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Karnataka 2008–9

BJP Penetrates the South

The 2009 Lok Sabha poll in Karnataka once again showed that the state bucked the national trend. It was one of the few states in which the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) actually increased its vote share compared to previous elections (Lok Sabha 2004 and State Assembly 2008). A year prior to the Lok Sabha elections, in the Assembly elections held in the state, the BJP fell short of a majority by just three seats, and came to power with the support of a few independents (Shastri and Padmavathi 2009). This victory of the BJP could be termed as historic, as it was the first time the party had won an election in any state in south India. The success in Karnataka was projected as the grand entry of the party south of the Vindhyas. In the 2009 Lok Sabha poll, the party further consolidated its presence both in terms of vote percentage and seat share (Shastri, Devi, and Padmavathi 2009). Many political observers would have anticipated this result, with the 'honeymoon' period for the BJP-led state government still on, and the opposition Congress having shown no visible signs of attempting a political recovery. (It is another matter that the BJP squandered this victory by ignoring governance issues and by indulging in corruption and factionalism. This cost the party heavily in the Assembly elections of 2013, leading to a

resurgent Congress. This chapter, however, does not go into an analysis of that election.)

The 2009 Lok Sabha verdict saw a near repeat of the 2004 results (Shastri and Ramaswamy 2009) with the BJP's tally rising by one seat. The Congress was down by two seats, with the other beneficiary being the Janata Dal–Secular (JDS), which increased its tally by one seat. The Karnataka voters have invariably made a distinction between a Lok Sabha poll and the Assembly polls (Shastri and Ramaswamy 2009; Shastri 2004). Elections in Karnataka have rarely conformed to any trend that influenced voters across the country. For the last quarter century, there has invariably been one party/alliance in power at the central level, and another occupying office in the state (save for a brief period between 1991 and 1994, and again from 1996 to 1998).

The verdict throws up some very relevant questions and intriguing puzzles. What accounts for the good performance of the BJP? Given the constellation of political circumstances, should it not have swept the state? Is the result a reflection on the performance of the state government? Why was the Congress not able to recover from its 2008 Assembly debacle in the state? Why was the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) not able to reap dividends in the state similar to what it was able to achieve in other parts of the country? No single factor explains this complex verdict. Voters across the country are generally not known to reject a party which has been in power for less than a year. The BJP appeared to benefit from this tradition. Though the voters were distinctly uncomfortable with some of the actions of the BJP at the state-level and did not regard the state government's performance as anything spectacular, they decided to endorse the claims of BJP candidates in the Lok Sabha poll. This could possibly explain the absence of a sweep in favour of the BJP. The utter disarray, string of defections, poor choice of candidates, incessant infighting, and total confusion in the ranks of the Congress party, the limited ambitions of the JD(S), and the split of non-BJP votes between the Congress and the JD(S) in some regions, clearly benefited the BJP.

The Outcome in 2009

The BJP was able to win nineteen of the twenty-eight seats in the state. The Congress candidates won in six constituencies while the remaining

three seats were won by the JD(S). The other political parties which fielded candidates—Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)), Communist Party of India (CPI), Nationalist Congress Party (NCP)—all drew a blank. The winning margin of the BJP candidates was formidable in most cases, while the Congress victories were generally by less flattering margins. The three JD(S) candidates won with comfortable margins in their constituencies. In Karnataka, the BJP has generally fared better in the Lok Sabha polls as compared to the state elections (Shastri and Ramaswamy 2009). This time around too, the BJP was able to secure its highest ever share of votes—close to 42 per cent (Table 23.1). The Congress vote share was five percentage points lower than that of the BJP.

Post-delimitation, the geographical boundaries of the seats have undergone major changes, while the actual names of only four constituencies have been changed.¹ The BJP was able to retain all the seats that it won the last time around, save two. The Congress, on the other hand, lost more than five of the eight seats it had won in 2004, and wrested three seats from others. Though the final tally of each party was more or less close to the 2004 figure, there was a swapping of several seats.

