



NEWSLETTER

June 2009

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4.	Summer Workshop on Data Analysis	Owing to various projects and activities the month often saw the team functioning at half its strength with team members traveling to different parts of the country and the world. Details of the projects and activities of Lokniti during the month of June are given later in the newsletter.
5.	Update on UKIERI Project	
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		Vanita Leah Falcao Lokniti, CSDS

Questioning the Revolution

- Athul N. Ravunniarath

While we ushered in the 15th session of the Lok Sabha a month ago, other important elections were taking place around the world namely in Lebanon, EU and Iran. Iran held its tenth Presidential election on the 12th of June. It was a heated contest between the hard-line holocaust-denying incumbent Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the 'reformist' candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi. Though the election was declared to be a victory for Ahmadinejad, the results were widely disputed, leading to violent street protests in the major cities of the country. Iranian elections have always been overshadowed by accusation of the outcomes being rigged. Only candidates who are personally approved by the supreme (un-elected) leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei are allowed to contest, and most of the important decisions and issues ranging from foreign policy to military policy are handled by the Ayatollah. In this context, it is really surprising that Ahmadinejad's disputed victory actually led to a massive popular uprising.

One argument is that Iranians are tired of the Islamic theocracy and wanted the liberal 'reformist' candidate, Mousavi, to win. Ever since the Islamic revolution in 1979, Iran has remained a pariah in the international arena with tumultuous relations with the US, EU and the Arab world. Iran is one of the most alienated countries in the region and the population is simply exasperated. This view of the 'Green democratic revolution' has been espoused by most of the media.

The second argument deals with a political crisis amongst the clergy - Iran's political elite. Ahmadinejad ran his

campaign this year against the un-elected old clerical elite. His campaign attacked their corruption and luxurious lifestyle and charged them with running the state for their own benefit. Ahmadinejad's prior populist measures and economic mishandling depleted the personal fortunes of the old clergy, and he now poses a serious threat to the entire power structure of the country. Ahmadinejad had already secured the support of the Ayatollah and the newer, younger clergy who despised the monopoly of their elders. On top of this, Ahmadinejad was particularly critical of the former President Akbar Rafsanjani. Rafsanjani is a member of the old clerical elite, a member of the original 1979 Islamic revolution and arguably the most influential person in the regime after Ayatollah Khamenei himself. It is under these circumstances that Rafsanjani and the other 'reformist' members of the clergy gave their support to Mir Hossein Mousavi.

There is a common perception that the elections were rigged in favour of Ahmadinejad and there is also a shared belief that Ahmadinejad would have stepped down if he had been unanimously opposed by the clergy. However, there is no unity among the clergy and Ahmadinejad's 'victory' poses a threat to some powerful elements within it. This election was not about the liberals or the hardliners, policies or issues, but merely about which faction within the regime would stay in power. The outcome of this fiasco is hard to predict, but some sort of consensus will be reached amongst the elites in order to ensure the survival of the regime, which is of utmost importance.

(The author is a student of Political Science at Colby College, Maine, USA. He is currently interning at Lokniti, CSDS.)

Post Fieldwork Musings

- Anonymous

My 5 years of fieldwork (though in sporadic bouts) have been enriching, challenging and in many ways confusing. When I recall the first time I was a field investigator I also remember that on returning from my first day of work an experienced researcher told me that at particular points I seemed dismissive of and rude towards the respondents. That criticism was something that literally shocked me. I was not sure what it was that I had said or done that could have been misconstrued as the above. However I knew I had done something and obviously it was something that I thought was insignificant but others viewed it differently. This episode led me to be much more careful in the subsequent days and months of field work, but till date when I visit a field site there are various situations that pose challenges to me.

The initial hurdle to overcome is always challenging the ideas many people have of a female researcher. To add to that identity is the fact that I am from a city. The stereotyping of me according to that image though mostly harmless can sometimes result in people (especially men) being very condescending or too "chatty".

Next is the question of my caste identity. If I say I do not believe in the caste system I get the sense that more often than not people cannot comprehend what I am saying. Caste is a very basic and intrinsic part of some realities. When I

say I do not belong to any caste I am viewed suspiciously because to some it appears as if I am attempting to hide my caste identity.

If I state the little I know about my caste background I am categorised into the upper castes. Though being viewed as an upper caste person (who breaks the rules of pollution and purity) allows me access to most communities however there are aspects to such a move that are very uncomfortable. The acceptability I get after my caste identity is revealed is very different from before. The fact that if I had said that I belonged to a lower caste I would have been treated very differently is a reality I cannot ignore. It is disconcerting to know that something I abhor is so closely linked to my identity.

In the same context is the need to be silent and listen. Be silent and listen even when and especially if it is an issue one strongly disagrees with. The constant need to remind one's self that you are a researcher and not an activist, as well as when is it appropriate to make this distinction, is something I often grapple with.

In the above mentioned situations the dilemma that arises is whether I ultimately choose the only way out or just the convenient way out? When is tweaking one's stand in order to serve a particular purpose justified? Is it justified at all?

