



IPCS

INSTITUTE OF PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES

BATTLE FOR THE STATES

ASSAM | KERALA | TAMIL NADU | WEST BENGAL



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FOREWORD

The assembly election verdicts for Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal emerged yesterday, on 19 May.

Election manifestos in India are buttressed by guarantees made on domestic, local issues. State governments may take a stand on national policies, but this is of incidental importance – their ascendance to power is not known to be on the basis of it.

Having said that, the regionalisation of politics has increased the ability of state governments to impede or facilitate the implementation of Indian foreign policy, and this complicates an already uneasy balance between the centre and the states.

Assam is considered important for India's 'Act East' policy, and remittances from migrant workers in West Asia constitute one of the drivers of Kerala's economy. Tamil Nadu and West Bengal have in the past been in conflict with the central government over India's bilateral relations with Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, respectively.

This five-part series on the battle for the states is an effort to recognise some of the dynamics and distinguishing features of state-level politics, which are vital for the understanding of Indian political and policy behaviour.

RUHEE NEOG

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, IPCS



INDIA: FOUR STATES, FIVE TRENDS

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On 19 May 2016, the results of legislative assembly elections of four Indian states – two from South India (Kerala and Tamil Nadu) and two from the east (West Bengal and Assam) – were announced. While there were no big surprises in the results and not much in common between them, they do project certain trends. Some of these trends reflect continuity with the past, while the others are new and need to be watched closely for their likely implications.

CHALLENGES FOR THE BJP

First, the election results in these four states (and a Union Territory – Puducherry, a former French colony) do highlight the challenges for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to penetrate into all of India. Barring Assam, where the BJP overthrew the long-standing Congress rule led by former Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi, in the other three states, the party's performance has been marginal and insignificant. In Kerala, it was able to win only one of the total 140 seats; and in Tamil Nadu, it could win none of 232 seats (declared so far). In West Bengal, although it has secured more seats than in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, its tally of six seats out of 294, is insignificant.

Assam has been the only exception for the BJP. The unpopularity of the Congress rule (Gogoi had been the chief minister for the past three consecutive terms) and the BJP's sustained campaign should have tilted the voting in its favour. In the other three states, the BJP has never been strong (or even present strongly) despite its strong campaign.

However, in terms of vote share, the BJP has made an important beginning. Having its leaders talking in TV shows and occupying a media space is different from having a substantial vote share.



DECLINE OF THE CONGRESS PARTY

The second major trend that should extremely be worrying for those who are watching national politics is the further decline of the Congress. While the BJP never had a strong presence in these states, the Congress always had a substantial contribution to the state politics, either as a ruling party, or as its coalition, or a strong opposition. Barring Assam, its performance in all other four states has been pathetic in the recent elections. It managed to secure 26 of the total 120 seats in Assam; but its performance in Kerala, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu do not augur well either for the Congress's future, or for national politics.

NATIONAL PARTIES AND THE PERIPHERY

The third major trend is an extension of the above two – the failure of national parties to have their presence in the periphery, and the relevance of strong regional political parties. Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress (TMC) in West Bengal, along with Jayalalitha's All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) and Karunanidhi's Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Tamil Nadu, signify the power of regional political parties. While a few nationalists project this as a worrying factor, in a large multi-ethnic country such as India, strong regional political parties actually strengthen federalism by playing a crucial role in the national parliament.

At times (in fact, more often than otherwise) regional political parties are accused of sabotaging national interests in terms of pursuing New Delhi's foreign policy vis-à-vis the neighbourhood. New Delhi has to take into account the interests of Tamil Nadu vis-à-vis Sri Lanka and West Bengal vis-à-vis Bangladesh. And this should be seen in a positive framework where the Centre accommodates and works with its periphery in framing foreign policy. Strong regional parties play a substantial role in strengthening the federal fabric.

In a large federal country, it is important to have a strong regional presence in the national parliament. All three (federation, regional parties and parliament) should have a symbiotic relationship for successful national governance.



