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India's Watershed Vote

BEHIND MODI'S VICTORY

Eswaran Sridharan

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In May 2014, India completed its sixteenth general election since independence in 1947. The results were dramatic, possibly even epochal. The electoral patterns of the last quarter-century have undergone a sea change, and the world's largest democracy now has what appears to be a new party system headed by a newly dominant party. The political center of gravity has shifted. The Lok Sabha, the 545-seat lower house of Parliament, now has its first single-party majority since 1984. Back then, eight elections ago, that majority belonged to the Indian National Congress (INC or Congress party). Now it belongs to the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), led by 64-year-old Narendra Modi, the longtime chief minister of Gujarat who today is prime minister of India. Although the BJP controls a 282-seat (51.7 percent) majority on its own, it is governing at the head of a coalition (known as the National Democratic Alliance or NDA) formed with its preelection allied parties.

The BJP gained its Lok Sabha seat majority with a vote share of just 31 percent of all ballots cast, enough for a plurality but far short of a vote-share majority. That enormous seat bonus works out to a "conversion factor" of 1.67 percent of the seats for every 1 percent of the vote—the highest such ratio ever seen in an Indian general election.[1] Congress, which had been running a minority-coalition government with external support since 2004, suffered massive voter rejection. It won its lowest-ever vote share (barely more than 19 percent) and now has just 44 seats (its worst previous showing was 114 seats in 1999). For the first time since 1977, moreover, it was not the single largest party in terms of vote share.

These stunning results—only one of the six major preelection polls

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and one of six major exit polls, not by the same organization, predicted anything like them—raise a slew of major questions. Has India turned its back on the inclusive, secular centrism that Congress represents and opted for a Hindu-nationalist majoritarianism widely seen as hostile to India's Muslim and Christian minorities?[2] Can Congress, which has governed India for 54 of the 67 years since independence, right itself and make a comeback, or is it finished as India's number-one political formation?

Since the election, there has been an avalanche of analysis. Sifting through it can help us to understand how the BJP could win (and Congress lose) on such a scale (see Table 1 showing only main allies of the BJP and Congress). The BJP itself fielded candidates in 427 of the Lok Sabha's 543 single-member districts, each of which elects a representative to the national legislature via Westminster-style, first-past-the-post voting. (Two additional seats are reserved for the Anglo-Indian minority.) The BJP's allied parties at the Lok Sabha level numbered ten, six of which were significant players in their respective states. The BJP had added a total of eight new preelectoral partners since 2009, and had seat-sharing deals in ten states.[3] Congress competed in 464 districts and had a dozen preelectoral coalition partners (mostly minor parties) across eight states.

The BJP's 51.7 percent seat share represented a huge swing of 12 percentage points in its vote share (to 31 percent) compared to 2009. Nearly mirroring it was Congress's declining vote share, which plunged by 9 points from the earlier election to this most recent balloting. Parties other than Congress or the BJP (whether allied with one of them or not) form a highly heterogeneous group that consists overwhelmingly of parties (many of them left of center) whose appeal is restricted to a single state or region. These parties, taken as a whole, won 49 percent of the vote and 217 seats, just four seats less than their collective 2009 total. Crucially, the pro-BJP swing was heavily concentrated in the populous and predominantly Hindi-speaking states of northern, central, and western India, leading to sweeping victories in these states (see Table 2).

Just how regionally concentrated was the BJP's victory? Behind the party's overall success rate of 66 percent (282 seats won out of 427 contested), we can discern the outlines of its regional bastion. Its strength lies in the so-called Hindi Belt—the nine northern and central states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Chattisgarh (along with the Union Territories of Delhi and Chandigarh) where that language predominates—plus the three western states of Gujarat (Modi's home), Maharashtra (whose capital is Mumbai), and Goa, as well as the Union Territories of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu.[4] These areas, which include India's largest state (Uttar Pradesh) with its two-hundred-million people, gave the BJP 84 percent (or 244) of its 282 seats. The BJP won a majority of all votes cast in, respectively, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttarakhand. These

