

The poor save the Congress-NCP

Changing nature of party competition and entry of MNS has complicated politics in the State



MAHARASHTRA
Maharashtra contributed to the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) victory in a major way. The ruling Congress-Nationalist Congress Party alliance captured 25 out of 48 seats, confining the rival Bharatiya Janata Party-Shiv Sena alliance to only 20 seats. Of the three remaining seats, one went to an Independent, one to the Swabhimani Shetkari Paksha and one to the Bahujan Vikas Aghadi — a party said to be floated by a noted member of the Mumbai mafia. There is a gap of around four percentage points between the two alliances. Compared to the 2004 Lok Sabha election, the Congress-NCP alliance lost around five percentage points while the BJP-Shiv Sena combine came down by eight points.

Social base of the two coalitions		
	Congress-NCP	BJP-SS
Marathas and Kunbis	35	49
OBCs	36	45
Dalits	55	28
Rich	37	37
Poor	39	39
Very poor	47	26
Muslims	69	9
Aggregate vote share	38.9	35.2

Source: NES 2009, weighted data file, all figures in per cent

Looking at the performance of individual parties, the Congress scored well with 17 seats, albeit with a reduced vote share. The NCP was reduced to a mere eight seats though its support base increased marginally. Between the BJP and the Shiv Sena, the latter did well in spite of challenges posed by the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS); however, both partners lost votes. Two factors may help explain the Maharashtra ver-

dict in favour of the Congress-NCP — the changing nature of party competition and the rise of the MNS as a major player in the State. However, as the survey indicates, it is a successful combination of the votes of the middle and the poor classes that led to the Congress victory.

The entry of the BSP and the MNS has complicated Maharashtra's politics. The rise of the MNS posed problems particularly for the Shiv Sena in Mumbai. Out of the six seats in the city, the Sena lost four as a major chunk of its votes was taken away by the MNS. The NCP suffered mainly due to infighting and strained relations with the Congress cadre at the local level. In many constituencies of Western Maharashtra, the NCP and the Congress workers did not work for each other's benefit. A rebellion within the party resulted in two candidates in the NCP bastion of western Maharashtra losing.

Traditionally, Congress dominance — and more recently, the victories of the Congress-NCP alliance — is often linked to the consolidation of the Maratha vote. However, NES studies over the years have shown a gradual fragmentation of the Maratha vote, a process that continued in the 2009 Lok Sabha poll. A major chunk of the Maratha vote has now gone to the BJP-Shiv Sena combine. The NCP's base is

more skewed, with Marathas contributing nearly 30 per cent of the party's vote. On election eve, the NCP raised the dead issue of job reservations for the Marathas, but this fizzled out during the campaign. In what may ring alarm bells for the NCP, Maratha voters seemed to believe that the Shiv Sena best represented their interests. Among other major social groups, the OBC vote is more uniformly distributed across parties, while the Dalits seem to favour the Congress-NCP alliance.

Compared to the NCP, the Congress seems to have managed to lead a rainbow social coalition in the State. This is one of the main reasons for its success. The Congress' social support base is more uniform across social groups, including upper castes. The survey also reveals that the Congress managed to lead a class coalition of the poor and middle classes. As far as the middle class vote is concerned, the Congress is more or less on par with the Sena and the BJP alliance. However it is a clear winner among the poor, especially the very poor sections; this is a significant factor behind the Congress victory.

Clean sweep

Three factors helped the Congress



DELHI
The Congress swept the national capital by securing all seven seats, including South Delhi, which it lost to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2004. With a vote share of 57 per cent, the party has clocked a 17 percentage point upswing since the 2008 Assembly election, mostly at the cost of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and others. The Congress led in all but two Assembly segments.

ing the safety of women (45 per cent), and holding the price line (37 per cent). Initiatives such as the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) corridor met with general approval (48 per cent for, 16 against).

Secondly, the Congress has expanded its social base. While maintaining its hold on its core constituency, including Muslims and Dalits, it has made inroads into sections of the BJP's traditional support base: the upper classes, and the highly educated and among the Sikh and Punjabi Khatri communities.

Thirdly, the vote share of the BSP, the big spoiler in the Assembly election, has fallen sharply from 14 to just five per cent. The BSP has lost its vote share in all seven constituencies since the 2008 Assembly election, most prominently in North-East Delhi (a 13 per cent drop) and South Delhi (a 12 per cent drop).

