
The Dynamics of Electoral Politics: A Case Study of the Karnataka Assembly Elections, 1989

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An Overview

Free and fair elections play a major role in ensuring the successful working of any democratic polity. The Indian polity is a case in point. The decision of the Constituent Assembly to grant universal adult franchise was a momentous and bold decision. (Quoted in Narain, 1972) Dr. Rajendra Prasad called it 'an act of faith'. It was an act of faith not only in the common man of India but also in his practical common sense. In the Indian context, elections are both modern and modernising agents. They strive towards the realisation of the modern political goals of integration, nation-building and development on the one hand and serve as a link between the modern and traditional sectors of Indian life, on the other.

In this paper, the electoral dynamics in the state of Karnataka have been treated conceptually and thematically, both perceived as being inclusive of the nation's political life. Hence issues like party manifestoes, the pattern of electoral alliances, the strategy and process of nomination, the election campaign, the voter turnout, the voting behaviour, the poll verdict and analysis of the election results have all mingled in the kaleidoscope.

To put the analysis in a proper perspective it becomes necessary to briefly evaluate the important political developments in Karnataka prior to the formal announcement of the holding of elections. The political scenario that unfolds, is examined at all levels—national, regional, local and personal.

It may be recalled that on 10 August 1988 Ramakrishna Hegde resigned as Chief Minister accepting moral responsibility for the tapping of the

telephones of leading political figures (*Times of India*, 1988). S.R. Bommai succeeded Hegde as Chief Minister and was sworn in on 13 August 1988 (*Deccan Herald*, 1988). Devegowda who had earlier resigned from the Hegde Ministry in March 1988, was now back in the Cabinet retaining the portfolio of Irrigation and Public Works.

Meanwhile the polarisation of political forces which had triggered off the merger of a few major opposition parties at the national level climaxed with the formation of the Janata Dal. As a result the Janata MLAs in the state were required to sign affidavits pledging their support to the Janata Dal. Devegowda and his supporters opposed the merger and refused to sign the affidavits. On 19 January 1989, Devegowda resigned from the Cabinet (*Deccan Herald*, 1989a). He held a convention in Bangalore along with his supporters three days later, thus formalising a split in the Janata Party in Karnataka.

Declaration of President's Rule

The split within the Janata Party on the one hand and S.R. Bommai's decision to expand his Council of Ministers on the other further precipitated the crisis. On 19 April 1989 the Governor, P. Venkatasubbaiah in a report to the President indicated that 18 members of the ruling Janata Dal and one member of the BJP had withdrawn their support to the government. This, in his opinion, had resulted in the Bommai Ministry losing majority support. Further, the Governor held the view that no other party was in a position to form a government and hence there was no alternative but to declare President's rule. On 21 April 1989 both Houses of Parliament by voice vote approved the promulgation of President's rule in Karnataka following the dissolution of the State Assembly (*The Hindu*, 1989). President's rule was further extended in the state for another six months on 12 October 1989. A few days after the President's rule was extended the decision to go in for a General Election to the Lok Sabha was taken (*Indian Express*, 1989a).

Nomination of Candidates: Strategies and Considerations

There is much truth in the statement that half the electoral battle is won, if candidates are selected with political imagination and sagacity. In Karnataka, selection of candidates for the Assembly elections was by no means an easy task for any of the parties.

Congress (I): The complex situation in which the Congress party found itself is demonstrated by the fact that the KPCC (I) is estimated to have received 7,800 applications in all for 224 Assembly seats. Deep differences of opinion among the members of the Pradesh Elections Committee (PEC) virtually brought its working to a standstill—so much so that each one of

the 21 members were reported to have been told to submit individual lists. On 27 October the PEC members are believed to have split themselves into two groups—one consisting of 10 members and the other of 11 members. The two groups came up with their respective lists (*Deccan Herald*, 1989b). Both these lists, along with a list received from the district observers were submitted to the party High Command for a final decision.

The Congress Central Parliamentary Board announced the list of candidates nominated by the party to contest the Assembly elections on 31 October. There appeared to be simmering discontent within the party as a result of the High Command's decision on the party nominees to contest the elections. This led many to believe that certain changes in the original list were on the cards. On 3 November a press note was released by the KPCC (I) President Veerendra Patil conveying that the Central Parliamentary Board had decided to replace the Congress candidates (as announced in the list released on 31 October) in 28 constituencies (*Deccan Herald*, 1987).