Table 1—India's 2014 Election Results by Party

Coalition/Party	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Seat Share (%)	Vote Share (%)
National Democratic Alliance*				
BJP	427	282	51.93	31
SHS	58	18	3.31	1.85
TDP	30	16	2.55	2.95
SAD	10	4	.74	.30
LJP	7	6	1.10	0.04
United Progressive Alliance*				
INC	464	44	8.10	19.31
NCP	36	6	1.10	1.56
RJD	30	4	.74	.66
IUML	25	2	.37	.20
JMM	21	2	.37	.30
Left Front				
CPI(M)	93	9	1.66	3.25
CPI	67	1	.18	.78
RSP	6	1	.18	.30
AIFB	39	0	.00	.22
Major Regional Parties				
AIADMK	40	37	6.81	3.27
AITMC	131	34	6.26	3.81
BJD	21	20	3.68	1.71
Others	-	57	12.39	24.97

Parties

BJP - Bharatiya Janata Party
SHS - Shiv Sena
TDP - Telugu Desam Party
SAD - Shiromani Akali Dal
LJP - Lok Janshakti Party
INC - Indian National Congress
NCP - Nationalist Congress Party
RJD - Rashtriya Janata Dal
IUML - Indian Union Muslim League
CPI(M) - Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPI - Communist Party of India
RSP - Revolutionary Socialist Party
AIFB - All Indian Forward Bloc
AIADMK - All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
AITMC - All India Trinamool Congress
BJD - Biju Janata Dal

*List does not include smaller allied parties that won two seats or fewer.

Source: Election Commission of India *http://eciresults.nic.in/PartyWiseResult.htm*.

states together, according to the 2011 census, are home to about 220 million people, or close to a fifth of India's total population of 1.2 billion. Modi's party also took 27 percent in Maharashtra (population 112 million) even while fielding candidates in just half the state's districts.

The BJP's 2014 showing extended and intensified a pattern seen in earlier elections, particularly those of 1996, 1998, and 1999. In those races, the BJP won more seats than Congress despite receiving a smaller share of the total vote—a circumstance that owed much to the geographically concentrated nature of the BJP's northern, central, and western base and the extraordinary success rate that the party was (and is) able to compile there. The regionally focused pro-BJP swing of 2014, and the stratospheric success rate flowing from it, also lies behind the high

Table 2—India's 2014 Elections (Results for BJP Stronghold* and Rest of India)

Coalition	Party	BJP Stronghold (304 seats)				Rest of India (239 seats)			
		Seats Contested	Seats Won	Seat (%)	Vote (%)	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Seats (%)	Vote (%)
NDA	BJP	266	244	81	44	161	38	16	19
	BJP Allies	38	29	10	5	75	18	8	11
INC	INC	233	10	3	20	229	34	14	21
	INC Allies	65	11	5	6	6	4	2	1
	AIADMK	-	-	-	-	41	37	15	8
	AITC	-	-	-	-	60	34	14	9
	BJD	-	-	-	-	21	20	8	4
	Left Front	-	-	-	-	78	11	5	10
	Others	-	-	-	-	-	42	20	44

*Includes the states and Union Territories of the Hindi Belt plus Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, and the two Union Territories of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu.

conversion factor of 1.67 percent of the seats for every 1 percent of the vote, and hence the BJP's seat bonus.[5]

None of this is to say, however, that the pro-BJP swing was restricted to the party's traditional bastion. Indeed, signs of it were evident in eastern and southern states which, Karnataka in the southwest aside, have never been areas of BJP strength. The BJP won its first-ever plurality in Assam in India's northeast, taking 36 percent of the vote and half the state's fourteen Lok Sabha seats. In West Bengal, where a communist party had been electorally dominant for more than three decades prior to 2011, the BJP made its strongest showing ever by garnering 17 percent of the vote, though this was not enough to win more than a pair of the state's 42 seats. In Kerala and Tamil Nadu at India's southern tip, the BJP's vote share hit 10 and 5.5 percent, respectively. In Kerala this was not enough to win a seat, though the BJP did take one of the seven seats it contested in Tamil Nadu—the first time that it won a seat there since 1999.

