

# Open contest, closed options

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IN ways more than one, the forth-coming Lok Sabha elections mark a moment of closure in India's political history. These elections come at the end of a period of fluidity that characterized the first phase of the 'third electoral system' in India.<sup>1</sup> The reconfiguration of the party system witnessed in the last 15 years or so has come to a completion, at least for the time being. With these elections, the participatory upsurge of the socially marginalized appears to be reaching a point of saturation.

Election 2004 also marks the closure of a historical possibility that arose at the beginning of the 1990s, the possibility of competitive politics providing space for exercise of substantial choices by ordinary citizens. By now it is clear that the earlier system of Congress hegemony has been replaced by a system of multi-party convergence that does not meaningfully expand the range of choices available to and exercised by the citizens.<sup>2</sup> The democratic upsurge of the 1990s has been contained and domesticated.

The Lok Sabha election of 2004 is thus simultaneously a closed and an open contest. It is an open race, for notwithstanding the media hype about a rising BJP and shining India, the final outcome leaves open a wide range of political possibilities for government formation in the 14th Lok Sabha. At the same time the race is a closed one, for the options available on the electoral menu and the range of expected consequences have shrunk significantly. The

essay traces both these dimensions of the forthcoming election.

The first part places these elections in the larger context of the structural transformations in the arena of competitive politics in the last decade and a half to understand the historical closure mentioned above. The second part situates these elections in the more immediate context of the recent round of assembly elections and tries to anticipate the broad contours of the final verdict, so as to argue that the outcome is still an open question.

The demise of the Congress system in 1991 changed the structure of political competition and opened a range of radical possibilities in democratic politics. One dimension of this structural change was the emergence of state politics as the primary arena of political contestation. As states became the effective unit of political choice, it led to a differentiation of the trends and patterns in different states. Gone were the days of nation-wide electoral waves; now the national elections were no more than an aggregation of state level verdicts. Widely misunderstood as the rise of disintegrative forces of regionalism, this change actually opened the possibility of bringing politics closer to people and of providing them with better alternatives at a time when national parties were not up to meeting local demands and aspirations.

**T**he other dimension of the structural transformation in the early 1990s was a reconfiguration of the party system. The Congress system gave way to either a neat two-party competition or a multi-party system in different states. Suddenly there was not only space for new parties or for the

old, but marginalized ones to gain new salience. The same development made formation of electoral alliances and post-poll coalitions both desirable and necessary. Viewed with suspicion as a sign of political fragmentation and unprincipled opportunism, this opening up of the political marketplace promised greater choices and newer opportunities to the ordinary consumer.

The high level of electoral volatility, leading to a very high incidence of the incumbent governments and representatives losing at the polls, seemed to confirm this reading. While many political analysts dismissed this as merely 'anti-incumbency', it was possible to read in these rejections a sign that the citizens were effectively and vigorously exercising their newly acquired choices. It held out the promise of making governments more accountable to the people.

These two structural changes were accompanied by two related shifts that served to underline the radical nature of the promise of the 1990s. The post-Congress polity was marked by a participatory upsurge of the lower classes and lower castes. Electoral politics witnessed higher participation and more intense politicization of the hitherto marginalized groups, first OBCs and dalits and then women and adivasis.<sup>3</sup> Initially noticed and scorned by the entrenched elite as a sign of the declining quality of the leaders and the idioms of politics, the second democratic upsurge had the potential of transforming the character of democracy by admitting new sets of demands as legitimate claims on the democratic enterprise.

**T**he discursive shift that took place around 1990 deepened the promise implicit in the democratic upsurge. The sudden arrival of three 'M's (Arvind Das' memorable shorthand for Mandal, Mandir and Market) on the centrestage of Indian politics changed the political idiom and the nature of ideological contestation. Viewed as a sign of ideological impurity and decline by all the established ideologies, this development opened the possibility of shaping high politics according to peoples' need. A one-dimensional and thinly held left-right spectrum was replaced by real and intense contestations around three different dimensions of the idea of India; the three 'M's stood for three disputes about the competing visions of national political community. This ideological rupture also opened the possibility of issues like environment to be placed on the political agenda.