Janata Dal: The state Janata Dal Executive unanimously adopted a resolution on 26 October asking the Janata Dal Vice-President Ramakrishna Hegde to lead the party's election campaign in Karnataka (*Times of India*, 1989). The task of preparing the list of candidates was entrusted to the State Janata Dal Parliamentary Board. After a great deal of speculation, intense lobbying and political activity, the party announced its list of candidates for the Assembly elections on 3 November (*Deccan Herald*, 1989c). The Janata Dal also offered to give the CPI and the CPM six seats each. While the CPI-M broadly agreed to this arrangement, the CPI decided to go it alone.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP): The BJP State President led the party in the elections. All efforts to forge seat adjustments with the other non-Congress parties failed to materialise. The President, L.K. Advani, announcing the strategy of his party, stated that his party had decided to go it alone in the Assembly polls (*The Statesman*, 1989).

Janata Party (JP): Having failed to arrive to any electoral understanding with the non-Congress parties, the Janata Party (JP) decided to contest the election on its own strength (*Times of India*, 1989).

Communist Party of India (CPI): The Communist Party of India, fielded candidates in as many as 18 Assembly constituencies. This followed the failure of seat adjustment talks with the Janata Dal. The State Secretary of the party, M.S. Krishnan, considered the Janata Dal offer of five Assembly seats to be 'totally unacceptable' to the CPI (*Indian Express*, 1989b). It may be recalled that in the previous Assembly elections (1985) the CPI was offered nine seats, of which it won four. However, in keeping with the party's national stand, it decided to support the Janata Dal in constituencies where it had not sponsored candidates.

The Election Manifestoes and the Election Campaign

The election manifestoes of the different parties were of a mixed character, a combination of critiques, programmes and strategies. The existing political climate was clearly reflected in the manifestoes of the various parties.

Every election campaign is a dual process of image-building and image-destruction. The election campaign in the state was overwhelmingly negative in nature. Each political party ventured to tarnish the image of the other. Campaigns went hi-tech in a big way. Extensive use was made of video films and audio cassettes. However, as in any other election, lung power was most noticeable, to get various messages across. Banners, posters and festoons sprang up all over the state. Other forms of campaigning included house-to-house campaigning, displaying cut-outs of political leaders both past and present at vantage points and presenting tableaux projecting the achievement of various political parties.

An Analysis of Party-Wise Performance in the Elections

Party Performance

On 24 November 1989, elections were held in Karnataka to elect 222 (elections in two constituencies were countermanded)¹ members to the Ninth Legislature Assembly. The overall performance of the different political parties and independents is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1
Performance of Political Parties and Independents in the November 1989 Elections

Party	Seats won Seats contested in parenthesis	Success rate
Congress (I)	176 (219)	80.36
Janata Dal	24 (208)	11.53
Janata Party (JP)	2 (215)	0.93
BJP	4 (119)	3.36
CPI	0 (18)	..
CPM	0 (7)	..
RPI	0 (15)	..
AIADMK	1 (1)	100.00
Lok Dal	0 (15)	..
KRRS	2 (108)	1.85
Independents and Others	13 (1086)	1.20
	222 (2011)	

¹ Elections were countermanded in Jayanagar and Mundargi due to the death of the candidates.

The success rate of the different parties in the context of the seats they contested and won is also indicated in Table 1.

Party-wise performance can also be assessed from the perspective of the leading contestants in each constituency. The principal contest was between the Congress (I) and the Janata Dal in most of the constituencies (Table 2). In no constituency was the battle primarily between the Janata Dal and the Janata Party (JP), Janata Dal and the BJP or the Janata Party (JP) and the BJP.

Table 2
Principal Contestants in the Assembly Elections, November 1989

Principal contestants first and second position	Number of constituencies
Congress (I) – Janata Dal	139
Congress (I) – Janata Party (JP)	38
Congress (I) – BJP	10
Congress (I) – CPM	3
Congress (I) – CPI	1
Congress (I) – Independents	16
Janata Dal – Independents	10
Janata Party (JP) – Independents	2
BJP – Independents	1
AIADMK – CPM	1
Independents – Independents	1
	222

A district-wise study of the performance of the Congress (I) shows that the party made a clean sweep of the seats at stake in Hassan, Chikmagalur and Kodagu districts. Its success rate was below 70 per cent in only three districts (a) Bidar—where it secured 2 of the 6 seats (33 per cent);² (b) Raichur—where it secured 5 of the 11 seats (45 per cent);³ and (c) Belgaum—where it secured 10 of the 18 seats (55 per cent).⁴ The Janata Dal drew a blank in as many as 7 districts.⁵

Correlation between Votes and Seats

A study of the relation between votes polled and seats secured reveals that while the Congress (I) secured only 43.85 per cent of the valid votes polled,

² In Bidar, the party was plagued by infighting and several rebel candidates entered the electoral fray.

