

Lokniti Newsletter

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IN THIS EDITION:

When the tyrant has disposed of foreign enemies by conquest or treaty, and there is nothing to fear from them, then he is always stirring up some war or other in order that the people may require a leader.

--- Plato

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EDITORIAL

Readers will find this month's Lokniti Newsletter reporting on a variety of issues. To begin with the Lokniti office in Delhi has been the hub of activity during the recently concluded CNN IBN-Hindustan Times-CSDS **State of the Nation Poll**, which threw up a host of interesting findings and got much media coverage, both in the print media and the television. Hope some of you were able to catch the TV programs, which were run for three days from the 24th to the 26th of January. For those of you who could not watch the programs, the findings of the survey are posted and can be downloaded from the Lokniti website.

This newsletter carries an synopsis on an interesting case study done in Pakistan by Saba Gul Khattak on **'Women and political representations under military regimes'**. We would appreciate your comments on the case study and volunteer to forward them to the author.

The suggested reading section features the book, **Votes and Violence- Electoral Competition and Communal Riots in India** by Steven I. Wilkinson. Wilkinson has done a detailed analysis of communal riots in the country and specifically theorizes on the Hindu-Muslim riots. He argues that far from being spontaneous eruptions of anger, ethnic riots are often planned by politicians for a clear electoral purpose.

In the Debate for the month we would like your opinion on the current political situation in Latin America. Even while dictatorships and military regimes threaten and suppress some

regions of the world, Latin America is being swept by contradictory winds, after a long struggle with oppressive regimes, peoples power is finally gaining strength and momentum. Do send us your thoughts and analysis on Latin America to be published in the next newsletter.

There have been numerous occasions when members of the Lokniti network have not received the pdf attachment of the newsletter due to some technical error. Should this happen to you this month, please download the Newsletter from http://www.lokniti.org/lokniti_news.htm

With best wishes,

Lillian D'Costa

'STATE OF DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH ASIA'

The SDSA report continues to be in the stage of being written and refined.

Case Study

Below is a brief synopsis of the fifth case study done for the SDSA project.

The case study **'Women and political representation under military regimes'** has been done by Saba Gul Khattak of Pakistan. She points out the interesting fact that not only has the

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women's movement of Pakistan consistently collaborated with the state but has also made greater political gains under military regimes than under civilian led governments.

Pakistan has been reserving seats for women in Parliament since 1954 and the amount of reservations has only been growing since. President General Pervez Musharafs' initiative to grant increased representation of women in Parliament and at the local level has led to the entry of more than 40,000 women in the local government and provincial and national parliament. 'Such a large presence', points out the author, 'has the potential to lead to a radical shift in women's political position and voice in the country'.

The author then goes on to trace the roots of the women's movement in Pakistan, which since the 1950's 'has voiced demands for socially acceptable rights' and kept 'away from more radical issues that question the very system under which their rights are usurped'. Many women activists however argue 'that given the adverse circumstances that women face, they try to create a niche for themselves anywhere they can'. Women like Sheila Zia however argue that reservations have prevented the mainstreaming of the political involvement of women. It has also been alleged that there is nepotism in the selection process and that the representation of women in the cabinet continues to remain nominal.

Saba Gul Khattak then goes on to investigate possible reasons for the military's support and promotion of women's political rights. One possible reason she says, could be the 'Look-Good' Syndrome. Tolerance for military regimes is declining and under international pressure it helps the regimes image to make

symbolic gestures towards women and minorities. It also makes the regime look less autocratic.

A second reason could be to 'create a new support base', among women who are a largely untapped political constituency. Towards this end they have opened up the armed forces, including the top rung leadership to women.

Thirdly, the military regimes have displayed a 'historical support to local governance' as it brings in a large number of people to participate in the democratic processes of the country. This breaks the hold of big politicians and it also gives an opportunity to a wide section of people to find political expression.

Interestingly, even while the military regimes have seemingly enhanced women's participation in governance, they have also gone to extraordinary extents to hinder their political participation when women attempted to rival them. For example General Ayub managed to get a *fatwa* issued against Fatima Jinnah. Nusrat Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto also had to face much opposition.