Three factors helped the Congress better its Assembly election performance. First, the newly re-elected government enjoyed an early incumbency advantage, with 71 per cent of the people polled satisfied with its performance. Most people consider the Congress most capable of providing such things as electricity and water (58 per cent), ensur-

Riding on goodwill

Vote in Jammu region polarised along religious lines; clear edge for Omar in Kashmir Valley



JAMMU AND KASHMIR
The 2009 election was held four months after the Omar Abdullah-led National Conference-Congress coalition government won the Assembly election. The two parties fought the Assembly election separately and the coalition was the result of a post-poll power-sharing arrangement.

This time round, the NC and the Congress contested as an alliance, and fielded three candidates each. (In the 2004 election, the Congress had an alliance with the People's Democratic Party.) The alliance won five of the total six seats and the remaining one, Ladakh, returned an NC rebel, who has since come back to the party.

The participation of separatist leader Sajjad Lone, who contested from the Baramulla constituency, was a notable feature of the 2009

election. Even though he got only 14.8 per cent of the vote and came third, behind the NC and the PDP, the fact that a prominent separatist leader contested the election is a significant development.

The political situation in the State has been more or less the same for over two decades now. Besides insurgency, last year's Amarnath Yatra land controversy had created a new communal divide in the Jammu region. However, the agitation's main leader, Leela Karan Sharma of the BJP, lost Poonch constituency to his Congress rival by a decisive margin of over 1.2 lakh votes.

The State also witnessed polarisation on religious lines, with the BJP getting a majority of the Hindu upper caste and Dalit votes in the Jammu region. But the Congress swept both the seats here because it got 55 per cent of the Muslim vote, along with a substantial proportion of the remaining

Hindu vote. The contest in the Valley was directly between the NC and the PDP. The NC edge came from its 11-percentage point lead among Muslims. The overwhelming public opinion in Kashmir is that security forces should be removed from the Valley (92 per cent), and Omar Abdullah's support of this demand seems to have helped his party. Even though Mufti Mohammed Sayeed of the PDP too had supported the demand, the party failed to convert its appeal into votes.

When asked to compare all the State governments in the last decade, 48 per cent of the respondents rated the Mufti government as the best. Despite this, 33 per cent voted for the PDP, while 43 per cent voted for the Congress-NC alliance in this election. This indicates that the people have high hopes from the new government and the NC-Congress alliance benefited from this goodwill.

Congress gains across all sections

BJP-AGP combine saved from total rout because of the support of Assamese Hindus



ASSAM
The verdict in Assam has far-reaching implications for the State's politics. Against extensive fears of a wipe out, the Congress got away with a minor loss of two seats from its tally of nine in 2004, with a loss of just under one percentage point in votes. The Assam United Democratic Front (AUDF), which contested the Lok Sabha election for the first time, polled 16.1 per cent of the vote and won one seat. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its alliance partner, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), polled 30.8 per cent of the vote. In 2004, the two parties, which contested separately, had polled nearly 43 per cent of the vote. The alliance was expected to sweep Assam by consolidating the Hindu vote because the AUDF was projected to deprive the Congress of its Muslim vote. Things, however, worked out differently. The big question is how did the Congress manage to guard its fortress?

The emergence of the AUDF did cost the Congress a substantial chunk of the Muslim vote it had in 2004, but the AUDF polarised them in two big categories. The Congress lost virtually all its Bengali-speaking Muslim voters; 78 per cent of them voted for the AUDF. But among Assamese-speaking Muslims, the Congress secured 75 per cent support, a gain of 23 percentage points compared to 2004. The AGP-

Among social groups	
Compared to 2004, Congress gains among...	
Assamese-speaking Muslims	23
Bengali-speaking Hindus	21
Bodos	18
Assamese-speaking Hindus	8
Other STs	3
But lost among...	
Bengali-speaking Muslims	50

Source: NES 2009. Weighted data. Sample size: 1402. All figures in percentage points.

BJP combine lost 13 percentage points among Assamese-speaking Muslims.

The alliance with the BJP cost the AGP its Assamese Muslim constituency. Conversely, the alliance with the AGP cost the BJP its Bengali-speaking Hindu vote. Traditionally, the BJP in Assam has depended largely on Bengali-speaking Hindus; in 2004 a majority of them voted for the party and the combined vote share of the BJP-AGP was over 62 per cent.