³ In Raichur district too, there was infighting in the party and a feeling of discontent with the selection of candidates.

⁴ In Belgaum district, the Congress faced stiff competition from the Maharashtra Ekikaran Samithi in certain pockets.

⁵ In Gulbarga, Dakshina Kannada, Mandya, Hassan, Mysore, Kodagu and Chikmagalur. Interestingly, in Hassan district, the Janata Dal won all the seats and the Congress (I) drew a blank in the 1985 elections. In 1989, the trend was reversed.

it won a staggering 79.28 per cent of the seats. The Janata Dal polled 27.33 per cent of the valid votes but secured only 10.81 per cent of the seats. The incongruence in the case of the Janata Party (JP) is more pronounced. While the party secured over 11 per cent of the valid votes polled, it managed to win less than 1 per cent of the seats.

Table 3

Percentage of Votes Polled and Seats Secured by Parties in the November 1989 Elections

Party	Voies polled	% of votes polled	Seats won	% of seats won
Congress (I)	79,26,853	43.85	176	79.28
Janata Dal	29,40,120	27.33	24	10.81
Janata Party (JP)	20,64,079	11.42	2	0.90
BJP	7,37,555	4.08	0	..
CPI	1,08,000	0.60	0	..
AIADMK	32,928	0.18	1	0.45
KRRS	6,52,034	3.61	2	0.90
Others	16,16,505	8.39	13	5.86
	1,80,75,974	100.00	222	100.00

An analysis of the voting trend in the earlier elections also highlights a similar pattern. In the last nine General Elections, save on three occasions, the party that formed the government after the elections, did so on the basis of a minority vote (Table 4).

Table 4

Percentage of Votes Polled by the Party that Formed the Government after a General Election (Karnataka)

Year	Percentage of votes polled	Percentage of seats secured	Party
1952	46.35	72.73	Congress
1957	52.07	71.15	Congress
1962	50.05	66.83	Congress
1967	48.14	57.40	Congress
1972	51.49	76.38	Congress
1978	44.25	66.52	Congress (I)
1983	33.08	43.84	Janata
1985	43.84	62.05	Janata
1989	43.85	79.28	Congress (I)

In the 1985 elections the Congress (I) secured 41.10 per cent of the valid votes (Table 5). In the 1989 elections, it secured 43.85 per cent of the votes polled—an increase of a little over 2 per cent. However, in terms of seats won by the Congress party in the 1985 elections it won 29.45 per cent of the

seats and in 1989 it secured 79.28 per cent of the seats—an increase of nearly 50 per cent.

Table 5

Percentage of Votes Polled and Seats Won by Parties in the Elections to the Karnataka Legislative Assembly in 1978, 1983, 1985 and 1989

(Figures of Seats Won in All Elections in Brackets)

Party	1978		1983		1985		1989	
	Votes polled	Seats won	Votes polled	Seats won	Votes polled	Seats won	Votes polled	Seats won
Congress	44.25	66.52 (14)	40.32	36.32 (81)	41.10	29.45 (66)	43.85	79.28 (176)
Janata Dal	37.95	26.34 (59)	33.08	42.60 (95)	43.84	62.05 (159)	27.33	10.81 (24)
BJP			7.97	8.07 (8)	3.84	0.89 (2)	4.08	1.80 (4)
CPI	1.19	1.34 (3)	1.25	1.35 (3)	1.08	1.79 (4)	0.60	..
CPM	0.50	..	0.90	1.35 (3)	0.86	0.80 (2)	0.54	..
AIADMK	0.16	..	0.13	0.44 (1)	0.18	..	0.18	0.45 (1)
Janata (JP)							11.42 (2)	0.90 (2)
Independents and others	15.95	5.80 (13)	16.35	9.87 (22)	9.10	4.91 (11)	12.90	6.76 (13)

The first past the post system is largely responsible for this anomaly. It is in this context that the demand for a change in the present electoral system is increasingly being voiced. The adoption of the list system or the single transferable vote system may help mirror more effectively the voting pattern and preferences of the voter.

From the Eighth Assembly to the Ninth

For the purpose of the analysis of the performance of the sitting MLAs, only 220 sitting MLAs are being considered, as two seats were vacant at the time of the dissolution of the Eighth Assembly.⁶ Of the 220 sitting MLAs, only 165 were re-nominated to contest from the constituencies that had returned them in the last elections. Of the 165, only 61 were re-elected (less than 40 per cent). Most of the sitting MLAs who were re-elected belonged to the Congress (I) (45 out of 61). These facts are borne out by Table 6.

⁶ Further, in 2 constituencies the election was countermanded.

