

Republic of India: Emergence of a Competitive Party System and Civil-Society Space

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The last three decades of Indian politics have seen a fundamental change in the nature and structure of political competition. The states have become the new centre of politics. The results of the 2014 national elections to the lower house of Parliament underscored this point. This change is not the by-product of any constitutional amendment or legal reform. It is a natural corollary to the cut-and-thrust of political party competition. Since the last decade of the twentieth century, India has witnessed the replacement of a one-party dominant system by a competitive multi-party system.

This party system has a few distinct features. It was caused by the gradual erosion of the support base of the Congress Party. The space vacated by the Congress was not occupied by any one party but by several parties. The principal opponents of the Congress Party, therefore, varied significantly across the states. A natural consequence of this development was the emergence of the states as the visible sites for political contestation.¹ Meanwhile, the limited space to manoeuvre among civil-society groups in the political domain made political parties the key players in the federal system. Recent developments involving a segment of a civil-society movement transforming itself into a political party and coming to power in one of the states is an indicator of a new trend.²

Politics and Society

Since its independence in 1947, India has had a stable, federal, parliamentary democracy. Over the years, the broad institutional framework of government has remained largely unchanged, even as the reality of politics has triggered significant developments across the political spectrum. In the last six decades, the dynamics of politics has brought in its wake multi-track changes: deepening of the democratic process,³ more intense electoral competition,⁴ expanding democratic space,⁵ power-sharing arrangements in the working of the parliamentary system,⁶ assertion of "state rights" in the federal process,⁷ transformation in the nature of party competition and politics,⁸ and greater visibility of civil-society organizations and initiatives.⁹

The Polity

The parliamentary system was part of the "legacy package" bequeathed to the country by years of British colonial rule. Given the familiarity of the political elite with the working elements of parliamentary government during British rule, a parliamentary system faced little serious competition and emerged as the natural choice of the framers of the Constitution.¹⁰ It symbolized the legitimization of an existing organizational arrangement. A key architect of the constitutional edifice described the choice of the parliamentary system as a vote for responsibility over stability.¹¹ Having opted for the federal system, the constitution makers decided to replicate the parliamentary system created for the federal government in each of the Union's states.

The country also consciously chose federalism. Given its large geographic size and the human diversity that had to be effectively represented, the choice of a federal arrangement was enshrined in the Constitution. Although many observers have described India's federal system as essentially having unitary features or at best quasi-federal features, scholars of Indian federalism have asserted that when a country designs its federal system, it keeps in mind its historical circumstances and specific requirements.¹² Federalism is rightly defined as a "question of degree."¹³ India, in this regard, is no exception.

The federal scheme as represented in the Constitution places a premium on the role of the federal government.¹⁴ This was considered vital for ensuring the country's unity and integrity. India's states do not have their own constitutions.¹⁵ A single document details the constitutional provisions for organizing both the federal and the state governments. Given the fact that independent India involved the coming together of territories that were part of British India and several princely states, an interim arrangement of organizing states was worked out until a thorough reorganization of states was undertaken. In 1956, when the states were re-organized, the union consisted of fourteen states and seven Union territories.¹⁶ Today, there are twenty-nine¹⁷ states and eight Union territories. Since 1994, local government has been accorded a constitutional status as the third order of government in the federal structure.¹⁸

Elections for the lower houses of the federal Parliament and state legislatures are first-past-the-post (FPTP) elections. This is another British legacy. In the recent past, especially with the emergence of a competitive multi-party system, a debate has emerged on the need to reform the electoral process.¹⁹ Many have pleaded for an electoral system that more fairly represents the voter's choice and prevents a "winner-takes-all" cascade. The system does not provide for direct democratic checks (e.g., referendum, initiative, or recall) in either the federal or state arenas. In most states, the

rural local-government system provides for a *Grama Sabha* (village assembly which all adult villagers can attend) twice a year, in which the elected representatives in the local arena are required to present before the *Grama Sabha* the welfare programs implemented during the past six months.

The nature of the federal design as enshrined in the Constitution clearly tilts the balance of power in favour of the federal government. The context of the primacy of the federal government was the belief that the country's unity and integrity would best be protected by a well-endowed federal government. Several indications in the constitutional framework illustrate this fact. The Constitution's reference to India as a "Union of States" bears testimony to this fact. Further, single citizenship (citizenship of only the country and not the states), a single constitution, initiation of constitutional amendments only by the federal government, a single integrated judicial system, and an elite All-India civil-service system all point to the preponderance of the role envisaged for the federal government. The Constitution also has a special provision relating to emergency powers, under which the federal government can take over the administration of a state on the grounds of a "breakdown" of a state's constitutional machinery.²⁰ Even in the distribution of powers between the different orders of government, the decisive role of the federal government is delineated clearly. Though the name of the federal upper house—the *Rajya Sabha*—translates to mean "House of the States," its membership and powers provide no proof of its being a body intended to represent and protect state interests in the federal arena.²¹ The few exclusive powers it enjoys are largely meant to endorse initiatives that may be taken by the federal government on matters of inter-governmental relations or intervention by the federal government in state affairs.

The nature of the party system had a critical impact on the dynamics of federal governance and federal-state relations. For three decades after independence (until 1977), the country was dominated by one political party controlling the federal government. The Indian National Congress²² not only monopolized federal power for the first three decades after independence but also was the dominant political force in most of the states during this period.²³ In 1977, it was voted out of power to return once again in three years (1980) with a decisive victory in the federal elections. It remained in power for close to a decade (until late 1989). Since 1989, in the federal arena, the country has seen only coalition governments or minority governments involving different political formations.²⁴

Several factors contributed to the gradual eclipse of the Congress monopoly. The Congress Party had been in the forefront of the freedom movement and was virtually unchallenged as the ruling party in the initial years after independence. Over time, the party witnessed splits as influential leaders left the party and formed their own parties due to ideological differences

or personality clashes. During the years of the freedom struggle and in the first decades after independence, the Congress had been a rainbow coalition of different social groups. With increasing competition for power and distribution of benefits of office, this social coalition experienced cracks. The broad social base of the Congress began to erode, and new political formations began to represent specific social interests. A linked development was the rise of state-based parties as direct opponents of the Congress Party. The polity has thus transitioned from a one-party dominant system to a competitive multi-party system since the late 1980s. This development also reflects the changing dynamics of party politics in the states. Many observers would assert that the developments of the last two decades are clearly an assertion of states' rights and that the states are today at the centre of Indian politics.

In the area of coordinating the delivery of public services and protecting citizens' rights, several civil-society organizations have been operating across the country. In recent years, the media too has focused on the role of civil-society groups in drawing attention to problems faced by ordinary citizens and their efforts in ensuring efficiency in service delivery and protection of basic rights. As a conscious effort, most civil-society groups have maintained a distance from mainstream politics. In many cases, they have sought to project their activities as visible and viable alternatives to mainstream politics as pursued by the political parties. This has often placed them at cross-purposes. Furthermore, given the fluidity of party organizations in the local arena, civil-society organizations have frequently stepped in to discharge the interest-articulation function that local party units were expected to perform.

Social and Economic Structures

India represents social diversity in all its myriad manifestations. With 1.2 billion people, it is the second-most populous country in the world and has the distinction of being the largest democracy. Given its multi-religious complexion, secularism is enshrined as one of its founding principles. More than 80 percent of the population is Hindu. Muslims constitute the largest minority, making up over 13 percent of the population. Christians and Sikhs each account for around 2 percent of the population. There is a small presence of followers of Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, and Judaism.