TABLE 23.1 Lok Sabha polls 2009: Overall and region-wise votes polled and seats won in Karnataka

Regions	Total seats	BJP		Congress		JD(S)		Others	
		Won	Vote (%)	Won	Vote (%)	Won	Vote (%)	Won	Vote (%)
Hyderabad	4	2	41.6	2	39.6	0	9.6	0	9.1
Karnataka									
Mumbai	6	6	50.5	0	40.6	0	3.1	0	5.8
Karnataka									
Central	4	4	47.2	0	41.8	0	4.4	0	6.6
Karnataka									
Bengaluru	4	3	41.3	0	33.5	1	20.6	0	4.6
South	7	1	30.4	4	32.5	2	28.1	0	9.0
Karnataka									
Coastal	3	3	47.5	0	44.0	0	1.9	0	6.6
Karnataka									
Total	28	19	41.6	6	37.7	3	13.6	0	7.1

Source: Election Commission Statistics 2009.

The 'safe seat' concept seems to have become a thing of the past in Karnataka.

There is evidence that in Karnataka, the voting pattern of 2009 was in many ways a repeat of the 2004 Lok Sabha election trend. The BJP was able to retain close to nine of every ten who voted for it in 2004. In the case of the JD(S) too, its capacity to retain those who voted for it in 2004 was quite high. The Congress, on the other hand, was able to hold back only seven of every ten of those who voted for it, losing more than one-fourth of those who voted for it earlier, to the BJP to a larger extent and the JD(S) to a lesser extent (Table 23.2).

It would be useful to contextualize the 2009 Lok Sabha verdict in Karnataka by tracing the political events in the state over the past five years, since the earlier Lok Sabha elections (2004). The year 2004 saw Karnataka faced with a simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly polls. The state saw a split verdict with the BJP securing a majority of the Lok Sabha seats, but failing to secure a majority in the Assembly, and emerging only as the single largest party (Shastri and Ramaswamy 2009). This by itself for many would have been a creditable achievement as the BJP had never reached this position in the past. It was clearly evident that the BJP strategy in Karnataka in 2004 was to ensure the return of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) to power in Delhi. All its efforts were focused in that direction. Coming to power in Bangalore seemed a 'belated afterthought' with the leadership (both central and the state) doing precious little to becoming the ruling party in the state.

Though the BJP emerged as the single largest party in the 2008 Assembly elections, the Congress and the JD(S) outmanoeuvred the BJP and formed an alliance to stake their claim to power. Still reeling under its national defeat, the BJP appeared too dazed to make a serious bid for power in the state. The Congress–JD(S) government saw very

little unity among the coalition partners, or decisiveness in action. The only 'glue' that held them together was to prevent the BJP from coming to power. Within two years, an internal rebellion with the JD(S) saw Kumaraswamy (the son of Deve Gowda) strike an alliance with the BJP to bring down the Congress–JD(S) coalition, and form an alternative BJP–JD(S) government with Kumaraswamy from the JD(S) as Chief Minister, and Yeddyurappa from the BJP as his deputy. It is important to record that even though the BJP had a larger number of legislators as compared to the JD(S), it conceded the chief ministership to the junior partner.² The working of this new coalition was fraught with challenges as the coalition partners constantly aired their differences in public and often pulled in opposite directions. As the coalition was completing twenty months in power, the BJP demanded that they be given the chief ministership for the remaining twenty months as per the original understanding. The JD(S) was in no mood to concede to the BJP demand, leading to the fall of the government and declaration of President's Rule. The BJP and JD(S) soon reached an understanding leading to the formation of a BJP government with the JD(S) promising to join the government after it won the vote of confidence. Prior to the vote of confidence, the JD(S) withdrew support, leading to the fall of the BJP-led government. Thus the period between 2004 and 2008 saw a series of coalition governments formed, largely on account of political machinations and negotiations, with the sole aim of enjoying the spoils of political office. It was in this context that the 2008 Assembly elections were held.

