

A shift in political fundamentals

The saturation of caste-based identity politics, the focus on good governance, and the BJP's limitations gave Congress the edge

When votes were being counted on the morning of May 16, there was an unmistakable sense of being witness to a turning point in the nation's political history. The surprise element — the Congress crossing 200 seats and the UPA coming close to the majority mark against the widespread expectation of a badly fractured Parliament — underlined the national character of the outcome. The voters appeared to have delivered a decisive verdict, one that heralded a new era in the country's politics. As India digested its import, the consequences were stark enough for all to see. The verdict provided greater stability to the national government and reduced the bargaining and blackmailing capacity of coalition allies vastly. The verdict eliminated the need for a Congress-Left coalition and was widely seen as paving the way for greater economic liberalisation. The verdict, especially the success of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh, catapulted Rahul Gandhi to the centre-stage of national politics. It was tempting to read these consequences back into the minds of the voters and conclude that this was a vote for stability, a man-

date for economic reform and proof that the Rahul magic had worked. A focus on the big regional losers such as Lalu Prasad and Mayawati gave the impression that the days of regional parties and caste-based politics were coming to an end. The new strength of the Congress gave rise to the idea that national parties were back at the centre-stage of national politics.

Political context

Now that the surprise has worn off and now that we have the data from National Election Study 2009, it is time to verify some of these initial impressions. We need to map the political context of this election in different parts of the country, understand the nature of political choices available to the voters and analyse the sociology of voting. We need to keep in mind a fundamental distinction between the consequences of a verdict and its meaning. We need to take our minds away from the absorbing spectacle of the fallout of this election and focus on how India voted. That is what this special supplement is all about.

Take two simple yet basic points. First, for all the excitement following its out-

come, this election was a normal one. It was not woven around an emotive issue, it was not centred on a personality, and it was not a plebiscite on any one issue. Secondly, while there was a nationwide pattern in the outcome for the two big parties, the principal arena of political contestation was very much located at the State level. The political choice available to the voters, the familiar social equation of who prefers who, and the major issues that determine voter choice were all State specific. To be sure, 'national' issues played an important role this time, but these issues and factors manifested in different ways in different States. National politics reaches the people through the prism of the State. The two basic features of this election ensured that the final outcome reflected the balance of political forces in all the States. An interpretation of the mandate, therefore, must be an exercise in understanding how the balance shifted this time.

The widespread impression that the balance shifted in this election in favour of the national parties and against the regional parties is not borne out by evidence.

The combined tally of the Congress and the BJP has no doubt gone up from 283 to 322 seats but their combined vote share has actually come down by 1.3 percentage points. If we add the Left to the definition, the national parties have gained two seats and have lost about two percentage points in vote share.

Remarkable stability

Similarly, the combined vote share of all the regional parties in the country put together shows a remarkable stability: the figures for the last three Lok Sabha elections read 29.3 per cent, 29.3 per cent and 29.2 per cent. The figure for this time reads 29.2 per cent. The obituaries of the regional parties are premature. As long as the States remain the principal arena of politics, State-specific parties will be relevant. Besides, the regional sentiment on which these parties draw is alive and kicking. More than 70 per cent of re-

spondents in our nationwide survey agreed with the statement that we should first be loyal to the region and then to the nation; only 14 per cent disagreed. In fact, this election buttressed the trend of the regionalisation of the national parties, as leaders of national parties with a regional touch such as Y. S. Rajasekhara Reddy, Tarun Gogoi, B.S. Yeddyurappa and Raman Singh emerged winners.

What really happened is that the internal balance between the two leading national parties has shifted in a fundamental and perhaps enduring manner to the Congress party's advantage. The Congress has gained significantly, if unevenly, in a majority of States, while the BJP has lost across the country. This shift appears to signify more than the usual ups and downs of electoral politics. While the Congress was somewhat lucky to have improved its seat tally in such a

big way, in a way disproportionate to the modest increase in its vote share, the BJP appears to be stuck in a restricted pool of potential voters, a limitation inherent in its exclusionary politics. This shift in balance in favour of the Congress was not a short-term phenomenon. This election was not won or lost during the few weeks of the election campaign or in the few months prior to the polling day. In hindsight, the outcome of this election reflects the political fundamentals.

