

BJP Crafts a New Social Coalition in Bihar

SANJAY KUMAR

The electoral verdict in Bihar can be attributed to two factors. One, there was a clear preference among the voters for change at the centre. Two, the Bharatiya Janata Party's emphasis on carefully crafting a caste alliance allowed it to leapfrog its rivals.

The 2014 Lok Sabha elections seem to have marked a new beginning in the politics of Bihar. If the last two decades (1989-2009) of politics in Bihar were marked by massive social and political mobilisation of people belonging to the Other Backward Classes (OBC) in favour of either the Lalu Prasad-led Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) or the Nitish Kumar-led Janata Dal (United) – JD(U) – the 2014 elections marked the beginning of a massive consolidation of the upper castes in favour of the Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The upper caste consolidation behind the BJP was also supported by the mobilisation of sections of dalit and the OBC voters in favour of the BJP and its allies, a result of the BJP's alliance with Ram Vilas Paswan-led Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) and Upendra Kushwaha's Rashtriya Lok Samata Party (RLSP).

One cannot deny that the people's strong desire for a change in national government due to dissatisfaction with the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government resulted in large number of people voting for the BJP as they saw the party as a viable national alternative. But at the same time the BJP's carefully crafted alliance with other parties aimed at building a social coalition of voters from different castes helped the BJP and its allies in registering a massive victory in Bihar. The rival parties, the JD(U) and the RJD-Congress alliance had not only lost badly, but also failed to put up a decent contest against the BJP-LJP-RLSP alliance.

In the early 1990s, Lalu Prasad benefited from the mobilisation of the OBCs and remained the undisputed leader of Bihar for nearly one and half decade (1989-2004). In the latter half of 1990s, the JD(U) led by Nitish Kumar (in alliance with the BJP) managed to mobilise the OBCs and emerged as a strong leader. In the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP with its allies managed to turn the tables and swept the polls by forming similar coalitions.

The Results

In a three-cornered electoral contest, the BJP and its allies registered a remarkable victory by winning 31 of the total 40 Lok Sabha seats, and polled 38.8% of the popular vote. The BJP on its own won 22 of the 30 Lok Sabha seats it contested, while its ally, the LJP won six of its seven Lok Sabha seats. The BJP's other ally RLSP won three of the four Lok Sabha seats it contested. The RJD-Congress alliance together polled 29.8% votes and won only seven Lok Sabha seats. The ruling party JD(U) performed badly, winning only two seats and its vote share was as low as 15.8%.

The BJP and its allies performed well in almost all the regions of Bihar. But the alliance was particularly stronger

Sanjay Kumar (sanjay@csds.in) is director at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi.

in some regions compared to others, while its opponents have been able to put up a modicum of contest in other regions. The BJP and its allies swept the elections in the Tirhut region winning all the 12 seats. Here, the alliance polled 44.1% of the votes, nearly 5 percentage points higher compared to its average vote share in the state. The alliance also performed very well in Magadh winning nine of the 10 Lok Sabha seats in this region with 40.7% of the votes. The RJD-Congress alliance performed well in eastern Bihar which has a sizeable Muslim population. Of the seven Lok Sabha seats here, the RJD-Congress alliance managed to win five seats and polled 35.2% of the votes, nearly 5% more compared to its average vote share in the state. More than the fact that JD(U) performed badly in the entire state, the bigger worry for the party is its dismal performance in the Magadh region, the stronghold of the party. This is the region which has a sizeable proportion of core JD(U) supporters, namely, the Kurmis and Koeris. In the past the JD(U) has performed extremely well in Magadh. One would have expected the JD(U) to at

Table 1: Region-wise Analysis of the Lok Sabha Elections 2014

Region	Total Seats	RJD+		BJP+		JD (U)		Others	
		Seats	Vote	Seats	Vote	Seats	Vote	Seats	Vote
Tirhut	12	0	26.5	12	44.1	0	13.3	0	16.1
Mithila	7	2	33.3	5	33.1	0	19.7	0	13.9
Magadh	10	0	27.4	9	40.7	1	16.8	0	15.1
East	7	5	35.2	1	31.9	1	17.2	0	15.7
Bhojpur	4	0	28.6	4	41.4	0	10.6	0	19.4
Total	40	7	29.8	31	38.8	2	15.8	0	15.7

Source : CSDS Data Unit.

least hold on to its traditional stronghold of Magadh. But the party failed miserably in this region, polling only 16.8% of the votes and managed to win only one of the 10 Lok Sabha seats from here.