The BJP went into the 2008 Assembly elections with the image of a martyr who had been wronged by the JD(S), and denied its right to lead the government. Its chief campaigner and chief ministerial hopeful, Yeddyurappa, led an aggressive campaign across the state. The JD(S) was clearly on the back-foot, unable to explain its political 'flip-flop', and the opportunistic politics of sharing power, first with the Congress and then the BJP, and refusal to transfer the leadership in the JD(S)–BJP coalition. The Congress, on the other hand, made little effort to launch a well-coordinated campaign. The infighting within the state leadership was clearly apparent in the run-up to the election campaign (Shastri, Devi and Padmavathy 2009).

As part of its preparation for the 2008 Assembly polls, the BJP launched a three-pronged strategy. First, highlighting the fact of

TABLE 23.2 Shift of vote from 2004 Lok Sabha elections to 2009 Lok Sabha elections in Karnataka

	2009 INC	2009 BJP	2009 JD(S)
2004 INC	69	17	8
2004 BJP	4	89	3
2004 JD(S)	8	5	85

Source: Calculated by the authors.

'betrayal' by the JD(S) and its right to be given a chance to 'serve' the people. The campaign saw the party project itself as a political formulation, which was 'different'. Second, in a bid to emerge as the ruling party, it allowed for many new entrants to the party in the run-up to the polls. These included those who left other parties and decided to don the BJP colours. Also, many of those who represented and were sponsored by the mining and real estate lobby were accommodated in the party. The new entrants were liberally given tickets for the 2008 Assembly elections in the light of their 'winnability'. This of course, created a flutter and discontent among the party loyalists and came to the fore especially after the party came to power.³ Third, the party projected Yeddyurappa as its Chief Ministerial candidate. He belonged to the powerful Lingayat community, considered one of the dominant castes in the state and a force to reckon with especially in Northern Karnataka. No other party projected a Lingayat leader. The state had not had a leader from that community as chief minister since 1990. The spectacular performance of the BJP in North Karnataka in the 2008 Assembly elections is largely credited to the strong support it received from the Lingayat community.

The BJP coming to power in Karnataka in 2008 needs to be seen in this political backdrop. The Lok Sabha elections were held within a year of the BJP coming to power in the state.

The Region-wise Picture

The BJP victory in Karnataka was essentially a by-product of a sweep in select regions. For a meaningful political analysis of state politics, Karnataka can be divided into six distinct regions: (i) the Hyderabad-Karnataka region (areas earlier under the Nizam of Hyderabad which became a part of Karnataka in 1956); (ii) Mumbai-Karnataka region (areas which were under the Bombay Presidency during British rule); (iii) Central Karnataka (largely the Malnad regions); (iv) Bengaluru (the city and its rural surroundings which have assumed political significance post-delimitation in view of the increase in the number of seats); (v) Southern Karnataka (the bulk of the erstwhile princely state of Mysore); and (vi) Coastal Karnataka (the coastal region of the state). The BJP made a clean sweep of three of these regions—Mumbai Karnataka, Central Karnataka, and Coastal Karnataka. Two veteran Congress leaders⁴ won in the Hyderabad-Karnataka region, thus resulting in the party

sharing the electoral spoils with the BJP in this region. What prevented a BJP sweep in the state was its lacklustre performance in the important Southern Karnataka region. The Congress and the JD(S) picked up most of their seats in this region, with the BJP managing to win only one of the seven seats here (Table 23.1). In terms of vote share too, it is noticed that the BJP did exceptionally well in the Mumbai-Karnataka, Central Karnataka, and Coastal Karnataka regions, and lagged behind the Congress in Southern Karnataka. The Congress gave a tough fight to the BJP in straight contests in the Coastal Karnataka region with the vote share margin being less than three percentage points. Yet, the Congress could not manage to win even one of the three seats in this region. The JD(S), on its part, registered its presence largely in Southern Karnataka and Bengaluru.

