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Modistan?

A 2014 Election Report

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I.   Introduction

This report serves a dual function: it provides a mapping of the political terrain leading up to the nation's 16th independent general (Lok Sabha) election (May 2014), and it reflects on the results, and what they signal about the country's politics. The first three sections give background knowledge and orientation towards India's political system. The final section comprises an analysis of the present election results.

The Parliamentary System

The Indian parliamentary body is largely modelled on the British: it too consists of two houses of parliament, the house of the people (Lok Sabha), and the council of states (Rajya Sabha). They are both involved in legislation, although the former has more power and greater jurisdiction than the latter. While, the Rajya Sabha consists of candidates elected by the state legislative assemblies, the national government is formed through the direct electoral process, like it has just happened now, of the Lok Sabha. This process is carried out every five years, and normally takes place in phases; lasting in its entirety up to the course of a month. One reason is the sheer scale of the country – this year, the official count of the electorate exceeded 800 million.

The Lok Sabha election follows *'first past the post'* conventions, meaning that elected representatives are decided based on majority victories in their respective constituencies, as opposed to being linked to the proportion of national votes that a party receives The 543 seats in the Lok Sabha corre-

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sponds to the country's 543 constituencies . Any party or coalition, which wants to form government must exceed half this number.

The commonly cited advantage of such a system is that it encourages the consolidation of votes, hence ensuring a strong government; since those who come to power will have a clear mandate and will be able to legislate freely. This also means that the result of such an electoral system does not proportionally reflect the demands of the voters. This is especially true given the disparity in sizes between constituencies. The spectrum ranges from those of 50.000 people to those of approximately 2.500.000, all representing just a single seat. This system has led to the political terrain of India being dominated for a very long term by two larger parties. But the system only works as long, as the necessity to form alliance remains valid for the political actors. The two major players were the INC and BJP.

Indian National Congress (INC)

The Congress is the largest political party in India and the leader of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) which led the country from 2004 until today. The Congress is one of the oldest organized political bodies in India, and serves as one of the significant poles in the nation's politics. Formed originally within British rule, and working at the forefront of the freedom movement; it was at first the only truly significant and large-scale party in the country. It was singularly in power from 1947 to the late 1970s. During this period, it implemented an agenda envisioned predominantly by its first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. This *'Nehruvian politics'* involved a push towards industrialization, and some degree of welfare measures, but most principally a large and powerful state body that mediated economic activity. Today, the party claims to be secular[2], inclusive, and left-of-centre (Nehru's socialist legacy). Interestingly enough most of their leadership comes from higher classes/castes of Indian society.

The fact that the party began as an umbrella and social movement instead a clearly defined political party has meant that it is difficult to ascribe clear-cut political labels to. In fact, on a number of issues the congress was always internally divided, with multiple opinions from different camps. Being a broad front under a national umbrella, the Congress has been associated with a strong national legacy. This strong tie between the national movement and the people has been broken in the last years. This is partly because numerous scams and corruption charges have emerged and implicate a number of their ministers. For instance, in an auction that the government held in 2012 to issue 3G licences to phone companies, it was found that nearly 26 billion US-dollars had gone out of circulation.

Bharatya Janata Party (BJP)

The BJP is the leader of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and is going to form the newly elected government. In terms of scale, it is the second largest political organisation in India and forms the other pole of the political space. It began as an outgrowth from an older party which in turn was the political arm of the Hindu organisation: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

The RSS is an extremist Hindu-nationalist body, formed in 1925 also to counteract secular tendencies and to preserve a supposed *'Hindu identity'*. The organisational structures consists of a nucleus of ideologues and intellectuals, as well as several thousand 'branches' around the country that conduct civic education, as well as yoga and religious guidance and military training, in order to mobilize. Even as the RSS publicly projects itself only as an ally, it is usually seen as having control, or

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[2] In India the word secular is used to denote the position that all religions should be treated equally. This does not necessarily entail a clear separation of religion from the state however, as in India there are certain laws that remain specific to one's faith

large-scale influence over the BJP's activities. Hindutva (*Hinduness* in English) is a significant aspect of BJP politics, his involves an emphasis on culture, patriotic nationalism and often heightened communalism. Economically, supporting a predominantly neo-liberal framework, often employing a rhetoric that revolves around the nation's 'economic growth', and endorsing such policies as rapid industrialisation, unregulated markets, and increasing rates of foreign investment.