Explaining the BJP Swing

Among the causes of the big pro-BJP swing was the party's sheer effectiveness at mobilizing its voters. This can be read in the overall turnout, which hit 66.4 percent of all registered voters, a significant improvement over the 58 to 62 percent showings seen in recent national elections. In districts that the BJP won, its average margin of victory was 18 percentage points, as compared with an average winning margin of 12 points for its allied parties and just 8 points for Congress. The winning BJP candidate topped 50 percent in 137 constituencies, and finished between 40 and 50 percent in an additional 132.[6] As one might expect, most of the heavily pro-BJP districts were located in the Hindi-speaking states as well as Gujarat and Maharashtra.

In order to grasp how effective the BJP's mobilization efforts were, one need only consider that, of those districts where turnout increased by more than 15 percentage points as compared with 2009, 96 percent went for the BJP. Where turnout rose by 10 to 15 points, the BJP's success rate was an only slightly less stunning 86 percent. By contrast, fewer than half (46 percent) of the districts that saw a 10 percentage-point or less increase in turnout went for the BJP, while districts that witnessed flat or falling turnout brought the party just a 34 percent success rate.[7] The strong correlation between higher turnout and BJP victories shows that the BJP's efforts to mobilize voters won the party large rewards at the polls.

The BJP did more than just boost its share of the vote within its "traditional" urban, middle-class, and upper-caste base. The party also made deep inroads into the large group that official government parlance terms the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), as well as the so-called Scheduled Castes (once known as "untouchables") and the Scheduled Tribes (aboriginals). In most states of the north, center, and west, these latter two groups had long been known to vote mainly for Congress. Postelection surveys carried out by the New Delhi–based Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), India's leader when it comes to electoral research and the most accurate forecaster of 2014 party vote shares, show that 54 percent of upper-caste voters, 34 percent of OBC voters, 24 percent of those from Scheduled Castes, 38 percent of those belonging to Scheduled Tribes, and 8 percent of Muslims voted for the BJP.[8] Within the ranks of all these groups save Muslims (who gave Congress 38 percent of their votes), support for the BJP far outstripped that for its main rival. And even among Muslim voters, the BJP doubled the 4 percent that it won in 2009.[9] If we analyze the results in rural-urban terms, BJP superiority again becomes evident: Congress managed 19 percent of the rural and 20 percent of the urban vote, while the BJP won 30 and 33 percent, respectively.[10]

The CSDS survey sorted respondents into one of four income-based categories. In each, the BJP won more votes than Congress: Those who were identified as "rich" voted 32 to 17 percent for the BJP while "middle-class" Indians went BJP by 32 to 20 percent. Meanwhile, "lower-class" voters split 31 to 19 percent against Congress, and "poor" citizens preferred the BJP by 24 to 20 percent. The BJP's lead narrows as we go down the income ladder, but at no level, even the poorest, did voters prefer the traditionally social-welfare–oriented Congress to the more free-market–favoring BJP.[11] The picture of not only a more active and enthusiastic, but a wider and deeper BJP support base emerges clearly. Among each caste and class of voters, and in rural and urban areas alike, Congress found itself overwhelmed. Despite the BJP's relatively weak performance across the east and south, its commanding leads among nearly all voter segments in its traditional northern, central, and western

MAP—INDIA'S STATES

*Portions of Jammu and Kashmir are claimed by Pakistan and by China.

stronghold were enough to provide a clear nationwide edge and vault it into power at the center.

What was it about the BJP's message and campaign in 2014 that mobilized turnout and moved voters its way across so many caste and class divisions, so many state borders, and such a vast geographical space? And conversely, what was it about the record and campaign of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government that caused even many longstanding supporters to abandon it at election time? Did the BJP's Hindu nationalism exert an appeal that transcended lines of caste, class, and region? Or were factors such as economic conditions, corruption, leadership quality, campaign funding and organization, "messaging," and the ability to catch voters' attention and fire their imaginations more important? Let us discuss each in turn.