Candidate Selection and Campaign

In retrospect, it can be argued that the BJP scored an advantage over the Congress both in the selection of candidates and in the nature of its election campaign. The BJP chose its nominees for the different seats reasonably early. There was some disquiet about certain candidates fielded by the party. Six of the party's nominees were those who had defected to the BJP on the eve of the elections—four of them were defeated in the polls. The Congress, too, had its share of party hoppers. All the four who had joined the party on the eve of elections, including two former BJP Members of Parliament who had voted with the Congress in the confidence vote (on 22 July 2008 in the previous Lok Sabha), lost. This factor is crucial as will be observed later, when public attitudes to 'floor crossing' by elected representatives is discussed. In spite of the heartburn within the BJP over the choice of some candidates, the party was able to resolve its differences and publically project a united face.⁵ The Congress, on the other hand, was besieged with internal bickering from the very beginning. This was nothing new to Congress politics in Karnataka (Manor 2008). Every seat saw a bitter internal contest among the factional leaders of the Congress. The announcement of each candidate was greeted with a spate of dissident activity.⁶ Even when apportioning the seats, the Congress leadership sought to satisfy the rival groups without keeping an exclusive eye on chances of winning.

The trend that was seen in the choice of candidates continued during the campaign. The BJP ran a well-oiled campaign with ministers asked to coordinate within certain constituencies and leaders spreading out across the state. Funds did not appear to be a constraint for the BJP candidates, especially with the powerful mining lobby backing the party campaign. The focus was clearly on the newly elected BJP government, and the party appealed to voters to endorse the claims of its state government. A second order of priority was accorded to endorsing BJP leader and 'prime ministerial candidate' L.K. Advani's leadership and challenging Manmohan Singh, termed by the BJP as the 'weak Prime Minister' of the UPA coalition. The Congress campaign, on the other hand, varied from constituency to constituency. Leaders focused attention only on 'their' candidates, resulting in a lack of clear and focused direction to the campaign. The party's electoral strategy in the state remained unclear till the end. A post-election analysis reveals that Congress leaders worked at cross purposes and actively sabotaged the interests of candidates from rival camps.⁷ The JD(S) strategy was clear. It preferred to consciously focus attention on a few prestigious seats, which it was keen on winning. All this worked to the BJP's advantage.

Satisfaction with Government

A few important indicators which emerge from the NES 2009⁸ need to be factored into any analysis of the BJP victory. Chief Minister Yeddyurappa was clearly in the lead when it came to voters' choice for the post of Chief Minister. In the survey, one-third of the respondents mentioned his name.⁹ Former Chief Minister, H.D. Kumaraswamy, was the second choice, being endorsed by about two of every ten respondents. Among the Congress leaders, S.M. Krishna led the way, followed by a clutch of other Congress leaders. The Congress could take consolation in the fact that the combined support garnered by all its leaders was higher than the support for those in the top two positions (Table 23.3). It must also be asserted that when respondents are asked this question, the tendency to mention names of past occupants was quite common. It is thus not surprising that the first three names mentioned were those of the incumbent and two of his predecessors.

TABLE 23.3 Chief Minister choice (in per cent)

B.S. Yeddyurappa.	33
H.D. Kumaraswamy	19
S.M. Krishna.	15
Mallikarjun Kharge	9
Dharam Singh	8
Siddaramaiah	4
Others	12

Source: NES, Karnataka post-poll 2009; weighted data set (n= 2120).

Note: Question: Who would you prefer as the chief minister of Karnataka?

While it must be conceded that little less than two-thirds of the respondents were satisfied with the performance of the state government, it is a much lower endorsement as compared to endorsements of similar governments which are in power for less than a year.

When asked to evaluate the recent governments in the state, nearly one-third of the respondents viewed the JD(S)-BJP coalition government headed by H.D. Kumaraswamy as being among the best (Table 23.4). Less than two of every ten respondents rated the present BJP government as among the best, while a similar number stated that the Congress government headed by S.M. Krishna was the best. In spite

TABLE 23.4 Rating of Karnataka governments

JDS-BJP Government (Kumaraswamy)	31
BJP Government (Yeddyurappa.)	19
Congress Government (S.M. Krishna)	18
Congress-JD(S) Government (Dharam Singh)	15

Source: NES, Karnataka post-poll 2009; weighted data set (n= 2120).