This time, the alliance could manage only about 35 per cent of the vote. The beneficiary of this failure was the Congress, which gained 21 percentage points among Bengali-speaking Hindus. The alliance seems to have paid the price for the AGP's anti-Bengali stance and the BJP's anti-Muslim stance in the form of Bengali-speaking Hindu votes and Assamese-speaking Muslim votes. The core constituency

for the BJP-AGP alliance continued to be the Assamese-speaking Hindus. In 2004, the AGP got 35 per cent of this vote, while the BJP got 24 per cent. In 2009, together they polled 59 per cent, the same as in 2004. The alliance did not make fresh gains, even though the community's continued support saved it from a complete rout. The two allies also maintained their marginal vote share among non-Bodo Schedule Tribes, but among Bodos they suffered a massive loss of 43 percentage points. This loss has more to do with the fact that in 2004 the BJP had supported a Bodo Independent candidate from the Kokrajhar seat, who got the Congress support this time for his new party, the Bodoland People's Front.

Even among the Assamese-speaking Hindus, the failure of the alliance to make fresh gains led to the Congress gaining around 8 percentage points, mainly at the cost of other smaller parties. Among non-Bodo Scheduled Tribes the Congress maintained its position with a marginal gain of three percentage points. The only group where it lost votes has been Bengali-speaking Muslims, but that loss has been made up by gains in all other sections of the electorate. The long-term implications of this verdict are that the polarisation within Muslims and the gains of the Congress across sections make it more of a 'catch-all party' in Assam.

Congress resurgent

Sikhs still back the Akali Dal, but the Congress has solid support from Hindu upper class and Dalit voters



PUNJAB
In Punjab, a resurgent Congress increased its vote share by 10 percentage points since 2004. Paradoxical as it may sound, the verdict came as a relief for some Akalis who had feared a complete rout. They managed to save face by winning two seats each in Majha and Malwa regions.

In the Congress bastion of Deoba, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) was rejected. With an almost 44 per cent vote share, the Akali Dal-Bharatiya Janata Party combine was only one percentage point short of the Congress count. The Congress consolidated its position in its rural stronghold, but the NDA lost a part of its traditional urban voters. The Congress clocked a seven-percentage point lead among urban voters. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) seems to have lost substantial ground in Punjab, with its vote share declining from 7.6 per cent in 2004 to 5.8 per cent in 2009.

Around 40 per cent of respondents agreed with the proposition that the Congress declared Manmohan Singh as its Prime Ministerial candidate only to woo Sikh voters. But more Hindus than Sikhs in Punjab expressed faith in his leadership. At 42 per cent, his popularity in Punjab is higher than anywhere else in the country and much higher than the neighbouring States.

On the development front, 30 per cent valued the work done by the State government while 26 per cent preferred the work done by Central government. As

many as 69 per cent of the respondents were happy with the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government's performance while 56 per cent were satisfied with the Akali-NDA government.

The opposition leader, Capt. Amarinder Singh of the Congress, is a more preferred candidate for the Chief Minister's post than the present Chief Minister, Parkash Singh Badal. His attempt to induct his son may have politically harmed him. Around 39 per cent felt that Sukhbir Singh Badal lacked the experience to be Punjab's Deputy Chief Minister and 29 thought otherwise. Thirty-two per cent had no opinion on this issue. Allegations of vindictive politics and rigging in the last panchayat and municipal elections may also have harmed the Akali-BJP combine's prospects.

The Sikhs were firmly behind the Akali-BJP combine. But the Congress has a 20 percentage point lead over the NDA among Hindu upper caste voters.

The BSP got 20 per cent of the Dalit vote, mostly from the Ramdasia community, but was way behind the Congress, which continues to command the support of 60 per cent of Punjab's Scheduled Caste voters.

Voters in Punjab think the Congress can effectively maintain law and order, solve the Sutlej-Yamuna water dispute, curb corruption, take care of the Dalit interests, and maintain good relations between Hindus and Sikhs.

However, the Akali Dal is seen as a party capable of solving the agrarian crisis. This means that all is still not lost for the Akalis in Punjab.

Riding high on Hooda's performance

Congress march to victory in Haryana fuelled by changing caste equations



HARYANA
In a State known for huge swings, the Congress' tally of nine out of 10 came as a big surprise to political observers. The number of seats it won and the vote share it garnered (42 per cent) remained the same as in the 2004 Lok Sabha election.

What helped the Congress in this multi-polar contest was the 12 percentage point vote share loss by the Bharatiya Janata Party-Indian National Lok Dal alliance, coupled with the fragmentation of the opposition votes.

In retrospect, the Bhupinder Singh Hooda-led Congress government would like to present this victory as a referendum on its performance. There is some evidence to back this claim: more than six out of 10 voters expressed satisfaction with its track record. Even a majority of the NDA voters were satisfied with the State government's performance. The voters gave the thumbs up to the Hooda government: 48 per cent said it was better than the Chautala government (21 per cent).