Will time help resolve this dilemma - I cannot say but I can only hope that it does.

Summer Workshop on Research Methodology



The month of June also witnessed the third annual Summer Workshop on Research Methodology: *Analyzing Quantitative data on Indian Politics* organized by the Indian Institute of Advance Study (IIAS), Shimla in partnership with Lokniti, CSDS from the 15th June to 27th June. 16 students ranging from college professors to young researchers attended the summer school under the expert guidance of Prof. Pradeep Chibber, UC Berkeley. The teaching assistants were Dr. Rajeshwari Deshpande, Pune University and Dr. Kailash KK, Punjab University. Dr. Divya Vaid, Lokniti was selected to be the resource person.

This year three students from the previous batch were selected in order to give them further training in data analysis and to assist the first year students.



Various research themes based on the NES 2004 were explored such as caste based voting, factors affecting attitudes/choices, impact of local factors on political participation, support for women's reservation, coalition politics etc... The summer school concluded with each student making a presentation on his/her research question and a promise to work further to develop a research paper!

Democracy & Children's Rights in India & the UK: Law, Policy and Outcomes-UK India Education and Research Initiative (UKIERI)

- ★ Lokniti hosted two research scholars, Michelle Lamb and Sule Tomkinson under the ongoing project “Democracy & Children's Rights in India & the UK: Law, Policy and Outcomes” funded by UKIERI. This partnership is a joint research programme between the Human Rights Centre (University of Essex, UK) and Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (Delhi, India) in collaboration with India partners VMS Salgaocar College of Law (Goa, India) and Children's Rights in Goa (Goa, India). The initiative was set up to facilitate multidisciplinary research on children's rights through a programme of exchange between scholars and activists in India and the United Kingdom.

Michelle Lamb: Michele Lamb is from the University of Essex. Her research interests are in children's participation in human rights activism and the challenges faced by human rights NGOs working with street children in Delhi. Whilst here she also participated in a workshop on Monitoring Human Rights: Law and Practice held at V.M.S Salgaocar College of Law, Goa. from 26th – 27th June 2009.

Sule Tomkinson: Sule recently completed her masters from The Human Rights Centre, Essex. Her research has been on the theme of child marriage. While at Lokniti she studied a number of government schemes aimed at improving the position of women and the girl child such as Integrated Child Development Scheme, Balika Samridhi Yojana etc... while at the same time examining the reasons behind their ineffectiveness.

- ★ Under the ongoing UKIERI project a workshop on “Monitoring Human Rights: Law and Practice” was held at V M S Salgaocar College of Law, Goa from the 26th - 27th June 2009.

Comparative Electoral Ethnography

The debriefing and closing workshop for the project titled “Comparative Electoral Ethnography” (CEE) was held from the 15th – 17th of June at Indian Institute of Advanced Study (IIAS), Shimla. The research project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council of UK was being directed by Dr. Mukulika Banerjee of University College London, in collaboration with Lokniti. The project enabled a comparative study of the elections across 12 sites in India. The questions it aimed to answer were: Why do people vote? What is the Culture of the Polling station? What is the language of voting and the vocabulary of politics and participation? What is a typical election campaign in India? What is the role of the media in elections?

★ **Banasmita Bora** of Lokniti participated in a colloquium “*In Their Own Defence: Violence Against Girls, And Girls As Human Rights Defenders*” organized at the Human Rights Centre, Essex between the 31st May – 1st June 2009. She intends to work further on the theme “*Girls Right to be born- Female Infanticide and Foeticide in India*”

★ **Praveen Rai** from Lokniti was a part of a 5 member team sent to Kabul by Asian Network for Free Elections ANFREL to observe whether the conditions are conducive for sending an election observation mission to Afghanistan. The team was required to assess the legal framework needed for conducting free and fair elections. The Presidential and Provincial Assembly Elections in Afghanistan are scheduled to be held on August 20th 2009.

Publications by Lokniti network members:

Sanjay Kumar, Delhi

- “*Verdict 2009: Congress Ups the Ante*”, CFO Connect June 2009.
- “*Is this the beginning of the decline of OBC Politics in India?*”, Forward Press, June 2009.

Nani Bath, Arunachal Pradesh

- “*Electoral Politics in Arunachal Pradesh*”, Pilgrims Publication, Varanasi, 2009

Ashutosh Kumar, Punjab

- “*Punjab: Dissonance between Governance and Electoral Processes*” in Sandeep Shastri, KC Suri and Yogendra Yadav (eds) *Electoral Politics in Indian States*, OUP, New Delhi, 2009.
- “*Rethinking State Politics in India: Regions Within Regions*”, Economic and Political Weekly, May 9, Volume XLIV, No 19, 2009.
- Book Review, *Contemporary South Asia, Volume 17, Number 2, June 2009*. Aseema Sinha (2005): *The Regional Roots of Development Politics in India: A Divided Leviathan*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis.

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