Note: Other respondents mentioned other government, or stated all are equally good/bad. or can't say / don't know

Q. If you compare the Congress-led by S.M. Krishna government, the Congress-JD(S)-led Dharam Singh government, the JD(s)-BJP-led Kumaraswamy government, the BJP-JD(S)-led Yeddyurappa government, and the present Yeddyurappa government, in your opinion which has been the best government?

of the ruling BJP's good performance in the elections, the voters were still not willing to recognize the present government as being among the best in recent times.

Respondents were asked whether they gave importance to the central government or state government when deciding whom to vote for. A majority of those who said state government (58 per cent) voted for the BJP. On the other hand, a majority of those who said central government (54 per cent) voted for the Congress. Thus, in a Lok Sabha election, the voting pattern seems to be influenced by which government's performance were you looking at while deciding whom to vote for.

When the present BJP government came to power in the state, they fell short of a majority by a few seats and needed the support of independents. In order to secure a majority on its own, the BJP launched what has been commonly referred to as 'Operation Kamala'.¹⁰ This plan involved Congress-JD(S) Assembly members resigning from their Assembly seats and contesting as BJP nominees in the by-elections (Shastri and Padmavathi 2009). The survey sought to tap public reactions to this 'majority manufacturing strategy'. Seven of every ten respondents had heard of 'Operation Kamala'. Among those who took a stand on the issue, more than two-thirds felt that this was not a welcome development.

Since the BJP came to power in the state, there has been a vigorous debate on the implications of this development on communal harmony in the state. When respondents were asked whether the relations between different communities had improved ever since the BJP came to power, many more said it had worsened compared to those who said it had improved (Table 23.5). Clearly those who voted for the Congress-JD(S) were more likely to say that the relations between different communities had worsened.

When pointedly asked whether there was greater protection for minorities under BJP rule, once again double the number of respondents replied in the negative rather than in the positive (Table 23.5). This fear appeared to be much more pronounced among the Muslim and Christian respondents. Many among those who voted for the BJP too conceded that the situation with regard to protection of minorities was much worse than before. A few months before the Lok Sabha elections, the city of Mangalore was in the headlines because of the much publicized pub attack incidents. More than half the respondents in the state had heard

TABLE 23.5 Performance of the BJP government on select indicators

	Improved	Deteriorated	same	No Opinion
Relation between different communities	19	25	46	10
Protection of Minorities	14	31	48	7
Security for Women	18	31	46	5
Condition of farmers	22	24	50	4
Infrastructure in cities	22	23	48	7
Commitments to Development	21	28	42	9

Source: NES, Karnataka post-poll 2009; weighted data set (n = 2120).

Note: Figures do not add up to 100% as 'No Opinion' not reported.

of these attacks. Once again, among those who took a stand on the issue, more than two-thirds felt that the incident was not justified.

Social Base of Parties

Was there any pattern with regard to the age of respondents and support for different political parties? Younger voters tended to favour the BJP more while those older appeared to be more supportive of the Congress. The BJP support reduced as the age of the respondents increased, and the reverse was true of the Congress. The support for the JD(S) did not vary significantly across age groups (Table 23.6). The

TABLE 23.6 Vote by age and education

	BJP	Congress	JD(S)	Others
Less than 25	48	31	16	3
25-36	43	37	13	7
36-45	41	38	14	7
46-55	40	38	14	8
More than 55	38	42	13	7
Illiterate	36	46	10	8
Up to Primary	43	41	14	2
Up to Middle	41	34	16	9
College and above	47	31	16	7

Source: NES, Karnataka post-poll 2009; weighted data set (n = 1940).

TABLE 23.7 Vote by locality

	BJP	Congress	JD(S)	Others
Rural	43	40	11	6
Town/Cities	40	33	21	6
Metro	34	35	17	15

Source: NES, Karnataka post-poll 2009; weighted data set (n= 1940).

BJP seemed to draw support from the more educated, while those who did not have the benefit of education tended to favour the Congress (Table 23.7). This continues to confirm an earlier trend that those with limited access to formal education tended to be Congress supporters and that the support for the BJP rises with access to education. The JD(S) vote share did not vary significantly across education levels.