WOMEN LEADERSHIP

The fourth trend in these elections is the continuation of women power. While other political parties were looking for alliances, Jayalalitha decided to fight on her own in Tamil Nadu. Mamata Banerjee led the campaign in West Bengal for the TMC. With Mayawati in Uttar Pradesh and Mehbooba Mufti in J&K, India can boast of strong women leadership at the state level. Significantly, they are outside the Congress family and do not come from a political dynasty. Mehbooba Mufti is the only exception in this – her Jammu and Kashmir Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) was founded and led by her father, who was earlier with the Congress. And none of the four women leaders belong to the BJP. All of them are extremely strong-willed and independent.

Strong women leadership, especially at the regional levels, portends well not only for politics, but also for social equations. Predominantly a patriarchal society, South Asia needs strong women politicians, that too evolving on their own and not from a political dynasty owing their rise to their fathers or husbands. Mayawati, Mamata and Jayalalitha have evolved from the grassroots and should be seen as a part of social evolution and not through their family connections. Male leaders not only respect leaders like Mamata and Jayalalitha, but also fear them. Undoubtedly, there is also an element of sycophancy. For example, Tamil leaders refer to Jayalalitha as Amma (mother) and visibly carry her photo on their pockets and fall at her feet to take her blessing. Although such trends do not bode well for democratic politics, they do indirectly play a role in women becoming more confident in an otherwise male dominated society in South Asia.

They are not only independent and strong, but also avowedly secular, liberal and even business-friendly. On the negative side, they are known for their autocratic and arrogant attitude, and their earlier terms have also been marked with corruption.

DECLINE OF THE LEFT

The fifth trend, which is an extremely worrisome one, is the continuing decline of the Left. Though the Left front has bounced back in Kerala, it has lost completely in West Bengal, which used to be its stronghold. Of the total 294 seats for West Bengal, they came third



with only 33 seats and that too below the Congress's 44. The decline is not only taking place at the party level; there is a leadership and ideological crisis within. The fact that they had aligned with the Congress in West Bengal (while fighting them in Kerala) would highlight the hypocrisy within.

While the Left in South Asia is on the decline all over, such a trend does not bode well as the Right has been increasing its electoral power in the Assemblies and muscle power on the streets. Given the need for a strong secular state and social equality between the classes, a declining Left bereft of a strong ideology is a disaster in waiting. The Left in India has to blame itself for reaching this situation. Preaching about Marx and harping on anti-American and capitalist critiques will not sell any further.

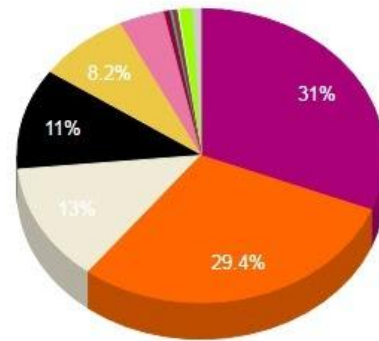
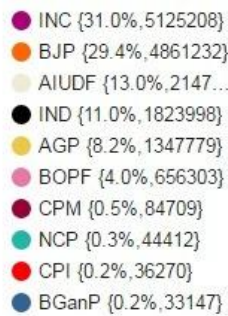


VERDICT 2016: ASSAM

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The BJP managed to break free from its 'Hindi-heartland' image by storming Assam with a massive victory, winning, along with its allies, 86 of the 126 assembly seats – thereby making its debut not just in Northeast India but in eastern India as well.



The BJP has a lot to cheer because apart from the fact that Assam has traditionally been a Congress stronghold, the Party managed to unseat the government of Congress veteran Tarun Gogoi, which was firmly saddled for three terms since 2001. This is no mean achievement, because except for a ten-year rule by the regional Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) over two separate terms, and a brief Janata Party stint, Assam had been under Congress rule.

