number of seats since their inception of parties. The BJP made history in this election by marking landslide victory. In this election, BJP succeeded in securing 312 seats that were more than what party itself expected. Many argued that it is the result of “Modi Magic” while some argued that BJP successfully polarized the election by its communal politics and people voted in the name of religion instead of genuine issues of socio-economic development.

STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTION, 2022

The Eighteenth Uttar Pradesh assembly election, 2022 was also very interesting in many aspects. The Bhartiya Janata Party under the leadership of Yogi Adityanath, had been ruled the state with massive majority. Although the face of the Chief Minister (CM) of the State was not before the election and party decided to contest the election on the name of PM Modi and the achievement of the central government. After the result of the election, many prominent faces, including the name of the then Home Minister Rajnath Singh, were in race and expected to be the next chief minister of the state. However, the name of Yogi Adityanath was finalized for the CM of UP. The governance of Yogi Adityanath had been remained in the discussions and debates many times. From changing name of cities, Romeo Squad, to the encounters and use of bulldozers on the houses of those who protested against the Citizen Amendment Act (CAA)- National Register of Citizens.

Many important events took place during the tenure of Yogi Adityanath government. Some of the prominent events are need to be concerned. In the initial couple of month of his governance, Yogi Adityanath took some important decision which brought him into the limelight of mainstream media. The decision of putting on ban on slaughterhouse and formulation of ‘Anti-Romeo Squad’ were very popular. Such actions were promoted in a way that party celebrated ‘100 days of government’. Secondly, the historic verdict of the Supreme Court on prolonged Babri-Masjid-Ramjanm-Bhoomi dispute was another chance to the party for cheering the credibility of the government. The party propagated in such way that the verdict came in favor of the majority community is the result of the ‘double-engine government’. In addition, the BJP party was successful in defending the General Election 2019. So, the victory of BJP in the General Election gave more confidence to the UP government. Another important incident was the outbreak of COVID-19. During COVID crisis, like all the government, the UP government also tried to seriously tackle the issue and meet the needs of the people by all possible means. However, the governments were more exposed by failure in controlling COVID-19 crisis.

Before the election, the BJP strategized to shape the 2022 election as the only battle between Samajwadi Party and Bhartiya Janata Party. The incumbent government made grounds for making BSP irrelevant in the election (Kumar, 2022). It was probably a part of politics to prevent the any strong alliance and, on the other hand, the BJP would probably thought easier to defeat SP on the ground of law and order and by putting allegation on Mulayam Singh Yadav as Muslim sympathizer. In spite of all efforts of highlighting achievements & hiding failures, the existing BJP government had the anti-incumbency. Unlike previous assembly election, the Samajwadi Party did not make alliance with the Indian National Congress. But it made alliance

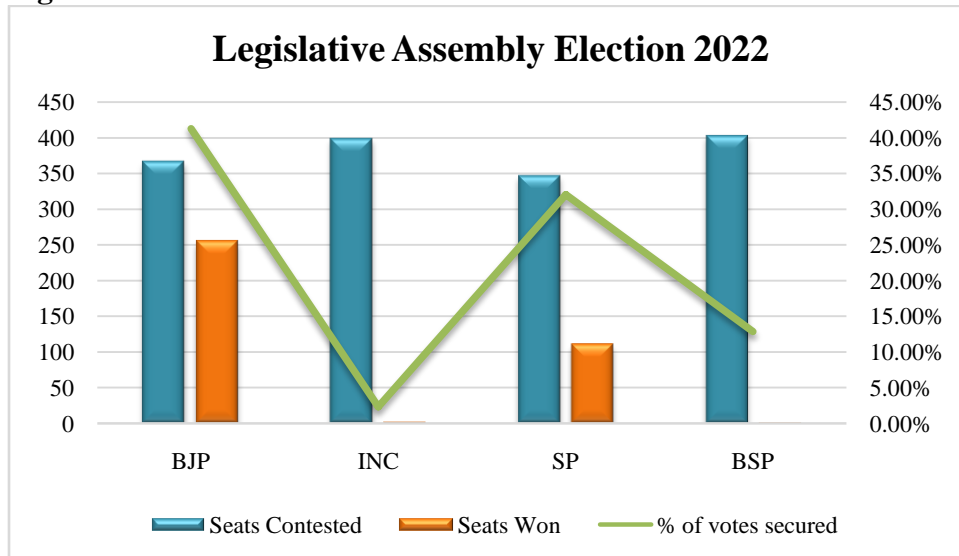
with Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) and other small parties of the region. The opposition parties, particularly the Samajwadi Party, criticized the government on the grounds of failures of government in managing COVID-19 crisis, government attempt to deal with agrarian crisis, women safety issue and the most important – the issue of unemployment.

Further, the opposition party also alleged that existing government is not worked for the development and therefore, the party is diverting people from the issue of development and unemployment to communal issues. However, in spite of this, as we can see in Table 2 and Figure 2, the election result came in favor of the incumbent BJP government with even more percentage of votes than earlier. Though, the number of seats of the Bhartiya Janata Party decreased. On the other hand, the voting percentage and number of the seats of the Samjwadi Party increased. Yet, SP could not get required numbers to form the government. Important to note, the Bahujan Samaj Party got severely hit in this election. The party could win only 1 seat out 403 contested seats and its voting percentage also declined (See Table 2 & Figure 2). The victorious Bhartiya Janata Party affirmed Yogi Adityanath continues to be the chief minister of the state. It has also been argued that such efforts of BJP, along with the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, could get fruitful result.