If the voting pattern in rural areas, town/cities, and metropolitan areas is analysed, it is noticed that this time around the BJP appears to have garnered greater support in the rural areas as compared to the towns and metropolitan areas. NES data reveals that this is the first time since 1996 that the BJP has secured a higher percentage of votes in rural areas as compared to its competitors (Table 23.8). The Congress, too, has more or less maintained its vote share in the rural areas, but has had to concede the first place to the BJP this time around. The JD(S) on the other hand, which was generally seen as a party of the rural hinterland, has done much better in smaller towns and cities as compared to rural areas. In fact, the support it received in metropolitan areas too, is higher than what it gained in the villages. The better performance of the JD(S) may be linked to the image of its leader and former Chief Minister, Kumaraswamy, whose government was rated amongst the

TABLE 23.8 Rural/Urban vote by party: 1996 to 2009

	1996	1998	1999	2004	2009
Congress	31 (30)	38 (25)	49 (33)	38 (32)	40 (34)
BJP	23 (32)	35 (55)	40 (42)	35 (44)	43 (39)
Janata Dal (S)	36 (30)	23 (17)	8 (21)	21 (20)	11 (20)

Source: NES, Karnataka post-poll 1996, 1998, 1999, 2004, and 2009; weighted data set.

Note: Vote in urban area in parenthesis.

best in recent years in the state. The JD(S) would, however, be alarmed at the sharp decline in its vote share in rural areas as it has fallen by ten percentage points (Table 23.8). The vote share difference between the Congress and the BJP is much less in rural areas as compared to towns and cities. In metropolitan Bangalore, the Congress had a marginally higher vote share than the BJP, even though the party did not win a single seat in the city (Table 23.7). The BJP has seen a decline in its vote share in urban Karnataka, having conceded ground in this region to both the JD(S) and the Congress (Table 23.8).

The caste factor is an important variable in explaining the Karnataka verdict. Karnataka has seen a domination of the peasant proprietary Lingayat and Vokkaliga communities in the politics of the state (Shastri 2008). A majority of the upper caste voters supported the BJP. In earlier elections, the party had done very well among the dominant caste and influential Lingayat community (Shastri and Padmavathi 2009; Shastri and Ramaswamy 2009). This community has a significant presence in Northern Karnataka. NES 2009 reveals that three-fourths of the Lingayat community voters endorsed the claims of the BJP. This possibly explains the creditable performance of the BJP in the Mumbai-Karnataka and Central Karnataka regions. Since 1996, the party has consistently expanded its support base in this community (Table 23.10). In earlier elections, the votes of the other dominant caste, the Vokkaligas, were divided between the Congress and the JD(S), with the BJP garnering a minor share (Shastri and Padmavathi 2009; Shastri and Ramaswamy 2009). This time around, the BJP was able to cut into the Vokkaliga votes of both the Congress and the JD(S), with nearly four of every ten Vokkaliga voters supporting BJP nominees (Table 23.9). It is important to note that there has been a sharp fall in the vote share of both the Congress and the JD(S) among Vokkaliga voters in more or less equal proportion compared to both the 2004 Lok Sabha poll, as well as the 2008 Assembly polls. In 1996, the Janata Dal did exceptionally well in the polls on account of the overwhelming support from the Vokkaligas community. Ever since it has seen an erosion of the Vokkaligas vote, which has gradually gravitated towards the Congress and the BJP. 2004 saw a revival of the support enjoyed by the JD(S) among the Vokkaligas (Table 23.11).

Electoral politics in the state in the recent past has shown that the two dominant castes often tend to support rival political formulations.

TABLE 23.9 Vote by caste/community

	BJP	Congress	JD(S)	Others	Numbers
Upper castes	55	25	16	4	122
Lingayats	73	17	5	5	335
Vokkaligas	38	28	30	4	326
Non-Dominant Backward caste	44	40	9	7	246
Scheduled Caste	33	49	8	10	368
Scheduled Tribes	37	41	14	8	187
Muslims	11	68	14	7	226
Others	37	34	13	16	133

Source: NES, Karnataka post-poll 1996, 1998, 1999, 2004, and 2009; weighted data set.