The BJP win has been indeed decisive because most of Tarun Gogoi's senior cabinet colleagues have lost, leaving him with no option but to sit in the opposition benches without his key aides. This was a reflection of the strong anti-incumbency against the 15-year-long Tarun Gogoi government. The BJP managed to engineer this victory because it projected and relied on two strong local leaders – state party president Sarbananda Sonowal and new entrant Himanta Biswa Sharma; stitched up alliances with influential regional parties; did not bring in its Hindutva ideology into the campaign; harped on development and livelihood options; and, of course, sought to protect Assam's future by saving the identity of the indigenous people of the state from an onslaught of illegal Bangladeshi migrants. The BJP also kept its radical breed of saffronites away from the



Assam campaign, lest they make controversial remarks. The results were there for all to see – the BJP on its own bagged 60 seats and its allies collectively won 26.

This has been a high-stake election for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi – who addressed 10 election rallies – and BJP President Amit Shah because they knew, of the five states going to polls in April, Assam was the one where they had a real winning chance, a result that could change the party's national profile. The foundation, of course, was laid during the 2014 Lok Sabha polls where the Modi wave propelled the BJP to centre-stage in Assam. From just three Lok Sabha seats the BJP won in 2009, it managed to bag seven seats. The Congress tally declined from seven in 2009 to just three in 2014.

After the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP realised that it actually led in 69 of the state's 126 assembly constituencies and came second in 29 other seats. The Party quickly got down to business. It came up with a 'Mission 84' slogan, claiming it was going to win 84 assembly seats in 2016. Still, the BJP knew it was organisationally weak and lacked a leader with a pan-Assam influence and someone who could stitch up alliances and bring people into the party fold.

The obvious choice was the dynamic Congress leader Himanta Biswa Sharma, who as Tarun Gogoi's one-time deputy and a key minister, brought about a sea change in Assam's health and education sector, besides being the main trouble-shooter. Himanta Biswa by now had revolted against Gogoi and was demanding a change in leadership. Neither Gogoi nor the AICC paid any heed. The Congress high command did send senior leader Mallikarjun Kharge to ascertain the view of each of the 78 Congress MLAs. At least 50 of them wanted the chief minister replaced but the AICC stood by Gogoi – a diehard Nehru-Gandhi loyalist. Himanta Biswa was pushed to the wall and was welcomed wholeheartedly by Modi and Shah. He quit the Congress, and nine other party MLAs joined the BJP along with him.

The BJP straightaway took two major steps – it announced the name of Union Sports Minister and a party MP from the state, Sarbananda Sonowal, as its chief ministerial candidate. This was a break from tradition, the only exception being made when it had



declared Modi as its prime ministerial candidate. Having clinched the leadership question, the BJP was quick to accord Himanta Biswa a status befitting his seniority and acumen. He was made the Convenor of the BJP election campaign committee, a responsibility Himanta fulfilled rather well by personally criss-crossing the entire state and addressing 270 rallies, drawing huge crowds.

The BJP strategy of forging alliances with the AGP and the Bodoland People's Front (BPF) paid rich dividends. Initiated by Himanta Biswa, the alliance with the AGP turned out to be a masterstroke because the BJP approached the regional party at a time when it was sought to be dismissed as having become irrelevant in Assam's politics. The AGP contested 24 seats as part of the seat-sharing deal and managed to win 14 of them – a tie-up that paid rich dividends. The siding of the BPF with the BJP helped the saffron party maintain its hold in the Bodo heartland and bolstered its tally. The BPF too managed to be at par with its 2011 tally of 12 seats.

Comprising 34 per cent of the state's 3.12 crore population, Muslims are a dominant community in Assam. At least 30 to 35 constituencies, mostly in western, northern and central Assam, are dominated by Muslims, most of them of migrant origin, who have traditionally been supporters of the Congress. Of course, the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) led by perfume baron Maulana Badruddin Ajmal emerged as an option from 2006 onwards. In 2006, the AIUDF won 10 seats and increased its tally to 18 in 2011.