Modi and the BJP are well known for their Hindu-nationalist ideology and track record. Do these explain how the party and its standard-bearer (who traveled widely around India to campaign) managed to draw voters from across various caste, class, rural-urban, and regional divides? Not really. The BJP for the most part kept quiet about Hindu nationalism and focused instead on what it said was the Congress-led government's corruption and poor performance, particularly the slow growth, unemployment, and inflation that had dogged its watch. There were anti-Muslim utterances by BJP leaders at times: Modi said while campaigning in West Bengal in late April that illegal immigrants from Bangladesh should "be prepared with their bags packed" after May 16 (in February, he had drawn a distinction between Muslim and Hindu immigrants, implying that the former were not welcome).[12] But there was nothing comparable to the violence and hysteria that had accompanied the BJP's rise to national prominence in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

While acknowledging how discontent over corruption and the economy created space for the BJP, we must also note that party's higher caliber of electoral leadership and contrast it with Congress's inept and reactive campaign.

The most notorious incident associated with this phase of BJP activism had been the televised destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, by a BJP-mobilized crowd in December 1992. Almost ten years later, while Modi was a few months into his first term as chief minister of Gujarat, the state was convulsed by anti-Muslim violence that left about a thousand people dead and many more homeless in the first half of 2002. There were charges that Modi's government had permitted or even conspired in the attacks. Eager to leave such memories behind, Modi focused his 2014 campaign on economic development and good governance. He stressed Gujarat's strong economic growth during his long stint as its chief executive, promising that he would make such achievements possible for the nation as a whole. The BJP's appeals to growth and effectual governance—"Good days are coming!" went the party's slogan—and not Hindu nationalism or anti-Muslim animus, are what drew voters to support the party's candidates.

The BJP found ample fodder for criticism in the economy's recent travails. Measured over its entire arc from 2004 to 2014, the two-term UPA government led by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was in office during the best single decade for economic growth in Indian history. Yet in India as in most democracies, voters care most about the recent past. The years since 2011 had been rough. The country's growth rate had dropped from 9 to 4.7 percent, while unemployment rose as young people's numbers outstripped available jobs. Inflation also bit

hard, particularly in the area of food prices (over the past three fiscal years, it has averaged 7.4 percent). In 2007, Congress had enacted a rural employment-guarantee program for the poor that drove rural real wages to a peak right around election time in 2009. In 2013, however, the annual rate of real wage growth had slowed to 3 percent after hitting double digits in 2011 and 2012, sowing widespread disenchantment.[13]

The effects of these developments showed up in preelection polling, which between July 2013 and March 2014 revealed a steady rise in prospective voters' support for the BJP and for Modi as prime minister. The Lok Foundation's survey for the University of Pennsylvania's Center for the Advanced Study of India found that voters' top concern was slow economic growth, followed by corruption and inflation, with issues of leadership quality and identity politics carrying little weight.[14] In the March 2014 CSDS survey, more than half the respondents said that the UPA should not be given another chance. When asked to name the single most important issue, those polled cited rising prices, corruption, lack of economic development, and unemployment in that order.[15]

Further dragging the UPA down was a quirk of the post-2010 slowdown's timing: It came just as the lid was being blown off a slew of outrageous public-corruption scandals that enraged countless millions of Indians. The scandals included gross misdealings linked to the allocation of the 2G telecom spectrum, certain coal-mining concessions, and construction contracts related to the 2010 Commonwealth Games. The common thread was crony capitalism at its worst, featuring regulatory favors done for politically connected businesses and UPA cabinet ministers. The government never managed to explain these away, nor was it seen to be tackling corruption. Instead, it seemed to be covering up and soon found itself playing defense as a popular anticorruption movement gained steam in mid-2011. The double whammy of stagflation (slow growth plus rising prices) and corruption kept the UPA off balance and allowed the BJP to shift the focus away from Hindu nationalism toward economic development and good governance.

