

# Western command of the BJP

Gujarat has a long tradition of pro-Jan Sangh, pro-BJP politics and Maharashtra is the latest recruit to the BJP fold. Only Goa still prevaricates

SUHAS PALSHIKAR

If Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan are characterised as 'BJP versus Congress' States, the BJP can safely treat the two western States of Gujarat and Maharashtra as 'no contest' States. Twice in a row, the two States have refused to look beyond the party. Goa is slowly emerging as a BJP bastion — with a limitation. Of course, the three cases present us with three different routes to dominance by the BJP, although the net political outcome might appear uniform. The BJP has added 49 MPs in both the previous and current Lok Sabha from Gujarat and Maharashtra alone.

## Usurping the local space

In Goa, the rise of the BJP has been shaped by the usurpation of the local space cultivated by the Maharashtra-wadi Gomantak Party. Like many other smaller States with a significant non-Hindu population, in Goa, too, the BJP is saddled with a critical challenge. It entered these States by adroitly appropriating the religious divide through its pursuit of Hindutva; nevertheless, continued electoral dominance would require a broad-based of its support. It remains to be seen how the BJP evolves a strategy to become acceptable to non-Hindu sections while at the same time retaining its Hindutva argument in Goa.

## Congress in a meaningless space

Gujarat under the BJP almost mirrors West Bengal under Left rule. It is characterised not merely by the dominance of a single political player over a long period; it also echoes the Bengal experience of deep penetration by the dominant party into civil society. Both in 2014 and now, the BJP has had multiple advantages in the State: a demoralised Congress that is tired of languishing in a meaningless space called Opposition; a more or less broad umbrella coalition of regions and sections of Hindu society; convergence of interests of trade, industry and the 'neo' middle class; regional pride that a Gujarati leader leads the country; and a civil society that is willing to ignore cracks in the 'Gujarat model'. So, it is no wonder the BJP did so well in the State. Winning all 26 seats remains an extraordinary performance that speaks volumes about the euphoria around Mr. Modi's leadership and the inability of the Congress to challenge the party's narrative and social coalition in the State. The latest results further de-



"A single political player has not only dominated Gujarat over a long period, it has also penetrated civil society." BJP supporters at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's public meeting in Ahmedabad on May 26. \*PTI

pen the crisis in the State Congress because the limited gains it had made in the last Assembly election are now wiped off and it is going to be very difficult to avoid an exodus from the party.

## No durable base, yet victorious

Maharashtra's route to shaping the BJP's dominance has been different on many counts. First, the party is still not able to carve out a durable base for itself in the State. Its victories in 2014 and 2019 have come riding on the back of uncertain social equations. Second, competitiveness — though not reflected in the outcome — has not completely disappeared in Maharashtra. That is why the BJP chose to make peace with its warring ally, the Shiv Sena, on the eve of elections. It is another matter that the BJP may today rue that decision because it may have bagged quite a few more seats for itself if it had contested alone. Third, in Maharashtra, the Congress was in power for 15 long years and the BJP has been in the saddle for just five years. Thus, the societal dominance that it enjoys in Gujarat is somewhat elusive in Maharashtra as of today. Above all, in Maharashtra, the BJP's emergence is more due to the

failures of its rivals — the Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party. These two parties have not only exported their many district-level leaders to the BJP, but have also ceded ground to the BJP among their long-time social base, the Maratha community. In any case, though shallow compared to Gujarat, the BJP has ensured electoral dominance in Maharashtra in the past two parliamentary elections. Given its share of total seats in the Lok Sabha and also given the size of its economy, Maharashtra's importance to national politics need not be overstated. As such, if the BJP manages to consolidate its position in the State, one can only conjecture the extent of importance that Maharashtra would have for the BJP's long-term future nationally.

Overall, the extended west (including Rajasthan which was discussed in this series earlier) is not far behind the north in being a BJP stronghold. If Rajasthan and Gujarat have had a long tradition of pro-Jan Sangh, pro-BJP politics, Maharashtra is the latest recruit to the BJP fold while Goa still prevaricates.

Suhas Palshikar is the co-director of the Lokniti programme and chief editor of 'Studies in Indian Politics'

# Replicating 2014, but with a higher vote share

The BJP-Shiv Sena alliance has won support across the social spectrum



NITIN BIRMAL & RAJESHWARI DESHPANDE

The second consecutive victory of the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance in Maharashtra in Lok Sabha elections indicates that there is now stability in the State. If the 2014 election marked the demise of the dilapidated Congress system in State politics, this time's outcome seems to have confirmed the arrival of a new party system in which the BJP is likely to be the 'Big Brother'.

## A hold on all regions

In this election, the BJP and Shiv Sena have won 41 of the 48 seats (the BJP won 23 and the Shiv Sena 18, the same as in 2014) and claimed nearly 51% of the vote share, which is higher than last time. The Congress could win only one seat, Chandrapur, and there too the party candidate was 'imported' from the Shiv Sena. The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) was hoping to regain its lost ground in this election, especially in western Maharashtra. However, it could win only four seats, three of which came from its traditional stronghold of western Maharashtra. There too, the Pawar family faced a major setback when one of its young family members lost the election to a Shiv Sena incumbent. The All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimeen won its maiden seat when it defeated a Shiv Sena veteran in Aurangabad by a slim margin. Elsewhere, the party, in alliance with the Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA), played a major spoiler for the Congress-NCP alliance in many key constituencies.

