

Social Base of the BJP in Karnataka

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The BJP's victory in Karnataka heralded the party coming to power for the first time in a state, south of the Vindhyas. This paper analyses the factors that account for the BJP and the social base of party support. The paper argues that the rise and growth of the BJP is directly linked to the widening of the social base of support for the party in the state. Based on the survey data of the National Election Study (NES) 2009 of Lokniti-CSDS, the paper examines the support base from the perspective of six important variables: age, gender, caste, educational level, economic status and place of residence. The study finds that the BJP's support was higher among the younger generation, more educated, affluent and the middle class, the upper castes and the Lingayat community. The paper also shows that the support for the BJP is linked to who is its principal opposition in the state.

Introduction

The paper focuses on outlining the support enjoyed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) across social groups in Karnataka and attempts to make an assessment of its rise and growth in the backdrop of the support it has received from different social formations.

Rich data base produced by the Lokniti-Programme of Comparative Democracy at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi is primary source of information for this paper. They have been conducting the National Election Study (NES) since 1996.¹

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They also have done a survey around the time of each of the state assembly elections. The researcher has accessed the National Election Study data since 1996, to track the social profile of those who have supported the BJP in Karnataka.

Six variables are taken into account: age, gender, caste, educational level, economic status and place of residence in this study. It has often been asserted that the study of the social profile of any political party at the state level would have to take into account the nature of electoral competition in the state and the principal political rival of the party being analysed (Yadav and Palshikar, 2009a). Thus, when examining the social profile of the BJP, the fact that its principal opponent in the state is the Congress and the Janata Dal, would need to be kept in mind. As this is a survey done around the time of elections, the performance of that party also needs to be taken into account. To assess the social base of the BJP, NES data from five rounds of elections are taken into account. NES 1996 was conducted around the time of the 1996 Lok Sabha elections in which the Janata Dal won a majority of the seats in the state. In 1998, the BJP-Lok Shakti alliance swept the polls. In 1999, when there were simultaneous polls to the state legislature and to the Lok Sabha, the Congress performed well. In 2004, when the state again had simultaneous polls, the BJP did exceptionally well in the Lok Sabha elections from the state and emerged as the single largest party in the Assembly. In the 2008 Assembly polls, the BJP fell short of a majority by two seats and formed the government with the support of independents.²

Analysis of the BJP Support Base

Age

An analysis of the survey data indicates that the BJP in Karnataka seems to enjoy a higher percentage of support from the younger voters (below 25) as compared to those from the older age groups. In every election since 1996 (except in 1998) the support for the BJP is highest in the below 25 age group. The proportion of increase in support across age groups is more or less the same.

Table 1
Support for BJP in Karnataka across Age Groups 1996-2008

Year	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	Over 56
2008	37	35	34	31	31
2004	38	34	35	34	33
1999	34	22	27	24	29
1998	23	28	29	28	26
1996	28	21	17	18	16

Source: Lokniti/CSDS Data Unit

The pattern of support across age groups varies significantly for the BJP and the Congress. If the BJP tends to get more support from the younger voters, the mainstay of the Congress support is the middle aged and older voter. Table 2 clearly indicates that the Congress support across elections (except 1998) is much more among the 25+ age group and increases with the increase of age. On the other hand in the case of the BJP, its support is significantly higher in the younger age group among voters in the state.

Table 2
Support for BJP and Congress in Karnataka across Age Groups 1996-2008

Year	BJP					Congress				
	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	Over 56	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	Over 56
2008	37	35	34	31	31	32	34	35	38	38
2004	38	34	35	34	33	32	38	40	35	39
1999	34	22	27	24	29	43	46	42	51	47
1998	23	28	29	28	26	42	30	35	37	41
1996	28	21	17	18	16	28	33	29	28	33

Source: Lokniti/CSDS Data Unit

Gender

NES data from 1996 to 2008 indicates that the BP has enjoyed lesser support from among the women as compared to the men. It must be stressed that over the years, the gap is narrowing. NES 1996 data shows that the gap was over three percentage points. In the 1999 polls, when the BJP performed poorly, NES data reveals the gap was as high as 13 percentage points. In the 2004 poll, there was no gender difference in support for the BJP, while in 2008, there was just a three percentage point gap in the support enjoyed by the BJP among men and women.

