

POLITICAL DYNAMICS IN TELANGANA: A FIRST-PERSON ANALYSIS OF THE ASSESEMBLY ELECTION OF 2023

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a first-person analytical account of the 2023 Telangana Legislative Assembly elections, focusing on the shifting political landscape, voter behaviour, and campaign strategies that defined the electoral process. Drawing from on-ground observations, interviews, and participation in local political events, the study captures the evolving relationship between regional identity, welfare politics, and party dynamics in the state. The 2023 election witnessed a significant contest between the incumbent Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS), the rising influence of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the revival efforts of the Indian National Congress. The paper examines how key issues such as agrarian distress, unemployment, welfare schemes, and regional pride shaped public discourse. It also reflects on the role of caste, community mobilization, digital campaigning, and youth participation. The author, as an embedded observer, provides unique insights into both formal political processes and informal public sentiment, highlighting the dissonance between narrative-driven and ground-level realities. This personalized lens contributes to a deeper understanding of Telangana's democratic experience, making the article a valuable contribution to contemporary regional political studies in India.

Keywords: Caste, Community, Demography, Election, Incumbency, Politics, Political Party.

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1. INTRODUCTION

As someone deeply engaged with India's evolving political landscape, the 2023 Telangana Assembly elections provided an opportunity for both reflection and revelation. These elections were not merely another political event; they represented a referendum on nearly a decade of regional statecraft, governance innovation, and the shaping of political identity in the newly formed state. Telangana, which emerged in 2014 after a protracted and emotionally charged struggle for statehood, found itself at a pivotal crossroads in 2023 — caught between the legacy of its founding leadership and the possibility of new political alternatives. In my analysis for *The Indian Express*, I argued that this election marked a turning point — where the foundational narrative of the *Bhartiya Rashtra Samithi* (BRS), built on statehood and welfare populism, began to show signs of electoral fatigue (Alam 2023; 2024). I then pointed to the rising discontent with the BRS government's governance style, which, despite its focus on welfare schemes, failed to adequately address issues of political accountability and administrative transparency. This created an opening for new political forces, such as the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) and the *Congress*, to challenge the dominance of the KCR-led government. The 2023 elections thus emerged as a crucial moment to evaluate the enduring appeal of the state's founding leadership, while also testing the viability of political alternatives in the run-up to the national elections.

The election results shocked many observers and political actors alike. The *Indian National Congress* staged a remarkable comeback, winning 64 out of 119 seats, and dislodging the BRS, which had ruled the state for two consecutive terms. The *Congress* victory marked not only a shift in power but also a broader reconfiguration of political energies in the state. The BRS, despite its robust welfare delivery record and strong rural network, was reduced to 39 seats, while the *BJP* managed a modest presence with 8 seats — a performance below its own expectations. For many voters, the 2023 elections became a site of collective re-evaluation — a moment to assess not just the achievements of the past, but the credibility of promises for the future (Election Commission of India, 2023). What made this electoral outcome even more fascinating was the contrast between pre-election survey data — including the pre-poll survey I was involved with — and the eventual results. At the time of our survey (July 2023), the BRS led in voter preference (33.8%), enjoyed a high satisfaction rating (62.2%), and *K. Chandrashekar Rao* (KCR) remained the most preferred chief ministerial candidate. Yet, the data also revealed significant warning signs:

a large segment of undecided voters (over 25%), rising anti-incumbency sentiment against sitting MLAs (around 39%), and dissatisfaction among key demographic segments — particularly youth and urban voters. These nuances, I now realize, were early signals of the tectonic shift that unfolded on election day.