The Congress did not win because it did something very clever in the last few weeks to sell itself — as always, the party appeared to be working more at cross purposes and seemed lacking in organisational capacity — but because it had a better product to sell than its main rival. It had leaders perceived to be honest and well-meaning, a pro-poor platform, a relatively fair record of governance aided by an economic boom during much of its tenure, and a non-divisive approach to social conflict. The only element of strategy that did work in favour of the Congress was its decision to go it alone in Uttar Pradesh, which paid off in ways unanticipated

by its own leaders.

The Congress was also helped by two fundamental shifts that these elections signalled. First, various kinds of identity politics have now reached a point of saturation and are beginning to be electorally non-rewarding. Voters have rejected the kind of caste politics practised by the Rashtriya Janata Dal, the Bahujan Samaj Party and the Pattali Makkal Katchi. This politics played an important role in giving their voters a sense of self-worth, but now they want more. In several States, Muslims have refused to remain hostage to the party that captured their vote. They needed these parties to protest against Congress indifference, but they now want to make nuanced choices. This is not to say that we are about to see a demise of caste in politics. Perhaps the way forward is 'identity plus' politics where the basic building blocs of caste or community will be combined with some basic interests.

Good governance

The second fundamental shift is the emergence of quality of governance as an important voting consideration. When elections become 'normal,' routine considera-

tions such as delivery of governance emerge as crucial factors in an election outcome. The days of blind anti-incumbency are over. At the State level, we have reached a fine balance where the incumbent government faces the elections with neither an advantage nor a disadvantage to begin with. This factor worked to the advantage of the Congress, especially among those whose vote was determined by an assessment of the Central government. Voters assessed the UPA government in the last five years positively. It was seen to be better than the previous NDA government and a majority of the people wanted to give it another chance.

The Congress was in a position to benefit from these two shifts. It has a skeleton of a national organisation and its leaders currently enjoy a positive image. The Congress presented itself, without designing — and its critics may say without deserving — as the natural alternative to those voters who wanted to make a shift. While it seems likely that both these factors will shape the future of Indian politics, there is no guarantee that these will work to the advantage of the winner of this election.

The balance between the BJP and Congress has shifted to the advantage of the latter

Portrait of a party in retreat

The BJP needs to reflect not so much on campaign strategy as on its overall political direction

Although the Bharatiya Janata Party did not start this election as the favourite, the scale of its defeat must still come as a shock. It posted its lowest vote share since it first exploded on the national stage in 1989. It won just 116 seats, down from 138 seats it had last time. Its vote share of 18.8 per cent was 3.4 percentage points down on 2004. This is the third successive election that its support base has shrunk since the high watermark of 1998.

While the Congress did not enjoy a positive vote swing all over the country, the BJP suffered a negative swing in nearly every State. Despite picking up the odd seat in Karnataka and Himachal Pradesh thanks to an increased share of the vote, the party saw its support base shrink in

BJP's vote share		
State	Vote share	Swing from 2004
Andhra Pradesh	3.7	-4.7
Assam	16.2	-6.7
Bihar	14	-0.6
Chhattisgarh	45	-2.8
Delhi	35.2	-5.5
Gujarat	46.6	-0.8
Haryana	12.1	-5.1
Himachal Pradesh	49.5	5.3
Jharkhand	27.5	-5.5
Jammu & Kashmir	18.6	-4.4
Karnataka	39.7	4.9
Kerala	6.3	-4.1
Maharashtra	18.2	-4.4
Madhya Pradesh	43.5	-4.6
Orissa	16.9	-2.4
Punjab	10.1	-0.4
Rajasthan	36.6	-12.4
Tamil Nadu	2.3	-2.8
Uttar Pradesh	17.5	-4.7
Uttarakhand	34	-7
West Bengal	6.1	-2

Source: NES 2009. Weighted data, all figures are in per cent, swing in percentage points, rest no opinion

to a point of stagnation, much before the party could cross the threshold of viability. This election marks a point of retreat in this project. The BJP is no longer the small but crucial player that it used to be in West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Despite paying a good deal of attention and adopting unorthodox tricks, the BJP is in retreat all over the North-East.