The caste system was a traditional form of social stratification. It still has a critical influence in both politics and social relations.²⁵ Rather than representing traditional hierarchies, it is today an important assertion of identities. Caste is no longer associated with its traditional role but is now an important marker for seeking political office and is often the basis of competitive politics. The government policy of reservations (i.e., affirmative action) in

both the political domain and the fields of education and public employment has resulted in the upward mobilization of the traditionally deprived social groups. Political party support and competition often run along caste lines, not so much as a result of people belonging to a similar caste but more due to the commonness of the life experience shared by the people belonging to a caste.

Diversity based on language has been an important dimension of Indian society. The Constitution accords an official status to twenty-two different languages. There are several more dialects spoken across the country. The 2001 census showed that as many as twenty-nine languages are spoken by more than a million people. Another 122 are each spoken by over ten thousand people. In the first round of state formation, the principal factor that determined and defined the creation of states was the criterion of language. Later, ethnicity was an important marker to justify the creation of more states. Each constituent state has an official language that is the basis for communication in the state. Hindi and English are the official languages of the federal government.

India's economy is considered the eleventh largest in the world in terms of GDP (US\$2.1 trillion in 2014) and the third-largest in terms of purchasing power parity.²⁶ In 1991, the government introduced major economic reforms by opening up the economy and ushering in liberalization and privatization. In spite of the country making rapid economic strides, however, more than 37 percent of the population lives below the poverty line.²⁷

There are also significant economic disparities between the states. In Bihar and Orissa, more than 40 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, while the figures for such states as Punjab are significantly lower. An analysis of states' annual growth rates in the 2000s shows that Gujarat (8.8 percent) and Haryana (7.4 percent) were far ahead of Madhya Pradesh (3.5 percent), Uttar Pradesh (4.4 percent), and Bihar (5.1 percent). The states with low annual growth rates are those with a larger population share. Uttar Pradesh accounts for more than 16 percent of India's population. The less economically developed states seek greater fiscal support and intervention from the federal government, whereas the states at the higher end of the scale of economic development desire to benefit more from the economic resources they generate for the country. Fiscal equalization remains a matter of serious debate in the federal system.

General Aspects of the Party System

Political parties are classified as national parties, state parties, and registered unrecognized parties by the Election Commission on the basis of their performance in the previous national election or state elections.²⁸ As per the latest direction of the Election Commission, there are currently

6 national parties, 52 state parties, and 1,737 registered unrecognized parties.²⁹ The Indian National Congress (INC) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are the two main national parties, each leading a national alliance: the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), led by the INC, and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), led by the BJP. The UPA was in power at the federal level from 2004 to 2014. The NDA was in power from 1998 to 2004 and returned to power in 2014.

Political Parties: A Historical Overview

The political party system that developed during the three post-independence decades (1947–77) was characterized by many as a one-party dominant system—the “Congress system.”³⁰ During this phase, the INC monopolized federal power and was the dominant player in most of the states. Until the early 1960s, the principal opposition to the Congress came from the Communist Party, a few socialist parties, the pro-privatization Swatantra party, the right-wing Jan Sangh, and a clutch of state and regional parties. The real challenge to the INC emerged first with the 1967 elections to the state legislative assemblies, when it was defeated in several states. The INC was replaced by non-Congress parties and alliances, many of which were splinter groups of the Congress. This symbolized the first wave of change. The INC’s defeat in the federal arena in 1977 ushered in a second phase of competitive party politics. Even though the INC tasted defeat on the national stage, it continued to be the dominant player in politics and returned to power in 1980. Until the late 1980s, Indian politics continued to be characterized as competition between the Congress and non-Congress parties.

The year 1989 marked an important watershed. Many observers would argue that the federal elections held in that year ushered in a competitive multi-party system in the federal arena.³¹ The developments since the early 1990s have been characterized as symbolizing the decline of the Congress³² and the emergence of a new trend in party competition with the rise of the “third electoral system.”³³ Clearly, the federal arena has witnessed the emergence of a competitive multi-party system.

A linked development is the increase in voter turnout with the emergence of a competitive party system on the federal scene. The 1990s were characterized as a decade of “democratic upsurge”³⁴ with increased participation, especially among socially and economically backward and rural voters. This upsurge seems to have peaked in the mid 2000s, with voter turnout in elections in the range of 60 percent.³⁵ The 2014 national elections saw a record turnout of 66.4 percent. Further, the groups that significantly increased their participation during the 1990s now do not demonstrate significantly different levels of voter turnout as compared to other sections of society. Many would argue that this is a result of the dynamics of liberal democratic

politics.³⁶ An issue that will be assessed later is the trend of increased voter turnout for elections to the state legislatures as compared to elections for the lower house of the federal Parliament.³⁷

The last election to the lower house of the federal Parliament, *Lok Sabha*, held in 2014, saw the election of representatives from thirty-four different political parties. This number has remained more or less stable over the last four elections (since 1998). The traditional classification of political parties by the Election Commission—national parties, state parties, and registered unrecognized parties on the basis of their vote share across the states—does not permit a meaningful analysis of the nature and structure of party competition in federal elections.

The post-1989 phase of Indian politics is witness to the end of a one-party dominant system and the clear emergence of a competitive party system in the federal arena. This is clearly evident in terms of the number of parties represented in the *Lok Sabha* and from the analysis of the vote share of political parties. Since 1989, there has been a significant rise in the number of political parties represented in the *Lok Sabha*. There has been relative stability in the number of parties that have been characterized as national parties (in the range of six to eight during 1989–2014), while the total number of state-based parties has increased sharply. If in 1989, representatives from seventeen state-based parties were elected to the lower house of Parliament, the number shot up to thirty-one in 2004 and stood at twenty-three in the 2014 elections. Similarly, the total strength of the representatives of all national parties has steadily declined, while the number of seats occupied by those from state-based parties has increased significantly. The total number of seats held by national parties in the lower house of Parliament declined by nearly one-fourth during 1989–2014 (from 471 to 364 in 2004 and to 342 in 2014); there was a near fourfold increase in the strength of state-based parties in the same period (46 to 174 in 2004 and 180 in 2014). The vote share of the national parties, in the same period, declined by about 15 percent. The beneficiaries were the state-based parties. These trends point to the emergence of a competitive party system in the federal arena.

Since 1989, the federal government has had either a coalition government or a minority government.³⁸ In 1989, the smaller political parties (those other than the INC, BJP, and Communist parties) stitched together an alliance (National Front) and came to power with the outside support of both the BJP and the Communists. The alliance did not last long and was replaced by another coalition of smaller parties with outside support from the INC. This, too, was in power for less than a year. In 1991, the INC formed a minority government because no party secured a clear majority in the federal elections. In 1996, the BJP came to power for only thirteen days and resigned on not being able to prove its majority. It was replaced by a thirteen-party alliance (mostly non-Congress and non-BJP) called the

United Front. This survived in power for two years with outside support from the INC. An election was again called in 1998, which saw the BJP-led NDA alliance forming the government. This alliance won yet another federal election called in 1999 and remained in power till 2004. The Congress-led UPA assumed office after the 2004 federal elections and was voted back into power in the 2009 elections. In the 2014 elections, the NDA led by the BJP secured a majority. This was the first national election since 1989, when a single party (BJP) secured a majority on its own, though it formed the government in alliance with its partners in the NDA. The UPA and NDA have each had relative stability of its core membership. There have been cases of parties switching or leaving alliances, but the alliances have acquired some stability, creating hopes of the emergence of a bipolar alliance system in the federal arena.