In this paper, I aim to critically examine the 2023 Telangana Assembly elections through a multi-layered analytical lens, drawing on pre-poll survey data, open-source insights, and established theoretical frameworks in political behaviour and electoral studies. This exercise is both retrospective and interpretive — retrospective because it reflects on why the results turned out the way they did, and interpretive because it seeks to understand what these results reveal about deeper socio-political transformations in the state. This analysis is not merely academic. It is rooted in the belief that understanding elections goes beyond numbers and margins — it involves unpacking public sentiment, political imagination, and the evolving relationship between citizens and the state. Telangana's 2023 elections offer a powerful case study for anyone interested in the democratic pulse of a young and aspirational Indian state. Through this inquiry, I hope to contribute to a deeper understanding of what democracy looks like in motion — and what it might become.

2. METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

Understanding the complex political landscape of Telangana requires a methodologically sound and empirically grounded approach. The pre-poll survey conducted prior to the 2023 Assembly elections was designed to capture the depth and breadth of political sentiment across the state. The survey was conducted by the Centre for Democratic Conversations (CDC), Hyderabad over the course of one month in July 2023. Its primary objective was to obtain reliable data and insights that would decode the key political dynamics shaping Telangana ahead of the elections.

The survey focused on five critical areas. First, it explored voting patterns and electoral preferences, aiming to map out the voting intentions of citizens, their party affiliations, and the key issues driving electoral choices. Second, it examined political participation by assessing the level of engagement among citizens — such as volunteering for campaigns, attending political events, or being members of political organizations. Third, it gauged public opinion on governance, approval of political leadership, and awareness of policy initiatives. Fourth, it assessed the political awareness and knowledge of voters, including their familiarity with democratic institutions, political

processes, and current political events. Finally, the survey investigated how socio-demographic variables like age, gender, caste, education, income, and occupation influence political behaviour. To ensure robust insights, the research employed both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. A structured and pre-tested questionnaire was administered to a broad cross-section of respondents, covering voting preferences, party identification, satisfaction with the government and MLAs, and perceptions of public services. Additionally, qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews with selected respondents to enrich the survey findings with nuanced individual perspectives on party loyalty, leadership, and voter behaviour.

A multi-stage sampling design was used to achieve demographic and regional representativeness. In the first stage, stratification was done across major regions such as North Telangana, South Telangana, and the Hyderabad metropolitan area. In the second stage, districts and Assembly Constituencies (ACs) were selected randomly. In the final stage, systematic random sampling was conducted to select individual respondents within each constituency, ensuring diversity in caste, age, gender, and occupation. Sampling was done across all 111 Assembly Constituencies (ACs) out of 119 to capture the political sentiments at a granular level. The final sample included over 6,000 individuals, with a high response rate, as shown in the table below:

Interview Status	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	5809	95.1%
No	302	4.9%
Total	6111	100%

Responses were digitally recorded, cleaned, and processed using data management software to ensure consistency and accuracy. Quantitative responses were analysed using statistical SPSS tool to derive frequencies, cross-tabulations, and correlations. The qualitative data from interviews was coded thematically to extract underlying trends, sentiments, and political narratives. Analysis included regional and demographic disaggregation to trace patterns across caste groups, age bands, gender divisions, and the rural-urban divide. The survey adhered to standard ethical norms of social research. Enumerators sought informed consent from all participants and clearly communicated that the data collected would remain anonymous and confidential. Participation was voluntary, and no incentives were offered to respondents. To ensure neutrality, fieldworkers clarified that the survey was

an independent academic effort and not affiliated with any political party or government agency.

Despite the robustness of the design, the survey acknowledges a few limitations. As a pre-poll survey conducted several months ahead of the elections, it may not capture last-minute shifts in political preference. Additionally, a significant number of respondents opted for “Can’t Say/No Response” on key questions — especially on voting preference and chief ministerial choice — highlighting a degree of political uncertainty. Lastly, certain remote areas or underrepresented social groups may have been harder to access, posing minor sampling challenges. In sum, the CDC’s pre-election survey in Telangana represents a comprehensive and methodologically rigorous attempt to document and analyse public opinion in one of India’s most politically dynamic states. Its mixed-methods approach, careful sampling design, and ethical research practices lend credibility to its findings and offer a reliable base for understanding voter behaviour in the 2023 Assembly elections.

3. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

To make sense of the electoral shifts observed in the 2023 Telangana Assembly elections, I found it imperative to root my analysis in a set of robust theoretical frameworks. These frameworks not only help explain voter behaviour and political strategy but also allow for a deeper understanding of the socio-political structures that shape democratic outcomes in a complex and plural society like India. While many lenses could be applied, I have chosen those that best align with the findings of the pre-poll survey and the broader dynamics observed in Telangana.

The first framework I draw upon is Anthony Downs’ Economic Theory of Democracy (Downs, 1957), which conceptualizes voters as rational actors who make decisions based on utility maximization. In this model, citizens assess political parties much like consumers evaluate products — choosing the one that offers the greatest personal or collective benefit. Telangana, with its extensive network of welfare schemes such as *Rythu Bandhu*, *Aasra Pensions*, *Shadi Mubarak*, and *Kalyana Lakshmi*, fits this model well. The survey data indicated that awareness levels for these schemes were remarkably high (above 90% in some cases), and the perception of governmental delivery on basic infrastructure was generally positive. However, despite this welfare-oriented governance, a significant section of the electorate shifted away from the incumbent BRS in 2023. This suggests that while welfare delivery may be a necessary condition for voter support,

it is not a sufficient one—other variables like corruption, leadership fatigue, and perceived inclusivity also matter in rational calculations.

Secondly, I employ Paul R. Brass' theory of elite mobilization (Brass, 1991), which argues that in ethnically diverse democracies, political mobilization is often orchestrated by elites who activate communal, regional, or caste identities to create loyal vote banks. This framework is particularly relevant in Telangana, where political actors have consistently drawn upon regional pride, caste affiliations, and socio-economic identities to build their electoral coalitions. K. Chandrashekar Rao (KCR) has long positioned himself as the architect of Telangana's statehood and the defender of its regional interests, while Revanth Reddy of the Congress projected a younger, more inclusive, and aspirational alternative — appealing especially to youth, Reddy caste voters, and minorities. These elite-led narratives have been instrumental in shifting the political discourse, particularly in urban and semi-urban constituencies.

In addition to these, the Median Voter Theorem (Black, 1948) offers a useful lens to understand the decisive role of the “undecided” or swing voter. According to this theorem, in a competitive democratic system, political parties and candidates will tailor their platforms to capture the preferences of the median voter — the one whose position lies at the centre of the ideological spectrum. In the pre-poll survey, I noted that 25.4% of respondents did not disclose their voting preference and 23.1% were undecided on their choice for Chief Minister. This sizable group of voters, located in the middle of the political spectrum, likely became the electoral tipping point. Their eventual swing towards the Congress may have been influenced by cumulative dissatisfaction with local governance, underwhelming campaign communication by BRS, and a renewed trust in the Congress' state-level leadership.

Another relevant framework is the Civic Voluntarism Model (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995), which emphasizes that political participation is shaped by three key factors: resources (time, money, skills), psychological engagement, and recruitment networks. In Telangana, youth dissatisfaction and the lower levels of direct political engagement reported in the survey (where 82% said they were not contacted by any BRS functionary) highlight a potential failure of mobilization through traditional party channels. The Congress, by contrast, seemed to have benefited from a more energized on-ground campaign, social media outreach, and alliances with local influencers.

I also draw insights from Arend Lijphart's theory of consociational democracy (Lijphart, 1977), which proposes that stability in plural societies is best maintained when diverse groups are included in governance through deliberate power-sharing arrangements. Although Telangana is not a consociational polity in the strict sense, the idea of inclusion remains central. In 2023, a section of the electorate, particularly minorities and marginalized caste groups, appeared to shift their support toward Congress due to perceptions that BRS had grown distant or unresponsive to their concerns. This shift points to a symbolic and substantive demand for inclusive governance, which goes beyond mere delivery of benefits.

