

REPRESENTING US OR SELF: PARTY SWITCHING IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Party switching is a common phenomenon in India. Representation of the considerable number of such switched politicians in the different parliamentary systems of India is the outcome of the number of such switched politicians got ticket to contest in an election. Cost-benefit, ideology, etc., are some of the driving factors of party switching, but in the case of India, it has been observed that the majority switched party because of denial of the party ticket. An attempt has been made to understand the trend of party switching in India considering the 2019 Lok Sabha election.

KEYWORDS: Ideology, Party ticket, Alliances, 17th Lok Sabha, Party Switching

INTRODUCTION

Election 2019: Setback for XXX (party name) in XXX (name of the state) as sitting MP joined XXX (party name). It is one of the common headlines of the majority of the newspaper during any election held in India observed in the last few decades. In fact, party-switching in India is not a new phenomenon. "Aaya Ram Gaya Ram" in fact, the turncoats, used in Indian politics to refer to party switching since 1967 when then a member of the legislative assembly of Haryana Gaya Lal changed parties three times in a day (Siwach 2011). "Conventional wisdom suggests that party switching is not common and is largely restricted to newer democracies" (Fell 2014: 32). However, recent studies (Heller & Mershon 2005) show that the practice of party switching is highly observed in Western European democracies (Heller & Mershon 2005). Further, this practice is also common than expected in many other non-western countries, including Japan, India, Nepal, Philippines, Brazil etc., (Desposato 2006; Mershon & Shvetsova 2008; Klein 2019).

Although party-switching raises lots of questions on the loyalty of the political leader yet in some cases, it can be acceptable when someone switched over to a like-minded party. However, in the context of India, it does not always happen. We have an example of many politicians who severed in a particular party for more than decades and switched over to a party with opposite ideology and status. Further, some politicians even have filed criminal cases on the rival party leader and suddenly switched over to that rival party. Therefore, switching political parties may raise lots of questions over the issue of party switching.

Understanding of switching is critical as "switching provides a unique window on politicians' underlying preferences, including their incentives for belonging to political parties" (Desposato, 2006: 62). Party switching not only reflects the changing party system but also "party switching can be viewed as a consequence of changing

nomination practices" (Fell 2014: 32). On the other hand, it should be kept in mind that "parties are the basic building blocks of democratic governance" (O'Brien & Shomer 2013: 112) and "party identification is deeply rooted social identity similar to ethnic and religious identities that are relatively impervious to outside forces" (Donald Philip Green and Palmquist (1990) as cited by (Killian & Wilcox 2008: 561). Even then, politicians change their party. What forced them to leaders switch the party? Is it mainly determined by power or ideology?

PARTY SWITCHING -ANALYSIS OF EXISTING LITERATURE

It is generally said that people change the party because to maximise their expected career utility (Desposato 2006). Thus, party switching is a weapon of maximising the influence over the political outcome by the leader who switched the party (Riker 1962). On the other hand, a few scholars (Hix & Noury 2018) considered that ideological differences drive party switching. Whatever may occur because of party switching by the candidates or leaders, but the cost of switching is the primary factor for welcoming of switching politicians by the new party (Desposato 2006). Further, expected vote share after joining the switching candidate also plays an essential role in the welcoming switching candidate by the receiving party. It has two implications; with the joining of switching politicians, the voting shares of the receiving party increase and decrease the party's vote share from which the switching candidate switched to the new party.

Existing research studies show two determinants of party switching— parliamentarians' motivation and political institutions (O'Brien & Shomer 2013). As defined by Muller and Strom, the first determinants of party switching are parliamentarians' motivation (Müller & Strom 1999). They found that the primary objectives of each politician are three-fold, such as maximising the electoral vote, serving the office,

and implementing ideological goals of the party by shaping policy outcomes. These three-fold goals of political leaders work as motivation for some of them to switch their party. A politician may switch party to enhance his/her probability of reelection. In such a case, the politician who believes that he/she will not be reelected under the current party or will get a ticket from a current party is more likely to seek alternative option such as switching to another party (Aldrich & Bianco 1992; Shabad & Kazimierz 2004). Beyond reelection, the politician also expects to progress within their party. In such a case, the politician may change party if he/she believes that he/she cannot advance within the party hierarchy or cannot change his/her portfolio (Kam 2009). Based on Muller and Strom (1999) party-switching determinants, other scholars (Herron 2002; Desposato 2006; Heller & Mershon 2009) argue that a politician's policy-seeking also influence a politician to switch a party. A politician may switch to another party if his/her ideological goals are closer to other parties.