It must be noted that in both the NDA and the UPA, save the alliance leader (INC in the case of the UPA and the BJP in the case of the NDA), all other political parties in the alliance are state-based (save the NCP in the case of the UPA). This has also been an important factor responsible for the shift in the "focus of politics" and "party competition" from the federal arena to the states.

General Aspects of the Civil Society

The contemporary discourse on democratic politics lays special stress on the need for a vibrant civil society. Traditionally, strategies for organizing people in domains and functions not directly connected to the state were quite common. In post-independence India, public action by agencies other than the state was believed to be prevalent, though its capacity to reach out to common people and address their concerns has been contested. In the last two decades, the rise of civil-society organizations (CSOs) has been more visible and often been under public scrutiny thanks to the media attention given to them.

CSOs are believed to be active in a select set of domains. First, they have often been seen as vehicles for crafting an "alternative politics" to the one dominated and directed by the political parties. In that sense, they are seen as arising and gaining visibility as they challenge the dominant political actors and choose to tread an alternative route to public action. The formation of a new political party, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)³⁹ (translated to mean "Common Peoples Party"), which was a splinter group that emerged out of a civil-society movement (India Against Corruption), is a recent example of those involved in "alternative politics" seeking to intervene in mainstream politics. The success of the AAP, in the elections to the state of Delhi and its subsequent forming of the government in the state, ushered in a vigorous debate on its impact on mainstream politics. Second, CSOs have been

active in the domain of apolitical action—social service, social empowerment, rights movements, movements for social equity and justice, and the like. Women's groups, *Dalit*⁴⁰ groups, and youth organizations can all be cited in this context. Third, with economic liberalization and an increasing regulatory role for governments, CSOs have emerged as "watchdog" agencies to ensure the public accountability of different private players. With the increasing emphasis on outsourcing, CSOs have developed the competencies to perform certain functions hitherto performed by government. International and multilateral donor agencies have also mandated CSO involvement in programs they fund. Finally, CSOs have been active in the socio-economic development domain, especially in local arenas. They often forge alliances within a state, and at times even across states, to be able to act as an effective pressure group in the system. There are powerful trade-union groups and student bodies that are often affiliated with political parties. They are often seen as front organizations of political parties and are spread across the states.

In a later section, there will be a special focus on three categories of CSOs: those involved in (1) cleansing the democratic process, (2) building up a strong women's movement, and (3) fighting for the right to information (RTI).

Territorial Dynamics of Party Competition

Earlier, we focused on the party system in the federal arena. Two issues raised in that section need to be flagged in any dialogue on the territorial dynamics of party competition. First, the emergence of a competitive multi-party system in the federal arena is necessarily a by-product of the cut-and-thrust of party politics and competition in the states. Many commentators have asserted that "the theatre of politics has shifted to the states."⁴¹ Second, large segments of the political parties operating in the political system are today essentially state-based parties. In effect, every federal election is a sum total of twenty-nine different electoral verdicts across the states.

A review of political party competition and the nature of electoral contests indicated that an increasing number of so-called (Election Commission-recognized) "national" political parties have their support base limited to one state or, at the most, a few states in the country. This is especially true in the phase of competitive multi-party politics. In the post-1998 phase of electoral politics, the INC crossed the threshold of a 10-percent vote share in all the states only in the 2009 federal elections. Earlier, especially in bigger states such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, its vote share had plummeted to less than 10 percent. In the case of the leader of the NDA alliance, the BJP, its vote share in the 2014 federal poll was more than 10 percent in only twenty of the twenty-eight states. In the 2014 poll, the Communist Party of

India-Marxist (CPM) gained more than 10 percent of votes in only three states, whereas the Communist Party of India (CPI), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) secured more than 10 percent of votes in only one state each.

These vote tallies raise the question of whether some of the parties classified as "national" are significantly different from those in the list of state parties. It is beyond a shadow of doubt that some of the "national" parties are major political players in a few states, and, given the impact of state politics on federal political dynamics, these parties could strongly influence the shape and direction of federal politics. Yet their power in the federal government is linked to their status and political influence in the states.

What appears to have clearly emerged in the recent past is a nearly bipolar alliance system in most of the states. This can be clearly concluded if one looks at the 2014 federal poll as twenty-eight different elections held in twenty-eight⁴² different states. In the 2009 federal poll, in more than half the states (nineteen of the twenty-eight), the two major parties and alliances in the electoral contest secured more than 80 percent of the valid votes polled. In another eight states, the two major parties and alliances secured over two-thirds of the valid votes polled. In just one state there was a truly multi-polar contest.⁴³ Thus, India's states have emerged as the true centre of politics as evidenced by the bipolar alliance system that exists in most of the states in a federal election.

Does the typology of political parties assume a different dimension if the elections to the state legislatures are taken into account? It may also be useful to look at the voter turnout in a federal election and state elections. Since 1989, in every state, save Bihar, the voter turnout for the state legislative elections has been higher than the voter turnout in the state for a federal election.⁴⁴

A higher level of interest in state politics among voters may reflect the fact that the state governments are more closely linked to the priorities, programs, and policies that directly affect the lives of common people. Stretching the same logic, it could be argued that the highest intensity of participation should be in local-government elections. This, however, is not true. The argument here is that the common citizens are aware of the nature of responsibility of the state government and the limited role of the local government in spite of their being accorded a constitutional status. A study undertaken in the early 2000s showed that citizens believed that the state governments should be responsible for delivering the public goods considered important by the people.⁴⁵

This could also be linked to the fact that the cut-and-thrust of party politics is more sharply manifest in the states and the electoral choice before the voter is articulated more visibly. In local elections, there is greater fluidity in party affiliations (a point discussed below) because, in most

cases, district party leaders "recruit" people at the lower level to volunteer and work for the party. As a result, party affiliation at the levels below the district are fluid because someone aligned to one party at the local level may switch preference to another party simply because the leader he/she is aligned with at the district level has a particular party affiliation. Also, local-body elections are fought on a non-party basis, which does not incentivize active party identification in local arenas. The principal zone of political contestation is the state; thus, political contestation in these arenas is clearly visible.

While analyzing party competition in the states, Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar argued that the state-party system is one of competitive convergence.⁴⁶ They went on to argue that there appeared to be four major types of party political competition: (1) bipolar convergence, wherein the principal contest in elections to the state legislature is between two parties (seven states); (2) multi-party-bipolarity, wherein the contest is essentially between two alliances (seven states); (3) stable multi-polar convergence, wherein the contest is between more than two effective parties with one party emerging with a stable majority (eight states); and (4) fluid multi-polarity, wherein there is clear multi-party competition in elections to the state legislature (four states).⁴⁷ It is important to record that even in the last category of states, there are stable one-party and/or alliance governments. Looked at from another angle, it can be argued that most states have a stable bi-party system or bipolar alliance system. This can be gleaned from the fact that in twenty-two of the twenty-eight states, the ruling party/alliance and the principal opposition party/alliance secured over two-thirds of the votes in the last state elections. This is a reasonably high proportion of polarization in a FPTP system. It implies that there is a clear polarization of choice that voters make in the state elections.