The radical promise of the 1990s may reach a historical closure by the time the 14th general election to Lok Sabha is held in a few weeks from now. A moment of closure is not necessarily a moment of negation or that of reversal. In many ways the processes that began in the 1990s have reached a point of completion. The two Lok Sabha elections held in rapid succession in 1998 and 1999 confirmed the emergence of states as effective units of political choice in a national election. The state assembly elections held since 1999 have demonstrated that the trends and patterns of state elections are independent of each other and of any presumed national wave.

**E**lectoral volatility has completed a full circle as all the states except West Bengal and Bihar have witnessed a regime

transition. In the last five years the process of reconfiguration of the party system was also completed. In this period Tamil Nadu, Goa and Assam joined the list of states where the party system has been fundamentally reconfigured, leaving Kerala as the only major state where the party system has remained unchanged since 1980. The democratic upsurge has spread downwards. If women's participation showed signs of matching the level of men's participation in the Lok Sabha elections of 1999, the latest round of assembly elections provide evidence of participatory upsurge among the adivasis, the only group that was left out till now.

The discursive shift of the 1990s has also reached a point of culmination, with every party coming to terms with the language of social justice, majoritarianism and economic liberalisation. If the first phase of the discursive shift was marked by intense partisan advocacy of one ideological dimension to the exclusion of others, the recent phase has completed the circle as parties begin to adopt platforms that were not their own. In recent years, the BJP has advocated reservations in the private sector, the BSP has shifted to 'sarvajan samaj' and the CPI(M) and SP have flirted with economic liberalization.

The completion of each of these structural changes and related processes did not, however, realize the radical hopes attached with them. The changes in the structure of political competition opened greater number of options before the electorate without expanding or deepening the choice-set in terms of issues and policies available to the citizens. The last five years have confirmed a trend of convergence, a tendency for the major players in the party political arena to become like one another. This has led to the disappearance of issues with transformative potential from the political agenda.

**E**lectoral volatility has undoubtedly brought in some measure of accountability, but has on balance led to routine oscillation rather than transformation. The groups that have managed to enter the political arena thanks to the democratic upsurge have been coopted by the existing political formations without undergoing radical internal transformation. The reconfiguration of party political space has not led to any relaxation of the entry barriers for the political movements struggling for social transformation. It is in this sense that the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections are being held at a moment of historical closure.

In this context, the narrow terms in which the electoral choice is cast comes as no surprise. For an election that could result in lasting effects, perhaps an irreversible damage, to the idea of India, the nature of political and ideological contestation appears to be remarkably narrow. This election is likely to be a contest between two corporate political giants, both with similar products to sell, seeking to expand their market share. As in corporate battles, the greater the similarity in products, the greater is the effort to distinguish the brands, and more intense tends to be the competition. The intensity of electoral competition this time is likely to focus on the mechanics of electoral management, on strategies of alliance making, and on psychological warfare and media manipulation through the fine art of spin doctoring.

The one critical issue that does distinguish the Congress from the BJP, the place of religious minorities in India's future, is unlikely to be placed in the foreground by either of the two players. The BJP has already shifted the terms of the debate to its

side and would be content to collect electoral dividends quietly, for it knows that a more strident posture at this juncture can be counter productive. The Congress knows that it is on the backfoot on this question in the absence of a policy or leader who can meet the BJP's challenge ideologically and is aware that a focus on this issue would work to its disadvantage. Thus in all likelihood these elections would be fought without any serious contestation about the only issue that makes these polls worthy of attention.

**W**hile moments of opening of historical possibilities often come with a bang, the moments of closure tend to be a quiet affair. The Lok Sabha election of 2004 is unlikely to cause a sense of world-turned-upside-down that one associates with 1977 or even 1967, the sheer surprise at the scale of the verdicts of 1980 or 1984, or the novelty of the pattern of 1996. In all probability we are looking at yet another routine verdict, where the element of suspense has to do with the sum total of the state-wide verdicts and its implications for the various possible permutations of manufacturing a majority in the Lok Sabha.