TABLE 23.10 Lingayat community vote by party since 1996

	1996	1998	1999	2004	2009
Congress	21	18	36	31	17
BJP	42	63	57	60	73
JDS	28	18	5	5	5

Source: NES, Karnataka post-poll 1996, 1998, 1999, 2004, and 2009; weighted data set.

TABLE 23.11 Vokkaliga community vote by party since 1996

	1996	1998	1999	2004	2009
Congress	6	29	34	38	28
BJP	31	26	31	14	38
JDS	63	43	25	44	30

Source: NES, Karnataka post-poll 1996, 1998, 1999, 2004, and 2009; weighted data set.

This time around, the BJP has not only been able to consolidate its support among the Lingayat community, but has also cut into the Vokkaliga vote of its two main rivals. The BJP made a conscious effort this time around to court influential leaders from the Vokkaliga community in the old Mysore region in order to build up its presence both in the region and within the community. Its efforts seem to have met with partial success. A backlash from either of the two dominant castes

in the next major poll cannot be ruled out as it would be difficult for the BJP to ensure the continued support from both the dominant castes. The BJP was also able to make inroads into the non-dominant, other backward classes vote too. This vote was earlier the mainstay of the Congress, and has gradually been seen moving away from the party, first towards the JD(S), and now towards the BJP. The JD(S) saw a sharp decline in support among the non-dominant OBC vote in the 2009 elections as compared to the earlier poll (Table 23.12).

NES 2009 also reveals that more than two-thirds of the Muslim voters supported the Congress, though none of the Karnataka MPs (Members of Parliament) in the Lok Sabha hail from this community (Table 23.8). In the past, the Congress has always revived its fortunes by consolidating the non-dominant backward classes votes, a trend that was mastered by former Chief Minister Devraj Urs (Shastri 2008). NES 2009 shows that the Dalit vote continued to be largely with the Congress. This trend is seen across elections since 1996 (Table 23.13). The tribal vote too seems to be split between the Congress and the BJP. While the BJP won both the tribal reserved seats, this had more to do with the support the party enjoyed among the Lingayat community who has a significant presence in both these constituencies.

TABLE 23.12 Non-dominant OBC vote by party since 1996

	1996	1998	1999	2004	2009
Congress	33	32	43	36	39
BJP	24	47	38	21	44
JDS	38	17	14	37	9

Source: NES, Karnataka post-poll 1996, 1998, 1999, 2004, and 2009; weighted data set.

TABLE 23.13 Dalit vote by party since 1996

	1996	1998	1999	2004	2009
Congress	39	69	54	44	49
BJP	3	13	34	30	33
JDS	27	11	10	8	8

Source: NES, Karnataka post-poll 1996, 1998, 1999, 2004, and 2009; weighted data set.

Assessing Broader Trends

The above analysis clearly indicates that it may be unrealistic to presume that the Karnataka vote was a positive vote in favour of the state government. The verdict was more a reflection of an 'indulgence' towards a ruling party, which had not yet settled down in power. NES 2009 indicates that there were several clear pointers to the unhappiness of the voters with what had happened in the state in the one year between the Assembly and Lok Sabha poll. The fact that the main opposition, Congress, appeared to be incapable of providing a stiff challenge to the ruling BJP worked to its advantage. More often than not, the Karnataka political scene has shown that the Congress Party has a habit of defeating itself and does not lose because of its opponent's prowess (Manor 2008).