While acknowledging how discontent over corruption and the economy created space for the BJP, we must also note that party's higher caliber of electoral leadership (call it the "Modi factor") and contrast it with Congress's inept and reactive campaign. With India having ridden out the post-2008 global economic slowdown in seemingly good order, Congress appeared intellectually unready to deal with the halving of the national growth rate after 2010. The flagship UPA programs—antipoverty initiatives, subsidies for both the poor and nonpoor, new entitlements—all seemed to assume that the policy framework for continued high growth was already in place, leaving redistribution (to be carried out in ways meant to maximize the UPA's vote share) as the main task. Although the octogenarian Manmohan Singh was retiring, Congress failed to name a candidate for prime minister, leaving the decision till after the election.

Could Congress have changed course in time to save its electoral prospects? Economists have argued that runaway public spending (all those subsidies) sparked so much inflation that people found themselves merely running in place.[16] Bringing growth back would have required the Congress-led government to cut back subsidies in favor of long-term infrastructure upgrades while also adopting market-friendly reforms (including public-sector privatization and labor-market flexibility) meant to revive foreign and domestic investment. Sonia Gandhi, the party's president, and her 44-year-old son Rahul either remained ideologically committed to subsidies and populist welfare spending, or else simply calculated that the election was so close there would be no point in embracing market-oriented reforms likely (in the short run at least) to bring nothing but pain and unpopularity. Singh and his finance minister were given no leeway even to talk about a new round of reform. Congress's informal practice of having two top figures—a party president and an uncommunicative prime minister—made the latter look ineffectual.

In this context, Modi put out a message that he would bring growth and jobs by pushing through major infrastructure and industrialization projects, as he had been doing in Gujarat for more than a decade. Shrewdly, his campaign sounded this theme without tying itself to specific policy commitments of any kind, even as the BJP was voting for such UPA-sponsored populist measures as 2013 laws guaranteeing subsidized food to the poorest two-thirds of the populace and generous compensation to villagers or farmers whose land was acquired for development.

Surveys suggest that the Modi factor was vital to the BJP's success. Half the CSDS survey's respondents said that leadership was important, and as many as a quarter of NDA voters told the CSDS postelection survey that had the alliance not put Modi forward as its candidate for the premiership, they would not have cast their ballots for it.[17] Without them, the NDA would have been stuck at 29 percent of the vote, almost certainly not enough for a seat majority. In this sense, the 2014 election can be said to have been quasi-presidential. Starting in late 2013, a discernible Modi wave began to build. Large pluralities of those surveyed said that he was their number-one choice to be India's next prime minister. In September 2013, when the BJP announced that Modi would be its candidate for the premiership, 19 percent of respondents said that they preferred him above all others for this post. By March 2014, he was leading Rahul Gandhi 36 to 14 percent in preference polling.[18]

The BJP campaign was much better funded and better organized than Congress's lackluster, defensive effort. Total spending by all parties on the 2014 election reached an estimated US$5 billion, with the BJP vastly outspending Congress.[19] The BJP not only put more activists on the ground, but also achieved a higher profile than did its rival on television as well as on social media and the Internet generally. Helping to make this possible were India's big business interests. These settled in to back

Modi after the BJP beat Congress handily in four major states' late-2013 legislative elections, and after the passage of the land-compensation and food-security laws (although the BJP had voted for both, probably reluctantly). Increasingly, business had been coming to see Congress as too attached to government regulation of the economy, too averse to further economic liberalization, and too given to populist social spending, not to mention lacking in clear leadership and credible ideas for bringing back investment and growth. A large part of the print and electronic media also seemed to have swung in favor of the BJP or at least against Congress, giving the former relatively favorable coverage and criticizing the latter, especially as represented by Rahul Gandhi.

A Revolution of Rising Expectations?

Even after taking all these factors into account, we are left with the conclusion that, in a democratic competition for power, message matters. Modi insisted—and voters agreed—that what India needed was a strong, decisive, personally incorruptible, and credible leader who could revive growth, with jobs and prosperity to follow. Without making specific policy commitments, his message stressed the Gujarat experience of high growth based on massive infrastructure development and business-friendliness, particularly in the form of round-the-clock electricity (something that cannot be taken for granted in all parts of India). Modi and the BJP generally left the subject of antipoverty programs alone, not promising more but at the same time taking care to avoid open attacks on those of the UPA.