Although a significant force since their inception, the BJP truly rose to power in the late nineties following their participation in the demolition of the Babri Mosque (Ayodhya)[3], which was done under the pretext of recovering the birth place of Lord Ram. While the event led to large scale-communal strife, many in the Hindu community supported the demolition. In the course of these events a religious toned language became a prominent part of the national discourse, and the BJP grew in popularity eventually forming the central government in 1998-2004. While it was believed that under their government India would become a extremist Hindu state, their actual policy of governance was comparable to the Congress's.

The PM-candidates

Rahul Gandhi was the prime-ministerial candidate from the Indian National Congress. He comes from what it is commonly perceived as the congress 'dynasty', his mother Sonia Gandhi is the current president of the party. His father and grandmother (Rajeev and Indira Gandhi) are both mythical figures in the peoples' imagination, both having been assassinated while serving as prime-minister. His great grandfather is Jawaharlal Nehru, the head of India's first independent government.

Gandhi started his political career in 2004, and worked for a number of years with the Indian Youth Congress. He was promoted to vice-president of the congress party at the beginning of its electoral campaign, and although it was declared officially much later, he was the de facto prime-ministerial candidate throughout the INC's campaign. Amongst Congress supporters, he is seen as someone with new ideas and youth, especially in contrast to the average figure of an old and weathered Indian politician. That said, the recent results indicate his failure to appeal to a wider audience, and the lack of faith the average citizen has in his leadership. The Party, however, has been reluctant to place significant blame on its dynasty.

Narendra Modi was the victorious electoral candidate of BJP, and is the new Prime Minister of India. He was being projected as the winner well in advance, and the performance proved even better than most expectations. Modi started his political career as a volunteer in the RSS, later being assigned to the BJP to help organize its campaigns in Gujarat. He went on to become the Chief Minister of Gujarat in 2001, and has since remained undefeated, having served four consecutive terms

He has become famous for what is called the 'Gujarat model' of growth, which is alleged to be responsible for the state's growing revenue and infrastructure. As a result, he has earned the support of many of India's leading capitalists (for instance, the Ambanis, Tatas, and Adanis) and many in the middle class. They expect him to implement policies that will reduce regulations, cater to investments, and generally move in the direction of a neoliberal society more forcefully than a congress leader would.

While he has shown the extent of his popularity, he has also polarized many people because of his background. He has been legally prosecuted for alleged involvement in the 2002 mass riots in Gujarat, where more than a thousand people (mostly Muslims) lost their lives. In the same vein, it is often pointed out that the growth of Gujarat has been largely uneven, with Muslim areas and communities remaining completely unattended, and the poorest sector of society faring even worse than it was before.

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[3] More here: http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-all-you-need-to-know-about-babri-masjid-1975089.

Symbolism and popular mobilization

While there are a number of reasons that have led to the strong mandate in favour of the BJP, the difference between the two major campaigns was certainly a factor that contributed to the margin of its victory. The Congress seems to have been unable to effectively get its messages across. They tried to demonize Modi by calling him a communal politician, but their own alliances with caste and religion centric parties made such a move rather hypocritical. They tried to reach out to the poor by having Rahul Gandhi travel across rural India, but his image as an entitled dynasty child made such an approach seem contrived. Finally, while the Congress attempted to emphasize their successful welfare policies, its tarnished corruption-ridden image made such claims difficult.

The BJP, one the other hand, used more potent symbolism in its campaign. Modi's language appealed to people across boundaries. His economic positions have enticed the rich, while the image which was created of him as a hard-working ascetic from humble origins has struck a chord with the poor. In fact, some of the tactics to appeal to the masses have been tremendously effective. Examples include his glorification of chai-wallas (tea vendors) and the culture surrounding them, as well as the popular call for labouring people to donate their tools so they may be used in constructing a tributary monument to the nation's hero Sardar Patel. These strong images managed to capture the people's imagination in a way other leaders have struggled to do.