Analysis of existing studies shows that to discuss the issue of party switching, and the existing literature has to mitigate various challenges such as the definition of party switching, typologies, measuring process (Heller & Mershon 2005); reason for party switching (Muller & Strom 1999) and consequences of party switching (Fell 2014). Therefore, the existing party-switching literature mainly engages with the debate over whether politicians are mainly motivated by considerations of policy, voters or office (Müller & Strom 1999). Considering the theoretical context of existing literature and existing data based on the 17th Lok Sabha, my focus in this study is to understand the pattern of party switching in India. Key questions to be addressed include (1) inter-administrative zone, variation of party switching in India and (2) motivating factors of party switching. This study used the data source available in Parliament of India: Lok Sabha to locate the sitting MPs and their party affiliation. For the member details, I used newspaper reports of both English and regional daily and profiles of sitting MPs.

DISCUSSION

Status of Party Switching in 17th Lok Sabha

The 17th Lok Sabha was formed after the Indian general election in 2019, conducted from 11th April to 19th May 2019 in seven phases. The 17th Lok Sabha of the Indian Parliament has 543 elected members. These 543 members belong to 37 various national and regional political parties. Further, 04 members represent their constituencies independently. In the 2019 general election, five major alliances contested in the election, such as National Democratic Alliance (NDA), United Progressive Alliance (UPA), Federal Front, Mahagathbandhan, and Left Front. Further, more than 640 registered and non-registered parties

contested the election independently. The Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress party, Biju Janata Dal, Telangana Rashtra Samithi etc., are some of such parties that contested independently.

Out of total sitting Members of Parliament (MPs), 135 sitting MPs were members of more than one party and switched to the present party at different period. Therefore, 24.86 per cent of sitting MPs of the 17th Lok Sabha have a record of switching party. Interestingly, out of 135 such MPs, 35 MPs have switched to the present party just before the 2019 general election. So, the 17th Lok Sabha has 6.45 per cent sitting MPs who switched their party in 2019.

Analyses of sitting MPs of different alliances show that politicians have not only changed their parties but there is a record of changing parties more than six times. However, the majority of sitting MPs of the present Lok Sabha switch one party only.

Table-1: Number of party switching by sitting MPs

0	More than					
	1 times	2 times	3 times	4 times	5 times	6 times
NDA	65	18	5	4	0	0
UPA	8	3	1	0	1	0
Federal Front	8	0	1	1	0	0
Mahagathbandhan	3	0	1	1	1	0
Left Front	0	0	0	0	0	0
Non-Alliance parties	11	1	1	0	0	1
Total	95	22	9	6	2	1

Similarly, the switching did not occur at a point in time, but it took place over a period. To analyse the period of party switching of sitting MPs, this research divides the period into four different phases such as before 2003, between 2004-2013 during the period of the Indian National Congress (INC) regime, between 2014-2018, during the regime of present prime minister Shri Narendra Modi and 2019. Existing data shows that the majority of switching MPs switched their parties during 2014-2018 and 2019. Eighty-two sitting MPs who switched during this period managed their victory. Among the alliances, NDA showed the highest victory during this period under the leadership of the present prime minister. The majority of switching MPs of Mahagathbandhan and UPA managed their victory who switched in 2013 or before.

Table-2: Details of Year Wise Party switching

Alliances	Before 2003	2004-2013	2014-2018	2019
NDA	9	24	36	23
UPA	3	5	3	2
Federal Front	3	2	5	0
Mahagathbandhan	2	2	1	1
Left Front	0	0	0	0
Non-Alliance parties	0	2	3	9
Total	17	35	48	35

Switching to the type of political party also plays a significant role in the victory of the election. State parties, which played

a significant role since the 1980s, had a great set back in the 2014 Lok Sabha election. Thus, the "electoral trends reveal a surprising degree of stability in the balance of power between national and regional parties" (Vaishnav 2015:1). Accordingly, many politicians switched over to the national party. Out of total switching MPs of 17th Lok Sabha, 80 such MPs (59.26 %) have switched to national party either from national or regional party, whereas only 37.78 per cent (51) sitting MPs switched to regional party either from national or regional party. Interestingly, switching from national party to national party is highest amongst the entire trends.