What are the trends in state politics in the last decade as evidenced in the 2009 verdict? In different regions, the state witnessed a near bipolar contest involving the Congress and the BJP. In some parts of Southern Karnataka and rural Bengaluru, the contest was principally between the Congress and the JD(S). This makes the possibility of an alliance between the Congress and the JD(S) very unlikely. Similarly, the BJP and the JD(S) will find it difficult to break bread together as both aim at consolidating the votes of the influential Vokkaliga community. Constituency-wise, the state still has a bi-polar orientation, which becomes tri-polar when viewed across the state. The JD(S) remains a third force in state politics and has the potential to cash in on any unease with either of two main players. 2009 did not give way to a new bipolarity, nor did it shape a clear multi-polar contest. The BJP's rise in Karnataka politics is a clear reflection of the inability of the Congress to present a credible alternative and the incapacity of the JD(S) to garner state-wide support.

Even in the post-election politics of Karnataka, the BJP's ability to remain in power and do well in local body elections, in spite of its serious internal dissensions, has a lot to do with the inability of the principal opposition party, the Congress, to take advantage of the situation. But the factionalism within the BJP led to a split in the state party unit, and ultimately resulted into a multi-cornered contest in many Lingayat dominated parts once ex-CM Yeddyurappa formed his Karanataka Janata Party in the run up to the Assembly election.

With its limited pockets of influence, the JD(S) was unable to position itself as an alternative. This situation catapulted the Congress into power at the state-level in 2013. The defeat of BJP in Assembly elections, however, depended mostly on a split in the BJP vote. This development, therefore, does not necessarily remove the BJP from the center of state-level politics. In the long run, if the BJP factions come together, there is a likelihood that JD(S) may get marginalized, giving way to a new social configuration in the state.

Notes

1 The one new constituency is Bangalore Central, and the constituency which no longer exists is Chikmagalur. Bangalore rural, more or less, takes the place of erstwhile Kanakapura and the former Udupi constituency is now Udupi-Chikmagalur.

2 The BJP strategy was to break the Congress-JD(S) alliance and be a part of the power structure. The BJP also claimed that there was an understanding with the JD(S), that the chief ministership would be transferred to the BJP after 20 months.

3 The party was forced to accommodate the new entrants once it came to power. Ministerial berths and other 'spoils' and benefits of office were conceded to the newcomers.

4 Former Chief Minister Dharam Singh in Bidar, and leader of opposition in the State Assembly Mallikarjun Kharge in Gulbarga registered wins in their respective constituencies.

5 In the post-election scenario, this unity has taken its toll with party leaders openly and continuously challenging the Chief Minister, and the manner in which candidates (including the Chief Minister's own son) were chosen by the party. Senior ministers, including K.S. Eshwarappa (he later became State Party President) and the Bellary mining lobby represented by the two Reddy brothers in the cabinet raised the banner of revolt against the Chief Minister, taking pot shots at his role in the selection of party candidates for the Lok Sabha poll. The post Lok Sabha elections phase in Karnataka politics has been one roller coaster ride for the BJP and its government in the state.

6 Things came to such a pass in the Congress that the then state party president and working president did not actively participate in the election campaign in their home constituencies (Kanara and Bangalore rural respectively), as the nominees they had proposed were not given the ticket.

7 This fact was highlighted by party leaders, candidates, and workers at the post-election conclaves organized by the party to analyse the election results.

Party leaders at the state-level and several candidates (who were defeated) shared this perspective in interviews with the authors.

8 Survey findings reported here are based on the study undertaken as part of the Major Research Project of the UGC granted to Veena Devi at the Department of Political Science, Bangalore University. The project title is: *Voters' Choice and Electoral Politics 2009* (F No is DEV/D2/UGC RP). The survey was conducted amongst 2,120 respondents.

9 It is important to record that the survey does not offer a menu of choices to the respondents, but leaves it to the respondents to decide whose name they would like to mention. The question asked was: Who would you prefer as the Chief Minister of Karnataka?

10 In the post Lok Sabha election days, 'Operation Kamala' saw several new phases, each triggered by a crisis faced by the government, and also being the cause of a new set of challenges. The BJP faced many internal revolts which included action being taken against the BJP legislators and independent MLA's by the Speaker of the Assembly, disqualifying them under the Anti Defection Law. The Supreme Court held that the disqualification was null and void, and the rebel BJP MLAs are not back in the party fold having once again expressed their support to the Chief Minister. The independents are no longer part of the government.

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