Finally, I found agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) relevant in understanding the role of media and political messaging. Despite the rise of WhatsApp and YouTube as daily information sources (used by over 34% of respondents according to the survey), the survey revealed that nearly 75% of voters had not received any direct political messages. This communications vacuum may have diluted BRS's policy messaging and allowed the opposition to set the tone on issues such as corruption, joblessness, and governance fatigue. The Congress's ability to create a counter-narrative — despite having limited institutional resources — highlights the changing nature of electoral communication in the digital era.

In bringing together these conceptual frameworks — ranging from rational choice theory to elite mobilization, from voter psychology to communication strategies — I have sought to construct an interpretive scaffolding that captures the multi-dimensional nature of the 2023 Telangana Assembly elections. These theories not only help explain the outcomes we witnessed but also provide a template for analysing electoral behaviour in other Indian states undergoing similar transitions.

4. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Building upon the theoretical scaffolding outlined above, the following section delves into the empirical terrain of the 2023 Telangana Assembly elections. By integrating pre-poll survey data, electoral outcomes, and on-ground political narratives, I aim to trace how voter behaviour, party strategies, and issue salience converged to produce an electoral verdict. Each analytical thread is examined not in isolation but in relation to the theoretical constructs previously discussed. The following findings offer more than an explanation of “what happened” — they serve as a mirror reflecting the changing grammar of regional politics in India:

4.1 Party Positions and Popularity: A Quantitative Pulse

When we conducted the pre-poll survey in July 2023, the political landscape in Telangana appeared tilted in favour of the BRS. With a voting preference of 33.8% and a loyal support base of 36.2%, the BRS seemed poised to extend its rule into a third term. The data pointed to a generally satisfied electorate — 62.2% of respondents expressed some level of satisfaction with the state government’s performance. However, even at that point, I could sense an underlying contradiction. There was growing ambivalence, especially among undecided voters, and a significant 25.4% refused to disclose their voting preference — a silent yet powerful indicator of political volatility.

The Indian National Congress stood second with 26.3% vote share and 22.6% CM preference. Though the gap between KCR and Revanth appeared significant at the time (12.2%), the survey hinted at a rising wave of sentiment for change. The BJP, with just 8.7% support, seemed largely peripheral to the core contest despite its attempts to replicate national narratives at the state level. In retrospect, the undecided voters — those not yet emotionally or politically anchored — proved to be the critical factor. Their eventual swing toward Congress, which emerged victorious with 64 seats, confirms how much was fluid beneath the surface of our early numerical leads.

4.2 Anti-Incumbency: Party v. MLA Distinction

One of the most intriguing revelations of the pre-poll survey was the decoupling of party loyalty from MLA performance. Even as 45.1% of respondents expressed a willingness to give the BRS government another chance, a staggering 39% showed signs of anti-incumbency against their sitting MLAs. This divergence told me something important: voters were learning to differentiate between the macro and micro levels of governance. The BRS, as a brand, retained a narrative of development and welfare, but at the constituency level, personal dissatisfaction with local leadership was mounting.

The numbers validated this sentiment. While 53.1% were satisfied with their MLAs, 38.8% expressed dissatisfaction, and a significant 22.4% were “fully dissatisfied” — a number higher than those who were “fully satisfied” (19.7%). These figures indicated a shift in voter maturity — supporters were no longer blindly loyal; they were evaluative, even transactional. In hindsight, the Congress’s strategic move to field fresh faces and amplify

grassroots discontent through hyper-local campaigns effectively tapped into this anti-incumbent mood. The BRS, by retaining many of its old candidates, underestimated this sentiment — and paid the price.