If the suspense is intense, it is not because the range of possibilities is very wide; in fact it is precisely because the range of probable outcomes can be narrowly defined that the contest appears exciting. If the stakes are high, it is not because this election holds any promise for radical social change, but because a possible outcome may threaten some of the basics of democratic politics and endanger the very idea of India.

**T**he outcome of the recent round of assembly elections needs to be interpreted in this larger context. Since the BJP and its spin doctors would like everyone to forget the larger context and see these elections as the foreshadow of the national elections, it is important to remind ourselves of what this verdict of the assembly elections is not.<sup>4</sup> It is not, first of all, a sign of a nationwide wave in favour of the BJP. The BJP's victory in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh was much narrower than the number of seats might suggest. While it did win a comprehensive victory in Madhya Pradesh, it also faced a comprehensive defeat in Delhi, more sweeping than the number of seats would suggest. The defeat faced by Congress in two states out of three was small and is by no means irreversible. In any case, whatever the margin of victory and defeat in each state, it is not clear if that has much relevance for other states.

As we have noted above, the post-Congress polity is characterized by trends and patterns unique to each state. The verdict of the four Hindi speaking states is specific to the political circumstances of these states and may not apply outside. That these elections took place just before the Lok Sabha elections is no more than a coincidence of electoral cycles. These are by no means indicators of popular mood all over the country. The six monthly *India Today*-ORG MARG Mood of the Nation Poll had, in the middle of 2003, found that the NDA was well below the majority mark.<sup>5</sup> It is not clear why the verdict of the subsequent round of assembly elections in a few states should be read as a reversal of public opinion trend in the country.

Similarly, there is no evidence of a saffron wave in this verdict. The BJP itself did not make Mandir an issue, except in some local context. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that the issue generated no popular enthusiasm. The BJP leadership had learnt its lessons in the Himachal Pradesh elections in early 2003; they knew that Gujarat could not be repeated everywhere. Thus, even when a communally charged Bhojshala issue presented itself in Madhya Pradesh, the BJP did not make it into an election issue. Clearly, the elections were fought on routine local and developmental issues, and not on Hindutva.

If Digvijay Singh lost the elections, it was principally due to a perceived record of poor governance, especially in his second regime. It must also be clarified that all the Congress governments did not invite severe indictment on governance. Besides the obvious counter-example of Delhi, the Congress government in Rajasthan also had a good reputation for its governance record and the Chhattisgarh governments' record on developmental work was not perceived to be bad. The electoral defeats do not necessarily imply an inability to govern.

And finally, these elections were not a positive verdict on the central government. The BJP leadership was at pains to point out till the day before the counting that these elections were not going to be a reflection on the central government. Survey evidence also suggests that ordinary voters did not see the election as being fought on the efficacy of the central government. These were very much state-specific verdicts, in line with the general tendency in the last decade or so of the ruling party's to fare poorly in the state assembly elections.

This is not to say that the verdict of the latest round of assembly elections is completely irrelevant to the forthcoming Lok Sabha

elections or that these would have no consequences on the national battle. The consequences are here for everyone to see: the BJP has succeeded in creating a hype, has mustered the confidence to advance the election timing, and has succeeded in demoralizing the Congress in the first round of psychological and media war that is likely to dominate the Lok Sabha election. It is still not clear if these consequences would last more than a couple of weeks and would have any effect on ordinary voters.

**I**n any case these assembly elections revealed something that can be critical for understanding the electoral prospects in the next Lok Sabha elections. These elections brought in sharp relief the complete mismatch between the organizational strength of the BJP and the Congress. The BJP has displayed an institutionalized will to power, while the Congress appeared like a house divided without any strategy. The Congress defeat in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh was a classic illustration of this weakness.