In this scenario, the Muslim vote has certainly split between the Congress and the AIUDF this time as well, with BJP allies such as the AGP and the BPF benefitting. But, if the scale of the BJP's victory is taken into account, it is possible the party or its allies managed to enlist the support of sections of Muslims too in several constituencies. That could be the reason why the AIUDF tally came down this time to 13 with its President and Lok Sabha MP Badruddin Ajmal himself losing his seat to the Congress.

The Congress was aware of the anti-incumbency wave, but could not devise a strategy to counter it. It lacked star campaigners, with Tarun Gogoi almost going solo in the campaign. Besides, the Congress suffered from a trust deficit with perceptions about the

existence of several lobbies within it, damaging its image. The Congress' inability to quell the dissidence in the party and the eventual exit of Himanta Biswa Sharma, by far the key strategist since 2001, cost the party dearly. An unprecedented 84.72 per cent polling, and the people's general chant of '*parivartan*' or change, clinched Assam for the BJP at the end of the day.

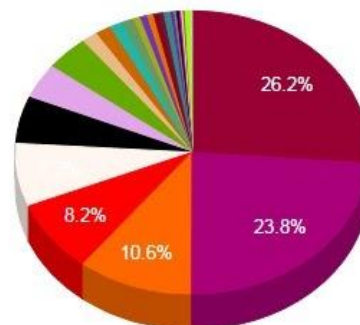
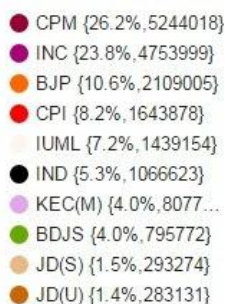


VERDICT 2016: KERALA

MANU S PILLAI

AUTHOR, THE IVORY THRONE: CHRONICLES OF THE HOUSE OF TRAVANCORE

Voters in the state of Kerala on India's south-western coast heralded in its fifteenth legislative assembly on 19 May with a guarded but noteworthy break from tradition. On the face of it, the rotation of power between the



Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) endures - for over four decades control of the state has see-sawed between these alliances, and no incumbent chief minister has continued to a second term in office. To this extent the elections were a case of business as usual. However, the arrival of a fresh political force, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that rules in Delhi and now in eight states, is what makes 2016 different.

While the BJP must necessarily trumpet its win of a single place in Kerala's 140-seat legislature, there is reason for the other camps to challenge further gains - the BJP's vote share has risen alarmingly from 6 per cent to nearly 11 per cent between 2011 and now. The question, though, is whether either is up to the task. The UDF is a gravely divided house -there is its parent Indian National Congress, a Kerala Congress (M), a Kerala Congress (Jacob) and other, now largely defunct variants, as well as allies such as the Muslim League. A public impasse between the Congress party president in the state and the chief minister on the subject of selecting candidates for these elections, as well as corruption scandals (the 'Solar Scam' involving a businesswoman and big names cornered prime-time attention for half the government's term) also weakened the UDF's pitch for re-election.

This was despite a record of development that the UDF could claim. Chief Minister Oommen Chandy opened access to his office and travelled in every district of the state,



receiving tens of thousands of petitions directly; he gave to Kannur in the north Kerala's fourth international airport; to Kochi in the centre a metro-rail project; and to Thiruvananthapuram in the south the Vizhinjam Port; even while improving social security and welfare schemes. The BJP swept the 2014 national elections on promises of development, and the UDF hoped that demonstrable successes in Kerala would see it through these elections into a second term by the same formula. The seesaw with the LDF, however, prevailed.

Factionalism is a cross that the LDF too must bear with camps revolving around VS Achutanandan (92), a popular former chief minister, and Pinarayi Vijayan (72), a politburo member who controls the CPI(M)'s state unit. Credit for the LDF's 91-seat win is widely ascribed to Achutanandan's energetic campaign in the state, while greater press scrutiny around corruption and an old 1990s case involving Vijayan works against the latter. Both leaders will need to be accommodated, with talk arising of 'sharing' power under an arrangement that will see two LDF chief ministers in a single term. The risk here is possible policy paralysis and the widening of the breach in the party leadership, even as it opens up possibilities of other heavyweights in future expecting similar compromises that could threaten the wider interests of the LDF itself.