The Issue: Development vs Identity Politics

How does one look at this vote in Bihar? There are two dominant perspectives of looking at the results of the 2014 Lok Sabha elections from Bihar. Some attribute the BJP's success to the fact that it was able to reinvent *Kamandal* (Hindutva) with promises of development (George 2014). There is another belief that these elections were only about development, a vote driven by aspiration of the voters. Development was the issue on which people voted and identity-based voting was either less significant or missing during these elections (Desai 2014). Does the rejection of the ruling party in the state raise questions about the development work done by the Nitish Kumar-led JD(U) government? Does it imply that there can be critical political circumstances when a reasonably good record of developmental work is not enough to help the party in power? Does it also imply that the Bihar voter is making a clear distinction between the Lok Sabha and assembly polls? It is possible to argue that the voters of Bihar have not rejected the good work done by the Nitish Kumar-led JD(U) government, but voted for the BJP and its allies in such a big number only because this was a Lok Sabha election, and that the voters might still back the ruling JD(U) when assembly elections are held next year.

Going by the vote share of the JD(U) and the seats it managed to win in the recently concluded Lok Sabha elections it would be extremely difficult for the ruling party to revive its lost ground soon. The party may be heading for difficult times in the assembly elections due next year. But a verdict in favour of the BJP does not indicate complete rejection of the work done by the ruling JD(U). The findings of the post poll survey data do indicate that people may not be as happy as they were some years ago but at the same time from the results one should not conclude that people are critical about the work done by the government, though many of them may not have voted for the ruling party in these elections.

Though the positive endorsement of the work done by the state government was not as strong as it was few years ago, especially after the government completed its first term in office (2005-2010), overall, nearly two-thirds of the voters expressed satisfaction with the overall work done by the state government.

Though opinions of the people get coloured on the basis of their political choices, more people believed that there has been an improvement in the safety of women during the last five years. Perceptions on supply of electricity were also positive as more believed that it had improved during this period (Table 2). Opinion about government schools in the state was almost equally divided. The views were not that positive about issues like railways and employment generation which largely fall within the purview of the central government. But large numbers of people were correct in making a distinction that the responsibility for providing schools and electricity was of the state government while the issues of women safety or employment were the joint responsibility of both the central and the state governments. A sizeable number of voters also confirmed that they in person or someone in their family benefited from various schemes like the Indira Awas Yojana, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), National Rural Health Mission and the old age pension scheme. Large numbers of them also believed that it was the state government which was responsible for providing these benefits.

Overall there was a belief that the performance of the state government had been good. So if people had only voted for development, the ruling JD(U) should not have performed as badly as they did. What resulted in its poor electoral performance,

Table 2: Levels of Satisfaction with Nitish Kumar's Government

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
	Overall	64
Opinion on Facilities of Civic Amenities		
	Improved	Deteriorated
Safety of women	31	24
Electricity supply	32	24
Government schools	35	38

The rest either said that the condition remained same or did not answer the question. Source: National Election Study 2014.

in spite of reasonable approval of the work done by them, was the clear understanding that this was an election to the Lok Sabha. The verdict is a mix of a reflection on people's anger with the ruling UPA government and desire for country's

development under the leadership of Narendra Modi, besides the well-crafted political alliance by the BJP which was effectively a social alliance.

Hope for JD(U)

In early January as the early election campaigns began, the voters had indicated somewhat different voting preferences at the centre and the state. During the various rounds of pre-election surveys conducted on regular intervals few months before the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the voters were presented with a hypothetical situation and asked whom would they vote for if assembly elections in the state were also held at the same time. The JD(U) was the most preferred party while the BJP was the first choice of voters in Bihar for the Lok Sabha. This trend was clearly visible till very close to the day of actual voting in Bihar. In fact the JD(U) had a huge lead over the BJP and other parties about six months before the actual day of voting. A substantial number of voters, who preferred the BJP in the Lok Sabha elections, said that they would vote for the JD(U) in the assembly elections. But the gap narrowed down between the JD(U) and BJP even for the assembly elections as the day of voting came closer. By the time Lok Sabha elections were held, the BJP had become the most preferred party even for state-level elections. More and more voters seemed inclined to vote for the BJP both in the Lok Sabha and the assembly elections. The distinction preferred by the voters in elections to the state vs that for the centre in early January 2014 or late December 2013 seemed to have blurred by the end of April 2014.

It is difficult to say what might happen when assembly elections are held in Bihar (due in 2015), but the findings of the CSDS post-poll survey do indicate that the ruling party will face a tough political challenge.

