

Race for Delhi Assembly: Tight Contest on the Cards

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The Delhi State Election is most likely to be the most competitive in the state's history, with the parties running neck and neck, and to declare a clear winner at this moment is 'too close to call'. People in the National Capital are high on anxiety as we are fast approaching February 7, the voting date. The voters are apparently divided, as some of them want to re-live the nostalgia created on a wintry Sunday of December 2013, which saw Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) rising, while another section would simply want to give the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) a chance. It was way back in 1993 when BJP had formed the Government in Delhi. Post, the city scripted its love story with the Congress veteran Sheila Dikshit. However, things have changed since 2013 and the Indian National Congress (INC), probably for the first time in history, seems to be out of the race in Delhi before it starts.

Key Issues

AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal is a clever customer and he knows his weaknesses too well. This is exactly why the billboards and hoardings all across the megalopolis talk about AAP's achievements in its short-lived 49-day term with a promise of a full five years of good governance. Also, the party's manifesto talks about basic issues like water supply and power, which are fundamental needs for day to day lives. A corruption free state has always been a major poll plank of AAP since its birth. Growing food prices, chaotic traffic system and rising air pollution are other issues that the party seems to be concerned with. Many believe the middle class will be the game changer for this election and it is going to be them who will decide the winner. The big fat middle class of Delhi have usually been 'vote shy'. But in 2013 they voted in large numbers.

Women's Security

Women for long have been soft targets in Delhi and making the city a safe place for women is going to be a challenge for the next Government. Surely, security for women could be one of the biggest deciding factors in the outcome of the elections. To make Delhi a crime-free city AAP has already promised CCTV cameras to be installed all around the capital to enhance the vigilance system. Kiran Bedi, the Chief Ministerial candidate for BJP has also put women's security as one of the topmost concerns in the campaigning days. Bedi is known as a very strict administrator and she has promised to establish "student police" which will enable better policing system. Many, including women, feel if Bedi becomes the Chief Minister, things will change for better in Delhi as, one, she has been a very successful police officer and two, and she is a woman of words. Roping in Bedi at the last moment could turn out to be the master stroke as there are enough hints that women may rally behind her on the Election Day.

Not a Happy Family

Naming Kiran Bedi as the Chief Ministerial candidate just before the elections appears to have offended many in the BJP family and this may well go against the party in the coming election. Bedi, a strict disciplinarian, with her style of working may cause a concern for the party workers, many feel so. In fact, party insiders have openly shown disappointment with Bedi, and the resignation of her campaign manager just days before the Election Day only added fuel to fire (though he later retracted). Media reports indicate that even Rashtriya Sevak Sangha (RSS) was not in favor of Bedi as the Chief Ministerial candidate. But this is a new BJP where Modi has the last word in the party and Kiran Bedi is handpicked by none other than the Prime Minister himself. Both Amit Shah and Narendra Modi have been following the model of 'top down', which means making the leadership powerful by importing people from outside, and so far the experiment has been successful. But many regard it as a stopgap arrangement and 'bottom up' model makes a party's success rate maximum as this makes the organization strong, robust and leaves no room for resentment and revolt.

The Third Party

If we believe in media reports, unlike 2013, Congress this time is less of a king maker and more of a party with no hope. Coupled with corruption and ever-missing top leadership, the Congress party seems to be losing the ground. In 2013, the party had a share of 25% of votes with a strong base in the minority areas. A major chunk of minorities, who always have been very loyal to the Congress since the Nehru-Indira days are most likely to vote for the AAP this time, indicate media reports. Even the Kejriwal-led party has won the hearts of millions of slum dwellers in Delhi who have always voted for the Congress party since Independence. It is expected that the minorities and the lower and lower-middle class of Delhi will vote in numbers for the Aam Aadmi Party on Election Day. The election result will depend on which way the Congress voters swing.

The Modi Factor

Helmut Schoen was inducted as coach by the West German football management in 1966 after Sepp Herberger's term as coach ended. Under Schoen, the team did find its Midas touch as it went on to win the Euro Cup in 1972 and World Cup in 1974. Schoen was always the silent factor behind the country's success with star scorer Gerd Mueller. It was Schoen's brain and Mueller's skill which made the partnership so successful. The trust between Shah-Modi is a similar one. It was due to this partnership that BJP could sweep the General Elections of 2014. Post elections, the duo continued with their magic run with setting up Governments in states of Maharashtra, Haryana and Jharkhand. The party is likely to form Government in Jammu and Kashmir as well with PDP as partner. Modi, who is one of the star campaigners for BJP in Delhi, has apparently turned into the darling of the hopeful youth and the middle class. Although a good chunk of middle class had rooted for the AAP in the 2013 Elections, but with Narendra Modi in the picture a shift in votes of middle class from AAP to BJP may take place. An absolute majority in Delhi would reinforce the so-called 'Modi wave' which swept the 2014 General Elections, and is now turning into a nationwide occurrence. Having said that, it is also important to keep in mind that Modi is more seen as the face of Hindutva and less secular. The minority voters constitute around 12% in Delhi and it is hard to believe that BJP will earn anything substantial from it.

End Words

Even the Opinion Polls indicate the control of the Delhi Secretariat is coming down to the wire with BJP and Aam Aadmi Party locked in a very tight race. Could there be a hung assembly again? Well, there are enough signs! If that becomes the case, it will definitely not help the city, and certainly not the people of Delhi. Whatever the results be, it is again the man from Gujarat who seems to make a difference in the 2015 Delhi Elections. It is only because of Narendra Modi that BJP is nose ahead and the difference between the two parties is that of a hairline. But lest we forget, Arvind Kejriwal's biggest strength is that a big section of 'underclass' people are apparently with him. This factor can give BJP a run for money. So the big question at the moment is, can the "have not's" of Delhi flex its muscle enough to stop the BJP juggernaut? Come February 10 and we will have the answer.