Secondly, the BJP expanded its bandwidth on the political spectrum by acquiring new allies. The NDA of 1999-2004 represented the pinnacle of the BJP's political expansion. Since then it has been downhill for the party. From the peak of 41.1 per cent share of the national vote, the NDA slipped to 35.9 per cent in 2004 and has fallen to just 24.1 per cent this time. Big allies such as the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazha-

The BJP suffered a negative swing in nearly every State

gam, the Telugu Desam Party, the Trinamool Congress have dumped the BJP, because they found the cost of losing minority votes higher than the gains the alliance brought. This time the BJP did win back some old allies like the Asom Gana Parishad in Assam and the Indian National Lok Dal in Haryana, but it is possible that they may reach similar conclusions. The manner in which the Biju Janata Dal dumped the BJP and got away with it could give ideas to the Janata Dal (United) in Bihar. As the BJP's own strength declines, and its capacity to accommodate diverse interests decreases, it becomes less attractive to existing and potential alliance partners.

Thirdly, the BJP attracted new social groups during its phase of expansion. It expanded from urban to the rural areas. From being an upper caste party, it cultivated a major base among the lower OBCs. It took major strides towards capturing the adivasi vote in middle India and started securing some votes among non-Hindus. By 1999, the BJP was in a position to claim power by adding these newly acquired votes to its core bloc of the socially privileged.

This election represents a stagnation or reversal in all these respects. Except Karnataka, the BJP does not appear to be cultivating a new social base anywhere. In this election, the BJP's hitherto upward trend among adivasis and Muslim voters has been reversed and its expansion among the lower OBCs halted. The BJP faces a threat in its core constituency too. Though it continues to be the first preference of upper caste Indians, the only social group where the BJP is ahead of the Congress, the party has faced a sharper than average erosion in this group. The BJP trailed the Congress among 'middle class' urban voters. All this confirms the picture of a party in retreat.

These three reversals underline the basic limitations of the political strategy the BJP has been employing. It is a party with a smaller catchment area, a declining capacity to reach out to newer groups, and a lower 'coalitionability.' It takes an exceptional situation such as Kargil, an extraordinarily accommodative leadership as that of A.B. Vajpayee, and an extra large coalition such as the NDA of 1999 to carve out a victory from this base. Otherwise, it faces a permanent disadvantage. Perhaps it is time for the party to ask the big question: aren't these limitations related to the narrow and divisive approach the party has espoused? The BJP is still the largest opposition party, runs many State governments (and reasonably well by the prevailing standards), and contains a second rung leadership. It is in a position to ask the big question that it needs to.

A revival for the Congress?

The truth is that the party increased its vote share only marginally, but earned a disproportionate reward in terms of seats

This election handed over an unambiguously positive verdict for the Congress at a time when the party least expected it. The Congress went into this election with three handicaps: it was an incumbent government nervous about what it had to show by way of achievement, its allies were fewer and weaker than in 2004, and it was perceived as being on the backfoot on the question of its prime ministerial candidate. Eventually, the Congress won 206 seats, crossing the 200-seat threshold for the first time since 1991. It performed well in States that it was expected to dominate, and also did better than expected in many others.

CONGRESS

where it was considered too weak to make a recovery. Though there was nothing like a national wave, strong or mild, there appeared to be a nationwide trend working to the Congress' advantage.

A close look at the vote shares and vote changes suggests that initial reactions may have overestimated the Congress gains. Despite boosting its tally by an impressive 61 seats, the Congress did this by increasing its vote share by a mere two percentage points from 2004. Overall, it won 28.6 per cent of the vote, almost identical to its vote share in 1999, when the National Democratic Alliance triumphed. In the last three elections, the seat/vote 'multiplier' (proportion of seats won divided by proportion of votes) for the Congress has gone up from 0.74 in 1999 to 1.01 in 2004 and to 1.34 in 2009. To put it differently, every one per cent of the vote gave the Congress four seats in 1999, 5.5 seats in 2004 and 7.2 seats in this election.

Now, a higher multiplier is not just plain luck. Clearly, the Congress succeeded in focusing its energies in key battlegrounds such as Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala and Rajasthan and obtained disproportionate rewards for its votes. At the same time, a higher multiplier should not be confused with an electoral wave representing a broad change in the public mood, or a national swing.