The BJP had a clear game plan, backed by considerable research and astute political management; the Congress had none. In both these states the level of popular dissatisfaction was not of an order that would indicate electoral defeat. A clear game plan, partial electoral alliances, better candidate selection or even a more coherent campaign could have won these two states for the Congress. The results also indicated that the Congress could not hold nerves in a closely fought contest. More than the fact of defeat, it is this that should worry the Congress leadership as it prepares for the national battle.

**I**n the light of this medium run and short term context to the forthcoming elections, the arithmetic of the electoral horserace is easily summarized. While it is a gamble to forecast the precise outcome, it should not be very difficult to anticipate the broad outlines of the electoral verdict. Unless there is a sudden and radical reversal of some of the trends outlined above, we are looking at a fairly limited range of possible outcomes. The outer limit of this range can be easily defined in negative terms: one can rule out a clear majority for any single party. Like the five general elections preceding this one, election 2004 is going to produce a 'hung' Parliament.

The BJP accepted this reality long ago. One heard an occasional boast till last year that Mission 2004 would involve securing a majority for the BJP on its own. Such outrageous claims have been quietly buried now. The BJP managers know only too well that the BJP has improved and maintained its position through the 1990s by steadily contesting less and less seats to the Lok Sabha.

Beginning the decade by contesting 478 seats in the 1991 elections, the BJP has steadily ceded seats to newly acquired allies and contested only 339 seats in the 1999 elections. This time the figure is unlikely to be much different. This includes around 45 seats where the party is not a serious player, for it was not even the runner up here in 1999. A party that is a serious contender in less than 300 seats in a serious manner cannot possibly win 272 on its own, unless there is an electoral tornado working in its favour. That possibility can be safely ruled out.

**T**he Congress has taken much longer to accept this ground reality and there are still Congressmen who entertain the grand illusion of the party securing a majority of its own. But the steps taken by the party after the defeat in the assembly elections reveal that the party is waking up to the real world of the post-Congress polity. The Congress contested more than 500 seats in the 1991 and the 1996 elections. The next two elections saw the party enter into some limited alliances and reducing the number of seats it contested to 477 and 453. If it is serious about forging a nation-wide anti-NDA coalition, the numbers are likely to drop significantly this time to around 375 seats. This will include the 330 seats where the party was either the winner or runner up last time. Once again, barring an electoral whirlwind, one can rule out the Congress coming anywhere close to a majority on its own.

Having set an outer limit, let us turn now to the more probable and realistic scenarios. Are we looking at the possibility of a clear majority for the NDA, if not for the BJP? The answer, according to a large section of the media, is an emphatic yes. In doing so, the media may have unwittingly bought into the hype that the BJP spin doctors wish to create. There is no doubt that the BJP has made a smart move by advancing the poll timing by a few months. It avoids the uncertainties of a monsoon, increases the prospects of benefiting from a temporary improvement in macro-economic conditions, enables it to create a hype around its recent electoral success, and catch the Congress leadership off-guard. But is this relative advantage enough to allow the BJP to secure a majority of its own? Most sections of the

media have not bothered to ask this question.

A hard look at the state-by-state scenario does not confirm this impression, for the numbers do not really favour the NDA. The NDA peaked in the 1999 elections when all the partners put together secured 310 seats. Since 1999, the BJP has not acquired a substantial ally who could make a difference to the electoral arithmetic. The results of the various assembly elections held since 1999 do not work in favour of the NDA.

**T**he recent victories in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh do not indicate any addition to the BJP's tally, when translated into Lok Sabha seats. The BJP already holds 50 of the 73 seats in the Lok Sabha from the five states that went to polls in December 2003. If the voting pattern in these assembly elections were to be repeated in the next Lok Sabha polls, the BJP's tally would remain exactly at 50, as the gains in Madhya Pradesh would be offset by losses in Delhi. Prior to these assembly elections the BJP has experienced a string of electoral reversals including in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Taking all this into account, it is fair to say that the 310 seats the NDA won last time, or perhaps 300, is the upper limit of what the NDA can expect to have in this election. But it is equally important to look at the lower end of the range, should things go wrong for the BJP and its allies in the crucial states of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. In that case, the NDA could go down as low as 220 seats. In other words, while a majority for the NDA cannot be ruled out, it is quite possible that NDA may

fall substantially short of a majority. This election is still an open race.