It is into this fraying battleground that eight-seven-year-old O Rajagopal arrives as the BJP's sole winner and first MLA in Kerala. A man of sobriety and experience (including a stint as a union minister), Rajagopal enjoys an avuncular appeal in the state. This was despite his reputation as a chronic loser of elections - starting in 1980, each of his attempts to enter parliament or the Kerala legislature was a spectacular failure. However, with the rise of sympathy for the BJP in Kerala, O Rajagopal began to inch closer to victory, nearly winning a parliamentary seat in 2014. Unlike elsewhere in India where BJP firebrands whip up passions around issues like beef-eating, in Kerala an elderly moderate like O Rajagopal is more palatable to voters.

For the BJP, finding a core constituency in Kerala is a complicated proposition. Religious polarisation - a calling card of the BJP - has historically been frowned upon, and nearly half the population are Muslims and Christians. There is no consolidated Hindu vote, and



Hindus are mainly divided between the Ezhavas (an entrepreneurial class with a long history with the Left till they favoured the BJP in 2016) and their rivals, the Nairs (who are wary of the BJP, but among whom an attraction for a Hindu identity is on the rise). Remittances from the Gulf have sparked a greater religiosity and sense of 'reviving' Hindu pride in Kerala, and while it will take the BJP some time to convert this into a vote-bank, their parent organisation, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is heavily invested in building an organisational base through its 4500 local units or shakhas, a network that can be exploited for political gains.

With one seat in the legislative assembly the BJP may have a window from which to launch itself in Kerala. The LDF and UDF could, however, show the BJP the door if they set their house in order. The LDF can bank on longstanding leftist traditions in Kerala, while the UDF has charismatic youth leaders who have, even in their latest electoral loss, proved they can win votes. Add to this a cultural and social setting that still looks at the BJP's ideological roots with suspicion, and it is clear that winning more allies and a grassroots path with moderate leaders is what will allow the BJP to work its way into Kerala looking ahead.

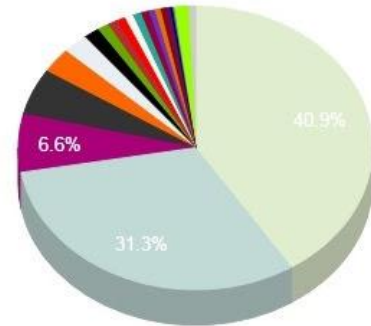


VERDICT 2016: TAMIL NADU

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This Tamil Nadu election was a landmark that brought two things – equilibrium and clarity. The equilibrium is that Tamil Nadu for the first time in 25 years since the 1991 election has a strong opposition. The clarity was regarding the relative strengths of the parties, their caste, demographic and geographic base.



The assembly now sees 134 seats with the ruling All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) and 98 for the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) combine. This is a massive change from previous elections where the ruling alliance would routinely win a two-thirds majority. However, the chances of policy paralysis are slim. Given the venomous and polarised nature of the relationship between the AIADMK and DMK this could translate into greater physical conflict both outside and within the assembly itself reminiscent of Jayalalitha's manhandling by Karunanidhi in 1998. This equilibrium is reflected in the vote share with the AIADMK at 40.8 per cent and the DMK combine at 38 per cent. This has significant implications for the marginal actors in the next round in 2021.

This election provided much clarity on two counts – the caste equation and the way forward for the so-called marginal players. This was because it showed definitive trends of caste alignment of the Thevars, Gounders and Vanniyars and highlighted the marginal actors' disruptive value.

The Thevars and Gounders rallied behind the AIADMK. The Thevar consolidation is not a new factor, given that Jayalalitha's close aide Sasikala is a Thevar and runs what is known as a Thevar coterie within the government, determining bureaucratic posts in the state



administration and seat allocation within the party. However, the reasons why the Gounders voted for the AIADMK still remain unclear. These two communities have a very strong presence in the western Kongunadu belt, which was the mainstay of the AIADMK victory. They are less strong, but nevertheless significant in the 75 southern districts where the AIADMK and DMK tied near evenly for seats.