Table 6
Performance of Sitting MLAs

Party	Strength in previous House	Renominated	Elected	Defeated
Congress	65	53	45	8
Independent ^a		1	1	
Janata Dal	104	76	12	64
Independent ^b		3	—	3
BJP ^c		1	—	1
Janata Party (JP)	32	26	1	25
BJP ^d	2	2	1	—
CPI	4	2	—	2
CPM	2	1	—	1
Independents ^e	11	1	1	—
	220	165	61	104

^a The Congress (I) adopted one of the independents who had won the 1985 elections as an independent.

^b The Janata Dal adopted three independents, who had won the 1985 elections as independents.

^c The Janata Dal adopted a BJP MLA as its candidate. He had won the 1985 elections on the BJP ticket.

^d Of the two BJP sitting MLAs, one contested on the Janata Dal ticket (as indicated in footnote c) and one on the BJP ticket.

^e Of the 11 independent MLAs elected to the Eighth Assembly (1985), one contested the 1989 Assembly elections as a Congress candidate and three as Janata Dal candidates.

The rejection of several sitting MLAs by the electorate could be explained in the backdrop of several factors. The elections saw the defeat of several sitting Janata Dal MLAs. The electorate's displeasure at the Janata Party's internal squabbles also led to the defeat of all but one of the sitting Janata Party (JP) MLAs. The defeat of a sizable number of sitting MLAs can also be attributed to the general dissatisfaction with the performance of the sitting MLAs.

Hold on Constituencies: From the 1985 Elections to the 1989 Elections

The hold of the different parties on the constituencies can also be examined in the context of the seats wrested, retained and lost by the different parties in the 1989 elections as compared to the 1985 elections. The seats wrested by the Congress (I) are more or less directly proportionate to the seats lost by the Janata Dal.

Ninth Legislative Assembly: A Blend of Seniority and Fresh Talent

The electorate of Karnataka has ensured that in the Ninth Legislative Assembly there is a harmonious blend of fresh talent with seniority. Nearly

Table 7
Seats Wrested, Retained and Lost by Political Parties and Independents in November 1989 Elections

Party	Wrested	Retained	Lost
Congress (I)	122	54	12
Janata Dal	6	18	119
BJP	3	1	1
CPI	—	—	4
CPM	—	—	2
Janata Party (JP)	2	—	—
AIADMK	1	—	—
Independents	12	3	8
	146	76	146
	222		222

100 members of the legislature elected are entering the Legislative Assembly for the first time. A majority of them belong to the Congress (I).

Table 8
Terms Served by Legislators Belonging to the Different Parties

Party	1st term	2nd term	3rd term	4th term	5th term	6th term	7th term	8th term
Congress (I)	79	48	24	15	6	2	1	1
Janata Dal	10	10	2	2				24
Janata (JP)	1			1				2
BJP	1	2	1	—				4
AIADMK		1						1
Independents (including KRRS)	9	4	2					15

Multi-Cornered Contests: Causes and Consequences

The elections witnessed a record number of contestants entering the electoral fray. The number of contestants touched an all time high figure of 2,011. The number of contestants has been on the increase in successive elections.

An immediate fall-out of the presence of a large number of contestants has been the multi-cornered contests in all the constituencies. A straight contest was not witnessed even in a single constituency.

Besides Independents, the fielding of candidates by the Congress (I), Janata Dal and the Janata Party (JP) in nearly all the constituencies and the BJP in more than half the constituencies, propelled the contest in almost every constituency to its multi-cornered dimension.

Table 9
Total Number of Contestants—Karnataka Legislative Assembly Elections: 1952 to 1989

Election	Contestants	Seats
1989	2011	222
1985	1795	224
1983	1356	223
1978	1165	224
1972	815	216
1967	727	216
1962	644	208
1957	552	208
1952	394	99

Table 10
Multi-Cornered Contests: Assembly Elections, 1989

No. of contestants	No. of constituencies	No. of contestants	No. of constituencies
Three cornered	5	Thirteen cornered	6
Four cornered	14	Fourteen cornered	6
Five cornered	17	Fifteen cornered	5
Six cornered	27	Sixteen cornered	3
Seven cornered	40	Seventeen cornered	4
Eight cornered	19	Eighteen cornered	1
Nine cornered	20	Nineteen cornered	2
Ten cornered	15	Twenty cornered	2
Eleven cornered	14	Twenty-one cornered	3
Twelve cornered	16	Twenty-two cornered	1
		Twenty-three cornered	1
		Twenty-four cornered	1
			222

Role and Performance of Independents

The sharp rise in the number of independent candidates contesting the elections can be attributed to the inter-play of a wide variety of factors.