The BJP was far less quiet about the UPA government's economic-policy failures, the corruption that had occurred on its watch, and the quality of Congress party leadership, which Modi flayed as effete, indecisive, weak, and dynastic. Modi particularly enjoyed drawing a contrast between himself, the son of a tea-seller, and Rahul Gandhi, who as a scion of the Nehru-Gandhi clan is the son, grandson, and great-grandson of Indian prime ministers. Modi mocked the relationship between Sonia and Rahul Gandhi as "mother-and-son government," and dismissed Rahul as a "prince."

In response to all this, Congress was left to highlight its antipoverty programs—in effect, promising "more of the same" in a context where to most voters this meant more slow growth, unemployment, and inflation. Then too, Congress may have been a victim of its own success. Since 2004, it had raised 140 million Indians out of poverty, and with those improved circumstances had come enhanced aspirations even (and perhaps especially) on the part of the rural poor. They now wanted not just welfarism, but something a step beyond that. They—and especially the many among them who were under the age of 40—were looking to move to the next level.[20] The BJP had a message that resonated with this

changed, more aspirational mood of a youth-heavy electorate tired of a seemingly corrupt, nonperforming Congress. The BJP's promise of a better future struck a chord and gained credibility as the campaign went on.

Congress had no answer, and its appeal collapsed. It slid from January's projection of a 27 percent vote share to a CSDS-predicted 25 percent in March and then to an actual result of just 19 percent in May.[21] The BJP's resonant message and Modi's can-do image vaulted them first into the lead and then into office.

A Fundamental Shift?

Over seven elections spanning the last quarter-century, the trend in India has been toward hung parliaments where the game is to eke out a government by means of horse-trading and logrolling with a congeries of smaller regional parties. The 2014 results represent a sharp deviation from that pattern and give grounds to wonder whether the single-party majorities prevalent before 1989 may have made a lasting comeback. Is Congress, which has seemed so tired and rudderless, in permanent decline and hence finished as a hegemonic party? If so, can the BJP take its place?

Where the two main parties were in direct competition, the BJP overwhelmed Congress. The rivals faced each other in 189 head-to-head contests, and the BJP won 166 of these—a stunning 88 percent success rate that yielded 59 percent of the BJP's 282 seats.[22] But these head-to-head races formed barely more than a third (35 percent) of all contests and clustered in the two-party states of central, western, and northern India—the epicenter of Congress's meltdown. In eastern and southern India, electoral politics is usually a matter of Congress versus some robust local opponent, typically either a regional or a leftist party (in Karnataka and Assam, this local foe is the BJP).

In a first-past-the-post system, the BJP's seat majority is fragile. It rests on a vote share of just 31 percent, the lowest such share in Indian history to have produced a seat majority. And behind everything stands the BJP's unprecedented sweep in a limited area—the Hindi Belt and the three western states, which altogether hold 738 million people or just over three-fifths of India's population. (The Congress vote is geographically much more spread out but not clearly dominant anywhere except for Kerala in the south). How realistic is it to expect this sweep to be repeated? In order to reduce its intense dependence on its existing stronghold, the BJP will need to find a way to consolidate itself nationally by expanding its base and becoming a contender for the plurality vote share in a number of southern and eastern states. Its ability to do this is highly uncertain. Much will depend on how well it performs in government over the next five years, and also on what Congress and the regional parties do. Among these last, not only those in the east and south will bear watching but also Rashtriya Janata Dal in Bihar and the Samajwadi (Socialist) and Bahujan

Samaj parties in Uttar Pradesh. Each was reduced to a handful of Lok Sabha seats or none at all in 2014, and is eager to rebound.