Within different geographic regions,⁴⁸ the trajectory of state politics is significantly different. At the end of the first decade of the new century (2010) in the four states of southern India, the Congress was in power in one state (Andhra Pradesh); in another, the BJP was the ruling party (Karnataka); in a third, a regional ally of the INC was in power (Tamil Nadu); and in the fourth, the Left Front was in power (Kerala). Further, during an election to the lower house of the federal Parliament, the electoral verdict can significantly differ from state to state within the same geographic region and often involves a response to the government in power in the state itself. If the 2009 national elections are taken as an example, in twenty-four of the twenty-eight states, the voters endorsed a majority of the candidates who hailed from the ruling party/alliance that was in power in that state. In only four states the candidates of the ruling party did not do so well, and this was clearly linked to the unpopularity of the state government in those states. The same trend was witnessed in the 2014 national elections. This

132 POLITICAL PARTIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN FEDERAL COUNTRIES

implies that state-party politics has a relative degree of autonomy and that the principal stage of contestation is the states.

Across the twenty-nine states, there is a sharing of power among political parties. In twelve of the states, the constituents of the NDA are in power. In six of these states, the BJP has a single-party government. In two, the BJP is leading an alliance government; in another three, a party from the NDA is in power. In one state, the BJP is a junior partner with another party that is not yet a part of the NDA (Jammu and Kashmir). In eight states the Congress is in power, and in one it is leading the ruling coalition. Between them, the two major national alliances are in power in twenty-one of the twenty-nine states. In one state the CPI(M) is in power; in seven states, other powerful state-based parties are in power.⁴⁹

Two more dimensions linked to the nature of party competition merit attention. State parties and their leaders today play a vital role in federal politics. As of early 2015, the third-, fourth-, and fifth-largest parties in the lower house of Parliament were powerful state-based parties. In successive federal coalition governments, they have played a major role in the formation of alliances, making a bid for holding power and sharing power.⁵⁰ In the coalition governments of the last two decades, important cabinet portfolios such as finance, defence, agriculture, railways, industry, information, law, and commerce have been held by leaders from powerful state-based parties. They have often bargained hard for key portfolios, and more often than not had their way. The selection of the representatives of the state-based parties in the Federal Council of Ministers is today not a prerogative of the prime minister but of the leaders of these state parties.⁵¹ This has resulted in the greater assertiveness of state-based parties while they are part of federal coalitions.

Another trend is that this new party competition has created a legitimate autonomy and political space for the state governments and parties. Until the late 1980s, there were several examples of abuse of legitimate constitutional provisions by the federal government to undermine the autonomy of states.⁵² This especially happened when a different party or alliance was in power in the federal and state arenas. The abuse of constitutional provisions has declined dramatically since the 1990s. This abdication of abuse has little to do with any constitutional amendments but is more linked to the reality of politics. Even within the "national" parties, the state leaders tend to enjoy much greater autonomy compared to the past. This is a direct corollary of the locus of power even in "national" parties being in the states. An example of the reluctance of the federal government to interfere in the politics of a state was the political developments in Karnataka and more recently in Bihar. Karnataka had a BJP government from 2008 to 2013, and the state government did not have the best of relations with the governor. On October 4, 2010, the governor recommended that the federal

REPUBLIC OF INDIA 133

government take over the administration of the state in view of the breakdown of the state's constitutional machinery. A Congress-led UPA government in the federal arena decided not to initiate action on the governor's recommendation. More recently in Bihar, when the BJP decided to support a rebelling chief minister from an opposition party in Bihar, it desisted from initiating action in Bihar under Article 356 of the Constitution; hence, a chief minister who hailed from a party opposed to the BJP and who had clear majority support assumed office.

Party Organizations in Federal Contexts

In the discussion of the organization and working of political parties in the backdrop of federalism, it would be useful to make a few preliminary points. First, although political parties are central to the functioning of parliamentary federal democracy, political parties were not mentioned in the original Constitution. It is only when the Constitution was amended to include a provision to prevent "defections" that the term *political party* received mention in the Constitution.⁵³ Second, there is no comprehensive legislation to regulate the functioning of political parties. A demand for the same has been voiced with varying degrees of assertiveness for quite some time.

The Election Commission of India has attempted to use its implied powers to hold political parties to account. This has, however, met with limited success. In order to be registered, a political party needs to approach the Election Commission and fulfill a few formalities, including making an undertaking that it would not violate the principles enshrined in the Constitution. When a political party formally splits, the Election Commission decides who inherits the mantle of the original party. In the 1990s, the commission took the stand that in order to decide who inherits the name, symbol, and status of the original party in the event of a split, it would be mandatory for parties to hold their internal organizational elections. Given the fact that most positions in political parties were filled by nominations, it became difficult for the Election Commission to take decisions on which group (after a split) authentically represented the original party. The Election Commission thus mandated that political parties hold their organizational elections with regular frequency.⁵⁴

Party leaders have not taken this direction of the Election Commission very seriously. The challenge faced by political parties is that few of them maintain a well-developed and integrated list of members. Save for the cadre-based Communist parties, most political parties have a very fluid organizational structure. More often than not, state and district political leaders recruit their followers to the party. Many of them are then willing to switch sides if the leaders change their political affiliation. Given the fact that political parties do not have a well-defined organizational base, it is essentially

a top-down structure with a hopeless lack of clarity below the district level. In such a situation, organizational elections end up being a farce and often involve a competition between leaders on how many people each could enrol. A trend seen in local government elections is the sponsoring of candidates by those elected to Parliament and the state legislature. Those elected to local bodies are then responsible for galvanizing support for the leaders who got them elected when a national or state election takes place. A string of challenges are a natural by-product of this development. Two of them merit attention. First, there is a near absence of intra-party democracy. The differences among them (political parties) in this regard are only a matter of degree. Second, most political parties lack transparency in procedures for selecting candidates for political office and in fiscal transactions.

A linked development is the emergence of a new player in politics—the Aam Aadmi Party. The AAP was created by a segment of those involved in a citizen movement that fought against corruption in the political system under the banner of India Against Corruption. It was critical of mainstream parties for their inability to cleanse the body politic of corruption and for being insincere in creating an ombudsman-like institution (*Lok Pal*) to check corruption. The movement against corruption and in favour of creating an ombudsman-like institution garnered tremendous support, especially among the urban middle class. A section of the movement's leadership decided to plunge into politics to challenge mainstream political parties and demonstrate the possibility of alternative politics. It was in this context that the AAP was formed. Within a year of being created, the party came up with a spectacular performance in December 2013, in the state of Delhi. Delhi had a state government led by the Congress party and had been in power for fifteen years. The leading opposition party in Delhi, the BJP, was also seen by many as a mirror image of the Congress (in terms of its weak commitment to fight corruption and cleanse politics). The AAP emerged as the second-largest party in an assembly where no party was able to secure a clear majority. It later formed a government with the outside support of the Congress. The AAP asserted that it represented an alternative way of doing politics. While its tactics and strategies have been embroiled in controversies, it has forced mainstream parties to re-look at their strategies and think seriously in terms of reforming the party system.⁵⁵ More recently, in February 2015, it won a spectacular victory in the state of Delhi by winning sixty-seven of the seventy seats in the Assembly. It is interesting that soon after this victory, the party came down heavily on those who sought greater democracy from within the party and expelled key founding members from the highest decision-making body. Many today ask whether the AAP really represents an alternative way of doing politics or is just an alternative within the existing mainstream political framework manifesting the same maladies that plague all political parties.