Individuals, who are not members of a political party, but nurse political ambitions, are known to enter the electoral fray as independents. There are also cases of individuals entering the contest as independents on being denied the party ticket. Further, parties too have often sponsored and supported independent candidates, to offset the chances of a rival candidate or split the vote on caste considerations. Sponsoring independents would also help political parties to increase their election agents in the polling booths and during the counting of votes. Independent candidates are also known to use the elections as a lever for political bargaining and greater publicity.

The 1989 elections saw the victory of 12 independents.⁷ Of the 12 independents, four belonged to the Maharashtra Ekikaran Samiti. The four MES victors were returned from traditional MES bastions. In a few cases, individuals who were denied the party ticket, contested the elections and emerged victorious.⁸ In the case of some other independent victors, the backing of a political party was evident.⁹ Some independent victors have, over the years, built up a strong political base in the constituency they were elected from.¹⁰ The independents also emerged victorious on account of the weak and lack-lustre candidates nominated by political parties.¹¹

Deposit Losing Candidates

Section 158 of the Representation of People's Act, 1951, states that a candidate who secures less than one-sixth of the valid votes polled, forfeits the security deposit. Of the 2,011 candidates who contested the elections, as many as 1,492 (74 per cent) forfeited their deposits.

Table 11
Party-wise Number of Contestants Who Forfeited Their Security Deposit

Party	No. of contestants who forfeited their deposit	Party	No. of contestants who forfeited their deposit
Congress (I)	7	CPM	3
Janata Dal	38	Lok Dal	15
Janata Party (JP)	153	RPI	14
BJP	104	KRRS	88
CPI	16	Independents	1054
		Total	1492

In the 1989 elections, the principal contest in most of the constituencies was between the Congress (I) and the Janata Dal candidates. This accounts for a lesser number of contestants belonging to these two parties forfeiting their deposits. In the case of the Janata Party (JP), the BJP and the CPI, a high incidence of deposit losing candidates can be attributed to the fielding of candidates by these parties in constituencies where their electoral prospects were very bleak.

⁷ In Table 1, in the column of independents and others, the figure 13 is mentioned. This includes one victor belonging to the Indian Union Muslim League.

⁸ Mallikarjun Diwatar (Koppal), T.B. Jayachandra (Kallambela) and Vijay Khadre (Bidar).

⁹ K. Bheemana (Kalmala).

¹⁰ Vatal Nagraj (Chamrajnagar).

¹¹ E. Vijay Kumar (Hosadurga), L.K. Shivaram Gowda (Nagamangala) and Basanagouda Amaregouda (Manvi).

Margins of Victory

An assessment of the margins of victory of the successful candidates is undertaken from the perspective of its percentage (margin of victory) in the context of the total valid votes polled.¹²

Table 12
Margins of Victory

Percentages of valid votes polled	Cong (I)	JD	JP	BJP	KRRS	Ind.	AIADMK	Total
0-1	2	5				2		9
1-5	21	9	1	3		1		35
5-10	33	5		1		3		42
10-20	65	3			2	2		72
20 & more	55	2	1			5	1	64
	176	24	2	4	2	13	1	222

The trend in the margin of victory of the victorious Congress (I) candidates is distinctly at variance with that of the successful non-Congress candidates. More than 70 per cent of the Congress (I) contestants who emerged victorious, won by margins that were more than 10 per cent of the valid votes polled. The margins of victory were in these cases, overwhelming and substantial. On the other hand, 19 of the 24 successful Janata Dal candidates and all the 4 BJP victors, won by victory margins that were less than 10 per cent of the valid votes polled.

Split in the Non-Congress Vote

The 1989 elections witnessed a significant split in the non-Congress vote. The inability of the non-Congress parties to form an alliance and thus force straight contests, paid rich dividends to the Congress (I).

As a result of the disunity among the non-Congress parties—further accentuated by their internal squabbles—the voter was faced with a choice of voting either for the Congress (I) or several non-Congress parties, which had the potential to collectively appear strong but in reality portrayed a dismal picture of opportunism and weakness. This worked decidedly to the advantage of the Congress (I).

In as many as 38 constituencies the combined votes polled by the candidates of the non-Congress parties were higher than that of the Congress (I) candidate. The split in the non-Congress vote undoubtedly ensured the victory of the Congress nominees. While the non-Congress parties have

¹² The reason for employing this approach is that there is a vast numerical difference in the total number of voters from constituency to constituency.

realised the pressing need for unity, political considerations and personal differences have invariably come to the forefront, thus, forestalling any hope of unity and brighter electoral prospects.