We should also bear in mind that the BJP's single-party majority of just ten seats has not meant the end of coalition politics. The BJP picked up 57 of its 282 seats thanks to vote-pooling deals with allied parties in Maharashtra (23 seats), Bihar (22), Haryana (7), Punjab (2), Andhra Pradesh (2), and Tamil Nadu (1). Technically, the BJP is now heading a "surplus" majority—that is, it could formally put together a government on its own, without allies—but in reality it is going to keep on needing its partners for their capacity to transfer votes to BJP candidates via pre-election coalitions.[23] By standard measures based either on seats or on vote shares, India still has a multiparty system. If one reckons by vote shares, there were about seven "effective" parties in the 2014 election—a higher number than in any election during the period of Congress party hegemony before 1989. Going by seat shares, the 2014 effective-parties figure was 3.5, but again that is higher than anything seen before 1989. It is too early to say that the BJP has become a new hegemonic party.

Another major obstacle standing between the BJP and political hegemony is the Rajya Sabha, Parliament's 245-member upper house. It takes a majority of both houses to pass any law other than a money bill. The BJP has only 46 Rajya Sabha seats, while Congress holds 68. Since members of this chamber are elected to staggered six-year terms (every two years, a third face reelection), its composition changes only slowly. At the state level, things are similar. The BJP and its allies govern just 7 of the 29 states, while Congress outnumbers the BJP in overall share of state-legislature seats by 27 percent to 21 percent.[24] Coalition politics are not going away.

The emerging situation combines the promise of faster growth and poverty reduction (in a more market-oriented economy) with the danger of Hindu majoritarianism. Congress's revival prospects will hinge partly on how well it manages to reinvent itself organizationally. There are leadership and succession issues that cry out for resolution. Yet Congress will also need to come up with a new message and new policies that get past welfare populism and patronage politics in order to show how economic growth can be made consistent with social equity. The left-wing parties, now down to a historic low of just eleven Lok Sabha seats, face the same challenge. So do the lower-caste–based parties of northern India, which the BJP defeated handily in this election. All must devise and communicate credible and sustainable ways to blend market-oriented reforms with redistributive measures (politically necessary in what remains a low-income country with massive poverty) that do not choke growth.

Do the 2014 election results tell us that India is pivoting away from the politics of religion and caste, patronage and populism, toward a Western-style, left-right debate over economic policy? The BJP's success at employing a message of market-friendliness against Congress's

penchant for populism might seem to suggest this, though voter surveys cannot as yet be said to confirm it. Large fractions of respondents from a cross-section of classes show little knowledge of economic policy regarding matters such as government spending or foreign investment; yet it is notable that a large fraction in each of the above voter categories, including the poor, says that it prefers government infrastructure spending over antipoverty subsidies.[25] At this point, it seems safest to say that if there is a shift in the works that favors market-based economic reform, the change is incipient and complex, and its intensity and effects will vary from state to state in a diverse federal economy. The BJP has won, not on the basis of overt appeals to economic liberalization or (still less) Hindu nationalism, but rather owing to a general promise to a more aspirational electorate that better days are coming.

NOTES

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1. All electoral data in this essay come from the Election Commission of India (*www.eci.nic.in*). On the multiparty, minority-coalition governments that ruled India for most of the years from 1989 to 2014, see Eswaran Sridharan, "Why Are Multi-Party Minority Governments Viable in India? Theory and Comparison," *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 50 (July 2012): 314–43. On the BJP's electoral record and strategies, see Eswaran Sridharan, "Coalition Strategies and the BJP's Expansion, 1989–2004," *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 43 (July 2005): 194–221; Pralay Kanungo and Adnan Farooqui, "Tracking Moditva: An Analysis of the 2007 Gujarat Elections Campaign," *History and Sociology of South Asia* 2 (December 2008): 222–45; and Christophe Jaffrelot, "Gujarat Elections: The Sub-Text of Modi's 'Hattrick'—High Tech Populism and the 'Neo-Middle Class,'" *Studies in Indian Politics* 1 (June 2013): 79–95.

2. Muslims make up 13 percent of India's population, while Christians account for another 2 percent.

3. Seat-sharing deals between parties in Indian politics typically divide a given state's Lok Sabha seats (electoral districts) in some ratio between the parties, thereby facilitating a vote-pooling arrangement in which parties ask their supporters to vote for the candidate of the allied party in districts where the ally contests.