An analysis of the State-wise picture bears this out. The swing in favour of the Congress was far from uniform. Among the major States, it varied from a loss of 7.6 percentage points in vote share in Orissa to a gain

No national wave		
State	Vote share	Swing from 2004
All India	28.6	2.1
Andhra Pradesh	39.0	-2.6
Assam	34.9	-0.2
Bihar	10.3	5.8
Chhattisgarh	37.3	-2.9
Delhi	57.1	2.3
Gujarat	43.5	-0.4
Haryana	41.8	-0.3
Himachal Pradesh	45.6	-6.3
Jharkhand	15.0	-2.9
Jammu & Kashmir	24.7	-0.4
Karnataka	36.8	0.0
Kerala	40.1	8.0
Maharashtra	19.6	-4.2
Madhya Pradesh	40.1	6.0
Orissa	32.8	-7.6
Punjab	45.2	11.0
Rajasthan	47.2	5.8
Tamil Nadu	15.0	0.6
Uttar Pradesh	18.2	6.2
Uttarakhand	43.3	5

Source: NES 2009. Weighted data, all figures are in per cent, swing in percentage points, rest no opinion

of 11 percentage points in Punjab. But such was the Congress' fortune this time, that even losses translated into victories. Thanks to the break-up of the Bharatiya Janata Party-Biju Janata Dal alliance in Orissa, the Congress was able to pick up four extra seats. In Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, the loss in the Congress' vote was more than offset by the entry of crucial players such as the Praja Rajyam Party and the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena; these parties allowed the Congress to add to its tally of seats. On the other hand, in States

The Congress has not yet peaked; it still has a lot of room to grow

such as Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Kerala, a moderate positive swing brought handsome gains for the party in terms of seats. Parties should not expect such a boon every time.

The Congress' vote share in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar ought to please the party most. In Uttar Pradesh, the votes it received were concentrated in some pockets, thus giving it disproportionate rewards. But even so, a vote share of 18 per cent provides it with a launching pad for reviving the party in the State. The journey of revival in Bihar is bound to be tougher than in Uttar Pradesh, but Rashtriya Janata Dal chief Lalu Prasad may have done the Congress a favour in Bihar by forcing them to make an attempt. In Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, the Congress proved a useful secondary partner for its bigger allies, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the Trinamool Congress.

A revival in the electoral fortunes of the party has also been accompanied by a subtle shift in the social profile of its voters. By the late 1990s, the Congress had become a party whose support base was a mirror image of its opponent in different parts of the country. The party did not have a vote of its own and was excessively dependent upon the residual support it got from the marginal sections of society. In the last election, the Congress regained something of its famous 'rainbow coalition.' This election takes this trend a step further. The stigma attached to voting for the Congress among a section of Muslims and Sikhs is definitely over. The Congress has improved its standing among the urban middle classes and educated voters. It has done so while largely retaining the 'bottom of the pyramid' that constitutes its core voting bloc.

This recovery is still very partial, especially in States such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, where the Congress has been unable to access the bottom of the social pyramid. Also, there are many States where the Congress is in no position to take on the BJP. The Congress cannot outgrow its allies in other parts of the country, at least not yet. But to say this is to imply that the party has not yet peaked. The Congress still has a lot of room to grow.

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A case of stagnant political support

The challenge for the Left is to expand its presence beyond its strongholds

Is this a temporary setback for the Left? Or does this election result portend a long-term decline for the organised Left in Indian politics? This question suggests itself as the Left has come down from its historic high of 61

LEFT

seats in the previous Lok Sabha election to 24 seats. Part of the reason for this is a coincidence of political calendars: the low tide in Kerala happened to coincide with a political earthquake in West Bengal. The political context, the party system and the nature of issues are so different in these two States that it would be hard to see both these defeats as constituting the same phenomenon. Also, it so happened

that the alliances that the Left joined in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh did not do very well. If nothing else, the law of averages would ensure that the next electoral outcome is not so disastrous for the Left.

While this prognosis may not be inaccurate, it evades some serious questions that need to be posed. While the parliamentary presence of the Left has fluctuated somewhat, in terms of popular support, it has been stagnating for some time. Over the last two decades, its vote share has slipped from about 10 per cent in the early 1990s to eight per cent in the last election and below eight per cent this time. The problem for the Left parties is that they are unable to expand beyond their strongholds of West Bengal,

Kerala and Tripura for several decades. Their vote share has been fluctuating without any increase in other States where they are moderately present, such as Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

This stagnation may point to a deeper difficulty in the social base of the political support enjoyed by the Left. There is no doubt that the support for Left parties comes more from the poor and very poor classes. In its strongholds, the Left has drawn disproportionately from marginalised social communities such as Dalits, adivasis and in some cases Muslims. More than half of those who voted for the Left parties belong to the poor or very poor sections. In terms of the social profile of Left voters, about 42 per cent are Dalits and

Muslims. Despite their claims of representing the proletarian classes, these parties draw 80 per cent of their vote from rural areas, significantly more than the 'bourgeois' parties. Notwithstanding their self-image of drawing upon the youth, who are generally prone towards radical political ideologies and practices, the Left parties do not any longer enjoy greater than average support among younger voters. In West Bengal at least, the Left is expanding its base among the rural well to do and the urban middle classes at the expense of the small and marginal farmer.

