

## Parliamentary Election 2014: Inferences From Kashmir

Dr. Aijaz Ashraf Wani

The 2014 Parliamentary election in Jammu and Kashmir signified a vote for change. The ruling National Conference-Congress coalition suffered a severe defeat in the whole state and was not able to open its account. This is for the first time that the state's oldest party, the National Conference (NC), will not be represented in Parliament. The election threw up many surprises and taught many lessons to the political parties in Kashmir. The present paper is an attempt to make a brief analysis of the election results in the state. The election will be remembered as a unique one in many respects. Firstly, this is perhaps the first parliamentary election that was taken very seriously by the political parties with many of them nominating their big guns to contest the elections. This could well be due to the fact that the state was scheduled to go for assembly polls at the end of the year and a good show in the parliamentary elections it was felt would have a direct bearing on the assembly elections. In Udhampur, the Congress had fielded former chief minister and union health minister Ghulam Nabi Azad. In Anantnag, the contest was between People's Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti and NC Member of Parliament Mehboob Begh. In Srinagar, the electoral fight was between former CM and NC party patron Farooq Abdullah and former finance minister Tariq Hamid Qarra of PDP. In the Baramulla constituency, it was a four way contest between two-time MP Sharifuddin Shariq of NC, former deputy chief minister Muzaffar Hussain Baig of PDP, Awami Ittehad Party president Er. Rashid, and Salamudin Bajad of the People's Conference.

Secondly, the election was also important as far as the separatists are concerned. With almost all the separatist groups unanimously giving a call for poll boycott, there was a serious question mark being put on this strategy

<sup>1</sup> Author is Senior Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science, University of Kashmir, Srinagar, aijazpol@gmail.com.

given the fact that it has failed to yield desired results in the past. After all very recently people had come out in large numbers to vote in the panchayat elections. The experience of 2008 Assembly elections was also not very encouraging. It was in this backdrop that many people argued that the separatists should forego the strategy of giving boycott calls, as elections will have no real impact on the Kashmir issue. However, the separatists went ahead with their strategy and the fact more than 70 percent people in the Kashmir region preferred not to vote gave a reason for the separatists to smile at least for the time being. Overall, Jammu and Kashmir recorded 49.7 percent polling, ten percentage points more as compared to the 2009 Lok Sabha election. However this turnout increase was largely due to greater voter participation in the seats of Udhampur and Jammu and not of the Valley. Srinagar once again recorded the lowest constituency polling in the entire country at 25.9 percent followed by Anantnag and Baramulla.

Thirdly, and most importantly this election was seen as a litmus test for the state's oldest political party, the National Conference, as well as for the ruling NC-Congress alliance. The election saw the debacle of the incumbent coalition government with the NC being routed in the Kashmir region by the PDP and its alliance partner the Congress meeting the same fate at the hands of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the Jammu and Ladakh regions (*Table 1*). It is important to mention that the alliance partners not only suffered defeat but their vote share also witnessed considerable decline as compared to the 2009 Parliamentary elections, particularly the NC. The party's vote-share dipped to 11.1 percent from 19.1 percent while the Congress ended up securing 22.9 percent votes as against 24.7 in 2009. PDP's vote share remained intact at 20.5 percent while BJP's vote share went up from 18.6 percent in 2009 to 32.4 percent. The huge rise in the BJP's vote is largely due to the party's big victories over the Congress in the Jammu region. The party won the Jammu seat by a margin of over two and half lakh votes. The post poll survey conducted by CSDS indicates a consolidation of Hindu voters behind the BJP in the Jammu region. The Ladakh seat on the other hand was won narrowly by the BJP. The country's

Table 1

## Jammu and Kashmir Parliamentary Constituency-wise Lok Sabha Result 2014

Parliamentary Constituency	Region	Winning party	Winner vote (%)	Runner-up party	Runner-up vote (%)	Victory Margin (votes)
Baramulla	Kashmir	JKPDP	37.6	JKNC	31.3	29219
Srinagar	Kashmir	JKPDP	50.6	JKNC	37.0	42280
Anantnag	Kashmir	JKPDP	53.4	JKNC	36.0	65417
Ladakh	Ladakh	BJP	26.4	IND	26.3	36
Udhampur	Jammu	BJP	46.8	Cong	40.9	60976
Jammu	Jammu	BJP	49.5	Cong	28.9	257280