Table-3: Trend of Party switching among the sitting MPs

To National Party (NP)			To Regional Party (RP)			To Independent		
Total	From NP	From RP	From Independent	Total	From NP	From RP	Total	From NP
80	58	20	2	51	33	18	4	4

The trend of Party switching in India

This research found primarily two types of party switching while analysing the details of sitting switching MPs of 17th Lok Sabha. These include inter-alliance and intra-alliance party switching. There are six various types of the trend found in inter-alliance party-switching such as switching from regional party to national party; from national to national party; from national to regional party; from regional to regional party; from national/regional to independent; and from independent to regional/national party. These are major trends of inter-alliance party switching. These trends also lead some politicians to switch from one party to another party, then switch to the first party from the second party. Sometimes switching also leads to the formation of a new party or merger with another party. For example, sitting MPs of the Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) formed the party after switching from INC. On the other hand, we have cases of merging the party with other parties. For example, Haryana Vikas Party merged with INC in 2004 just before the Assembly election in Haryana (Financial Express 2004).

Intra-alliance switching is taken place when politicians switch their parties within the parties of the same alliance. Although in the 2019 general election, five alliances contested the election, the switching MPs managed victory who switched their parties within their alliances of NDA, UPA, and Mahagathbandhan. Amongst the alliances, NDA has the highest number of sitting MPs who switched their parties within the alliance. Fourteen such MPs of NDA managed a victory, while this number is two for UPA and Mahagathbandhan each. In NDA, this type of switching took place among eight alliance parties of NDA, such as BJP, Janta Dal (United), Lok Janshakti Party, Shiv Sena, Rashtriya Loktantrik Party, Assam Gono Parishad, Apna Dal (Sonelal).

Amongst these parties, seven MPs made inward switching to BJP while six MPs made out-ward switching to various alliance parties of NDA. In the case of the UPA, one each candidate managed victory by switching from INC to NCP and NCP to INC. The case of Mahagathbandhan was different from both NDA and UPA. In the case of the Mahagathbandhan, both the sitting MPs managed victory from the ticket of the Samajwadi Party (SP) switched from the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). Therefore total 18 sitting MPs managed victory who made intra-alliance party switching. Interestingly, except for NDA, such switching is not reflected by other alliance during 2014-2019. In NDA, six present MPs made intra-alliance switching in 2014-18 and five made in 2019.

Inter-regional variation

Analysis of sitting MPs of six different administrative zones of India provides interesting facts about the party-switching politics of India. Here, this research observed two different types of inter-regional variations, i.e. number of sitting switching MPs and trend of party-switching among different types of political parties.

The 17th Lok Sabha has the highest number of switching MPs from the Eastern Zone, followed by the Central Zone. In fact, the proportion of switching MPs to total MPs of the respective zone is highest in Eastern Zone followed by Central Zone. On the other hand, sitting MPs who switched the party in 2019 is highest from Southern Zone followed by Western Zone. However, the proportion of switching MPs of 2019 to total MPs of the respective zone is the highest Western Zone.

Table-5: Administrative Zone wise number of sitting MPs switched to different Political Parties

Zone	Total MP	Overall Switching MPs	No of the MPs switched in 2019	Percentage of Switching to total MPs		Proportion to total switching candidates	
				Overall	Switched in 2019	Switched in 2019	Switched in 2019
Northern Zone	66	10	1	15.15	1.52	7.41	2.86
North Eastern Zone	25	6	0	24	0	4.44	0
Central Zone	125	34	8	27.2	6.4	25.19	22.86
Eastern Zone	117	38	7	32.48	5.98	28.15	20
Western Zone	78	21	9	26.92	11.54	15.56	25.71
Southern Zone	132	26	10	19.7	7.58	19.26	28.57

The trend of party switching in the various administrative zones is also important to understand the variation of party switching. In all entire zones, except the Southern zone, the majority of sitting switching MPs switched to national parties either from national or regional

parties. On the other hand, in Southern Zone, the majority of such MPs switched to regional parties. However, it does not impact national parties as most such incidents occur among the regional parties in Southern Zone, primarily between YSR Congress Party and Telegu Desam. Interestingly, five such MPs managed victory after switching to the YSR Congress party from Telegu Desam in 2019.