4.3 Leadership: The Politics of Preference

In the survey, K. Chandrashekar Rao still held the edge with 34.8% of respondents preferring him as Chief Minister. His stature as the founding father of Telangana and a symbol of self-rule had not completely faded. However, Revanth Reddy's rapid rise was undeniable. With 22.6% CM preference at that stage — despite being relatively new to the leadership mantle — he was clearly breaking through the established hierarchy. Young, confrontational, and assertively regional, Revanth represented an energy that I saw resonating more with youth, middle-class, and non-committed voters. The 12.2% leadership gap, which appeared significant at the time, turned out to be more fragile than it seemed. Voters, especially the swing segment, were clearly hungry for a new style of leadership — one that was more accessible, more vocal, and less patriarchal in its politics. The final result not only catapulted Revanth to the Chief Minister's seat but also ended the decade-long monopoly of KCR, underscoring how leadership perception is not just about legacy, but also about momentum.

5. CASTE AND COMMUNITY VOTING: SOCIAL BASES OF SUPPORT

Our caste-wise breakdown of support patterns reflected the enduring role of identity in electoral behaviour. The BRS enjoyed significant support among Other Backward Classes (OBCs), especially rural groups who benefited directly from schemes like *Rythu Bandhu*. In contrast, the *Reddy* community showed a clear tilt toward the Congress — largely a result of Revanth Reddy's leadership and the traditional association of the Congress with dominant agrarian castes in the region. Among Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), preferences were mixed. While groups like *Madigas* and *Yadavas* were split between the two main parties, Congress made deeper inroads among these communities in constituencies where local caste leaders were fielded strategically. Minority voters — particularly Muslims and Christians — showed a strong lean toward Congress. At the time of the survey, I believed this was a signal of growing unease with BRS's perceived proximity to BJP-led national politics and the Congress's more inclusive rhetoric. This reading was validated in the election results, where minority-dominated constituencies swung heavily toward Congress, bolstering its urban and semi-urban seat share.

6. RURAL-URBAN DIVIDE: GEOGRAPHY OF SUPPORT

The geographical cleavage between rural and urban Telangana was another theme that emerged strongly in the survey. Rural areas, particularly those dependent on agriculture, continued to support the BRS. This was not surprising, given the party's focused rural welfare agenda, with schemes like *Rythu Bandhu* boasting 96% awareness and 65.2% beneficiary coverage. In many villages, I encountered a pragmatic electorate — people who valued material delivery even if they were unhappy with their MLA or local conditions. Urban voters, however, painted a different picture. In Hyderabad and other towns, the sentiment was more fractured, with growing openness toward Congress. Concerns about corruption, civic infrastructure, and employment dominated urban conversations. Urban voters were also more exposed to digital political narratives and national debates, which made them more responsive to calls for transparency, change, and leadership accountability. This urban swing was pivotal to the Congress victory, as they consolidated urban and minority-dominated constituencies that had been previously fragmented.

7. POLICY PERFORMANCE AND GOVERNANCE PERCEPTION

In terms of governance delivery, the BRS still scored reasonably well in our survey. Respondents gave high marks for improvements in roads, electricity, and water supply. These basics formed the backbone of BRS's development narrative. However, the feedback on government hospitals and schools was mixed, with concerns about quality and accessibility surfacing repeatedly. The survey also flagged two major concerns: religious harmony and corruption. Only 30% of respondents believed that inter-community relations had improved, while 54.1% believed corruption had increased in the last five years. This dichotomy — of visible delivery versus invisible rot — stood out to me. It encapsulated the broader challenge in Indian governance: can a regime retain power through efficient delivery alone, if it fails the moral and symbolic expectations of its citizens? The 2023 results answered this in the negative. Voters seemed to say: delivery matters, but so does dignity and fairness.

8. YOUTH, FARMERS, AND TRADERS: SECTORAL SENTIMENTS

Sector-specific sentiments provided yet another layer of insight. Farmers were the most appreciative of the government, with 43.7% believing their interests were protected — a testimony to BRS's rural orientation. Traders, meanwhile, were divided. Some appreciated the infrastructure and stability,

while others expressed frustration over bureaucratic inefficiencies and lack of economic growth. But the most striking pattern was among the youth. A staggering 28.9% of young respondents believed that the government had fully failed them. This was a red flag. In focus groups, I heard recurring themes of unemployment, lack of innovation in education, and absence of opportunities for upward mobility. While the older generations were still engaged with the legacy of statehood, the younger generation seemed far more future-focused. Their eventual pivot to Congress, which framed its campaign around employment and education, became a decisive factor in the election outcome.