Source: ECI data compiled by CSDS Data Unit

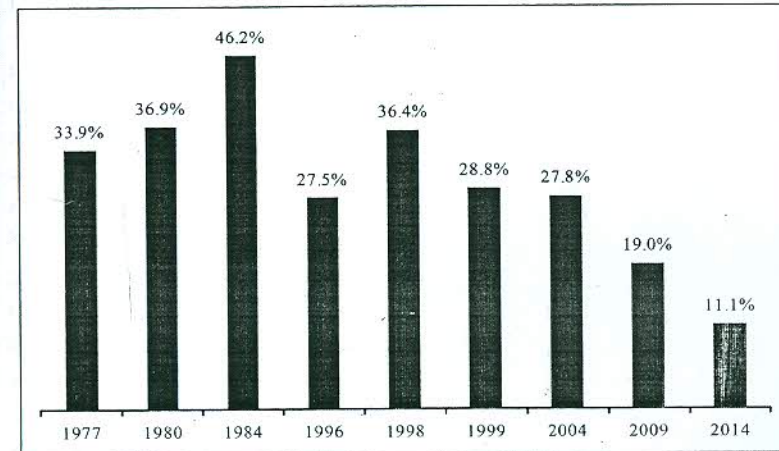
largest parliamentary segment (area-wise) recorded the lowest victory margin with BJP candidate Thupstan Chhewang defeating his nearest rival Ghulam Raza, a Congress rebel fighting as an Independent, by just 36 votes. This is for the first time in the history of Jammu and Kashmir that the BJP has won the Ladakh parliamentary seat. The victory of the BJP on the seat was attributed to strong ideological differences between Buddhists and Shia Muslims in the Ladakh region, the Modi wave, and deep factionalism within the Congress (Sharma 2014). The failure of NC-Congress pre-poll alliance on the ground was evident in Ladakh as well with Aga Syed Kazim Sabri, an Independent candidate, being supported by religious body Islamiya School Kargil and the ruling National Conference.

Interestingly this will be for the first time that no member of National Conference will be there in Lok Sabha. Moreover, since 1998 the party's vote share has been steadily declining (Figure 1). The PDP on the other hand has seen its vote share increase since the 2004 election, although the rise was marginal this time around as compared to 2009.

One of the important lessons that this election has taught all political parties is that they can no longer take people for granted. People have become conscious and are evaluating political parties and leaders on the

Figure 1

## Vote share of National Conference in parliamentary elections from 1977-2014



Source: CSDS Data Unit

Table 2

## Jammu and Kashmir Lok Sabha Result 2014

Party	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Seats Change from 2009	Vote (%)	Vote Change from 2009 (percentage points)
UPA	6	0	-5	33.98	-9.80
Congress	3	0	-2	22.86	-1.80
JKNC	3	0	-3	11.12	-7.99
BJP	6	3	3	32.36	13.75
JKPDP	5	3	3	20.54	0.49
JKNPP	5	0	0	1.22	-1.59
NOTA	6	0	0	0.88	0.88
Other Parties	61	0	-1	11.02	-3.73

Source: ECI data compiled by CSDS Data Unit

basis of their contribution and performance, and how responsive and transparent the government has been in its functioning. This is what cost the NC-Congress coalition very badly. During the NES 2014 pre and post-poll surveys in Kashmir conducted by CSDS, peoples' discontent against the coalition was visible on account of the failure of the government to check corruption, inflation, together with poor health care, pathetic condition of roads and so on. When people were asked to compare the performance of the NC-Congress government with the previous PDP-Congress government, 40 percent of the respondents opted for the latter and only 18 percent for the former. Along with these issues of governance, the hanging of Afzal Guru and the killing of more than 100 youth in the 2010 protests were the other important reasons for the NC debacle in Kashmir as pointed out by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah himself (Hussain 2014)<sup>2</sup>. Sensing trouble during the upcoming Assembly elections due later this year Abdullah went online seeking feedback from people as to why they rejected the NC.<sup>3</sup>

The results of the election in the Kashmir valley also dismantled the concept of 'traditional vote bank'. In fact one of the biggest shocks that this election gave to the National Conference was the breakdown of its traditional vote bank in the Kangan assembly constituency of district Ganderbal and in the Charar-e-Sharif assembly constituency of district Budgam. These two constituencies have always been represented by the NC candidates since 1957 when the first Assembly election in the state was held. It is pertinent to mention that NC's own pre-poll analysis that it was going to win the Srinagar seat was based on the assumption that it will get decisive lead in

<sup>2</sup> Also see Greater Kashmir May 23, 2014, p.3

<sup>3</sup> To know the reasons responsible for party's debacle in Parliamentary elections, the Chief Minister created an e-mail [gupkar@gmail.com](mailto:gupkar@gmail.com) for receiving the online feedback from people, while launching the e-mail the CM said "gupkar@gmail.com is my email id. I'd like to hear from you as to the reasons for the enormous setback the NC has faced in these elections". See *Greater Kashmir*, May 19, 2014, p.1. *Kashmir Reader*, May 19, 2014, p.1. *Rising Kashmir*, May 19, 2014, p.1.