Table-6: Zone wise trend of party switching

Zone	To National Party (NP)				Regional Party (RP)			To Independent	
	Total	From NP	From RP	From Independent	Total	From NP	From RP	Total	From NP
Northern Zone	7	6	1	0	2	1	1	1	1
North Eastern Zone	5	4	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
Central Zone	20	17	3	0	13	10	3	1	1
Eastern Zone	24	15	9	0	13	11	2	1	1
Western Zone	14	8	4	2	6	5	1	1	1
Southern Zone	10	8	2	0	16	5	11	0	0

Motivating factors of Party Switching

Before discussing the motivation of party switcher, let us see some of the comments (justifications) made by different sitting switching MPs to justify their switching to other parties. Below some of such comments collected from various newspapers and their interview.

1. I am originally XXX (party name) soldier. I had worked under PM XXX (name of the minister) and XXX (party name) president XXX (president name). I am leaving XXX (party name) because of infighting. I have realised that only XXX (party name) can ensure people's well-being.

2. The XXX (name of the party) did nothing for Dalit and backward. Its government functions unconstitutionally and is conspiring to end reservation. I will ensure the XXX (party name) defeat in my constituency and am ready to campaign wherever my party sends me.

3. The XXX (party name) does not have leadership.

4. After observing that XXX (party name) has done much work for the poor, Dalits, farmers, youths, unemployed people, women, and the elderly, I have thoughtfully taken this decision. Today, I am whole-heartedly joining the XXX (party name).

5. The country again needs an influential prime minister. Many leaders from different parties are joining the XXX (party name) after being influenced by the public policies of the XXX (name of the Prime Minister) government.

6. I joined XXX (party name) as there is a need for XXX (party name) to come to power there to fulfil people's aspirations.

7. XXX (name of the leader) leadership is not acceptable to people. With XXX (name of the leader) at the helm, nobody listens to us. He has anyways outsourced the entire party to XXX (leader name) overnight.

8. I have come to the party that thinks for the poor. My focus is on development, not on insulting others.

9. If I am not eligible to be a candidate, then there is no need for me to hold on to the post of the party. So, I have resigned.

10. I do not see any future in the XXX (party name) as the party has diverted from its ideology.

11. I have always fought for social justice, but there was no space left in XXX (party name) to do so as they were only focusing on Hindu and Muslim. I was feeling suffocated and therefore decided to join XXX (party name)

12. I am joining XXX (party name) today. XXX (party leader's name) will announce my candidature from his rally at XXX (place name) tomorrow.

As identified by existing literature (O'Brien & Shomer 2013), both parliamentarians' motivation and political institutions act as major determinants of party switching. The above statements of politicians reflect the same. This research found five major factors that motivated the politicians to switch their parties based on the above statements. The majority of politicians switched their party to ensure the well-being of people (see statement no- 1,2,4,6 and 8). Two politicians directly indicted that they switched their parties as their present parties denied them the ticket (see statement no-9 and 12). Switching of parties because of denial of the ticket is a common phenomenon mainly observed in developing countries as party politics in developing countries is driven by "the sheer motivation of capturing or sharing political power" (Diwan 1979: 292). Although political parties' objective is to capture power in democratic counties, all much have some ideology or principle. Capturing power without ideology or principle can not be a usual method of capturing power in democracy (Diwan 1979). Therefore, they not representing the people; instead, they are representative selves. So, the party-switching is taking place as "politics becomes more personalised and the power of parties over individual politicians erodes" (Hix & Noury 2018: 20).

However, the above statements also show that we have politicians who switched the party because of ideological reason (see statement no-10 and 11). Ironically, the number of such politicians is very few. Further, party leadership acts as one of the major motivating factors for

switching. The above statement shows that three politicians (see statement no-3, 5, and 7) switched their parties because of party leadership. The numbers of sitting switching MPs in the 17th Lok Sabha also prove this statement. It is observed that leadership, along with party culture and party popularity, also motivate the politicians to switch their party. For example, switching MPs of NDA performed better results in the 2019 general election than other alliances. Furthermore, BJP, who contested the election under the present prime minister, has the highest inward switching sitting MPs. Interestingly, out of total 73 inward switching sitting MPs of BJP, 24 switched from INC. Similarly, 36 switching sitting MPs of NDA switched from different parties of UPA, accounting for 39.13 per cent switching sitting MPs of NDA.