Other than these stray exceptions, the saffron alliance maintained a complete hold on all regions of the State. Vidarbha and north Maharashtra have been strongholds of the BJP for many elections now. Since 2014, the BJP, in alliance with the Sena, has also been able to establish its dominance in the more urban and somewhat more cosmopolitan Mumbai-Thane region where its vote share shot up to almost 60% this time. The consolidation of support for the BJP and the Sena in this region also neutralised the possible impact of Raj Thackeray's Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS),

## Pro-incumbency sentiment decoded

	% of respondents
Want Narendra Modi as Prime Minister	48
Satisfied with the State government	63
Satisfied with the Central government	65
Satisfied with the work of the MP	50
Willing to give the NDA government another chance	53
See development as a key issue in the polls	16
Economic condition of family has improved in the last five years	43
Development has helped all	46
Decided who to vote for even before the campaign began	43
Saw party as the most important consideration while voting	52

Note: The figures above are answers to different questions

## Support across social groups (%)

Social group	Congress	NCP	BJP	Shiv Sena	Others#
<b>Locality</b>					
Rural	15	18	24	26	18
Urban	19	12	33	19	17
<b>Caste/ community</b>					
Upper Castes	7	3	63	21	6
Marathas	9	28	20	39	5
OBCs	14	5	44	31	7
Dalits	13	11	18	12	45
STs	11	37	23	12	16
Muslims	56	30	9	4	1
Buddhists	5	4	4	2	85
<b>Economic class (only the extreme ends)</b>					
Poor	19	17	27	18	18
Rich	11	13	38	21	17

# A major share of these votes went to the Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi. Figures have been rounded off and may not add up to 100

which did not contest the election but nevertheless campaigned against the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance.

The near-complete victory of the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance is mostly a pro-incumbency sentiment that goes along with the national mood. Similar to many other States, according to our data, the State-specific context of the election did not matter much for the voters. The BJP could pull off its success despite a deepening agrarian crisis, simmering discontent among Marathas, and a comparatively weak regional party organisation.

The alliance has been able to win support across the social spectrum this time. The Congress had already lost support among the poor, Adivasis, and a large section of Dalits over the past few elections. This time, the Dalit and Muslim votes were further divided with the arrival of the VBA that claimed substantial support from neo-Buddhist Dalits. The fragmentation of the Maratha vote continues although the NCP was able to regain some of its lost support from the community. The BJP, on the other hand, has carved out a new social equation that brings together the upper castes, OBCs, Adivasis, Hindu Dalit castes and the poor into its fold. This leaves out Muslims, the erstwhile dominant Marathas, and the politically active

Buddhist Dalits. As Maharashtra is one of the most rapidly urbanising States, the BJP's hold over urban voters indicates the durability of its base in the coming years.

## Complicating future contests

The BJP-Shiv Sena alliance will soon face a challenge when the Assembly election takes place later this year. In the alliance's first joint press conference immediately after the Lok Sabha election, the Shiv Sena graciously agreed to play second fiddle to the BJP. However, given its past record, the party will try hard for its own survival in the Assembly election, and so will the MNS. The MNS was clever in not contesting the Lok Sabha election. But for the sake of its own survival, it will be actively involved in the Assembly election and will complicate the structure of party competition. The rise of the VBA, which has claimed nearly 8% of the vote share in this election, will complicate the contest. To what extent the prevalent pro-incumbency sentiment among voters in the State will help the BJP neutralise these potential political contestations is an open question for now.

Rajeshwari Deshpande teaches political science at the Savitribai Phule Pune University and Nitin Birmal is with Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar College, Pune

THE HINDU  
CSDS-LOKNITI  
Post-poll Survey 2019

# The most preferred party of young India

Among the youth, except in non-Hindu communities, the BJP has found acceptance across caste groups. PM Modi's popularity was a great pull factor

AMRIT NEGI & JYOTI MISHRA

Since 2014, it has been noted that young voters are particularly strong supporters of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The party has taken care to assiduously woo this segment. It initiated several campaign programmes to attract the youth before the 2019 Lok Sabha election. A digital campaign, 'Youth with Modi', was launched on social media to connect people on a single platform to discuss and advertise the popular policies introduced by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government. The youth wing of the BJP, the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha, launched a campaign called 'Modi Yuva Shakti'. This was used to popularise the BJP's schemes among college students.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi started focusing on the youth much before the election and urged them to get registered as voters. For instance, on August 15, 2017, in his Independence Day speech, Mr. Modi said that 2018 would be an important year as all those who were born at the start of the century would turn 18 and should get registered as voters. "They are going to be the creators of the destiny of our nation in the 21st century. I heartily welcome all these youth, honour them and offer my respects to them," he said. In other words, the BJP was keenly aware of the importance of the youth vote.