There is no reason to believe the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal was a big issue in the voting decision of the Left voters. About 55 per cent of Left voters have no knowledge

of the deal. Of those, who have heard about it, more than half do not have an opinion. However, compared to the Congress and BJP voters, more Left voters believe that the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal would place India in a subservient position to the U.S. On the economic policies of the UPA government and their consequences, the positions and perceptions of Left voters do not seem to be very much different from that of other non-Congress voters.

The challenge of operating in a liberal democracy requires not just expanding political appeal but also aligning the party with the beliefs of existing and potential supporters. That is where the deeper political lesson of this electoral defeat may lie.

Methodology of NES 2009

The analysis of the national and State-level verdicts presented here is based on the National Election Study 2009 (NES 2009), a post-poll survey conducted by a team of scholars from all over the country and co-ordinated by Lokniti, Programme for Comparative Democracy at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS). The NES 2009 is the largest and most comprehensive social scientific survey of an Indian general election, perhaps of any election in the world. It adheres to the best international practices and protocols of survey research. While the NES gathers robust information about how Indians voted, this is not just a study of voting behaviour. The NES treats elections as a window to capture the most accurate snapshot of political beliefs, attitudes and opinions of Indian citizens. The NES 2009 also explores awareness levels and opinions on issues related to the Indian economy, national security, democracy, and diversity.

The study of Indian elections based on survey methodology started in the CSDS in the 1960s, led to the first National Election Study in 1967. Before this one, the National Election Studies (NES) — were carried out in 1967, 1971, 1996, 1998, 1999 and 2004. Together, they comprise the most comprehensive information database of social and political change in India, one that has been used as a source for international comparative studies.

NES 2009 has the unique distinction of being a collaborative research work shared by over 35 scholars across the country, many of who have been awarded Major Research Projects by the University Grants Commission for studying this election. The present report is the first collaborative output of these projects.

The post-poll survey presented here is very different from an exit poll, in which voters are approached and interviewed outside the polling booth. The purpose of the post-poll survey is to provide insight into the voters' political preferences and determine the reasons for the electorate's choice rather than to forecast or anticipate the outcome. However, early projections based on the initial findings of this study were released to *The Hindu* (published on May 14, 15 and 16) and the actual election results broadly confirmed the trend indicated by these projections. To provide an accurate and reliable account, the survey has been designed to be representative not just at the national level, but also at the State level. For this, the sample for the study was randomly selected from all eligible voters in the country. This meant that every single Indian on the electoral rolls had an equal chance of being selected and interviewed. Thus, all the 536 Lok Sabha constituencies in the 28 States of the country and the Union Territory of Delhi were selected for the study. Other Union Territories were excluded for logistical reasons. Within these constituencies, Assembly constituencies and polling booths were randomly selected, using the principle of a blind lottery. Thus, a total of 729 Assembly segments were selected, and then a further 2,346 polling stations areas, typically villages or urban wards, were selected for conducting the interviews.

From each rural polling station 20 registered voters and from urban polling station 25 registered voters were randomly selected from the latest electoral rolls. This procedure of multi-stage stratified random sampling ensures that the selected sample is fully representative of the cross-section of voters in the country.

Once the sample of the electorate was prepared, trained investigators went to meet them at their residences. In all, 1,847 investigators were trained in 39 workshops held across the country for this purpose, supported by a special grant from the Indian Council of Social Science Research. They were asked to interview only those whose names were provided to them. Substitution was not allowed under any circumstances. If the identified respondent was not available, the investigator would come back at a later time in order to carry out the interview. Information was recorded on the age, sex, religion and caste of the non-respondents as well to ensure that those who did not take part in our survey were not substantially different from those who actually did. In all 59,650 persons were approached and 34,365 interviews could be completed. The sample profile shows that the persons interviewed broadly mirrored the Indian population, in terms of the country's demographic profile. All the interviews were conducted within a few days of the date of polling in that locality but before the counting day.