9. COMMUNICATION AND CAMPAIGN: THE MISSED OPPORTUNITY

In hindsight, one of BRS's most consequential missteps was in the realm of campaign communication. The survey showed that between 73% and 76.9% of respondents had not received any political messaging. Even more concerning was that over 80% had not been contacted by a BRS worker or candidate in the month before the survey. For a party in power, this revealed a dangerous complacency — an overreliance on past performance and a belief that infrastructure would speak for itself. In contrast, Congress adopted a more aggressive and personal style of campaigning. They used WhatsApp groups, youth mobilizers, local influencers, and street-level outreach to penetrate communities. Given that platforms like WhatsApp and YouTube were each used daily by over 34% of respondents, this failure to engage digitally and relationally cost BRS dearly. Elections in 2023 were not just about policies; they were about perceptions. And perceptions were being shaped less by manifestos and more by mobile phones.

10. ELECTORAL LESSONS AND STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

Writing this paper in 2025, with the benefit of hindsight from the 2023 Assembly elections and the foresight of an upcoming contest in 2028, I find myself reflecting not just on what went wrong or right for Telangana's political players, but what lies ahead for them — and for the electorate. The pre-poll survey had offered many clues, and the actual results confirmed that political momentum in Telangana is highly fluid, emotionally charged, and yet increasingly rational in its expression.

For the BRS, the road ahead must begin with a deep introspection. The party can no longer depend on the nostalgia of statehood or the comfort of legacy infrastructure projects. The 2023 defeat was not merely a verdict

on performance — it was a statement on political fatigue and a disconnect with the aspirations of a younger, more restless electorate. The survey had already highlighted high levels of dissatisfaction with individual MLAs, and the results proved that voters were willing to separate the party's past from its present. To regain lost ground, BRS must renew itself from within — this means inducting fresh, credible faces, ensuring greater MLA accountability, and more importantly, reinventing its political narrative. Welfare alone is not enough anymore; the electorate wants dignity, transparency, and hope for upward mobility.

For the Congress, the 2023 victory was a significant turnaround, but sustaining that momentum will be a far greater challenge. If the party wants to hold on to power beyond 2028, it must do more than celebrate its comeback. The pre-poll survey had already indicated that Revanth Reddy's persona was beginning to resonate with a broad base of voters — especially the youth and urban middle class. Going forward, the Congress should institutionalize this charisma by building a stronger organizational apparatus, especially in rural areas where the BRS still retains emotional and material influence. Social outreach must continue, not just during election cycles but through governance that reflects inclusion and listens consistently to the concerns of farmers, youth, minorities, and backward castes. Congress must avoid the temptation to become complacent in power — it must continue acting like a challenger, not a beneficiary of a temporary electoral wave.

The BJP, meanwhile, faces a more foundational task. The 2023 elections exposed the limits of its national narrative in Telangana. Despite high-voltage campaigns and central leadership involvement, the party could not secure a decisive foothold. The pre-poll survey had shown its vote share stagnating at 8.7%, and while it won a few seats, it still lacks a coherent and credible regional leadership in the state. If the BJP wants to be taken seriously in Telangana, it must abandon parachute politics and invest in building a ground-up cadre, aligned with local aspirations and languages of identity. It needs to articulate a Telangana-specific development and cultural agenda — one that doesn't just replicate the national pitch but adapts it to regional nuances. The BJP's future in the state will depend not on its rhetoric, but on its ability to listen, adapt, and organize from below.

Perhaps the most important lesson that I carry forward from the 2023 cycle is the centrality of the “Can't Say/No Response” (CS/NR) group. In the survey, over a quarter of the electorate remained undecided or unwilling to express their preference. This group is not apathetic; they are reflective.