The real surprise of the election though was the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) party of Anbumani Ramadoss. Far from being the wipe-out that people claim it was (given its failure to win a single seat), it has in fact emerged as the third party of Tamil Nadu. In the northern belt where the Vanniyars form a significant community, the party got upwards of 15,000 votes going up to 45,000 in some places. This is important given the victory margin of both AIADMK and DMK in several of these constituencies was between 1000 to 3000, rising to about 15,000 to 20,000 in some constituencies. No other party outside of the big two (AIADMK and DMK) has been able to replicate such results with so much consistency across a geographical and caste belt. Ramadoss had in fact factored this in, being very clear he would not ally with any party. In that sense the seeming tactical defeat for the PMK is actually a strategic victory for the next election in 2021 when victory margins will almost certainly be much slimmer and the value of the PMK as an ally will increase exponentially. He will therefore in the run up to 2021 be able to claim far more than the PMK has ever been able to in the past.

One aspect not spoken about much is how the lack of MK Azhagiri – Karunanidhi's second son, and elder brother of Stalin – now expelled from the DMK, cost the party. The near even split between the AIADMK and DMK in the 75 southern districts as well as the wafer thin margins can be attributed to the fact that Azhagiri had gutted the DMK's organisational structure there. However, given he did not contest in an independent capacity, it remains hard to predict his next moves and what they mean for the DMK's internal dynamic.

The one deceptive trend however was the INC-BJP vote share with 6.4 per cent for the former and 2.8 per cent for the latter. GK Vasan's (GK Moopanar's son) Congress breakaway – the Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC) – fared well in the few seats where it



fielded big names and won between 17,000 and 25,000 votes. It is safe to assume then that the TMC is in fact the real Congress, while the Indian National Congress (INC) and its 6.4 per cent have to be chalked down to the DMK transfer of votes. Much of this has to do with Vasan's command of the Congress organisation built up over several years and the fact that "known" figures in Delhi such as Mani Shankar Iyer and P Chidambaram have almost no mass base. This is similar to 1996, when Vasan's father Moopanar walked out of the Congress and won big, leaving the INC high and dry.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on the other hand can claim its 2.8 per cent to be entirely its own with some spectacular showings in urban concentrations: parts of Chennai, Coimbatore and Kanyakumari with upwards of 10,000 votes. This still does not change the fact it will remain marginal for many decades to come till it gains traction in rural areas. However, it enters both the 2021 state election and 2018 general elections from a position of strength in at least 5 parliamentary constituencies, where its vote bank can mean the difference between victory and defeat.

All up, the 2016 Tamil Nadu assembly election should be seen as a cusp for far reaching changes in the next decade or so.

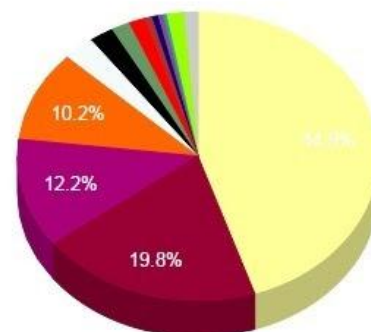
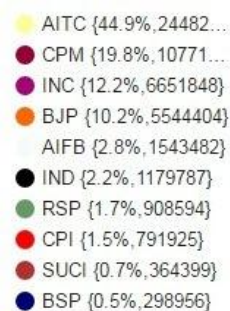


VERDICT 2016: WEST BENGAL

MAYURI MUKHERJEE

SENIOR ASSISTANT EDITOR, THE PIONEER

In West Bengal, the assembly election results have brought reason to cheer for three of the four major players in the state. At the top of the pile is the Trinamool Congress (TMC), which has won an impressive 211 seats in the 294-seat assembly,



thereby single-handedly securing a rare two-thirds majority in the House. With this, the party has also improved upon its landmark performance in 2011, when ended the Left Front's three-decade long rule in the State with a 184 seats. That year, the party's vote share was pegged at 38.9 per cent. This year, it has gone up to almost 45 per cent.

