

India Votes 2019: National, Regional and Global Reverberations

Date: 2 May 2019

Venue: Verbarium, de Vrieshof 3

Beginning 11 April, the electoral exercise will entail voting for representatives to the bicameral legislature that is the Indian parliament, the results of which will be declared on 23 May, making this one – if not the largest – such electoral exercises in the world. Some of the largest (the BJP or the Bharatiya Janata Party – the current incumbent) and the oldest (Indian National Congress) political parties will be embroiled in direct electoral contests, along with those with specific regional (Samajwadi Party, Trinamool Congress, DMK) and national (Bahujan Samaj Party, Aam Aadmi Party) ambitions. The most crucial contests are expected in the BJP strongholds of Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. West Bengal has emerged as a key electoral battleground for the ruling dispensation as the BJP looks to consolidate its position in the state (particularly with the Left on the wane) – by garnering numbers it might potentially lose in Uttar Pradesh owing to the pre-poll alliance between the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party. The alliance is expected to wean away the OBC and Dalit electorate, a large part of which had supported in BJP in 2014.

A national destiny?

The 2019 elections are critical not just because of the numbers and the alliances but also because the outcome might well restructure the future of Indian politics in remarkable ways. An incumbent majoritarian government has projected a disregard for constitutional procedure and failed to curb anti-minority violence in the form of cow vigilantism. A fractured public sphere has emerged which appears to suppress dissent, curb opposition and show disdain for the founding principles of the Indian state such as secularism and freedom of speech and expression. By foregrounding national security and holding it up as a benchmark of patriotism, the incumbent government has given rise to growing jingoism among the ‘public’ with potentially deleterious consequences for historically shared cultures of tolerance and mutual co-existence.

Indian elections and ‘global’ South Asia

From the Americas to the Philippines, electoral politics in our times is paradoxically producing populist icons and the erosion of democratic values. What impact will India 2019 have for a global political sphere that is turning increasingly towards populism and democracies that are validating majoritarian parties and demagogues?

Programme

Time: 17:00-18:30

India 2019: National and regional implications, **Prof. Pralay Kanungo**, Fellow, Max Weber Centre for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies, Erfurt University, Germany and Professor, Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India

India Votes 2019: caste and the democratic upsurge, **Dr. Nicolas Jaoul**, EHESS, Paris

Elections and India’s foreign policy: populism, national security and the future of South Asia, **Dr. Nicolas Blarel**, Leiden University

Why discuss elections in India, **Dr. Roshni Sengupta**, Lecturer, Leiden Institute for Area Studies, Leiden University

Session chaired and moderated by **Prof. Nira Wickramasinghe**, Chair/Professor of Modern South Asian Studies and Academic Director of Research, Leiden University Institute for Area Studies (LIAS), Leiden University

Reception: 18:30-19:30, basement area, de Vrieshof 3