It is relevant to note that the NES data shows that in Karnataka, the Congress party has always had a higher degree of support among women as compared to men. This is true across elections on which NES data is

available. Even when the Congress has performed poorly in a poll, its votes share among women has been higher than men.

Table 3
Support for BJP in Karnataka by Gender 1996-2008

Gender	2008	2004	1999	1998	1996
BJP Men	35	35	47	40	23
BJP Women	32	35	34	37	19

Source: Lokniti/CSDS Data Unit

Table 4
Support for BJP and Congress in Karnataka across Gender 1996-2008

Gender	2008	2004	1999	1998	1996
BJP Men	35	35	47	40	23
BJP Women	32	35	34	37	19
Congress Men	34	35	40	37	24
Congress Women	36	39	50	36	36

Source: Lokniti/CSDS Data Unit

Educational Level

The support for the BJP amongst those who have had the benefit of education is much higher than among those who are less educated. It is clear that as the level of education reduces, the support for the BJP also reduces. This is in direct contrast to the educational background of Congress supporters. In the case of the Congress, as the educational level increases the support for the party reduces.

Table 5
Support for BJP and Congress in Karnataka by Educational Level

Year	BJP				Congress			
	Illiterate	Up to Primary	Upto Matric	College and Above	Illiterate	Up to Primary	Upto Matric	College and Above
2008	27	31	36	39	41	36	35	30
2004	30	34	33	46	44	38	52	26
1999	18	26	39	47	55	45	36	21
1998	22	39	30	30	42	31	26	32
1996	16	20	27	39	37	25	23	17

Source: Lokniti/CSDS Data Unit

Traditionally, the BJP has been considered a party which tends to appeal more to the educated sections of society as compared to those who

have not had access to education. Survey data shows that this is clearly evident in the case of the party in Karnataka. In all the five elections for which National Election Study data is available, except in 1998, the party did the best among those who have studied up to college level.

Table 6
Support for BJP in Karnataka by Educational Level

Education Level	2008	2004	1999	1998	1996
Illiterate	27	30	18	22	16
Upto Primary	31	34	26	39	20
Upto Matric	36	33	39	30	27
College and Above	39	46	47	30	39

Source: Lokniti/CSDS Data Unit

Economic Level

Do the BJP supporters have a typical economic status profile? Survey data in Karnataka does reveal a pattern. The party does have consistently high support among the middle class. Over the years, it appears to have consolidated its presence among this segment of society. Among the rich, the BJP has consistent support across the years irrespective of how it performed in the polls. Among the poor and very poor, the party has seen a rise in support especially in the two elections held in the 2000. It also needs to be stressed that in 1998, as the BJP-Lok Shakti alliance did well in Karnataka, its support among the different economic groups (especially the poor and very poor) was reasonably high. Many would argue that the BJP gained from the alliance with the Lok Shakti and was able to ensure some of the traditional support base of the Janata Party to the BJP (Shastri, 2004). Thus, the analysis reveals that the BJP in Karnataka has maintained its support base among the rich, consolidated its support among the middle class and started gaining support among the poor and very poor.

Table 7
Support for BJP and Congress in Karnataka across Economic Sections 1996-2008

Year	Rich	Middle	Poor	Very Poor
Rich	41	39	40	41
Middle	45	35	30	41
Poor	39	31	30	41
Very Poor	39	30	11	27

Source: Lokniti/CSDS Data Unit

If one were to compare the support base of the Congress and BJP from the perspective of the economic level of the voters, it is noticed that the poor and very poor are the mainstay of the Congress supporters. In the 1999 elections Congress has done well (1999) it has a lot to do with the overwhelming support of the poor and very poor. The support that the BJP enjoyed from the very poor in this election, plummets to just over 10 per cent. The party does not seem as popular among the rich and middle class. If the Congress has a higher vote share than the BJP among the poor and very poor, the BJP has much greater support than the Congress among the Rich and Middle class.