Now, the fact that the TMC has been able to renew its mandate and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has secured a second term for herself is on expected lines. However, what is interesting though is the scale and scope of the win, given that there has been palpable public disillusionment with the TMC government in these past five years. When Banerjee was sworn into office in 2011, the people had hoped for development and good governance. But her first term was marked by a deteriorating law and order situation, the worst kind of minority appeasement, limited economic progress and large-scale corruption scandals.

If the TMC has been able to prove its critics wrong and return to power with overwhelming public support, it is in part because of Banerjee's own personal charisma and strategic politicking, and in part because of her opponents' absolute failure to put up a fight. In the first case, it is important to understand that while the TMC and many of its senior leaders even may have been tainted in these past five years, Banerjee has retained her appeal with the masses. She is still seen as a committed and incorruptible leader who will fight the good fight for her people. Additionally, Banerjee has consistently cultivated



the state's large Muslim vote-bank, and some of her social welfare schemes, such as education stipends for girls and cycles for school students, as well as her notable road improvement projects have also worked in her favour.

This brings us to the second factor in the TMC win story: the lack of any serious and credible Opposition. Having been dislodged from power in the state in 2011 (and effectively reduced to a minor player at the national level), the CPI(M) should have used these past five years to reform and re-build itself from the ground up. Herein, it failed spectacularly – and its situation was only made worse by its alliance with the Congress. The two parties have historically been at loggerheads in the state, and even if party bosses in Delhi decided to join hands and perhaps consolidate the Opposition vote, on the ground in Bengal, the rank and file did not reconcile. And so it was that the CPI(M) won only 26 seats, compared to the 40 it held in 2011, while its vote share fell from a reasonable 30.8 per cent to a shameful 19.79 per cent.

In contrast, the Congress actually managed to up its game, emerging as the party that is second in line, even if by a huge distance. It has won 44 seats, thereby slightly improving its 2011 tally of 42 seats, and its vote share has shot up from less than 10 per cent in 2011 to more than 12 per cent this year. This may not be much for what used to be this country's grand old party but given that the Congress has been reduced to a rump in Parliament, this was not such a bad showing after all.

This brings us to the fourth and final player in Bengal: the BJP. Notwithstanding the fact that the party's founder, SP Mukherjee, was from Bengal, the saffron party has never really had a significant presence in the state. But the 2014 Lok Sabha election indicated that it may be possible to change this script – riding on the so-called Modi wave, the BJP won as many as 24 assembly constituencies in West Bengal and cornered 17 per cent of the vote share. However, in the two years since the Lok Sabha election, the BJP failed to leverage the momentum from the Lok Sabha election. It has won only three assembly seats and its vote share is now at 10 per cent. Sure, this is better than its 2011 tally when it had no seats and only four per cent of the votes but even the staunchest BJP supporter



will agree that if the party's state unit could have put its house in order sooner, it could have done even better.

That said, the BJP is at a very interesting place in Bengal especially vis-à-vis its relations with TMC. It is widely believed that the BJP cadre downplayed its campaign wherever possible so that the TMC could emerge with stronger numbers. The understanding here is that the TMC will return the favour to the BJP in New Delhi. At the Centre, the BJP has a majority in Lok Sabha but still needs all the help it can get in Rajya Sabha to pass crucial legislation. TMC support in this case will make a big difference.

Moreover, these two parties may not be allies today (though they have been in the past), but they are not ideologically opposed to each other - in the way that, say, the Left is to the BJP. And this is one of the most important reasons why the BJP, which all these years was unable to set foot in Bengal, has slowly but steadily now made inroads into the state. Now, if only the party could organise itself better and produce some capable state-level leaders, it could emerge as a force to contend with sooner than later.



The Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), founded in 1996 as an independent think-tank by former Indian Administrative Service officer PR Chari and Major General (Retd) Dipankar Banerjee, aims to develop an alternative framework for peace and security in South Asia through independent research and analysis.

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