## A successful strategy

The party's strategy worked. Data from the post-poll study conducted by Lokniti confirm that the BJP

## Preference for parties age-wise

Age groups	Vote (%)				
	Congress	Congress allies	BJP	BJP allies	Others
18-22 years	20 (+3)	5 (+3)	41 (+4)	7 (0)	28 (-7)
23-27 years	18 (-2)	6 (+3)	40 (+8)	7 (0)	29 (-8)
28-35 years	19 (0)	7 (+4)	39 (+6)	7 (0)	28 (-8)
36-45 years	20 (2)	7 (+4)	37 (+7)	7 (0)	29 (-11)
46-55 years	20 (0)	8 (+5)	36 (+6)	7 (1)	29 (-10)
56 years & above	19 (-1)	8 (+3)	35 (+7)	7 (-1)	31 (-8)
Overall vote share	19 (0)	7 (+4)	37 (+6)	7 (0)	29 (-9)

Figures in parentheses show shift in votes from 2014. Figures have been rounded off

emerged as the most preferred party among first-time young voters. In the 18-22 age group, 41% voted for the BJP in this election, which is four percentage points higher than the party's national vote share. The BJP's vote share increased by four percentage points among first-time young voters from 2014. However, this was comparatively lower than the party's gain from voters of other age groups. The party's vote share among those in the 23-27 age bracket was eight percentage points higher than what it was in 2014. Interestingly, the Congress's vote share among 18-22-year-olds was three percentage points higher than 2014. The support for the BJP also increased among young women voters.

It is true that there is no great difference between the youth vote for the BJP and what the party receives from voters of other age groups. But the Congress's relative inability to garner votes from second-time voters (23-27 years) and also from those in the 28-35 age bracket gave the BJP a considerable advantage. It is possible that having voted the BJP for two or three elections, these young vot-

ters may continue voting for the party in future elections, thus giving the BJP a long-term advantage.

## Busting some myths

This advantage can be seen across caste groups. The BJP, traditionally labelled as a party of Hindu upper castes, now has acceptance among younger voters belonging to other castes too. Among the lower OBCs, for instance, it saw a 14 percentage point increase in support among the youth from the last election. Nevertheless, a skew is still visible as young voters among upper OBCs and Dalits have not supported the party in such large numbers.

Similarly, the BJP could not find acceptance among young voters from non-Hindu communities. So its appeal among the youth remains limited to Hindu youth in particular. It is noteworthy that the BJP's acceptability saw a dip of 11 percentage points among youth from other religious minorities. Another myth which was busted in this election was that the BJP is an urban party. In this election, its vote share was higher among young voters in towns and

rural India than in cities.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was a pull factor for first-time voters. More than the party or the local candidate, for these voters the prime ministerial candidate was the most important consideration while voting. One-third of young BJP voters saw the prime ministerial candidate as the most important consideration while voting. This was nearly double the national average. This can also be affirmed by the fact that the same proportion (33%) of young BJP voters asserted that they would have voted for some other party had Mr. Modi not been the prime ministerial candidate. This figure was 10 percentage points higher than the national average. In States such as Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka, Mr. Modi's popularity among the youth was higher than the State average. Interestingly, in two southern States which have strong State-based parties, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, Mr. Modi was the most preferred Prime Minister among the youth.

The Balakot air strikes also gave a push to the BJP's campaign, as shown in the table. It would not be wrong to say this incident changed the discourse of the election and pushed issues like unemployment, price rise and agrarian distress to the background. This can be ascertained by the fact that young voters who considered joblessness as an issue voted for the BJP after hearing about the air strikes. In this election, the youth was clearly with Mr. Modi.

Amrit Negi & Jyoti Mishra are researchers at Lokniti-CSDS

## Support for the BJP cuts across castes

Caste/ Community	Voted for BJP (%)	
	NES post-poll 2019	NES post-poll 2014
Upper caste youth	56	53
Youth from upper OBC	45	36
Youth from lower OBC	58	44
Dalit youth	35	28
Adivasi youth	46	37
Muslim youth	7	8
Youth from other religious minorities	11	22
<b>Locality wise</b>		
Rural youth	40	34
Youth living in towns	44	35
Youth living in cities	38	34

## Importance of PM candidate

	Voted for party (%)	Voted for candidate (%)	Voted for PM candidate (%)
Young BJP voters (18-25 years)	36	28	33
First-time young BJP voters (18-22 years)	33	30	35
All voters	44	32	17

## Modi's magnetic pull

	Would have voted for some other party if Modi was not PM candidate (%)	Would have still voted BJP if Modi was not PM candidate (%)
Young BJP voters	32	50
First-time young BJP voters	33	49
All voters	23	51

## Nationalism overshadowed unemployment

	Voted for BJP in 2019 (%)
Young voters who considered joblessness a very serious issue and had not heard about Balakot strikes	30
Young voters who considered joblessness a very serious issue but had heard about Balakot strikes	37
Young voters who considered joblessness a somewhat serious issue and had not heard about Balakot strikes	32
Young voters who considered joblessness a somewhat serious issue but had heard about Balakot strikes	50