Table 8

Support for BJP and Congress in Karnataka across Economic Sections 1996-2008

Year	Rich	Middle	Poor	Very Poor	Rich	Middle	Poor	Very Poor
2008	41	45	39	39	37	34	42	41
2004	39	35	31	30	30	32	39	41
1999	40	30	30	11	35	38	42	66
1998	41	41	41	27	31	31	35	40
1996	40	38	16	18	20	19	26	35

Source: Lokniti/CSDS Data Unit

Place of Residence

Does the support base of the BJP vary across urban and rural areas in Karnataka? It has generally been argued that the BJP grew as a party that had its essentially support in urban areas (Hansen, 1999). Initially, even in Karnataka the party was able to emerge victorious in urban and semi-urban constituencies (Shastri 1995). Survey data reveals that, across elections the BJP has higher percentage of support in urban areas as compared to the rural parts of the state. In every election since 1996 for which survey data is available, the BJP's vote share in urban areas is clearly higher than in rural areas. It needs to be stressed that the vote's share of the BJP in rural areas has been registering a rise with every successive election. In the elections that it fared poorly (1996 and 1999), its vote share in rural areas was significantly low. In urban areas too, the vote share of the BJP has been rising, especially in 1998 and 2004 when it did exceptionally well. In 2008, its vote share in urban areas did not register any significant increase (in fact it was less than in the 2004 poll) on account of the Janata Dal (S) doing reasonably well in urban areas. This to a certain extent is linked to the reasonably good image

the JD(S) Chief Minister Kumaraswamy especially among the younger generation in urban areas.

Table 9

Support for BJP in Karnataka by Place of Residence 1996-2008

Place of Residence	2008	2004	1999	1998	1996
Rural	34	32	29	34	20
Urban	35	43	31	37	28

Source: Lokniti/CSDS Data Unit

If the BJP has had consistently higher support in urban areas as compared to rural areas, the reverse is true of the Congress. Survey data reveals that the Congress has always enjoyed more support in rural areas as compared to urban. In 1999, when it did well, its support in rural areas registered a significant increase.

Table 10

Support for BJP and Congress in Karnataka by Place of Residence 1996-2008

Year	BJP		Congress	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
2008	34	35	35	35
2004	32	43	38	32
1999	29	31	49	33
1998	34	37	38	25
1996	20	28	30	30

Source: Lokniti/CSDS Data Unit

Caste

The caste factor has been important in understanding and explaining the politics of the state. The caste configuration in a state is critical to explaining electoral results (Yadav and Palshikar, 2009b). Karnataka politics has seen the crucial role played by the dominant castes (Manor and Raghavan, 2009). The Vokkaliga and Lingayat community – two peasant castes in rural areas have been considered as the dominant castes in Karnataka. Their dominance is not on account of their numerical strength³ but in terms of the power and influence that they wield. In all the State Legislative Assemblies elected to date, the two communities account for over half the legislators. At times their numerical strength has been close to two thirds of the house. Have the dominant castes played any role in the rise and growth of the BJP in Karnataka?

Across the country, studies have shown that the Upper Castes have traditionally voted for the BJP (Yadav 1996). This hold good for Karnataka too. Especially when the party did well, the Upper Castes have solidly supported the BJP. In the 1996 polls, when the Janata Dal got a majority of the Lok Sabha seats in Karnataka, its share of the Upper Caste vote came close to that of the BJP. It would be relevant to note that the presence of Ramakrishna Hegde, a respected leader from the Brahmin community may have accounted for a surge in Upper Caste vote for the Janata Dal. Once Hegde left the Janata Dal and formed his Lok Shakti and contested the next elections in alliance with the BJP (1998), the alliance's share of Upper Caste votes rose to 57 per cent. It is clear that in 1998, besides its traditional Upper Caste votes, the BJP benefitted from the alliance with Ramakrishna Hegde's Lok Shakti. In 1999, though the BJP led alliance did badly, it still secured half the Upper Caste vote, much higher than what was secured by the other parties. It further consolidated the Upper Caste vote in the 2004 elections in which it won a majority of the seats. However, in 2008, there was a slight dip in the share of Upper Caste vote for the BJP. Though its vote share among the Upper Castes was higher than that of other formulations, it is important to record the fact that the Janata Dal (S) did well in urban areas and garnered close to 12 per cent of the Upper Caste vote. As mentioned earlier in this narration, this may have been on account of the popularity of the Janata Dal (S) Chief Minister Kumaraswamy with youth in urban and semi-urban areas.