II.   Changing patterns and regional drift

In recent years, two significant developments within the Indian political sphere have been the large anti-corruption mobilizations and the regionalization of voting patterns. The following will provide an overview of these phenomena. First, the emergence of the new Aam Aadmi Party; the response to growing anguish over state corruption. Second, it describes how frustration over lack of electoral alternatives at the national level has led to greater consolidation of power at the state level. Certain regional parties have begun to have more leverage while negotiating with the centre. One example of such a party is the Trinamool Congress (AITC), which is a breakaway group of the INC. It has become the dominant party in West Bengal, having displaced the 34 year legacy of the Left Front. Other examples would be the All India Dravidian Munnitra Kazhagam (AIDMK) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) are dealt with in more detail.

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)

Corruption has become a massive public issue in recent years, with a great number of government scandals coming into view. In 2011, a piece of legislation known as the *"Jan Lokpal Bill"* was commissioned as anti-corruption measure that would create legal posts to monitor and evaluate state activity. The inertia of parliament to implement this bill led to large-scale civil protests in 2011. These were dismissed by the Congress government. Parts of the movement were confronted with the alternative to become a political body, if they wanted to legislate. These parts organised themselves into what is now the *"Aam Aadmi Party"* (AAP).

The AAP has featured prominently in the events leading up to the national election. They catapulted into the limelight when they overthrew the Congress-government in the capitol's state elections, and formed a controversy-plagued minority rule. They claimed that the rationale for doing so was the implementation of the above mentioned Jan Lokpal Bill that they had been fighting for all along. They promised to resign from office if they could not pass the bill. 49 days into their rule, they did not have enough power (seats) to do so. As a result they stepped down from government. Their leader, Arvind Kejriwal, has claimed that his resignation was carried out in order demonstrate that

they were a party that held itself accountable. This attempt at honesty has gone largely unnoticed in the political sphere or has been seen as retreat from responsibility.

It is difficult to ascertain what their inroad into Indian politics is going to bring in the future. They did not win many seats, but their influence is greater in terms of vote-share and in terms of media coverage, they were second only to the BJP. They are one of the few parties (except the left) who openly discussed corporate influence on politics, and the media's collusion in such activities. What is more, they have genuinely invested themselves in rank and file mobilization, engaging in dialogue with rikshaw-walas, and shop-keepers, advertising locally in different languages, and keeping their offices open to visits by all.

AIDMK (All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam)

The AIDMK, which got the biggest regional Indian party with 37 seats in the Lok Sabha, was formed in 1974. It claims to represent Dravidian interests. Over its history has consistently been getting the Tamil votes in the region. It serves as an exemplary case of the trend in regionalization, for in recent years, it has managed to ensure that it will preside over the votes of the community it aims to represent. It uses its large vote base and assurance of seats to negotiate alliances with national parties. It has most often done so with the congress.

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)

The Bahujan Samaj Party is another important case that illustrates the way a certain section of the public (here the Dalit) have pledged their allegiance to a single party. With the BSP the loyalty is based on a social indicator and not on region. Formed in 1983 by the Dalit reader Kanshi Ram, it identified itself as a party that would mobilize and represent the lowest caste - and hence the most underrepresented - of Indian society: the Bahujans (Dalit). It has most presence and has come into coalition government three times in the state of Uttar Pradesh, and it's current leader Mayawati came into power in 2003. She has become something of a cult figure, and her image as a Dalit front-runner and a woman have become the centre of BSP's politics. There are even countless statues of her in U.P. The BSP have been praised for giving Dalits a voice, for they did not organize themselves to make political demands in the past. But it is also certain that the concrete situation of the Dalit community has not improved dramatically. They have also been criticized for further solidifying caste-based categories and relations by making it part of political identity. While they retain a significant amount of the vote-share in U.P., this is not represented in the current parliament as they have lost all of their seats in the 2014 election.[4]

III.   The Left in India

The left movement in India has its roots – along with the Congress – in the years of the freedom struggle. The participation in this struggle is also what led to the agenda of the Left being initially intertwined with the goals of the freedom struggle. Many who considered themselves adherents of Socialist ideas – figures such as Subhash Chandra Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Jayaprakash Narayan – chose to prioritize the nation to international socialism and allied themselves to the Gandhian movement and the National Congress.

Those who believed more radically in communism, while still a part of the freedom movement, began to organize themselves separately. This began with the inception of the Communist Party of India (CPI) in 1925, a movement that has since seen the outgrowth of further entities, The Com-

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[4] Discussed in more detail in section IV

munist Party of India Marxist (CPI(ML)) and the Communist Party of India Marxist-Leninist (CPIM(ML)), which too has faced numerous splits until today. While there are other parties and organizations that claim to represent the communist/socialist movement, these are the ones that have played the largest and most decisive role in Left-wing politics in India.