The military regimes in Pakistan have learnt much from their British colonial counterparts and therefore women have been well integrated as wives, teachers and doctors into the military hierarchies. To make themselves more acceptable, the military regimes have been mindful to come across as progressive minded and therefore not been made to wear *pardah*. However women are expected to speak about women's welfare and not on political issues touching on democracy and systems of governance. Also because the women entering politics through reserved seats are not elected but hand picked it is obvious that they will not speak up against the government.

Projects Undertaken

The Hindustan Times-CNN-IBN and CSDS through Lokniti recently conducted a countrywide survey called the **State of the Nation Poll**. A team of over 500 researchers travelled across the country and interviewed over 15,000 respondents, they sought responses to an astounding variety of questions, ranging from the choice of political party of the respondent to their opinion on dating and Muslims.

The findings were more than a surprise. The Congress led UPA government at the center seems to have increased its popularity by 10% over the NDA. The Congress's biggest gains have come from the urban voters, upper and dominant castes, and minorities. Against popular perception, the survey shows that should the Congress go to polls now, they would secure a comfortable majority.

This survey put to rest much media hype about the all-pervasive liberal attitudes sweeping India. That may well be true of a tiny metropolitan elite obsessed with oneself, but when you look at real India, it was found that only one-third manage to go beyond matriculation, only 22 per cent read a newspaper every day and only 8 per cent own any four-wheeler, tractors included. In this India, exposure to modernity does not mean liberal values. Unlike the West, there is no generational gulf, gender divide or rural-urban split here when it comes to family values. Three-fourths of Indians, cutting across caste lines, were opposed to inter-caste marriages. Even among the most highly-educated professionals, the opponents of inter-caste marriage outnumbered the supporters. About the same proportion of Indians

think that the parents, and not the boy and girl concerned, should have the final say in the decision about marriage. A good 59 per cent of the urban youth and 67 per cent of the rural youth also agrees with this proposition.

In this survey, 42 per cent of the urban men below 25 supported the idea that unmarried boys and girls should be allowed to meet freely. But even among this most daring group the majority supports restrictions on this freedom. Three-fourth of the people interviewed said that sons should settle with parents rather than set up a separate household. There is very little urban-rural, gender or generational difference on this question. On the question of inheritance however they showed no conservatism. Five out of the six Indians who had an opinion on this subject agreed that sons and daughters should have equal share of parental property.

The survey also checked out popular perceptions about Muslims and it was found that an increasing number of people seem to be unknowingly falling prey to popular myths doing the rounds. According to the latest Census, Muslims are 13.4% of the Indian population. But when asked to guess the size of the Muslim population, only one in six persons came anywhere close to the right answer. Three-fourths of the people highly overestimated the Muslim population. A majority of the people interviewed gave a figure well above double the real population of the Muslims. Muslims themselves share this myth even more than non-Muslims and overestimate their own population. The loyalty of Muslims to the country has long been suspect however the survey found that all but 2% of the Muslims said they were 'proud' or 'very proud' of being an Indian. A clear

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majority of Muslims said they are first an Indian and then a Muslim.

Thanks to the US propaganda, this myth that 'Islam is not compatible with democracy' has gone global. Our survey once again proved what many studies all over the world have repeatedly asserted. Three-fourth of Muslims, about the same proportion as the Hindus, are firm in their rejection of any non-democratic alternatives.

Another popular myth is that Personal Law, is top on the Muslim mind; they would defend it at any cost. But when asked about the most important problem for the Indian Muslims, 69 % chose livelihood issues as compared to only 4% who talked about religious matters. An overwhelming majority of Muslims, more women than men, disapprove of the practice of polygamy as well as the 'triple talaq'.

Governments, we are told, pander to the interests of Muslims. The only trouble, of course, is that Muslims don't see it this way. One out of every five Muslims interviewed in this survey said they had personally faced discrimination on religious grounds. The more educated and better-off Muslims experienced greater discrimination.