The increasing fragmentation of political parties is another consequence of the absence of clear organizational procedures and internal democracy. All the major parties have witnessed several splits during their lifetimes. Many of the “new” parties of today are splinter groups that emerged from either national parties or other state-based parties. Most major splits in political parties are an expression of dissent against the party leadership, as exit seems to be the only honourable option for those who disagree with the party's leaders.

Most political parties—both national and state-based—choose the route of nomination of party office-bearers by the high command or central leadership of the party. This has serious implications in a federal structure. The “national” parties are highly centralized in their functioning, and the high-command culture is all-pervasive. As a result, the state units of the “national” parties enjoy little autonomy and freedom. The state leaders are often sensitive to the “political cues” from the party's central leaders. It is quite common in the “national” parties for the central leadership to decide on who should be chief minister if the party comes to power in a state. It must be conceded, though, that given the shift in the focus of politics from the federal arena to the states, the state-party organization of the “national” parties does have some room for political manoeuvre as compared to earlier decades. Yet, the acknowledgement of the supremacy of the “national leadership” is something that state leaders cannot afford to ignore.

The situation is no different in the state-based political parties. They too are stifled by a lack of internal democracy. The only difference between them and a “national” party is that their central leadership is located in the state itself! This, in fact, can be even more suffocating because the party's supreme leadership is not far away in the federal capital but closer to home at the state headquarters.

A linked factor is the powerful influence of the personality of individual leaders in shaping the political destinies of parties. The emergence of powerful political dynasties across the political spectrum is seen as an expected consequence. The next generations of political leaders contesting (and winning) elections invariably hail from well-known political families and often carry forward the political legacy of their father or mother. This has also weakened the grassroots organization of parties. Loyalty of party workers and cadres are not so much to the principles and ideology of the party but to the leader who is often a godfather or mother-like figure. Selection of candidates for election to representative bodies is often made by a small coterie of leaders who have the confidence of the top leadership. This explains the frequent violent protests in many political parties at the time of the announcement of the party candidates for a federal or state election. It is not uncommon to find leaders (and their followers) quitting

a party on being denied the party ticket and joining en masse a rival party simply on the promise of being nominated to contest.

Political parties also lack transparency in terms of funding. A realistic audit of the fiscal status of a political party is rarely ever made and, if done, is unlikely to become available for public scrutiny. The real strength of a party's leadership is its access to large amounts of unaccounted funds that help sustain and run the party. Often, leaders selected to stand for public office raise their own resources and, once elected, cover up the costs and budget for future elections.

It is thus no surprise that when surveys ask common citizens to rank institutions on the basis of trust, political parties compete for space at the lower end of the spectrum.⁵⁶

Territorial Dynamics of Civil Society

To capture the territorial dynamics of CSOs, it may be useful to report the findings of important surveys on the awareness among common citizens about CSOs and their involvement in their activities. While CSOs may have registered their presence across the country, their impact on community life is a matter of animated debate.⁵⁷ A survey done as part of the State and Society Project showed that very few people interact with community and voluntary organizations. The study asked respondents whether there was any organization in their area working on development and addressing the problems that they face in their day-to-day life. Two-thirds of the respondents answered this question. Of those who answered the question, close to nine out of ten opined that other than the government, no other organization addressed such problems. Fewer than 2 percent of the respondents said that international or national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were working in their area and contributing to development. Only 8 percent of respondents acknowledged that they were members of any association involved with development activities in their locality.⁵⁸ This finding is consistent with the findings of other large national surveys, including the National Election Studies.⁵⁹

The presence of CSOs in local communities does not seem to have captured the attention of common people. Interviews with district local government officials in Karnataka showed that CSOs are not very visible to citizens. Even those who recognize their presence tend to see them as an extended arm of the federal or state government. While a slew of CSOs has emerged in the local arena (especially catering to development initiatives and monitoring program implementation), their role vis-à-vis the government machinery does not seem to be defined clearly. As a result, lines of distinction are blurred, and demarcation of roles remains hazy.

Adding to the challenge is the fact that a multiplicity of local actors is involved, directly or tangentially, in development initiatives or social awareness campaigns and movements. Often alliances develop among some of them in order to undercut others. The alliances are often brokered on preferences that are not even remotely connected to the goals they are meant to achieve and the tasks they are required to focus on. There have also been cases of CSOs coming together merely to ensure that the funds being allocated by the government are within their "divisible pool" and not shared with too many others. With multilateral funding agencies advocating a role for CSOs to monitor and implement development schemes funded by them (in order to ensure greater accountability), there is a mushroom growth of CSOs.

While CSOs strengthen the capacities of society to hold those in power accountable, ensure that citizens are accorded their due share of public benefits, and secure their civic rights, there is a need for a clearer definition of CSO roles and public accountability.

Civil-Society Organizations in Federal Contexts

To assess the nature of alliances that CSOs have across the federal polity and analyze their relationship with political parties in the public domain, we consider three important CSO initiatives that have had a far-reaching impact on the political process.⁶⁰

The first example is that of the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). The ADR was formed in August 1999 by academics from the Indian Institute of Management (Ahmedabad) and National Institute of Design (NID) to work toward strengthening democracy and governance by focusing on ushering in fair and transparent election processes.⁶¹ It brings together several citizen initiatives spread across the country. Its Election Watch Campaign at the time of federal and state elections is carried forward through its nationwide network of CSOs.

The ADR's first success was with regard to a public interest litigation (PIL) that it filed in December 1999 seeking disclosure of the background (i.e., criminal, educational, and financial) of candidates contesting the elections. This PIL brought it into direct conflict with the political parties. The PIL culminated in a landmark judgment of the Supreme Court in May 2002 and an ordinance on electoral reforms promulgated in August 2002. Political party leaders cut across party lines and came together to pass a law in December 2002 to replace the ordinance. What the legislation provided for was disclosure relating only to the criminal background of candidates but not to their financial and educational background. The ADR challenged the new legislation in court, and in a second landmark judgment issued in March 2003, the

Supreme Court declared the bill passed by Parliament unconstitutional and restored its earlier order. As a result of this initiative, candidates contesting the elections are required to file an affidavit providing details of their criminal, educational, and financial records. This was opposed by political parties but has now become a part of the electoral process. It has led to a mine of information being available in the public domain pertaining to the fiscal and criminal records of candidates contesting elections.⁶²

A second example of a struggle led by CSOs is the Women's Reservation Bill. A successful experiment carried out by local governments has been the constitutional provision for the reservation of one-third of seats in local bodies for women. The electorate is general, but the candidates for those seats are only women. This experiment is now more than twenty years old. Women's organizations have been demanding the implementation of a similar provision in the Constitution for the lower house of the federal Parliament and the elected state legislative assemblies. While most of the mainstream political parties expressed their support for women's reservation, no concrete step was taken to pass the bill into law. Women's organizations took up the cause, and women politicians across the political spectrum supported the bill. The Constitutional Amendment Bill to provide for one-third reservation for women in the lower house of the federal Parliament and the elected state legislatures was passed by the Parliament's upper house on March 9, 2010 and awaits passage in the lower house.⁶³ The successful passing of the bill in the upper house was due largely to the sustained pressure exerted by women CSOs across the country and the national alliance they created.