The CPI and CPI(M), although earlier involved in insurrectionary activity, have predominantly worked within the representative political sphere. They have had confined historical success until recently, mainly in the three states West Bengal, Kerala, and Tripura.

Communist Party of India (CPI) :

The Communist Party of India was the first large-scale political body to declare allegiance to the Communist project. It began in the 1920's as an underground organization, which had legal fronts, such as the Workers and Peasants Association. The members of CPI engaged in anti-feudal and anti-imperialist propaganda and demonstrations, as well as armed insurrections in places like Andhra Pradesh and Bengal. In 1942 the party became legal and took part in elections post-independence. However, this complicity with the national project created a split within the party that became critical when national interests were not aligned with the strategy of the Comintern. This was most severe during the Quit India movement, which some communists wanted to delay, so that India could join British forces in the fight against fascism.

CPI has served as a national level party, and is often found in alliance with other parties in the 'Left Front'. This front was a member of the Congress-centred United Progressive Alliance (UPA) that came into power in 2004, but subsequently ended ties because of its opposition to a nuclear energy pact with the United States.

Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPIM)

Emerging out of a split from the CPI in 1964, the CPI(M) has come to be the most prominent and biggest communist party of Indian politics in the last few decades. Currently, they claim to boast more than a million cadre, and head the state government in Tripura.

The party, aiming to eventually bring about communism, has mostly been involved in matters of reform and cultural propaganda. They have been an important force in the Indian Left for two principle reasons: First, they are the only party that has had sustained rule at the state level (In large provinces too: the state of West Bengal has more inhabitants than Germany) and secondly, they — more than any other communist party — have managed to attract intellectuals and stimulate theoretical debate.

The CPIM served as the leader-party of the so called 'Left Front' of India. They had managed to consolidate power in the three states of West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura for more than thirty years. Though still maintaining a base in Tripura, they have been ousted in West Bengal and Kerala.

The Naxalites

The term 'Naxalite' is used to refer to another 'left' split — this time from the CPI(M) in 1967, when there was a peasants uprising in the Bengali province of Naxalbari. This movement led to the formation of the Communist party of India (Marxist-Leninist two years later. The new leadership believed that the only legitimate course of action was a forceful seizure of power, and thus engaged in different armed insurrections.

Almost from the very beginning however, this movement has been fragmented into numerous factions. Some of these prefer legal means such as social reform and mass organization, whereas others condone a more extreme insurrectionary approach. There are degrees to the level violence that

each group allows as well. Certain bodies such as New Democracy are willing to train its cadres to retaliate against land seizures but do not go further. While the Maoist faction has resorted to forms of guerrilla warfare.

The Naxalites have a presence across a number of states, most so in Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Bihar. The Indian government has registered the armed factions of the movement as a serious threat, and launched a large-scale military project (*Operation Green Hunt*) to combat them in 2009.

IV.   Taking Stock of the Verdict

The Recent Elections

This year, India held its 16th Lok Sabha elections, and the biggest in its history with an electorate of nearly 800 million going to the polls. On May 16th, the results of the general elections were announced and placed the BJP with a landslide victory. Though this result has vindicated pre-poll assumptions, the extent of this mandate, and the margin by which seats have changed hands, came as a big surprise.

With two hundred and eighty three seats (out of five hundred and forty three), the BJP recorded their best electoral performance in history; as well as the only single party majority in close to thirty years. Unexpectedly, they have enough seats to form the government themselves, and along with their allies, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), they claim three hundred and thirty six seats in parliament.