Table: 2 Results of Legislative Assembly Election 2022

Party	Seats Contested	Seats Won	% of Votes Secured
BJP	367	255	41.29%
INC	399	02	2.33%
SP	347	111	32.06%
BSP	403	01	12.88%
Others	1892	34	9.64%
IND	1025	--	1.11%
NOTA	--	--	0.69%
Total	4433	403	100 %

Figure: 2



COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF 2017 & 2022

The main objective of this paper is to analyse the changing nature of the anti-incumbency in the state politics of the Uttar Pradesh. As it has already been discussed and highlighted the nature of electoral politics and pattern of government. In post-independent period, the Indian National Congress dominated the state politics. The first non-congress government in the state was made in 1967. Since then, the state politics has been gone with many changes in the context of electoral politics and pattern of government. In the 1960s and 1970s, the state was also facing the crisis of political stability. At the same time, the state also witnessed for the growth of regionalism in electoral politics which led to the formation of many prominent regional parties in the state – Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party, Rashtriya Lok Dal. These regional parties started to rule the state in the 1990s. However, neither Samajwadi Party nor Bahujan Samaj Party could succeed to repeat the tenure of the government. In this context, the Bhartiya Janata Party made record in assembly election 2022 for retaining the government in the state. This landmark change in the state electoral politics needs to be understood.

As far as the UP Assembly Election 2017 is concerned, the Samajwadi Party under the leadership ruled the state with many positive outcomes and greater emphasis on the politics of development. Both Samajwadi party and his leader Akhilesh Yadav were confident enough on the governance and development which they chose during the tenure of the government. They also compare the development of UP government and the development of BJP's national government. The exit polls for 2017 assembly election were also showing no clear majority to any party and close fight between National Democratic Alliance and Samajwadi Party alliance. The election result compelled to revisit the traditional factors of voting behaviour in the state.

The UP Assembly Election 2022 is also peculiar and gained attention of the researcher in terms of many aspects. Firstly, since 1967, no single party could succeed to retain power for the second tenure. The Bhartiya Janata Party established the record by defending the government and continues its dominance over the electoral of the state. Secondly, the state also witnessed for the dramatic change in the voting behaviour of the state. People of the state forced political

pundits to rethink about the voting pattern of the state. Because the people, who commonly used to vote on the basis of the caste and regional identity, have now influenced by the new kind of politics. The communal ground and faith on the commitments of Bhartiya Janata Party have become dominant factor of the voting behaviour of the state. Even with having anti-incumbency due to the unprecedented rise of the unemployment rate, failure in managing COVID crisis and farmer's agitations, and women's security, the party easily secured the respectable number of seats to retain the power and form the government once again. However, the number of the BJP seats decline but the overall voting percentage of the party gained.

The caste is a predominant factor in the electoral politics of India (Kothari, 1986). The Uttar Pradesh is also one of the strong places where the caste plays key role in electoral politics of the state. The regional parties also formed and often characterized for promoting a particular caste and doing caste politics (Verma A. , 2004). For example, the formation of the Bahujan Samaj Party is a prominent example of consolidation of the interest of the lower caste; Samajwadi Party is also greatly associated to promote Other Backward Caste (OBC), particularly *Yadav*. In this way, the caste has been remained the dominant role to play in Uttar Pradesh. However, the last two UP assembly elections has brought dramatic change in the context of the dominance of the caste in electoral democracy in UP. The dramatic rise in the BJP's percentage of the vote in the assembly election depicts that people voted beyond the boundaries of the caste.

Religion is also an important factor in the electoral politics of India. Uttar Pradesh, particularly the western region of the state, is very delicate as far as the history of communal riots is concerned. It has been argued that the Bhartiya Janata Party has been using religion to mobilize people for very long period of time. It succeeds in 1990s when the party formed the government for the first time in the state with Kalyan Singh as a chief minister. However, the people of the Uttar Pradesh judged the party on the basis of the governance and rejected the communal politics. Now, the religion and communal politics has been in fashion in India's democracy. In the recent history of India, the religion and communal politics has been brought fruitful result in the electoral politics. The religion and 'communalization of the politics' has surpassed the traditional caste and regional factors in the electoral politics of Uttar Pradesh. The formation of the government by the Bhartiya Janata Party in 2017 assembly election and sustenance of the power in 2022 assembly election show that how the communal politics of the BJP has changed the nature of the electoral politics of UP. It also shows that how BJP's politics is successful in making anti-incumbency in 2017 and defending its own anti-incumbency in 2022.

CONCLUSION

The election is one of the most important features of democracy. Election empowers people to show their dominance as the 'rule of the people'. Election also gives opportunity not only voters but also leaders and parties to convince people to vote in favor of them and capture power democratically. But the 'free and fair' election is the need of the democracy. Though, like every democratic country, India has also a machinery to conduct free and fair election but India, particularly the Uttar Pradesh is also known for the electoral malpractices and eroding democratic values (Michelutti, 2020). In the contemporary period, India has been experiencing new changes in the electoral democracy. After the victory in the General Election 2014 and forming governments in many states of India, the rising dominance of the Bhartiya Janata Party, arguably the far right party has raised many questions on the democracy of India. The nature of

electoral campaigns, languages of the political leaders, fear and exclusion of the minorities has been eroding the democratic values (Varshney, 2022). Remaining in power of one party is not problematic and questionable. Moreover, if people extending unquestionable support for the party that wholeheartedly works for the welfare and development of the people, then it is really good sign for the democratic governance. But the extending support of people for such party which has more focus on propagating ideology than better policies and governance or whose leaders urges to change the nature and culture of democracy with new traits of campaigns and politics then it is really a matter of concern.

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