This trend is not unique to Bihar. Voters in some other states also indicated different voting preferences for the assembly and Lok Sabha elections. The BJP and its allies were favoured more for the Lok Sabha rather than for the state assembly. This is clearly evident in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, where elections for both Lok Sabha and assembly were held simultaneously. The BJP and its allies performed much better, polled more votes for the Lok Sabha elections while the regional parties (Biju Janata Dal in Odisha, Telugu Desam Party and the Telangana Rashtra Samiti in AP) polled more votes for the assembly elections.

Political Alliance Helped in Building Coalition of Castes

It would be incorrect to say that caste-based mobilisation was missing in this election and that caste had hardly any role to play in the Bihar Lok Sabha polls. By forming alliances with other political parties, the BJP did try to work out social coalitions of voters belonging to different castes, especially those unattached to the RJD or the JD(U) with the hope that it would be able to bring them to its fold. It is true that voters from various castes voted for the BJP and its allies, but the massive victory of the BJP and its alliance in Bihar is a result of BJP's well-crafted alliance with LJP and RLSF in order to expand its

support base by forming a social coalition. The alliances were clearly an effort to form a social coalition of the upper castes, dalits and sections of OBCs, mainly the Koeris.

The RJD also entered into an alliance with the Congress trying to repeat the Muslim-Yadav coalition which had paid political dividends to Lalu Prasad Yadav in the past, especially in the mid-1990s. The JD(U) was hoping that besides its core support amongst the Kurmis, it would manage to get votes from various sections of society (read castes) due to its development work done in Bihar during the last few years.

The findings of the post-poll survey data indicate that the political alliances formed by various parties did help them in forming strong social coalitions. This helped the party/alliance in mobilising votes in their favour from particular castes. The BJP did benefit from its alliance with the LJP and RLSF as this election witnessed a sharp shift in the voting preference of the dalits, more so amongst the Dusadhs (Paswan community) in Bihar.

This election witnessed the sharpest polarisation of the upper-caste voters in favour of the BJP and its allies. Findings reported in Table 3 indicate, 78% of the upper castes voted for the BJP alliance during the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. Even in the past when BJP contested elections in alliance with the JD(U), the BJP used to attract large number of upper-caste votes. In the early 1990s more than 70% of the upper-caste voters voted for the BJP-JD(U) alliance. But this election witnessed unprecedented polarisation of the upper castes in favour of the BJP alliance.

Table 3: Vote Banks for Parties and Alliances in Bihar – Yadavs, Muslims, and Upper Castes

Year of Election	Yadavs for RJD+	Muslims for the RJD +	Upper Castes in Favour of BJP+
1996 Lok Sabha	81	61	77
1998 Lok Sabha	74	68	75
1999 Lok Sabha	76	77	71
2000 Assembly	80	52	49
2004 Lok Sabha	68	79	63
2005 February assembly	83	47	50
2005 October assembly	64	58	65
2009 Lok Sabha	65	30	65
2010 Assembly	69	32	56
2014 Lok Sabha	64	64	78

All figures are in per cent.
 Figures reported in the table are from various surveys conducted in Bihar by CSDS during various assembly and Lok Sabha elections.
 Figure for 1996 refers to vote share for JD since RJD came into being in 1998.
 Figures reported in the table are vote share for the RJD with its allies.
 The RJD contested various elections in alliance with different political parties: 1996, RJD+ CPI+ CPM; 1998 RJD+INC+JMM; 1999 RJD+INC; 2000 RJD+CPM+M-COR; 2004, RJD+INC+LJP+NCP; 2005 Feb RJD+CPI+CPM+NCP; 2005Oct. RJD+INC+CPM+NCP; 2009 RJD+LJP; 2010 RJD+LJP.
 Figures for RJD+ in 2014 refer to RJD+Congress.

The alliance enabled the BJP to mobilise voters belonging to the lower backward castes. It is interesting to note that the BJP's consolidation of "lower" OBC votes in 2014 is almost as much as the proportion of votes that its alliance with JD(U) had secured in 2009 and 2010. Amongst the lower OBCs, 53% voted for the BJP alliance while only 18% voted for the JD(U), the party which championed the cause of the lower OBCs in Bihar. Only 10% of them voted for the RJD-Congress alliance (Table 4, p 98). The biggest setback and the main reason for

Table 4: Decisive Shift in the Lower OBC towards the BJP in 2014

Year of Election	RJD+	BJP+
1996 Lok Sabha	37	36
1998 Lok Sabha	26	41
1999 Lok Sabha	30	45
2000 Assembly	35	25
2004 Lok Sabha	38	36
2005 February Assembly	24	26
2005 October Assembly	22	48
2009 Lok Sabha	12	58
2010 Assembly	13	55
2014 Lok Sabha	10	53

All figures are in per cent. Figures reported in the table are from various surveys conducted by CSDS, Delhi in Bihar during various assembly and Lok Sabha elections. Figures for 1996 refers to vote share for JD since RJD came into being in 1998. Figures reported in the table are vote share for the RJD with its allies amongst Muslims.