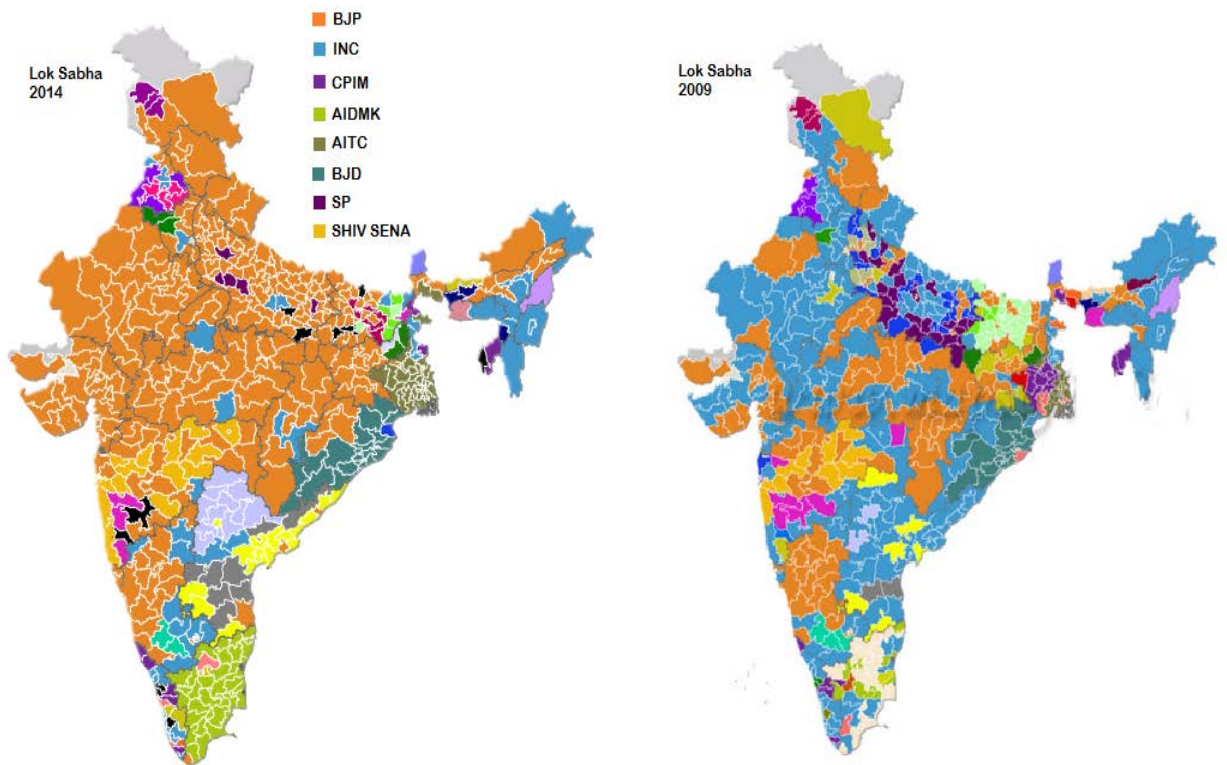2014 Election Results (2009 Results in brackets):

Alliances

NDA (BJP + allies)	UPA (INC + allies)
336 (159)	60 (262)

Major Parties

BJP	INC	AIDMK	AITC	SP	BSP	Left parties
282 (116)	44 (206)	37 (9)	34 (19)	5 (23)	0 (23)	12 (24)

Electoral maps of India (2013 and 2009)

As the above map illustrates, the saffron of the BJP has really grown, having gained victory in almost the entirety of the nation's central and northern regions. Not only has there been a near clean sweep in states such as Gujarat, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan; if one looks at the BJP in tandem with its allies, one can say that they have managed to dominate in other large and electorally significant states as well; most notably, Uttar Pradesh (73 out of 80) and Maharashtra (46 out of 48).

The BJP has also made inroads into parts of the country where it did not earlier have much of a base. It has managed to become a contender against the left in Kerala and consolidated its presence in the important southern state of Karnataka. Surprisingly – for it is a first-time occurrence - it has also inaugurated itself in the northeast, having won Assam on its own and Nagaland through its allies.

However, what has truly been astonishing about the election results in 2014 is not so much that the BJP won by a large margin, but the extent to which it has decimated most of the opposition in what is called the 'Hindi belt' of the nation. This is best exemplified in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Five years ago the BJP claimed merely 10 seats; whereas the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Dalit-Centred BSP were the main contenders against the Congress with all three winning a third each of the state's total seats. This election, the BJP has increased its seat tally almost seven times as much, the Congress and the Samajwadi Party are reduced to sharing 7 seats between them, and the BSP has lost all seats.

