

Global implications of the mandate

It opens the window for India to take advantage of economic opportunities in the geopolitical space



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The clear and decisive mandate for Prime Minister Narendra Modi is a defining moment in India's democratic history. Its extent, which is manifest from the highest-ever voter turnout in a general election and the share of votes won by the winning coalition, creates its own very unique set of circumstances.

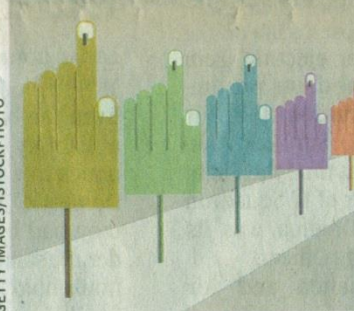
To put this in perspective, as the world's largest democracy, India has a staggering 900 million-odd voters, of whom about over 67% turned out, making it about a little over half-a-billion people participating in the general election of 2019. Out of this, the winning coalition is estimated to have earned close to 300 million votes. When we compare this with the next biggest democracy, the United States, which has a population of more than 320 million, the magnitude of the mandate earned by Mr. Modi becomes clear.

It is a unique moment for India

that the rising aspirations of people in one of the fastest growing economies have resulted in this kind of a mandate. While it raises the bar on expectations, more importantly, it gives the leadership of the country the necessary wherewithal to take the kind of decisions that are needed to put India on a high growth trajectory. At a time when two of the largest economic powers in the world, the U.S. and China, are locked in a trade war of sorts, this mandate opens the window for India to take advantage of economic opportunities that are likely to develop in the geopolitical space. To get the Indian economy on the right trajectory, to spur our exports and to create jobs – while this kind of a mandate creates expectations, it also empowers the leadership to take the right decisions to realise the same.

A chance to steer geopolitics

The poll result also paves the way for India to take its rightful place in the world order not just as a participant in the deliberations that happen at multilateral platforms but, more importantly, to set the course for the kind of change that we would like to see in the world. India over the last five years has taken a leadership position in quite a



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few initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance, while facilitating global action on climate change through the Paris Agreement. India has also projected its soft power through a global projection of yoga to shine the spotlight on how Indian spirituality can be a force for greater good. Now, with this kind of political mandate and the unique set of global circumstances it has been delivered in, the expectation is even higher that India would take up its rightful role in steering geopolitics in a host of areas: from global trade to regional conflicts to setting the global direction in emerging technology areas such as artificial intelligence and space exploration, to name a few.

India's democracy after Independence is a very unique experiment, just a few years away from

turning 75. There is no democratic parallel anywhere else in the world to the Indian context and the Indian experiment. This is missing in the manner in which the global media, especially influential western media outlets, have tended to view India. This mandate ought to be a wake-up call for global media outlets to shun their myopic view of the democratic discourse in India. They must now discard the stereotypes they still use in their reportage.

The mandate also places Mr. Modi as first among equals within his peer group of world leaders today. While a whole generation of strong leaders have emerged from among the G20 nations, be it the U.S., Japan, Russia, Turkey, Australia, Indonesia or South Africa, only Mr. Modi can credibly claim to have been tested by the largest number of voters in a free and fair election. The mandate gives India's voice heft at key multilateral platforms. It creates the opportunity for him to advance Indian values and advocate uniquely Indian ways of solving global problems.

Protecting interests

The mandate also calls for a new creed of techno-nationalism as a counter to borderless techno-acti-

vism that has threatened Indian interests through its pursuit of innocuous agendas (net neutrality and privacy) which have advocated measures inimical to India. The political mandate demands that India devise ways and means to stay ahead of the curve in emerging technology areas such as 5G and artificial intelligence, among others. It calls for out-of-the-box thinking as India can no longer risk being left out of setting the course for technology changes that will not only shape the global economy but also geopolitical dynamics.

India is also the largest open market to global technology majors which continue to locate their computing and storage infrastructure outside India and beyond Indian jurisdictions. The mandate demands that India leverage the strength of its democracy and the power of its markets to ensure that the global platforms play by rules that do not hurt the Indian national interest. While India continues to benefit from global digital innovations, this needs to happen within a framework that enhances Indian interests.

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The views expressed are personal