They represent voters who want to be convinced — not coerced. They are deeply aware of the promises and failures of past governments, yet remain open to persuasion. Political parties that can treat this group with respect, engage them with clear, issue-based communication, and offer them a sense of agency in the political process will find themselves with an edge in 2028.

As I look ahead to the next electoral cycle, I believe Telangana's politics will increasingly be shaped by three interlocking forces: demographic shifts, digital political communication, and the demand for ethical governance. A growing youth population, a digitally connected electorate, and a rising consciousness about corruption and fairness are changing the way politics is being imagined and practiced. No party can afford to ignore this. Ultimately, the road to 2028 is open — but not without challenges. Telangana's voters have proven that they are discerning, dynamic, and willing to change their minds. For political actors, this is both a warning and an opportunity. For analysts like me, it's a call to keep watching closely — not just the speeches and rallies, but the silences, the undecideds, and the mood on the ground. That is where the next election will be won — or lost.

11. CONCLUSION

Assessing the politics of Telangana in the 2023 Assembly elections felt, to me, like interpreting a complex novel with overlapping plots — where characters evolve mid-chapter, subplots unravel unpredictably, and the reader is constantly reminded that meaning is never singular. On the surface, it was the story of the BRS, a party that once commanded unquestioned dominance, seeing a dramatic erosion of its political capital. A party that had delivered on roads, pensions, and farmer schemes was eventually judged not just by what it gave, but by how it made people feel — ignored, unheard, or taken for granted. Our pre-poll survey had captured inklings of that brewing sentiment, but even we, like many observers, underestimated the speed and scale at which the ground was shifting.

At the heart of the election was a resurgent Congress, guided not by national figures but by a local leader with credibility — Revanth Reddy. He did not just fill a political vacuum; he created a new idiom of politics in Telangana — one that combined confrontation with connection, and populist symbolism with aspirational vocabulary. As I observed in my post-election commentary in *The Indian Express*, the Congress victory in Telangana was less about a pan-India resurgence and more about a successful regional strategy that understood caste arithmetic, youth anxiety, and the emotional

fatigue of a long incumbency (Alam, 2023). I believe this distinction is crucial. Telangana in 2023 was not voting for the Congress of Delhi — it was voting for a Congress it could call its own.

The pre-poll survey served as both a snapshot and a prophecy. It revealed key trends — rising anti-incumbency against MLAs, youth disillusionment, minority drift, and a muted communication strategy by BRS — that ultimately crystallized in the final outcome. More importantly, the survey highlighted the pivotal role of the “Can’t Say/No Response” demographic, which acted as the swing bloc. These voters, neither fiercely loyal nor perpetually sceptical, held the balance of power. Their eventual tilt toward the Congress was less a vote of blind faith and more a cry for attention and renewal.

In retrospect, what 2023 showed us is that governance delivery alone cannot substitute for democratic engagement. Infrastructure does not replace inspiration, and schemes do not silence scrutiny. Voters, especially the youth and urban poor, are no longer just passive recipients of welfare — they are demanding active roles as evaluators and shapers of political discourse. The civic maturity displayed by Telangana’s electorate — making clear distinctions between party, candidate, and leader — is indicative of a deepening democratic culture. Looking ahead to 2028, the political road is wide open but not without challenges. For the Congress, the task is to convert electoral success into institutional strength and policy innovation. For BRS, the future hinges on reinvention, humility, and listening to voices that were previously sidelined. The BJP, if it is serious about Telangana, must stop treating it as a national satellite and start nurturing it as a regional opportunity.

As someone who is following Telangana’s political journey closely, I can say with confidence that this state continues to defy linear narratives. It is young, restless, rooted, and aspirational all at once. And its politics, like its people, will keep evolving — sometimes unpredictably, but always with purpose. My hope, as a political observer and analyst, is that parties and policymakers read these signals not just as electoral feedback, but as democratic wisdom — spoken in the only language that truly matters: the ballot.

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