All this having been said however, it is important to note that looking at electoral seats does not provide the entire picture[5]. Commentators have already noted that the results seem somewhat different when one looks at the results in terms of voting percentages:

BJP 31.0%
INC 19.3%
BSF 4.1%
AITC 3.8%
SP 3.4%
ADMK 3.3%
CPM 3.2%
IND 3.0%,
TDP 2.5%,
YSRCP 2.5%
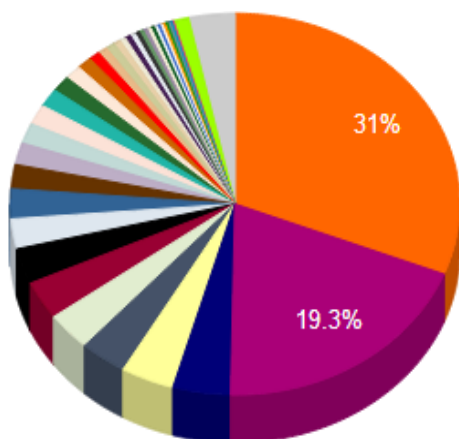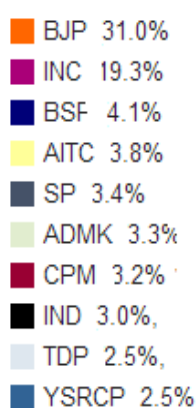
Despite what seems like a stunning landslide victory of 282 seats, the BJP still only has around 31 percent of the electorate's support. This means that parliamentary is not as representative of the nation's verdict as one might imagine. In terms of seats the, BJP occupies close to 52% of the parliament and the Congress only around 8%, a difference of 44%. This is a striking number given that the difference of vote-share between the two parties is only about 12%.

Similarly, while other parties have been blankly dismissed for their inability to consolidate seats, they do not seem so frail if one looks at the actual number of votes they received. Again, taking the case of Uttar Pradesh, although the BSP was reduced to having no seats at all, it actually remained the third-largest party in terms of the vote share..

The most effective way to read the elections through the vote-share data is to see what the parliament would look if India followed the 'proportional representation' (as exists in Germany) framework. When one does so, the results differ quite significantly –

Projected Results with proportional representation system (Actual results in brackets):

BJP	INC	BSP	AIDMK	AITC	CPI(M)	AAP
169 (282)	105 (44)	23 (0)	13 (37)	21 (34)	18 (9)	12 (4)

Based on electoral vote share then, the BJP would have nearly a hundred seats less and the Congress would not have fared quite so badly. Even more strikingly, the BSP that seemingly lost all support would still have gotten 23 seats, almost the same as its tally in the last election. The AIDMK would have gotten only a third of the seats it now has, and both the CPI(M) and AAP would have done considerably better. The stark contrast in the result can be seen only makes the argument to revisit the debate for electoral reforms even stronger!

Pro Modi or Anti Congress?

What does this impressive BJP victory mean? What is certain is that the votes reflect the extent of repulsion and anger that had built up towards the Congress party, signalling a nationwide storm of rejection against its incumbent government. If one takes this election as a measure of their credibility, the last 10 years have been disastrous for the Congress, having created more animosity towards their leadership than ever before. This was reflected even in the state assembly elections, where for instance, a completely new party such as AAP defeated it in the National Capital.

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[5] As depicted in Picture (piechart)

The opposite argument is that the BJP victory points to a positive affirmation of Modi as opposed to merely a negative gesture towards the UPA. Indeed, one may point towards Uttar Pradesh, and claim that a state where the Congress was not the incumbent party has still tilted strongly in favour of Modi. However, what this does not recognize is that both the Samajwadi Party and the BSP have been allies of the Congress in the past, and have become associated with them in the public mind. It is also worth noting that regional parties that have retained and even grown in power – the AIDMK, BJD, TMC – are all parties that have tried to remain distant from both the Congress and the BJP.

Secondly, when one compares the vote-share of the BJP to past elections, it is in fact the lowest ever for any party that has formed a single-handed majority. Indeed, before the BJP recorded this performance, the Congress government of 1967 was said to be the least representative, and it still retained a vote-share of 40%. When one subtracts the UPA and NDA from the electorate, one is still left with a share of around 39%, more than a third of the country and roughly equivalent to the NDA's total vote bank. This shows the extent to which the nation is in anguish over its political choices.