A third example of a successful CSO initiative, which became a national campaign, is the Right to Information campaign started by Aruna Roy along with other activists. A senior civil servant who resigned in order to take up a public cause, Roy helped establish in May 1990 Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), which roughly translates to "Organization for the Empowerment of Workers and Peasants." The MKSS took on the Rajasthan government, which had cheated labourers of the wages due to them during a famine in the mid 1990s. This sparked a movement demanding the right to information (RTI), resulting in the federal Parliament finally passing the Freedom of Information Act in 2002, which was replaced by the Right to Information Act in 2005. Given Roy's visibility and success, she was invited by the government of India to join the National Advisory Council (NAC) headed by the president of the INC. The NAC oversees the implementation of the policies and programs of the UPA government. This case provides an interesting example of the impact of CSOs in shaping and monitoring federal government policies and welfare programs. It must be added that the bureaucracy has created several roadblocks to the successful implementation of the RTI Act. The route they have used is the

way they have framed the rules and regulations operationalizing the RTI's provisions.

These three cases provide a range of examples of how CSOs have, on some occasions, challenged political parties on behalf of larger common interests. There are also cases of CSOs working with political parties to further public interests.

Many high-profile CSOs have developed national networks and have branches in the states. Alternatively, state-based CSOs have come together and formed national alliances in order to pool their resources and strength to achieve a common goal. Questions relating to the public accountability of the CSOs have been raised often. This does not in any way undermine their importance but would only require them to ensure even higher standards of public accountability. These CSOs can accept money from foreign private or government sources after securing permission from the federal government.

Impacts of Parties and Civil Society on Federalism

The politics of recent decades has had a significant impact on the nature of party competition on one hand and the cut-and-thrust of federal processes on the other. The assertive articulation of states' rights has created space for a more effective intervention by CSOs, especially in local arenas. The opportunity for creating alliances across regions has helped CSOs to galvanize their resources and ensure greater visibility for their causes.

It needs to be underscored that fundamental transformations in the dynamics of federal governance and party politics have been wrought not so much by legal and constitutional reforms and processes but by the stark reality of politics. On one level, the political events of the last two decades have democratized federalism and federalized democracy in significant ways. On another, it has altered the political landscape and created new spaces for political parties and CSOs to act and gain greater visibility and credibility.

The politics of the last decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first century placed state-based parties at the "table of power" in the federal arena. No longer are state-based parties characterized as having a merely regional vision. State-based parties have the opportunity to enrich the national vision by making it the sum total of regional visions. Their participation in federal coalitions during the last two decades has given them greater visibility and power to define and determine federal policies.

In contrast, the national parties have increasingly become regionalized and have come to accept (often grudgingly) the reality of their political influence. During the days of the one-party dominant system, the INC often

did not make the distinction between party and government. Though not consciously done, it had a regressive impact on the working of the federal system.⁶⁴ The emergence of a competitive party system has arrested that trend. For long, the INC was not willing to accept the fact that it needed to form an alliance with like-minded parties to make a meaningful bid for power in the federal arena. Just prior to the 2004 federal elections, the party accepted this reality, which placed it in a more comfortable position to come to power. The BJP's leading the NDA and remaining in power for six years (1998–2004) was a result of its recognizing the need to accommodate political forces and players. In order to make the alliance possible, the BJP had to place its pet themes on the back burner.⁶⁵ While forming alliances in the states, the BJP had to be satisfied playing the junior partner in order to consolidate its foothold in the federal government. In the run-up to the 2014 elections, the BJP nominated a sitting chief minister as its prime ministerial candidate who led the party to victory in the elections. It can be contended that the leadership factor (both the prime ministerial candidate, himself a chief minister, and the other BJP chief ministers) played a critical role in the party's victory.⁶⁶

Yadav and Palshikar highlight the fact that "the emergence of states as real and imagined political communities has intensified political regionalism without weakening the ties with the larger, national unit or suppressing the emergence of sub-regional communities."⁶⁷ This maturity reflects a moving away from the "federal government promotes unity and integrity" thesis that defined much of the politics of the early years after independence.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that the state leaders matter, even in federal elections. Political leaders realize the importance of consolidating their presence in the states and the leverage it then provides in federal politics. Narendra Modi, chief minister of Gujarat for over a decade, being made the BJP's prime ministerial candidate, leading the party to victory, and becoming India's prime minister, is a visible indicator of the importance of state leaders in national politics. The political career path that Rahul Gandhi, the youth leader of the INC, has chosen to follow reflects this trend.⁶⁸ Chief ministers of states are today often more important in federal decision-making as compared to those who are ministers in the federal government. In both the NDA and UPA, the chief ministers are part of the decision-making coterie in view of their political influence and stature. If the 2009 federal elections are taken as a site for analysis, it is found that in deciding whom to vote for, citizens tended to value state leaders much more than the federal leaders.⁶⁹ This trend was further entrenched with the 2014 national elections.

The changing contours of Indian federalism open a window of opportunity for different political players to use federal platforms for more meaningful political bargaining and negotiation. As of now, political parties and

CSOs have not fully grasped the potential of these federal platforms for ensuring a more fair and equitable distribution of benefits. The Annual Chief Ministers Conference, Departmental Ministers Conference, the new Neeti Ayog (Policy Commission), National Development Council, Inter-State Council and its sub-committees, and articulation of the state voice in the *Rajya Sabha* (federal upper chamber) are just a few of these avenues.

The greatest challenge before both political parties and to a lesser degree CSOs is to inject greater democratization in their internal functioning. The absence of processes of internal accountability would make federalism more a matter of form rather than content. At the end of the day, federal processes are not merely about structures, they are about attitudes and ways of thinking. Political parties as key players in the federal dynamic will be severely handicapped if they do not internalize the values and spirit of federalism—sharing, negotiating, and, above all, fostering multiple centres of power. It would also be necessary to rescue federal dynamics from the nearly exclusive influence of political players such as political parties. To quote Yadav and Palshikar, "struggles and movements seek to rupture the convergence of the political establishment but their non-political character limits their capacity to affect the political agenda."⁷⁰ Many CSOs have adopted an apolitical stance and distanced themselves from the political process. Yet, they could play a major role in holding the political parties to account and checking their actions.

Conclusion

In the larger political landscape, multiple factors have impacted on one another. A deepening of the democratic process, the expanding of the base of electoral participation, the democratization of the federal process, the federalizing of political parties, and the increasing visibility of civil-society organizations are all landmark developments in the journey of the Indian polity over the last few decades.

A competitive multi-party system has emerged in the federal arena with a bipolar alliance system in most of the states. This trend is a direct consequence of the end of the one-party dominant system. Its implications for federalism have been far-reaching. It catapulted the states to the "centre" of Indian politics. The emergence of a competitive multi-party system has led to the formation of coalition governments in the federal government over the last two decades. This has necessitated a sharing of power among the major political players.

The working of the federal system has had to accommodate the emergence of a range of state-based political parties. These state-based parties are not merely the nucleus of politics in many states; they also play a pivotal

role in federal politics. The unity and integrity of the nation is no longer the exclusive responsibility of the federal government but a joint responsibility involving political forces in the states too.

India's party system continues to face serious organizational challenges. At the grassroots, parties have a very weak and fluid structure. This has resulted in a top-down rather than bottom-up organizational and power arrangement. Most political parties are plagued by a lack of internal democracy. As a result, the core leadership of the party is central to decision-making within the party. This has resulted in the emergence of influential and powerful political dynasties in most political parties. A natural corollary is the frequent splits in parties largely caused by personality clashes and differences with the leadership. It is thus not surprising that in gauging citizens' trust of political institutions, political parties occupy the lower rungs. The emergence of the AAP needs to be viewed in this context. While it promised an alternative to the mainstream politics, the developments in the next few years will indicate whether it succeeds in projecting an alternative politics or merely becomes an alternative to mainstream political parties affected by the same maladies.