Kangan and Charar-e-Sharif (represented by two most prominent leaders of NC). However, it did not happen. The precise reason for this is that gone are the days when people of these areas, especially youth, would cast their vote in favor of the NC undisputedly since their forefathers have been doing so. Now the political socialization of the people (especially youth) in these areas is witnessing a shift as they no longer honor the party affiliations of their ancestors. Historically, Gujjars were strong loyalists of Mian Altaf. However, over a period of time PDP has made serious inroads in the Gujjar vote bank of NC. In the 2008 Assembly elections PDP candidate Bashir Ahmad Mir gave a tough competition to Mian Altaf. The problem that the NC is facing is that their traditional vote bank seems to be drifting from them. "My family wanted me to vote for NC, as we have been traditional voters of the part, however, I made clear to my family that they can vote for who so ever they want, but I will vote for change (indicating to PDP)", said a young Gujjar from Fakir Gujjar Basti from Nishat area<sup>4</sup>. It is pertinent to mention that the benefits of development have been confined to a few people who are close to the MLAs who also happen to be ministers under the NC regime. It was this discontent that the PDP exploited and made inroads.

Also contrary to the traditional notion that a call for election boycott helps the National Conference, the party lost despite the fact that more than 70 per cent people did not come out to vote. In fact the NC suffered heavily in some of the areas that have been its traditional strongholds and saw impressive voting this time around also. For example in its stronghold area of Ganderbal, which is also the chief minister's constituency, the NC suffered heavy losses in areas like Saloora, Tullamulla, Barsoo, Kurhama, Yangoora, and Kondabal. What surprised the political pundits was that the committed voters of the National Conference including its own party workers did not come out to vote costing the party very dearly. In the end, the Peoples Democratic Party managed to lead by 2913 votes in Ganderbal. Similarly in many other areas where the coalition partners have been

<sup>4</sup> Personal Interview with the respondent.

**Table 3**  
**Leading Party in 2014 Elections in the Stronghold Areas of**  
**NC & Congress Leaders**

Area	Coalition leader	Leading party
Ganderbal	Omar Abdullah (NC)	PDP led by 2913 votes
Chrar-e- Sharif	Ab Rahim Rather( NC)	PDP led by 3085 votes
Kangan	Mian Altaf Ahmad (NC)	PDP led by 3607 votes
Noorabad	Sakina Itoo( NC)	PDP led by 148 votes
Sonawari	Mohammad Akbar Lone (NC)	PDP led by 479 votes
Kupwara	Mir Saifullah (NC)	PDP led by 1905 votes
Handwara	Choudary Ramzan (NC)	PDP led by 2258 votes
Dooru	Gh Ahmad Mir (Congress)	PDP led by 3967 votes
Kokernag	Peerzada Mohammad Syed (Congress)	PDP led by 8557 votes
Gulmarg	Gh Hassan Mir (Congress Associate)	PDP led by 4331 votes
Uri	Taj Mohi-ud-Din(Congress)	PDP led by 16291 votes
Chamb	Tara Chand( Congress)	BJP led by 11000 votes
Gandhi Nagar	Raman Bhalla (Congress)	BJP led by 36835 votes
Akhnoor	Sham Lal Sharma(Congress)	BJP led by 11233 votes
Billawar	Manohar Lal Sharma	BJP led by 2400 plus votes
Leh	Nawang Rigzin Jora	BJP led by 4657 votes
Zanaskar	Feroz Ahmad Khan (NC)	NC-Congress trailed by 4616 votes
Mahr	Ajay Sadhotra (NC)	BJP led by 18753 votes

Source: Greater Kashmir, May 19, 2014, p.1-10.

historically strong, the trend changed this time around. Table 3 shows some of the areas, represented by key members of NC and Congress, where the coalition unexpectedly lost ground.

The 2014 parliamentary elections in Jammu and Kashmir made it crystal clear that the NC-Congress pre-poll alliance failed to materialize. This was reflected by the fact that Congress workers at grassroots level either boycotted the election or voted in favor of candidates of other parties, mostly PDP. It is true that coalition partners jointly campaigned in favor of their respective candidates, however, it seems that covertly Congress had given a freehand to its workers to vote as they like, and in some cases against the NC. This becomes crystal clear when we consider the fact that PDP was much ahead in constituencies represented by Congress sitting ministers of the coalition government in the Kashmir region, like Dooru, Kokernag, and Uri constituencies represented by Ghulam Ahmad Mir, minister of Tourism, Peerzada Mohammad Sayeed, minister for Haj and Auqaf, and Taj Mohiuddin minister for Health and Medical Education. The results demonstrated that NC-Congress alliance was an 'alliance at the top' which did not translate into an 'alliance at the base'. The election signified the slogan of 'vote for change'. This slogan was echoed by the electorate in almost all parts of the state and the results demonstrated that the slogan was translated into practice by them during voting.

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