Table 11
Caste Support for BJP in Karnataka 1996-2008

Caste	2008	2004	1999	1998	1996
Upper Caste	52	61	50	57	35
Lingayat	68	60	57	63	37
Vokkaliga	17	18	30	26	27
Non Dominant OBC's	40	31	38	40	21
Scheduled Castes	30	30	30	13	3
Scheduled Tribes	41	38	38	36	26
Muslims	16	19	12	10	6

Source: Lokniti/CSDS Data Unit

A critical factor that has contributed to the rise of the BJP in Karnataka is the support the party has garnered from the powerful Lingayat community. This community has a significant presence in Northern Karnataka, a region where BJP has achieved tremendous success especially in the late 1990s and the 2000s. It is important to record that the Congress

party had lost the support of the Lingayat community in the early 1990s when a prominent and influential Lingayat leader, Veerendra Patil was removed as the Chief Minister by the party High Command in 1990. The party was subsequently never able to re-establish its support base in the community. There were also not many mass based Lingayat leaders given prominence in the party. On the other hand, the BJP projected a Lingayat leader, B.S. Yedyurappa. The Janata Dal too had leadership troika in the 1980s and early 1990s who hailed from the Brahmin (Ramakrishna Hegde), Lingayat (S.R. Bommai) and Vokkaliga (H.D. Deve Gowda) community. Through the early 1990's, the troika projected a collective leadership in the Janata Dal. It was able to defeat the Congress in the 1994 Assembly elections and form the government. Two years later, the Janata Dal won a majority of seats in Karnataka in the Lok Sabha polls (1996). Survey data reveals that the party was able to garner close to three of every 10 Lingayat votes. Though a Brahmin, Hegde was deeply respected by the Lingayats of northern Karnataka (Shastri, 1996). After Hegde fell out with the Janata Dal and floated his Lok Shakti, the BJP-Lok Shakti alliance was able to garner over 60 per cent of the Lingayat votes. Even when the BJP - Janata Dal (U) alliance fared badly in 1999, they managed to secure a significant chunk of the Lingayat votes. In 2004, the BJP found support among this community and in 2008, they secured over two-thirds of the Lingayat vote. The success of the BJP is closely linked to its ability to consolidate the Lingayat vote. In the 2008 Assembly campaign the party projected itself as the only one which could give the state a Lingayat Chief Minister (Shastri and Padmavathi, 2009). This helped further strengthen the support the party enjoyed in this community.

If the Lingayat vote has got consolidated behind the BJP, the votes of the other dominant caste - Vokkaligas has been split across the three major players - Congress, Janata Dal and BJP. Survey data reveals that in the 1996 Lok Sabha poll, more than two thirds of the Vokkaliga vote went in favour of the Janata Dal. The state has at that point of time a Vokkaliga Chief Minister (H.D. Deve Gowda) after many years. The BJP was able to garner some support among the Vokkaliga community in 1996. In 1998, when the BJP-Lok Shakti won a majority of the seats, the Janata Dal continued to secure a significant chunk of the Vokkaliga vote (close to 43 per cent) with the rest being shared by the Congress and the JP-Lok Shakti alliance. 1999 saw a three way split in the Vokkaliga vote. The Congress had projected a Vokkaliga Chief Ministerial candidate (S.M. Krishna) and the party was able to secure over one third of the Vokkaliga vote. A quarter of the Vokkaliga vote continued to go to the Janata Dal, with the BJP-Janata Dal (U) claiming