Table-4: Details of Inward and outward party-switching

Alliance	Inward Switching	Outward Switching
NDA	92	20
UPA	13	53
Federal Front	10	4
Mahagathbandhan	6	19
Left Front	0	1
Non-Alliance parties	14	38
Total	135	135

CONCLUSION

Political parties play a significant role in democracy as they play the roles of aggregating and articulating the societal interests, structuring the votes, mobilising the electorate, and recruiting members (Heywood 1997/2002). In fact, “the modern democracies are essentially party democracies” (Diwan 1979: 292). On the other hand, political parties are equally helpful for an ambitious politician during elections. Parties can provide workers who may campaign for the candidate, financial support to carry out the campaign, and, most importantly, a well-developed policy brand name (Desposato 2006). Thus “they bring people together behind political agendas and candidates, thus reducing political fragmentation” (Barrow 2007:167). The study found that party switching can influence the patterns of party competitions and decrease party legitimacy (Mainwaring & Scully 1995).

Although switching parties is not a new phenomenon in India, we have members in parliament who have switched much before 2000, but the study found that most such switching reflects the opportunistic nature of politicians, which is a serious threat to Indian democracy. In fact, it has a negative impact on politicians too. It is generally said that people lose confidence in those political leaders who frequently switched parties, as mentioned by Vice-President

of India M. Venkaiah Naidu (The Hindu 2019). Similarly, this study also found that people lose confidence in the leader who frequently switched parties. Further, “party-switching politicians may serve parties’ short-term interests, in the longer-term party-switching may further erode citizens’ confidence in these important institutions” (Barrow, 2007:172). Interestingly, in the 2019 election, NDA has gained sympathy for switching candidates compared to UPA, but in the real sense, it was not towards the switching candidates but towards the issues and political propaganda on which this alliance fought in this election. So, it is rightly said that “voters’ choices are expressions of sympathy for particular parties’ ideals and policy positions and not simply for candidates” (Barrow, 2007:170).

As discussed above, the one fifth sitting MPs of 17th Lok Shaba are switching members, some of whom have changed more than six different political parties. There is much evidence of returning to the earlier party by party switching politicians, which is considered home returning. Further, there are records of forming a new party by switching politicians rather than joining a new party. However, the most important of such setbacks is that sometimes these politicians seem to contest in the election under the banner of earlier parties or a big party due to fear of gaining more popularity. Giving tickets by members of the alliance to the switching candidates who have switched over from party of the same alliance is another strangest feature of party switching in India. For example, A and B is the member of alliance C. There is an example of switching candidate getting a ticket from alliance C who has switched over to B from A. Therefore, here, it can be mentioned that there is no control of alliance over the selection of candidates of the different party for contesting the election. Accordingly, we have an example of the number of candidates who have switched over the party within the alliance getting party tickets in the 2019 election. This situation mainly occurred when the allied party was given seats to contest.

“Representatives have expectations of the parties with which they are affiliated. They are especially likely to leave these organisations if their vote- or policy-seeking aims are jeopardised” (O’Brien & Shomer 2013:131). Unlike European party-switching, where ideological congruence plays an important role (Hix & Noury 2018), in India, it has been observed that party switching is mainly influenced by power where party switcher switches party only to get the party ticket. So, in the context of India, politicians’ action of switching political party is mainly determined by their desire to maximise their influences over political agenda and getting power which is dangerous for Indian democracy as the switchers are not only non-loyal to the party but they only contest the election only for them but not for masses.

Although party switching is one of the primary political science debates, party-switching has been neglected in Indian literature. This study is an attempt to fill up this gap. This study tried to analyse the trend of party switching in India empirically. However, this study is not above limitations but reveals scope for further research. For example, it is important to understand voters' reaction towards the party-switching candidates, which will require extensive fieldwork and analysis of contemporary development in Indian politics.

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