That said, one must still explain why this discontent has only been able to consolidate itself in the figure of Narendra Modi. It cannot be said that all the hype that surrounds him is simply the media's creation, for he has managed to gain support across caste, class and religion and this would not be possible if he had not captured the people's imagination in some way. As has been pointed out by many, Modi's campaign and rise in the BJP has been sponsored and supported extensively by the corporate sector; that their interests speak through him is evident. It is also easy to understand that the aspirational middle-classes have voted for him with his promise of nurturing investment into the country. What is worth probing into is why many working class citizens and factions of the poorer sections of society have also chosen to give him their vote.

Modi's campaign seems to have been the most effective in capitalizing upon the people's grievances. It had bolstered Modi's credentials by continuous reference to the so-called 'Gujarat model' with its growing opportunities and infrastructure. Certainly, in many states where even basic amenities such as decent roadwork and electricity were lacking, it can be argued that such a vision is seductive. Secondly, it seems also to have worked in his favour that Modi is not a conventional BJP politician. The fact that he has been portrayed as someone from humble origins, and someone who stands against the old guard of the party has managed to distance him from the party name. This is a sound strategy, and it shows why the BJP decided to set its campaigned around a single figure as opposed to the party as a whole. For many of the poor who are cynical of the BJP as such, are also at a loss for choice, and such a campaign has made Modi appear as a candidate worth giving a chance.

The Reign of the Right

Ultimately, it seems to be true that this election points towards a shift to the right in India politics, at least for the time being. What is the form of Government that India is likely to receive in the near future? The basic underpinnings of Modi's so called Gujarat model seem fairly straightforward: it revolves around the prospect of investment, both by domestic corporates and foreign capital. The point is to organize regulations, infrastructure, and social climate so as to make it most amenable to investment (and supposedly, 'growth'). This is a largely neoliberal framework, and it is easy to discern that it is governed, in the final analysis, by the interests of capital. In fact, much of this framework was also what the Congress tried to implement, but the people expect Modi to be both more effective and extrapolate his Gujarat model to work at the national level

If this Gujarat success story is to be the benchmark for what to expect on a national level, it makes sense to evaluate how well it has actually worked. A study conducted by outlook magazine provides

some interesting conclusions: If one examines the rate of growth and average per capita income, it is true that Gujarat has been consistently growing over the last few decades. Interestingly however, it was also growing before Modi's tenure, and the growth rate has not risen dramatically since he took office. What is more, certain HDI indicators such as inequality and malnutrition amongst women have actually increased over the last 10 years. To add to this, dissident journalists and activists have pointed out how Muslim neighbourhoods have been completely neglected in the growth-frenzy and infrastructure building project of Gujarat. Thus, it is doubtful whether the kind of neoliberal policy framework that he represents will truly address the people's grievances. Indeed, it may appease the middle and upper classes, but it is likely to only further aggravate the condition of the poor, and reconstitute the discontent.

What is worrying about the prospective parliament is also the lack of a strong opposition. The Congress having reached an all-time low of merely 48 seats, means it is currently even weaker than a state-party. Although it still has a considerable vote-share, it has very little leverage to influence legislation. Such a situation is a threat to the democratic nature of Indian politics. Regardless of their not being a radical alternative, it is crucial for there to exist a strong enough opposition to resists the more extreme elements (e.g Communalism and Hindutva) of those in power. Interestingly enough, it seems as the powerful new regional parties — The BJD (Orissa), TMC (West Bengal) and AIDMK (Tamil Nadu) — are going to form an alliance in order to occupy the *'leader of opposition'* in parliament. Together the are able to bring together 91 seats, while the 'natural' opposition party the Congress is way behind in this regard and cannot even bring together the requisite of 54 seats to qualify as *'leader of opposition'*.[6]

Where is the left?

In speaking of radical alternatives, it is important also to take stock of where the left stands today. In 2004 general elections, the Left front (an alliance between all the largest left parties in the nation) seemed to have broken new ground. It had managed to secure a total of 59 seats, which was its best electoral performance to the date, and also the highest seat tally apart from the two big Indian parties. It seemed as though the Left was beginning to carve itself a truly significant role in the nation's politics. This is exactly what has not happened. In fact, since the 2004 elections, the left front has only fallen in stature; both in terms of political credibility as well as electoral seats. In 2009, the total number of seats had fallen by less than half and dropped to 24. Following that, in 2011, the CPIM was ousted from its stronghold of West Bengal after a reign of 34 years. Prior to this it had already lost its government, and considerable support in its key state Kerala where