the rest. Year 2004 saw the Janata Dal (S) consolidating its position among the Vokkaligas (44 per cent of vote) with the Congress following closely and the BJP securing a mere 18 per cent of the Vokkaliga vote. 2008 again saw a three way split in the Vokkaliga vote, with the Janata Dal (S) securing the highest percentage, followed by the Congress and the BJP. It is clearly evident that the BJP has not been able to consolidate its support among the Vokkaliga community. Two factors could explain this trend. The presence of prominent and influential leaders of the community in the Janata Dal (S) and Congress has ensured that the Vokkaliga vote gets split. Secondly, having consolidated the Lingayat vote, the BJP found it difficult to simultaneously appeal for support to the Vokkaliga community.

The non-dominant Other Backward Castes (OBC) are a major force in Karnataka politics. They were given a powerful voice by the first non-dominant caste OBC Chief Minister Devraj Urs (Manor and Raghavan, 2009). It has also to be noticed that without the backing of the non dominant OBC's it is difficult for a party to come to power. In 1996, the Janata Dal was in a position to garner a significant chunk of the non-dominant OBC vote (38 per cent). In 1998, when the BJP-Lok Shakti alliance won a majority of the Lok Sabha seats from the state, it secured more than four of every 10 non-dominant OBC votes. The alliance with the Lok Shakti helped the BJP to consolidate its presence among this community. Later in 1999, when the Congress came to power in the state and also won a majority of the Lok Sabha seats from the state, the non-dominant OBC vote swung in favour of the party (over 43 per cent). In 2004, there was a three way split in the Non-dominant OBC vote. This possibly explains why no party secured a majority in the legislature. In 2008, the BJP consolidated its presence among the non-dominant OBC's. The Congress too did reasonably well among the non-dominant OBC's in 2008. The BJP has thus not been in a position to make much headway in garnering the non-dominant OBC vote. This could be linked to their being perceived, in several regions of Northern Karnataka (where the non-dominant OBCs have a presence) as the spokespersons of Lingayat interests.

Does the BJP has support among the Scheduled Castes? Many have looked at Scheduled Castes support by assessing the victory pattern in reserved constituencies. It would be relevant to note that in the reserved constituencies, the voters hail from all groups though the candidate may belong to the category the seat is reserved for. A more effective way of understanding the support that the BJP enjoys among the Scheduled Castes is by assessing survey data. Traditionally, the Scheduled Castes votes have

generally stayed with the Congress party in Karnataka (Shastri and Vinod, 1991). Even after the emergence of a competitive party system, the Congress continued to enjoy strong support among the Scheduled Castes. Even in the 1996 Lok Sabha elections, when Janata Dal won a majority of the seats, the Congress secured more than one third of the Scheduled Castes vote. The Janata Dal secured one fourth and just three per cent voted in favour of the BJP. The BJP-Lok Shakti alliance, managed to increase their vote share among the Scheduled Castes to 13 per cent in 1998. In this election, more than two-thirds of the Scheduled Caste vote went in favor of the Congress. Even though the BJP-JD (U) alliance fared poorly in 1999, they managed to increase their vote share among Scheduled Castes to 30 per cent. The Congress continued to secure more than half of the Scheduled Castes votes. The support among the Scheduled Castes for the BJP seems to have plated at 30 per cent in 2004 and 2008. There is a marginal fall in the support that the Congress has enjoyed among the Scheduled Castes (never less than 40 per cent) and the beneficiary has been the Janata Dal (S). It is evident that while the share of support among the Scheduled Castes has increased for the BJP in Karnataka, it has not been able to attract the voters from this section of society. Having traditionally enjoyed support among the Upper Caste and one dominant caste (Lingayats), it may be difficult for the BJP to appeal to the Scheduled Castes. The reality of exploitation at the local level could influence the Scheduled Castes to believe that the exploiting social groups are aligned with the BJP.