Once a respondent agreed for the interview, the field investigators asked them a detailed set of questions in face-to-face situation at their residence. The respondents were given a 'secret' ballot paper designed to look like the list of candidates on the EVM, on which they could mark their choice. This was then placed in a sealed ballot box. This process was followed to ensure that the 'voters' knew their response would be confidential.

A committee of social scientists carefully designed five sets of questionnaires randomly given to the sampled voters. For the first time in NES, a 'split sample' was introduced, and the questionnaires carried additional survey modules on a range of different themes, covering topics such as the economy, security, communalism, democracy and social values. The questions were phrased so that they did not lead the person being interviewed to any particular answer. The questionnaire was translated not just into the language of each State but often into the 'dialect' spoken in the region in which the respondent was interviewed. The translation process was carefully monitored, so that a question in one State did not have a different meaning in another. Detailed information about the background, socio-demographics and the household was also collected. State specific questions regarding local issues and local politics relevant to each of the different States were also asked.

More information about NES 2009 will be available at www.lokniti.org. The Lokniti team will be happy to answer any query about NES at election@csds.in

Taking the leap that never was

But all may not be lost for the BSP, which has improved its vote share by one point

This election was to be the Bahujan Samaj Party's big leap forward. The BSP's electoral victory in 2007 in Uttar Pradesh, Mayawati's projection as a Prime Ministerial candidate, and the expectation of her growing clout provided the perfect setting for the party to expand its footprint. The final result was a big setback for Ms. Mayawati's ambitions. With just 20 seats in her bag and that too in a Lok Sabha where no one needed these seats, she was left with no option but to join the herd that was over-eager to extend unconditional support to the UPA. All may not be lost for the BSP though. Beyond the political drama, the

BAHUJAN SAMAJ PARTY

BSP has quietly pushed its vote share up by one point, from 5.3 per cent to 6.2 per cent. This is the third consecutive election in which the BSP's national vote share has grown significantly. If we look at the vote share in U.P., the BSP is still by far the largest party in the State and has fallen only marginally below its vote share in the Assembly elections of 2007.

The party also made significant gains in Haryana and Uttarakhanda in terms of vote share. In several other States such as Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Maharashtra

and Jharkhand, the BSP made small but significant accretions to its vote share. Yet, there is no clear upward trend in the party's gains outside U.P. It achieves a breakthrough in one State in an election only to surrender it the next time. In Delhi, for instance, the BSP polled only 5.3 per cent of the vote against 14 per cent in the 2008 Assembly election. Similarly in Maharashtra, where the BSP hoped to capitalise on the Republican Party of India's eroding Dalit base, it failed to win a single seat, its only consolation coming from four of its

candidates securing more than 1 lakh votes. The party is still disproportionately dependent on Uttar Pradesh.

The other major limitation is its dependence on Dalit votes. The NES 2009 data suggests that the party draws a majority of its voters from Dalits — 52 per cent all over the country and 55 per cent in U.P. Nationwide, only about three to four per cent of the upper castes, peasant proprietor castes and Other Backward Castes voted for the BSP. Its support levels among the Scheduled Tribes were two per cent and among Muslims seven per cent. This time, the BSP secured a

quarter of the Dalit vote in the country, just five percentage points behind the Congress. But a disproportionate amount of the BSP's Dalit votes is confined to the Jatav community to which Ms. Mayawati belongs.

There may be a third and somewhat hidden limitation of the BSP. About a quarter of BSP voters said their main consideration was that people of their caste or community supported the party. Only five per cent of respondents said they expected to benefit from the party coming to power and only 12 per cent voted for it because they felt its overall programme was good. It is important to note that the

party receives greater support from voters who feel that the performance of the State government is more important than that of the Central government. While the party's non-Dalit voters are unhappy about its non-performance on the development front, Dalit supporters are also beginning to be resentful: 46 per cent of Dalits believe Ms. Mayawati has ignored their aspirations by promoting Brahmins and upper castes. As the BSP makes a transition from the politics of 'bahujan samaj' to that of 'sarvajan samaj' and looks for the 'plus vote,' it would do well to address some of these anxieties.