Political Apathy

The health and vitality of a democratic polity is often mirrored in the enthusiasm displayed by the electorate in exercising their right to vote. The 1989 Karnataka Assembly elections saw more than two-thirds of the electorate (67.8 per cent) casting their vote. The percentage of voting in the 1989 elections is the second highest, when compared to the earlier Assembly elections in the state.

Table 13
Percentage of Votes Polled: Elections to the Karnataka Legislative Assembly—1952 to 1989

Year	Percentage of votes polled
1989	67.80
1985	67.21
1983	66.69
1978	71.96
1972	61.71
1967	62.72
1962	59.55
1957	52.55
1952	50.38

District-wise the highest voter turnout was in Mandya district. The first six districts, with respect to voter turnout, have invariably retained the same position, with minor changes, in the earlier elections also. Significantly, the district to record the lowest voter turnout was Bangalore (urban). In the 1985 elections too, this district recorded the lowest voter turnout.

The apathy of the urban voter appears to be more pronounced than that of the rural voter. An increasing number of voters in the urban areas appear to have been affected by a wave of disinterest triggered off by the lack-lustre performance of the political parties and the poor track record of the candidates.

The elections also saw certain sections of the electorate expressing their dissent by way of boycotting the elections. The indifferent attitude of the political parties and their leadership to the problems of the people appear to have been responsible for the boycott of the elections in some areas.

Invalid Votes

The 1989 elections registered a phenomenal increase in the percentage of

Table 14
District-wise Percentage of Votes Polled

District	Percentage of votes polled	District	Percentage of votes polled
Mandya	76.51	Kodagu	66.97
Kolar	75.05	Bijapur	66.81
Hassan	73.74	Bellary	66.63
Tumkur	71.92	Bangalore (Rural)	65.88
Mysore	71.75	Chitradurga	65.52
Shimoga	71.20	Gulbarga	60.75
Chikmagalur	70.59	Bidar	60.01
Dharwad	70.34	Raichur	59.11
Dakshina Kannada	69.35	Bangalore (Urban)	57.16
Belgaum	69.05		
Uttara Kannada	68.30	State Average	67.80

Table 15
Percentage of Invalid Votes in Successive Elections to the Karnataka
Legislative Assembly: 1962-89

Election	Percentage of invalid votes
1989	5.73
1985	1.72
1983	2.47
1978	2.72
1972	2.94
1967	5.66
1962	6.03

invalid votes. Thus, the process of gradual reduction in the percentage of invalid votes that had been achieved over successive Assembly elections, now stands reversed. When viewed district-wise, those districts that have a comparatively lower literacy rate registered a higher percentage of invalid votes and those districts that have a comparatively higher rate of literacy have registered a lower percentage of invalid votes.

A high percentage of invalid votes in an election does not speak well for the successful working of a democratic polity. It, many a time, distorts the electoral verdict.¹³ Several reasons can be advanced to explain the phenomenon of a high incidence of invalid votes. The simultaneous conduct of the Parliamentary and Assembly elections could have resulted in some confusion and uncertainty in the minds of the voter, in the event of clear instructions and advice not being given by the polling office. Further, the phenomenal rise in the number of contestants, the change of election

¹³ In five constituencies, the percentage of invalid votes was more than 10 per cent of the total votes polled.

Table 16
District-wise Percentage of Invalid Votes—Karnataka Assembly Elections: 1989

District	Percentage of invalid votes	District	Percentage of invalid votes
Bangalore (City)	3.86	Dharwad	6.16
Dakshina Kannada	4.30	Chitradurga	6.26
Bangalore (Rural)	4.52	Mysore	6.37
Hassan	4.54	Chikmagalur	6.48
Shimoga	5.03	Bidar	7.07
Kodagu	5.10	Bellary	7.24
Bijapur	5.20	Uttara Kannada	7.25
Mandya	5.28	Gulbarga	7.56
		Raichur	7.59
		State Average	5.73

symbols of two of the major parties—the Janata Dal and the Janata Party (JP)—just prior to the elections, could have also contributed to the confusion that resulted in a steep rise in the percentage of invalid votes. Voters, wantonly, ensuring that their votes become invalid, as a form of expressing protest and dissatisfaction, cannot be ruled out.

Role and Performance of Social Groups

The caste factor has been a major input in India's electoral politics. Karnataka, too, has been a witness to the crucial role that caste calculations have come to play in the electoral dynamics. Caste considerations have invariably been a key deciding factor in the choice of candidates by the political parties, for contesting the elections. It has also played a decisive role in the election results.

In the 1989 elections, all the political parties gave due weightage to the caste factor while choosing their candidates. In Karnataka, the traditional domination of the Lingayats and Vokkaligas, has been confirmed by the caste composition of the newly elected Assembly.