**F**or the Congress, its tally of 114 last time, the worst ever in terms of seats, defines the lower end of the realistic range for the party. Given the results of assembly elections since 1999, it is clear that the party is not going to fall further from the level it touched last time. It can only go up this time, and it has a lot of room there. If the Congress can turn the possible gains from Andhra, Haryana, Delhi and Orissa into a reality, the party's tally could go up to 175 or so.

Even this best-case scenario thus leaves the Congress about 100 seats short of the majority mark. Assuming that the Left would be willing to lend its 50 or so MPs, the Congress still needs to acquire and sustain a substantial support from its other possible allies. Currently it looks likely that the Congress will have a pre-poll alliance with the DMK and its partners in Tamil Nadu, NCP in Maharashtra, RJD in Bihar, BSP in Uttar Pradesh and perhaps in some neighbouring states. An alliance with SP looks improbable at this stage, while an understanding with the TRS in Telangana cannot be ruled out.

On this assumption, these pre-poll allies would bring anything between 50 to 75 seats to the Congress. Thus the range for the Congress and its various pre-poll allies is between 170 to 250 seats. Thus even in the best-case scenario, the Congress is not going to be in a position to form a government with its pre-poll allies, without the support of the Left. In the worst-case scenario, it will fall considerably short of majority where the support of the Left would be of no consequence.

**I**f this assessment is not wildly mistaken, election 2004 is still an open race. The BJP and its allies between 220 and 300 and the Congress and its allies anywhere between 170 to 250 may be a small range in statistical terms. This range of possible outcomes is narrower than the possible range in a national election during the period of wave elections. Yet, politically speaking, this opens up a wide range of possibilities. If the NDA crosses 250, ahead of the Congress-allies-Left combine, it is sure to manufacture a majority, ensuring another five years of what would be, for all practical purposes, a BJP rule at the centre.

The Congress and its pre-poll allies need to capture a minimum of 200 seats in order to be in the fray for the formation of the next government. If that happens, it again opens up several possibilities. If the Congress on its own has 150 seats or above, well within the range of possible outcomes, it will be in a position to drive the government formation. This would result in a Congress government supported from within or outside by its allies and the Left. Otherwise, the other allies and the Left will be in the driver's position, thus recreating the United Front scenario. The range of possible outcomes also suggests a third scenario, where both the NDA and the Congress-led coalition are short of a majority and the balance is held by others, mainly the SP. The arithmetic of government formation in that situation is anybody's guess.

Which of these possible scenarios becomes real would depend on how the battle is played out on the various regional battlegrounds. It is useful to see the forthcoming elections as comprising four fronts where four different battles will be

fought (see table). The battle of the West (including Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh) is likely to be tilted in favour of the BJP. With recent assembly election victories in these states and the possibility of Maharashtra going the BJP-Shiv Sena way, the BJP can virtually sweep this region. An alliance with the NCP may improve the Congress-NCP tally in Maharashtra. It needs to be remembered though that the BJP and its allies did very well in this region in 1999 as well and, therefore, do not have much to gain here.

**W**hatever the BJP gains on the western front may be lost on the eastern front. The BJP and its allies did exceptionally well in the East (Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, West Bengal and Assam) in 1999. Now they have only reverses to look forward to in all of these states except Assam where the Congress did very well last time. The crucial states for the Congress here are Orissa and Jharkhand.