4. The Hindi Belt states plus Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Goa together contain about 738 million people, or 61 percent of India's total population of roughly 1.2 billion. On the BJP's success rate, see Neelanjan Sircar, "The Numbers Game: An Analysis of the 2014 General Election," 16 June 2014, *http://casi.sas.upenn.edu/iit/nsircar*.

5. On the conversion factors, see Louise Tillin, "Stories of a Wave," 20 May 2014, *http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/stories-of-a-wave*.

6. Pradeep Chhibber and Rahul Verma, "It Is Modi, Not BJP, That Won This Election," *The Hindu,* 1 June 2014.

7. Sanjay Kumar and Shreyas Sardesai, "The Importance of High Turnout," *The Hindu,* 27 May 2014.

8. See Supplemental Table A at *www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/supplemental-material*. Seat shares are notoriously hard to predict in a multiparty, first-past-the-post contest; one can more accurately gauge a forecast's quality by asking how well it predicted vote shares. On this score, CSDS was the most accurate. Therefore, I have chosen to rely on its postelection surveys, which are based on the same panel, in order to assess which segments of the electorate voted for which party.

9. Shreyas Sardesai, "Why Minority Vote Consolidation Did Not Happen," *The Hindu,* 1 June 2014, see esp. Table 1.

10. See Supplemental Table B at *www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/supplemental-material*.

11. See Supplemental Table C at *www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/supplemental-material*.

12. "Come May 16, Bangladeshi Immigrants Must Pack Up: Narendra Modi," 28 April 2014, *www.ndtv.com/elections/article/election-2014/come-may-16-bangladeshi-immigrants-must-pack-up-narendra-modi-514883*.

13. See Dipti Jain, "The One Chart That Explains Why Congress Lost the Rural Vote," *Live Mint and the Wall Street Journal,* 4 June 2014.

14. Milan Vaishnav, Devesh Kapur, and Neelanjan Sircar, "Growth Is the No. 1 Poll Issue for Voters, Survey Shows," *Times of India*, 16 March 2014.

15. Reetika Syal, "The UPA-II Report Card," *The Hindu,* 6 June 2014.

16. For example, economist Jagdish Bhagwati has argued that the UPA's failure to rein in public spending after using it to ride out the 2009 slowdown caused the fiscal deficit that is the source of inflation. See Frank Jack Daniel, "Top Economist Jagdish Bhagwati Eyes Role in Modi Government," *Reuters*, 25 April 2014.

17. Chhibber and Verma, "It Is Modi, Not BJP, That Won This Election."

18. Sandeep Shastri, "The Leadership Factor in the 2014 Polls," *The Hindu,* 28 May 2014.

19. Palash Ghosh, "India's 2014 Election to Cost $5 Billion, Second Only to Price Tag for 2012 U.S. Presidential Election," *International Business Times*, 11 April 2014; and Himani Chandna Gurtoo, "BJP's Advertisement Plan May Cost a Whopping Rs. 5000 Cr," *Hindustan Times*, 13 April 2014.

20. For a defense of the UPA's economic record and the argument that the INC was ill-prepared to cope with the "consequences of accelerated economic growth," see Maitreesh Ghatak, Parikshit Ghosh, and Ashok Kotwal, "Growth in the Time of UPA: Myths and Reality," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 19 April 2014, 34–43.

21. Chhibber and Verma, "It Is Modi, Not BJP, That Won This Election."

22. Sircar, "The Numbers Game."

23. For a discussion of preelectoral coalitions, minority coalitions, and surplus-majority coalitions from 1989 to 2014, and for the BJP's expansion across states by leveraging preelectoral coalitions, see Sridharan, "Coalition Strategies and the BJP's Expansion."

24. Milan Vaishnav, "India's Congress Party: Down But Not Yet Out," *BBC News India,* 17 May 2014.

25. Responses to question 23 of CSDS National Election Survey by class category, rural-urban location, and caste and religious community, accessed by personal communication.