The Lingayats constitute a little more than 15 per cent of the state population and have been elected from 60 constituencies (27 per cent). Most of the Lingayat victories have been in the northern part of Karnataka.¹⁴ This region accounts for 75 per cent of the Lingayat victories.

Party-wise, there are 38 Lingayats in the Congress (I), 15 in the Janata Dal, 1 in the BJP, and 6 among the Independents. It is interesting to note that 15 of the 24 Janata Dal MLAs (62.5 per cent) are Lingayats. The possible explanation lies in the fact that 16 of the 24 Janata Dal victories have been in the north Karnataka region.

¹⁴ Belgaum, Bellary, Bidar, Bijapur, Chitradurga, Dharwad, Gulbarga and Raichur districts.

Table 17
Performance of the Various Communities and Castes in the 1989 Assembly Elections

Caste/Community	Percentage of the total state population	Total number of seats won	Percentage of seats won in the 1989 elections
Lingayats	15.57	60	27.03
Vokkaligas	12.97	42	18.92
SC/ST	13.72	36	16.22
Brahmins	4.28	8	3.60
Kurubas	6.88	8	3.60
Marathas	4.07	10	4.50
Edigas	2.39	10	4.50
Vaishyas	0.68	1	0.45
Jains	0.75	4	1.81
Nayaks	0.57	8	3.60
Other BCs	25.40	21	9.46
Muslims	10.63	12	5.41
Christians	2.09	2	0.90
Total	100.00	222	100.00

The Vokkaligas constitute nearly 13 per cent of the state population and have won in 42 constituencies, thus constituting nearly 19 per cent of the new Assembly. Most of the Vokkaliga victories—80 per cent—have been in the southern region of Karnataka.¹⁵ Thirty-eight of the 42 Vokkaliga legislators are in the Congress (I), one each in the Janata Dal and Janata (JP) and two were Independents.

In Karnataka, 33 constituencies have been reserved for the Scheduled Castes and 2 for the Scheduled Tribes. One General Constituency¹⁶ has returned a candidate belonging to the Scheduled Castes. Thus, the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, who constitute around 14 per cent of the state population, have emerged victorious in 36 constituencies—forming a little over 16 per cent of the new Assembly. Party-wise, there are 33 in the Congress, one each in the Janata Dal, Janata Party (JP) and the AIADMK.

The Brahmins, who constitute around 4 per cent of the state population, have been elected from 8 constituencies, constituting nearly 4 per cent of the new Assembly. Party-wise, there are 5 in the Congress (I), 2 in the Janata Dal and 1 in the BJP.

The Kurubas, who constitute nearly 7 per cent of the state population, have won from 8 constituencies, thus forming nearly 4 per cent of the new House. Seven have been elected on the Congress ticket and one on the BJP ticket.

The Marathas constitute a little over 4 per cent of the state population

¹⁵ Bangalore (urban and rural), Chikamagalur, Dakshina Kannada, Hassan, Kodagu, Kolar, Mysore and Mandya districts.

¹⁶ Anekal.

and have won from 10 constituencies, thus constituting nearly 5 per cent of the new Assembly. Party-wise, 4 are in the Congress and 2 in the Janata Dal. All the 4 MES victors are from this community.

The Edigas constitute a little over 2 per cent of the state population and have been returned from 10 constituencies, thus forming nearly 5 per cent of the new Assembly. Party-wise, 8 belonged to the Congress and one each to the Janata Dal and BJP.

The Vaishyas constitute a little more than 0.5 per cent of the state population and one member of this community has been elected.

The Jains constitute a little more than 0.5 per cent of the state population, 4 have been elected, thus constituting 2 per cent of the new Assembly. Three of them were elected on the Congress ticket and 1 as an independent.

The Naiks constitute a little over 0.5 per cent of the state population and have been elected from 8 constituencies, thus forming nearly 4 per cent of the new House. Seven were elected on the Congress ticket and 1 on the Janata Dal ticket.

The Muslims constitute a little over 10 per cent of the state population and have been elected from 12 constituencies, thus constituting a little over 5 per cent of the new House. All but one (Muslim League) were elected on the Congress ticket.

The Christians constitute a little over 2 per cent of the state population and have two representatives in the new House. Both belong to the Congress party.

Role and Performance of Women

Prior to the announcement of the elections, the major political parties—especially the Congress (I) and the Janata Dal—had expressed themselves in favour of giving greater representation to women while distributing the party tickets. However, when it came to actual decision-making, no party kept its promise of giving adequate representation to women. The Congress (I) gave the party ticket to only 11 women—a mere 5 per cent of the total seats it contested. The Janata Dal gave the party ticket to only four women—a mere 2 per cent of the seats it contested.