The Scheduled Tribes in Karnataka are concentrated in a few pockets across the state. Since 1996, from when survey data is available, the BJP has done well among the Scheduled Tribes. In 1996, it secured a little over one fourth of the Scheduled Tribe vote. This rose to over one thirds when the BJP-Lok Shakti alliance got a majority of Lok Sabha seats from the state in 1998. It continued to get support from one-third of the Scheduled tribe community in 1999 and 2004. In 2008, its support among the Scheduled Tribes rose to over 40 per cent. Across elections the balance of the Scheduled Tribe vote has been split across the Congress and Janata Dal. Unlike the Scheduled Castes who are spread across the state, the Scheduled Tribes are concentrated in few areas. The 2008 elections was the first after delimitation. Delimitation resulted in a significant rise of Scheduled Tribe reserved seats in Karnataka (Shastri and Padmavathi, 2009). The BJP had several powerful leaders from this community in their fold who actively campaigned in 2008. This may have accounted for the rise in Scheduled Tribes vote.

How has the Muslim community voted in Karnataka and have they supported the BJP. Given the pro-Hindutva image of the BJP, the minorities have generally maintained a distance from the party. This fact is evident in Karnataka too. It must however be stressed that over the years, the BJP has been able to increase its vote share from among the Muslim community. In 1996, when the Janata Dal got a majority of the Lok Sabha seats in the state, the BJP was able to garner only six per cent of the Muslim vote. Close to 45 per cent of the community voted for the Janata Dal and another one third backed the Congress. In 1998, when there was a BJP- Lok Shakti alliance, the vote share of the alliance among the Muslims rose to 10 per cent. While one third of the Muslim vote went in favour of the Janata Dal, more than 50 per cent of the community supported the Congress. In 1999, when there were simultaneous Assembly and Lok Sabha polls, the Congress increased its vote share among the Muslims to over 80 per cent. A little over 12 per cent supported the BJP which was now in alliance with the Janata Dal (U) with the Janata Dal (S) losing much of its Muslim vote base. In the 2004 elections, the support for the BJP among Muslims rose to 19 per cent. The Congress continued to have the support of a little over half the Muslim votes and the Janata Dal (S) was in a position to increase its support among the community to over 20 per cent. In the 2008 poll, the support of the Muslims for the BJP dipped marginally while the Congress and the Janata Dal (S) continued to share the rest of the Muslim vote. The BJP has thus not been able to gain much support within the Muslim community.

An analysis of the support for the BJP in Karnataka among the different caste groups indicates that the success of the party is largely on account of consolidating its support among the powerful Lingayats community, maintaining its support among the Upper Castes and increasing its share of votes among the Vokkaligas, non-dominant OBCs and the Scheduled Tribes. It has not been able to increase its support significantly among the Scheduled Castes and the Muslims.

Conclusion

In the above analysis it was found that the BJP tended to have greater support among the younger generation. Its support was higher among men as compared to women. The more educated were more likely to vote for the BJP as compared to those who had limited access to education. The more affluent and middle classes tended to support the BJP more than the poor and very poor. The BJP has seen a steady rise in its support base in rural areas even as it has maintained its support base in urban regions. The

Upper Castes and powerful Lingayats community have solidly backed the BJP. It has increased its vote share among the Vokkaligas, non-dominant OBCs and Scheduled Tribes. It has not been able to consolidate its presence among the Scheduled Tribes and Muslims. It is clear that the nature of support that the BJP enjoys from different segments of society is linked to who its opponent is in the state. In Karnataka, the Congress being the main rival and the Janata Dal (S) being the opponent in a few regions, the BJP support base is linked to this fact.

End Notes

1. The National Election Studies is a survey based study of citizens perceptions about politics, governance, society, economic and their daily life and what influences how they vote. The study is a post poll survey (after voting, before counting). These studies are coordinated by Lokniti-Programme on Comparative Democracy of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi. www.lokniti.org
2. When referring to the 1998 and 1999 data, BJP is referred to as BJP+. This implies that it was in alliance and the vote share is of the alliance - 1998 - BJP and Lok Shakti, 1999 - BJP and Janata Dal (U).
3. The two castes together account for around 28 per cent of the state's population (Shastri 2011b).

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