Table 5: The Kurmi Koeri Vote Got Split between JD (U) and BJP in 2014

Year of Election	Kurmi+Koeri Vote for the BJP+
1996 Lok Sabha	69
1998 Lok Sabha	—
1999 Lok Sabha	71
2000 Assembly	50
2004 Lok Sabha	64
2005 February Assembly	40
2005 October Assembly	61
2009 Lok Sabha	62
2010 Assembly	58
2014 Lok Sabha (BJP+)	26
2014 Lok Sabha JD (U)	30

All figures are in per cent. Figures reported in the table are from various surveys conducted by CSDS during various Assembly and Lok Sabha elections. Figures for BJP+ refer to Kurmi+Koeri vote for the BJP+JD (U) from 1996 till 2010; figures for 2014 indicate BJP+LJP+RLSP. Figures for BJP+ refers to dalit vote for the BJP+JD (U) from 1996 till 2010; figures for 2014 indicate BJP+LJP+RLSP.

castes, 42% voted for the BJP and its alliance, while only 10% voted for the RJD-Congress alliance and 20% voted for the JD(U) in spite of the ruling party's efforts towards social and economic development of people belonging to these castes by declaring them as *mahadalits* (Table 6). The BJP was even more successful in mobilising voters from the Paswan caste (Dusadh) within the dalits due to its alliance with Ram Vilas Paswan. Amongst the Dusadhs, the dalit caste to which Ram Vilas Paswan himself belongs, 68% voted for the BJP and its allies, while 10% among them voted for the RJD-Congress alliance and only 6% of them voted for the JD(U) (Table 7).

Findings of the survey data indicate that 64% of the Yadavs voted for the RJD-Congress alliance (Table 3). By forming an alliance with the Congress, the RJD was able to present itself as a viable alternative which could challenge the BJP in Bihar. This to a great extent helped in keeping the Yadavs polarised in favour of the RJD and prevented the shifting of the Yadav vote from the RJD to the BJP alliance, which had happened in neighbouring Uttar Pradesh. The BJP did try to mobilise Yadav votes in Bihar, but was not very successful as only 18% of

Yadavs voted for the BJP and its alliance, according to the survey.

The alliance of the RJD with the Congress helped Lalu Prasad in regaining Muslim support which the party had started losing gradually over the years. During the 2009 Lok Sabha and 2010 assembly elections only 30% of the Muslims voted for the RJD. In most elections held before, a majority of the Muslim voted for the RJD. Its alliance with the Congress helped in Muslim consolidation behind the RJD-Congress alliance in the 2014 elections as 64% of the Muslims voted for this alliance (Table 3). However, the RJD-Congress failed to attract any other caste in its favour. The JD(U) performed even worse: it failed to attract voters from even a single caste in sizeable numbers.

Table 7: Dalit Vote by Parties and Alliances – Lok Sabha 2014

Caste Category	RJD+	BJP+	JD (U)
Dusadh/Paswan	10	68	6
Other dalit castes	10	33	25

All figures are in per cent. Figures for BJP+ in 2014 include BJP, LJP and RLSP and figures for RJD + include RJD and Congress.

Conclusions

Bihar continues to remain a state with deep caste-based divisions. It has remained difficult for any political party to think of a successful political mobilisation only on the basis of good work done in power or by promising development. The post-Mandal politics in Bihar had resulted in the upsurge of the OBCs. The victory and defeat of parties are largely determined by whether the said party is able to form a coherent social alliance through coalitions with other political parties. It is difficult to ignore the importance of caste coalitions as the basis of political alliances in Bihar's politics.

It is also true that good governance by the ruling government does attract voters from all sections (caste-community) as had happened in the past for the JD(U). But this manner of support was and is always prefaced on building an ideal caste-community social coalition as a support base. Earlier it used to be the RJD which managed to do so at will in the 1990s. Now, it is the BJP which has managed that in the Lok Sabha elections.

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