Only nine women were elected to the new Assembly. All of them hail from the ranks of the Congress (I). Women constitute only 4 per cent of the new Assembly.

Concluding Observations

Free, fair and periodic elections, are verily, the touchstone of democracy. The election process, when scrupulously adhered to, strengthens the faith of the citizen in the democratic process. Elections are also a referendum on the performance of the government in particular and the working of the

Table 18
Women Candidates and Their Performance in the 1989 Assembly Elections

Party	Contested	Elected
Congress	11	9
Janata Dal	4	—
BJP	3	—
CPI	1	—
CPM	1	—
RPI	1	—
Independents	49	—
	72	9

political system in general. The 1989 elections to the Karnataka Legislative Assembly, have more than demonstrated this fact. This election can be considered as significant in the larger context of Karnataka politics.

One crucial sphere that vitiates the norm of non-interference of the Executive in the election process, is seen with regard to the timing of the elections. Elections have always been timed to suit the ruling party in power and this has worked to the disadvantage of the opposition parties. The Karnataka Legislative Assembly was dissolved in April 1989 and elections were held only after a gap of more than seven months. There appears to be no logical reason for this delay. The calculations of the then ruling party at the centre, appear to have held sway.

A free and fair election not only involves impartiality in the conduct of elections but also no special advantage to any group or party with respect to the timing of the elections. The ruling party deciding the time of the election to suit its political needs does not augur well for democracy. This lacuna can easily be rectified if elections are scheduled as per a clearly defined time-table that gives no opportunity for manipulation. Unless circumstances so warrant there must be no provision for the dissolution of the Assembly. The premature dissolution of an Assembly should be permitted only when no party enjoys a majority in the Lower House. In such cases too, provisions should be made to legally ensure that the Election Commission holds the election within two months of the dissolution of the Assembly. Such a provision would pre-empt any temptation to misuse authority.

It can also be by law provided, that under normal circumstances, elections will be held two weeks prior to the expiry of the term of the existing House. Such a law would strengthen the Election Commission without in any way increasing its power.

The sudden and dramatic announcement of the Assembly elections in Karnataka, caught the political parties—except the Congress (I)—unawares. This resulted in frantic preparations and in many cases faulty choice of party candidates (by all parties including the Congress [I]). This, in turn,

led to simmering discontent amongst the rank and file in the parties. The frequent alterations made in the party list of candidates and the delay in its announcements further tarnished the image of the parties. There were cases of candidates filing their nominations from several constituencies, unsure as to which constituency would be allotted to them!

The election results have very glaringly reflected the anomaly between the votes polled and seats won by the various parties. While the Congress party won nearly 80 per cent of the seats it polled only 43.85 per cent of the votes. As a result, the seats won do not effectively reflect the votes polled. However, this phenomenon of the ruling party getting a minority mandate is nothing unusual in the Indian context. Thus, the present electoral system—the first past the post system—very often does not reflect the popular will. The seat-vote distortion has reached grave proportions under this system. Minor modifications in the electoral system become imperative, in this context. The suggestion of holding a second run-off between the top two contestants, in the event of no candidate securing majority of votes in a constituency, merits scrutiny.

The elections also saw the defeat of several sitting MLAs, most of whom belonged to the Janata Dal and the Janata Party (JP). Their defeat was a reflection upon the image of the legislators and an expression of the people's displeasure at the internal squabbles that the parties indulged in.

In spite of the commitment of all political parties to give adequate representation to women, precious little has been done in this regard. The political parties must urgently address themselves to the question of setting up a convention of giving adequate representation to women while preparing their list of candidates.

Political parties and contestants have a major role to play in mobilising the voters during the elections and evoking their interest in the elections. Political parties, public bodies and the press have a special duty to educate the people about the correct way of voting. The proposal to use electronic voting machines is welcome as it would eliminate invalidity of votes.

The failure of the non-Congress parties to reach an electoral understanding adversely affected their performance. The Congress richly benefited from the split in the non-Congress vote.

Caste and community considerations continued to play an important role in the elections. The two dominant castes—the Lingayats and the Vokkaligas—have cornered more seats than their numerical strength warranted. On the other hand, the representation of the Backward Communities is proportion-wise, less than their numerical strength.

The election results have presented an admixture of negative as well as positive voting patterns. The Karnataka electorate decisively gave its verdict in favour of a change in government. In the light of the study certain electoral reforms have been suggested to ensure that the voice of the voter and the hopes and aspirations of the electorate are truly reflected

in the working of the system. Improvement in the quality of the people's representatives automatically improves the quality of democracy.

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