Parties in India reflect the changing contours of politics across the country. In significant ways, the emerging competitive party system reflects the increasingly assertive role the states have come to play in federal politics. The centrality of the role of state-based parties is also a natural corollary to the dynamics of electoral competition and the deepening of the democratic process. The emergence of civil-society initiatives to articulate the voice of common citizens to often challenge the inaction of political parties has helped improve the quality of democratic action and public accountability. The multiverse of Indian democracy is truly reflected in the working of political parties and civil-society organizations and the nature of the challenges they face in the federal political system.

Notes

1. With the emergence of the BJP as the head of the ruling coalition in the 2014 elections, the fact of an authentic multi-party system in the country and the states emerging as the site for political contest continues to be relevant.
2. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which translates to "Common Peoples Party," owed its origins to a civil-society movement to fight corruption and create an ombudsman-like authority. It came to power in the state of Delhi in January 2014 with the support of the Congress party. It remained in power only for forty-nine days. In a subsequent election held in February 2015, it swept to power in the state of Delhi, winning sixty-seven of the seventy Assembly seats. It is discussed in more detail in the section on Civil Society.
3. *Status of Democracy in South Asia: A Report* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008).
4. Sandeep Shastri, K.C. Suri, and Yogendra Yadav, *Electoral Politics in Indian States* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009).

5. Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar, "Ten Theses on State Politics in India," in Sandeep Shastri, K.C. Suri, and Yogendra Yadav, eds, *Electoral Politics in Indian States* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009).
6. Sandeep Shastri, *Changing Contours of Comparative Federalism: Understanding the Indian Experience* (Ibadan: John Archers, 2001).
7. Yadav and Palshikar, "Ten Theses on State Politics in India."
8. Ajay Mehra and Gert W. Kueck, eds, *Political Parties and Party Systems in India* (New Delhi: Sage, 2003).
9. For more background on Indian federalism, see Akhtar Majeed, "Republic of India," in John Kincaid and G. Alan Tarr, eds, *Constitutional Origins, Structure, and Change in Federal Countries* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), pp. 180–207; George Mathew, "Republic of India," in Akhtar Majeed, Ronald L. Watts, and Douglas M. Brown, eds, *Distribution of Powers and Responsibilities in Federal Countries* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), pp. 155–80; Rajeev Dhavan and Rekha Saxena, "Republic of India," in Katy Le Roy and Cheryl Saunders, eds, *Legislative, Executive, and Judicial Governance in Federal Countries* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), pp. 165–97; Govinda Rao, "Republic of India," in Anwar Shah, ed., *The Practice of Fiscal Federalism: Comparative Perspectives* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), pp. 151–77; Amitabh Mattoo and Happymon Jacob, "Republic of India," in Hans Michelmann, ed., *Foreign Relations in Federal Countries* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), pp. 168–87; Balveer Arora, "Republic of India," in Luis Moreno and César Colino, eds, *Diversity and Unity in Federal Countries* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), pp. 201–26; and M.P. Singh and Rekha Saxena, "Republic of India," in Johanne Poirier and Cheryl Saunders, eds, *Intergovernmental Relations in Federal Systems* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2015).
10. Sandeep Shastri, "Parliamentarism vs Presidentialism: Problems and Prospects in the Indian Context," in D.D. Khanna and Gert W. Kueck, eds, *Principles, Power and Politics* (Delhi: McMillan, 1999).
11. India, Constituent Assembly Debates 7: 34–6.
12. Francine Frankel, Zoya Hassan, Rajeev Bhargava, and Balveer Arora, *Transforming India: Social and Political Dynamics of Democracy* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).
13. Michael Bothe, "Federalism: The Historical Metamorphosis of a Concept," in Gert W. Kueck, ed., *Federalism and Decentralization* (New Delhi: Mudrit, 1998).
14. Throughout this chapter, the national government is referred to as the federal government, though the Constitution prefers to use the term *Union*, and *Central* is the more common term in public debate.
15. Save the state of Jammu and Kashmir in view of the special status guaranteed to the state by the Constitution.
16. The Union territories are areas that have been given a special status because of their historical significance, distinctness, being controversial area, or being a part of the federal capital. Delhi has been granted a special state status and, in this study, is listed as a Union Territory.
17. The twenty-ninth state of Telangana was created in 2014.
18. The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution accorded this status to the local bodies. See also George Mathew and Rakish Hooja, "Republic of India," in Nico Steytler, ed., *Local Government and Metropolitan Regions in Federal Systems* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), pp. 167–99.
19. Sandeep Shastri, "Electoral Reforms in India: Need for Second Look at the First Past the Post System," in Anjoo Sharan Upadhava, ed., *Electoral Reforms in India* (Delhi: Concept, 2005), pp. 64–73.
20. Article 356 of the Indian Constitution.