Prior to the counting for 2014, sources in the CPIM claimed that they expected to lose ground by a couple of seats in West Bengal, but were hoping for a better performance in Kerala. While the prediction was generally accurate, they did not estimate the margins correctly. In West Bengal, they were hoping to lose a little ground, whereas the suffered a much stronger blow (being reduced from 9 to 2 seats). In Kerala they hoped for a sizable victory but the left front as a whole only managed to gain an additional four seats. The CPIM managed to retain both seats in Tripura, but this has come as little consolation. The two biggest left parties the CPI and CPIM have had their vote bank reduced to the point where they no longer qualify as nation-level parties (a minimum of 6% in four states being the price of admission) and this means that they lose out both on leverage in the parliament as well as certain resources and privileges. In fact, the newly administered 'None of the Above'

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[6] "A provision in the Constitution of India says that that the main opposition party can be recognised so only if it holds at least one-tenth of the strength of the House. In the present context, the Congress needs to have at least 54 seats in a House of 543 to be accorded the status of the Opposition."
(http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/why-16th-lok-sabha-may-not-have-a-leader-of-opposition/1/362091.html).

(NOTA) category actually garnered more electoral support nationally than the CPI did. What is all the more disconcerting is that in this election, a number of other new or smaller left/socialist parties contested against the older ones. In fact, The Revolutionary Socialist Party of India has even announced it is leaving its alliance with the older parties. This points toward a further fragmentation in the Left movement.

It has to be conceded that the left is in a frighteningly vulnerable position. Why has this happened? A number of diagnosis ha been offered. Firstly, the history of factionalism in the left movement in India has been a continuously recurring obstacle. Secondly, the recent choices and policies of the organized left in terms of its narrow pragmatism have been just as damaging. Finally it can be said that the increasing violent confrontation between the armed faction of the left and the Indian state has made it easier for people to demonize and question the credibility of other left parties, intellectuals and activists; and this has certainly happened.

The Left, it is claimed, at some point ceased to try and further its presence in new territories and instead began to pay more attention to managing economic growth in states where it was in power. Such a shift in attitude has been somewhat problematic .Indeed, when in 2004 It began to join into strategic alliances with the Congress and other regional parties, its own policy-framework began to drift towards a more market-centric agenda. This led to strife within the party, for instance, when a series of land grabs and Special Economic Zone projects took place in Singur and Nandigram, West Bengal. This was especially controversial because in some cases it even reversed the very land reform process the CPI(M) had put in place. As a result, it has led to a sense of betrayal amongst a large share of the party's cadre.

According to Leftist and dissident intellectuals, the deeper problem lies in the Left's departure from a radical emancipatory politics, towards an overly pragmatic and socio-democratic approach. CPI(M) theorist Prabhat Patnaik has conceived of the concept of *'empiricisation'* to reflect the party's fall. For him,'empiricisation' is "a political praxis that is uninformed by the project of transcending capitalism". Similar positions are shared by others, Left-wing intellectual Achin Vanaik has said that the left parties have changed, that "the CPM was once a movement-based party, whose cadres were motivated by an ideological programme which, though Stalinized, nonetheless inspired involvement in mass struggles on behalf of various oppressed sectors"

The fact that the parliamentary left has made these concessions, it is claimed, has gone against its favour. People have come to associate it more and more as just another regional force, and the ideological positions that traditionally marked their positions have become somewhat blurred. Although these concessions were an attempt to make itself more amenable to the middle and upper classes, it could not cater to them in the same way as parties such as the BJP or the Congress. The same concessions however have also alienated its popular base and factions of the intelligentsia that supported it. It is interesting to note Vanaik's point that, unlike CPI/CPI(m), the Naxalite movement "has been the principal defender of the poorest and most deprived against their class oppressors and the politicians, bureaucrats, police and paramilitaries backing them at various levels" and has often delivered where others have not.

Of course, such a desperate situation also both necessitates and lends itself to transformation. The crisis of the Left in India may also be taken as an opportunity for it to regroup, rethink and realign itself for the struggles that are sure to come. It is also not as if the Left has lost all hope. As was mentioned earlier, if one looks at vote-shares, the CPIM's reach is equivalent to almost double the seats it is currently in possession of. Also, while the CPI has lost a lot of support, it is an organization that is present in a range of states: UP, Kerala, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab. The possibility exists for it to reinvent itself and try to consolidate its presence in these various places.

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