At least a part of the reason for this approval rating has to do with a subtle change in the caste profile of Congress supporters. Mr. Hooda's assid-

Congress gains Jats, loses Dalits				
	Jats	Yadavs	Lower OBCs	Dalits
Congress vote share 2009	42	56	54	33
Congress gain/loss from 2004	+17	+15	+8	-32

Source: NES 2009. Weighted data. Sample size: 703. Vote share in per cent, gain/loss in percentage points

uous efforts to court Jats, his own caste, have been rewarded: the Congress enhanced its vote share by as much as 17 percentage points among this powerful community that accounts for about a quarter of the State's electorate. This largely accounts for the poor showing of the BJP's partner, the INLD, which has traditionally enjoyed a massive support among the Jats. The Congress also gained significantly among the lower OBCs and Yadavs. This increase, however, may have come at a long-term cost: the ruling party has shed nearly one-third of its support among the Dalits, the second largest community in the State and the one most loyal to the Congress so far. The principal beneficiary of the desertion of Dalit voters was the BSP, which posted a significant swing of 35 points in its favour, though without winning a seat.

The changing caste equation also ensured that the revival of the BJP-INLD alliance was a non-starter. Instead of gaining from the alliance's synergy, they actually lost the only seat they won last time. The Jat vote of the INLD and the Bania-Punjabi vote of the BJP did not materialise as expected. The results strengthen the belief that the BJP would have better off with the Haryana Janhit Congress (HJC), the Congress offshoot floated by Bhajan Lal. This new outfit secured 10 per cent of the vote and won one seat. Three-quarters of the voters of the HJC in this election were those who voted for the Congress in 2004; 17 per cent of them had voted for the BJP. Similarly, 69 per cent of those who voted for the BSP voted for the Congress in 2004. But the BJP-INLD alliance was unable to cash in on this erosion in the Congress vote.

A partial recovery

The Congress' performance was influenced by factors unrelated to its popularity in the State



MADHYA PRADESH
The Congress staged a partial recovery here rather than a victory. The BJP had dominated the State, winning every election since 1999. The Congress has increased its vote share by around six percentage points over 2004, boosting its tally from four to 12 seats.

This surprised many people, including Congress leaders themselves. The Bahujan Samaj Party gained marginally by one percentage point, emerging victorious in the sole

seat of Reva, which it had won in 1998 and 1999. The Congress' recovery was particularly striking in the Malwa and Vindhya Pradesh regions where it led the BJP by two and five percentage points respectively. The BJP made up for these losses with a decisive lead of 29 percentage points in the Mahakoshal region and by maintaining its edge in urban areas. In urban areas, the BJP led by eight percentage points, while in rural areas, this narrowed to merely two points.

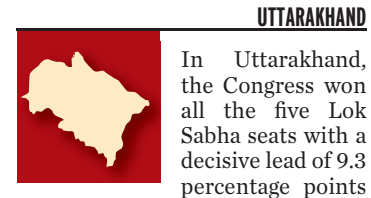
Not even diehard Congress supporters would claim it was organisationally in shape to take on

the BJP. The factionalism within the State Congress was embarrassing, even by the party's own standards. State level 'anti-incumbency' does not provide an explanation for the verdict: over 80 per cent of those surveyed and three-fourths of Congress voters said they were satisfied with the recently re-elected State government. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan was chosen by as many as 50 per cent of respondents as the preferred choice for the post.

The answer for the Congress' better performance lies outside the State. The popularity of the State government was

neutralised by that of the Centre: 71 per cent reported satisfaction with the performance of the UPA government in the last five years. So it boiled down to which of the two governments mattered more in this election. Expectedly, an overwhelming majority of those who voted with the State government in mind (about 30 per cent) voted for the BJP. Most of those who were influenced more by the performance of the Central government (about 25 per cent) voted for the Congress. The jubilation in the Congress camp over its performance should be tempered by the realisation that it was heavily influenced by factors that are unrelated to its strength and popularity in the State.

Big victory



UTTARAKHAND
In Uttarakhand, the Congress won all the five Lok Sabha seats with a decisive lead of 9.3 percentage points over the BJP.

This was a striking departure from a mere two percentage point difference between the two leading parties since the formation of the State. The Bahujan Samaj Party got an impressive 15.2 per cent votes even though it failed to win a seat. The outcome is being seen as a verdict against the BJP State government headed by B.C. Khanduri though the Chief Minister does not come across as a non-performer. As high as 63 per cent respondents were satisfied with the State government's performance, but the level of satisfaction with the central government was even higher at 67 per cent.

The Congress is seen as the best party for the State's development.