21. Sandeep Shastri, "Representing the States at the Federal Level: The Role of the Rajya Sabha" in Jorg Luther, Paolo Passaglia, and Rolando Tarchi, eds, *The World of Second Chambers* (Milan: Giuffrè Editore, 2007), pp. 135–56.
22. The Indian National Congress traces its roots to 1885 and was actively involved in the freedom movement and struggle against colonial rule. After independence, it emerged as the main political party and came to power in the federal arena. Over the years, the party has seen several splits, and the dominant group has had minor changes in its formal nomenclature but is popularly referred to as the Congress Party.
23. In 1967, the Congress Party was defeated in the state assembly elections in several states of North India. This heralded the rise of a competitive party system in the states.
24. Though the BJP secured a majority on its own in the 2014 national elections, the government at the federal level is a coalition government led by the BJP.
25. D.L. Seth, "Secularisation of Caste and Making of New Middle Class," *Economic & Political Weekly* 34–35 (August 21–28, 1999): 2502–10.
26. GDP per capita in 2010 was \$1,477 (nominal) and \$3,582 (purchasing power parity).
27. *Poverty Estimate for 2009–10*, Planning Commission, Government of India, May 2010.
28. The Election Commission classifies parties into national parties, state parties, and registered unrecognized parties. A political party needs to register with the Election Commission in order to be accorded recognition. A political party shall be treated as a recognized National party, if (i) the candidates set up by it, in any four or more States, at the last general election to the Lower House of the federal parliament or the Legislative Assembly at the state level, have secured not less than six percent of the total valid votes polled and (ii) at least four members have been elected to the Lower House of the federal Parliament or (i) its candidates have been elected to the Lower House of the Federal Parliament at the last general elections, from at least two percent of the total number of constituencies in India, any fraction exceeding one-half being counted as one; and (ii) the said candidates have been elected to that Lower house of the Federal Parliament from not less than three States. To be classified as a State Party (A)(i) the candidates set up the party, at the last general election to the Lower House of the Federal Parliament or to the Legislative Assembly of the State legislature concerned, have secured not less than six percent of the total valid votes polled in that State and (ii) in addition, it has returned at least two members to the Legislative Assembly of the State at the last general election; or (i) it wins at least three percent of the total number of seats in the Legislative Assembly of the State, (any fraction exceeding one-half being counted as one), or at least three seats in the Assembly, whichever is more, at the aforesaid general election.
29. As on March 7, 2015 as per Election Commission of India notification. http://eci.nic.in/eci_main/ElectoralLaws/OrdersNotifications/year2014/Notification%20English%2013.01.2015.pdf.
30. Rajni Kothari, *Politics in India* (New Delhi: Orient Longmans, 1994).
31. Shastri et al., *Electoral Politics in Indian States*; and K.C. Suri, *Parties under Pressure* (New Delhi: Lokniti Occasional Papers, 2005).
32. Yogendra Yadav, "Reconfiguration in Indian Politics: State Assembly Elections," *Economic and Political Weekly* 31, nos. 2–3 (1996): 95–104.
33. Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar, "From Hegemony to Convergence: Party System and Electoral Politics in Indian States," *Journal of Indian School of Political Economy* 15, nos. 1–2 (2003): 5–44. Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar, "Revisiting Third Electoral System: Mapping Electoral Trends in India, 2004–09" in Shastri et al., *Electoral Politics in Indian States*, pp. 393–429.
34. Yadav "Reconfiguration," 1994.
35. Suhas Palshikar and Sanjay Kumar, "Participatory Norm: How Broad Based Is It?" *Economic and Political Weekly* 39, no. 51 (December 2004): 5412–17; Sanjay Kumar, "Patterns of Political Participation: Trends and Perspectives," *Economic and Political Weekly* 44, no. 39 (September 2009): 47–51.
36. Yadav and Palshikar, "Revisiting."
37. Sanjay Kumar, "Patterns."
38. The Congress, which formed a minority government in 1991, was able to muster a majority in 1994 by ensuring that select members of the lower house of the federal Parliament changed their party affiliations and joined the Congress Party.
39. Hereinafter referred to as AAP.
40. Dalits are also referred to as the Scheduled Castes. These were the castes historically treated as "untouchables." The state has special provisions of reservations (similar to affirmative action) for these castes in elected bodies, public education, and public employment.
41. Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar, "Revisiting," p. 395.
42. The reference is to twenty-eight and not twenty-nine states as the twenty-ninth state formally came into existence after the elections.
43. It is important to make the point that the one state which did not see the major alliances secure more than two-thirds of the vote was Andhra Pradesh. This was the state from which the new state of Telangana was to be carved out and formally come into effect after the elections. The electoral verdict in 2014 was distinctly different in Telangana as compared to the rest of Andhra Pradesh, implying that from the voters' perspective the state was already divided, although in formal terms that would happen after the elections.
44. Sanjay Kumar, "Patterns," p. 48.
45. Pradeep Chhibber, Sandeep Shastri, and Richard Sisson "Federal Arrangements and the Provision of Public Goods," *Asian Survey* 54, no. 3 (May/June 2004): 339–52.
46. Yadav and Palshikar, "From Hegemony."
47. Yadav and Palshikar, "Ten Theses," pp. 59–60. Category i: Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand; Category ii: Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Kerala, Maharashtra, Orissa, Bihar, Tripura; Category iii: Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Jharkhand, Jammu and Kashmir, Manipur; Category iv: Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Haryana, West Bengal.
48. Traditionally the country has been divided into North, South, West, East, Central, and North East India.
49. The parties in power on March 7, 2015.
50. Some commentators may argue that after the 2014 national elections, the bargaining power of the state-based parties especially within the NDA has reduced as the BJP has secured a majority on its own and is not dependent on its NDA partners. It may still be early days to reach such a conclusion, and one would need to wait to see how the BJP deals with contentious political issues that may require support not only from its allies but also from those aligned against it.
51. In April–May 2010, several accusations of corruption and impropriety were made against federal ministers. A minister belonging to the INC resigned, whereas ministers who hailed from other parties in the alliance refused to resign for quite some time and were backed by their party leaders.
52. Misuse of the office of the governor and imposition of Presidents Rule evoking Article 356 can be cited as cases in point. See also Amal Ray and John Kincaid, "Politics, Economics, and Second-Generation Strain in India's Federal System," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 18 (Spring 1988): 147–67.
53. 52nd Constitutional Amendment.
54. Orders of the Election Commission of India: www.eci.gov.in
55. It may be too early to talk of the long-term impact of the AAP. The AAP government in Delhi resigned after being in power for just forty-nine days when its key

- legislation on creating an ombudsman-like authority for the Delhi state was rejected by the state legislature.
56. Findings of National Election Studies 1996, 1998, 1999, and 2004 and India Component of the World Values Survey 2000 and 2005.
 57. Sandeep Shastri, "Legal Impediments to Rural Development in Asian Development Bank," *Agriculture, Food Security and Rural Development* (Delhi: Oxford, 2010), pp. 281–2.
 58. Pradeep Chhibber et al., "Providing," pp. 339–52.
 59. NES 1971 and NES 1996, CSDS Data Bank.
 60. The author would have liked to include a case study on the India Against Corruption movement and how a part of it transformed itself into a political party—the Aam Aadmi Party. As these developments are still ongoing, they are referred to but not discussed in detail separately.
 61. <http://www.adrindia.org/About-Us/Content/about-adr.html>
 62. More recently the ADR has achieved success by filing another Public Interest Litigation which resulted in a Supreme Court direction that elected representatives who are convicted of a crime will be disqualified as elected representatives. As a result three Members of Parliament were disqualified. *Lily Thomas vs Union of India*, July 10, 2013. www.indiankanoon.org/doc/63158859 (accessed November 3, 2013).
 63. As on February 15, 2014.
 64. When Jawaharlal Nehru was the prime minister (1947–64), the INC was in power in both the federal government and most of the states. Party conventions were often used to discuss government policy matters. Nehru had the practice of writing fortnightly letters to chief ministers (a formal communication between the head of the federal government and the heads of the state governments) in which he often discussed internal matters relating to the Congress Party. See Sandeep Shastri, "Nehru and the Congress Party: The Nurturing of a Nascent Democracy," *Journal of Karnatak University* 24 (1991): 67–76.
 65. The BJP was constrained to place on hold its demand for a Uniform Civil Code, Abolition of Article 370, and Construction of a Temple at Ayodhya in deference to the wishes of its alliance partners.
 66. Sandeep Shastri and Reetika Syal, "Leadership in Context: Assessing the Impact of Leadership in the 2014 Lok Sabha Elections," *Economic and Political Weekly* 69, no. 39 (September 2014): 77–81.
 67. Yadav and Palshikar, "Ten Theses," p. 52.
 68. Within the Congress, there has been a clamour for Rahul Gandhi to take over the leadership of the party and government in the federal arena. The prime minister, when forming the government in 2009, made an open request to Rahul Gandhi to join the government. Gandhi declined the invitation and said he would attempt to build his political base by galvanizing the youth and rejuvenating the INC. His leading of the campaign during the elections to the state legislature in the largest state of India—Uttar Pradesh—did not meet with success. In 2012, Rahul Gandhi was appointed as the vice-president of the party. In the run-up to the 2014 elections to the lower house of Parliament, there was a move in the Congress party to declare Rahul Gandhi as its prime ministerial candidate. This assumed significance in the light of the incumbent prime minister, Manmohan Singh, announcing his retirement at the end of his term and the leading opposition party (BJP) announcing a prime ministerial candidate. The party, however, decided to project Rahul Gandhi as the chairperson of the Campaign Committee and did not declare him as the prime ministerial candidate.
 69. Sandeep Shastri, "Leadership at the State Level Mattered," *Economic and Political Weekly* 64, no. 39 (September 2009): 88–91.
 70. Yadav and Palshikar, "Ten Theses," p. 61.