The Muslim vote and where it went

The Muslim vote split between parties in States where there was greater electoral choice

How Muslims have voted across the years					
Party	1996	1998	1999	2004	2009
Congress	32	32	40	36	36
BJP	2	5	6	7	3
Left	13	8	10	9	11
SP	25	19	11	15	10

Figures are weighted by actual vote share of parties at national level. All figures in per cent

Conventional wisdom has it that the Muslims constitute a vote bank. And according to this wisdom, they vote en bloc to make or break a party. The NES 2009 offers enough evidence to assess this view. At the national level, the Congress and its allies bagged less than half the Muslim vote. If there is any pattern, it is this: Muslim support for the Congress and the Left fluctuates, while that for the Samajwadi Party has headed consistently downward since 1996.

The State-level pattern of how Muslims voted in 2009 is revealing. The Muslim vote seems to be consolidating in those States where the community's electoral choices were limited. States such as Delhi, Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh fall in this category. In contrast, the Muslim vote seems to have split among many parties wherever multiple choices are available — in States such as Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Bihar, Jharkhand and Maharashtra. A notable exception to this rule was Assam, where Baruddin Ajmal's AUIF garnered 61 per cent of the

Muslim vote with a little assistance from helpful clerics and ulemas.

While the AUIF succeeded in mobilising Muslim support, the same attempt failed in other States, especially in Uttar Pradesh where the Ulema Council drew a blank despite fielding a dozen of its own candidates. In Uttar Pradesh, the Congress, the SP and the BSP together bagged about two-third of Muslim vote. Muslim support for the Congress in U.P. and Bihar suggests a possible recovery of the ground the party lost following the demolition of the Babri Masjid. In Kerala, the Left Democratic Front's efforts to court the Muslim votes with the help of Madhani did not pay off as the United Democratic Front polled over two-thirds of the Muslim vote. The message is clear that the Ulema alone cannot sway Muslim voters.

The fragmentation of the Muslim vote may have led to a decline in the number of Muslim MPs — from 36 last time to just 28 in the new Lok Sabha. The poor performance of the SP and the RJD has hurt the number of Muslim representatives.

The myth of the youth vote

In India, they mirror political attitudes of the older generation

Do Indian youth vote differently from their elders? A comparison of respondents below 25 years of age with other age categories shows that the pattern does not vary significantly from the rest of the population. The evidence does not support the stereotype that youth prefer radical parties such as the Left or the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). It also does not confirm the pattern witnessed in the 1990s, and which continued till 2004, when the Bharatiya Janata

Party (BJP) did a little better among the voters below 25. The data also buries the hypothesis that it was the youth vote that brought the Congress to power this time. In fact, the Congress does a shade worse among young voters than the rest of the electorate.

Even their prime ministerial choice mirrored the options indicated by the older population. Many would have expected that younger leaders like Rahul Gandhi would find a greater resonance with the youth. The

fact is that more or less the same number of young people favoured Rahul Gandhi as Prime Minister as those belonging to older age groups. This is a consistent pattern that has been noticed in previous election studies as well. In the West, the youth are seen to articulate their political preferences in a distinctly different manner. This obviously does not hold good in India. A recent all-India youth study completed by the Lokniti programme of the CSDS also confirmed

that youth mirror the political attitudes and preference of the older generation.

However, when it comes to crucial issues concerning their own future, the youth tend to indicate a less conservative mindset. For instance, they were more supportive of marriages across caste groups and endorsed equal status for women in more categorical terms. They are more positive compared to the older generation about how the future of the country will shape up.

The women's vote

This election saw a substantial rise in the number of women in Parliament — as many as 59 against 45 in 2004. The survey shows that a majority of 69 per cent support women's reservation in legislatures. Fifty two per cent disagree with the statement that politics is not meant for women.

The survey also reveals that there was a slight consolidation of the women's vote in favour of the Congress, though the rise is less than what the party has gained overall. As a result, the Congress now gets support in equal proportion from men and women. As for the BJP, it continues to get more votes from men.

Forty three per cent of women say they decide who to vote for on their own. Against this, the figure for those who consult their spouses and family members is 21 per cent. The corresponding figures for men are 60 per cent and four per cent.

Highest number of women	
Year	Women members in Lok Sabha
1952	22
1957	27
1962	34
1967	31
1971	22
1977	19
1980	28
1984	44
1989	28
1991	36
1996	40*
1998	44*
1999	48*
2004	45*
2009	59

* Includes one nominated member
Source: Election Commission of India

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