It is a secular myth that the Gujarat massacre has caused an irreparable rift between Hindus and Muslims. Thankfully the Muslims do not agree. Only 13% Muslims feel that the rift cannot be bridged, about the same feel that it made no difference in the first place. The largest number of Muslims felt Gujarat did cause serious tensions, but now things are getting back to normal.

On nationalism, it was found that 97 % Indians felt 'proud' or 'very proud' of being an Indian and this feeling of Indianness trumps over all other identities. People are proud of their languages and state identities, but when asked to describe themselves, a majority say they are only Indians.

Nationalist leaders are still the most powerful icons in our country. When shown the photographs of some of the best-recognized Indians of the last hundred years, Mahatma Gandhi still emerged on the top in popularity. Regarding the Indian foreign policy more people wanted India to resist US hegemony. Nor did they like the idea of India acting as big brother to its small neighbours and wanted the country to pursue an active policy of friendship with Pakistan.

There is still considerable pride in the Kargil victory and when asked to name a moment of shame, an overwhelming majority chose the farmers' suicide. Clean drinking water for every Indian is an overwhelming choice as the wish for country's future.

To read more on the survey visit our website

<http://www.lokniti.org/recentssurvey.htm>

Announcements

As mentioned in an earlier newsletter, Prof. Peter deSouza has been appointed Chairperson of the Goa Knowledge Commission to prepare a Vision Document for the Government of Goa. In an effort to be participatory, the Commission has set up a website, so as to enlist thoughts, opinions, suggestions and ideas. Please visit the site at www.knowledgeforgoa.com and post your inputs.

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Suggested Reading

Wilkinson, Steven I., 2004, **Votes and Violence—Electoral Competition and Communal Riots in India**, Cambridge University Press.

Why does ethnic violence break out in some places and not others? More important, why do some governments try to prevent anti-minority riots while others do nothing, or even actively encourage attacks? In this book *Votes and Violence – Electoral Competition and Communal Riots in India* the author Steven I. Wilkinson through a detailed study of Hindu-Muslim riots in India, as well as case studies of Ireland, Malaysia and Romania argue that "... ethnic riots, far from being relatively spontaneous eruptions of anger, are often planned by politicians for a clear electoral purpose. They are best thought of as a solution to the problem of how to change the salience and ethnic issues and identities among the electorate in order to build a winning political coalition"

The author further elaborates how political competition can lead not just to violence but to peace as well. The author demonstrates how electoral incentives at two levels – the local constituency level and the level of government that controls the police- interact to determine both where and when ethnic violence against minorities will occur and more importantly, whether the state will choose to intervene to stop it.

Mr. Wilkinson also discusses electoral incentives at two levels interact to explain both how and where violence breaks out and, more importantly, why some states decide to prevent mass violence and others do not. While developing this electoral incentives model, the author shows why several alternative explanations for ethnic violence – focusing on town-level social and economic factors, the weak capacity of the Indian state, or India's alleged lack of "consociational power sharing" – cannot explain the observed variation in Hindu-Muslim riots.

Articles written

- Sanjay Kumar, Rajeeva Karandikar and Yogendra Yadav, **Cong on a roll, says Poll**, Hindustan Times, 24th January 2006
- Sanjay Kumar and Yogendra Yadav, **At heart, India is still conservative**, Hindustan Times, 25th January 2006
- Sanjay Kumar and Yogendra Yadav, **Veil of a few myths on Muslims in India**, Hindustan Times, 26th January 2006
- Sanjay Kumar and Yogendra Yadav, **Ignorance is bliss for proud Indians**, Hindustan Times, 27th January 2006

Debates

On a simmer, Latin America has been making news the last few months. People have developed a short fuse for political corruption and dictatorial regimes, and discovered a new strength in numbers. Even as corrupt presidents are being eased out and Latin America seems to be on a leftward swing, many political analysts think this is the first of a strong challenge to the long held hegemony of the USA. How do you assess the current political situation unfolding in South America? Send us your thoughts and analysis to be published in the next newsletter due in March 2006

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