In the South too, the NDA had peaked last time and can only hope to control the damage this time. The critical states are Andhra and Tamil Nadu. The TDP-BJP victory in Andhra last time was based on a very thin margin; the Congress can reverse it and inflict serious damage on the NDA if it can handle the Telangana issue. In Tamil Nadu the DMK led alliance appears to have an initial advantage as it threatens to do to Jayalalitha what she did to the DMK in the 1998 Lok Sabha elections. The NDA managers have reason to worry here since electoral sweeps are not uncommon in this state.

In the North it is really Uttar Pradesh that can make a difference. Elsewhere it is slight

advantage for the Congress: possible losses for the Congress in the Punjab may be made up and turned into net gains as a result of a better show in Haryana, Himachal and Delhi. In Uttar Pradesh, the last assembly elections had established the SP and the BSP as the main players. The BJP will have to come up with something special, more than just readmitting Kalyan Singh, to retain even the 25 seats that it won last time from the truncated Uttar Pradesh.

The Congress would have to depend on an ally. Here a BSP-Congress alliance has substantial rewards to offer both partners. If the Congress can substantially cut into the SP's Muslim support and the BSP maintains its base vote of 2002, this combine has potential of emerging as the largest bloc and causing a major political upset in the state. Incidentally, an alliance with the BSP has significant pay-offs for the Congress even outside Uttar Pradesh, especially in Madhya Pradesh and Punjab.

**A**ll in all, the BJP's game plan would be to improve its 1999 tally by about 20 seats in the West, retain what it had in the North and limit the damages in the East and the South to about 20 seats each, so as to cross the majority mark. The Congress, on the other hand, will plan to retain whatever it had in the West last time, gain 25 seats in the North (plus another 25 for its ally, the BSP), 20 each in the East and South (with additional 40-50 seats from its allies).

The final outcome within the range offered above would depend on how the electoral battle is fought in each of the battlegrounds representing different states. This is not the place to go into the specific factors that will determine the outcome in each state. But it

is necessary to mention the different issues that will and will not come up during the forthcoming election campaign. This helps to understand the narrow agenda that is likely to dominate the elections.

**T**he BJP's strategy is quite obvious: the party will try to turn it into a presidential race between Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Sonia Gandhi ('Atal ji versus a question mark') and exploit the carefully crafted and media managed image of the prime minister. Besides, it will try to wrong-foot the Congress on questions concerning Hindu sensibilities. Notwithstanding a lot of talk about the 'feel good' factor and 'India Shining', it is unlikely that the BJP's poll managers think that they have very much to sell about the performance of the Vajpayee government beyond some general hype. The strategy would be to create a *hawa* without getting into any substantial discussion of the government's performance in general and the economic policy in particular.

It is still unclear what the Congress strategy is, or indeed if Congress has any strategy, to counter the BJP's psychological warfare. The Congress has done little groundwork to be able to raise the issue of secularism in this election with any credibility. If it is serious about taking on the BJP it will have to find ways of focusing the campaign on the performance of the BJP government, especially on questions of impact of the economic policy on the poor and the level of corruption. Congress' inability to do so would only be seen as a sign of its internal weakness on these points.

As for other parties, it is unlikely that they would have much to contribute to the shaping of the debate, or that they would be

capable of doing so even if they wish to. All in all, it is quite clear that the election campaign would steer clear of the three contestations that dominated the public sphere and shaped political mobilization: the issue of social justice and dignity, the issue of pluralism and the future of Indian secularism, and the issue of the consequences of privatization, liberalization and globalization. Silence on these issues would not reflect a political resolution of these contestations, but a conscious attempt by both the leading parties to keep these issues under wraps.

It is a sign of the historical closure that the choice for citizens is restricted to an alliance led by the BJP and the possibility of another alliance led by the Congress. While the prospects of another five year stint for the BJP are frightening to many who cherish the idea of a plural India, the prospect of a Congress regime or another repetition of the United Front experience are not enticing either. A failed attempt by the non-NDA parties to provide an alternative to the BJP can in the long run consolidate the BJP as the natural party of governance. As the radical opportunities close and the polity returns to routines of bourgeois democracy, there is a danger that electoral verdicts can negate the gains of the last decade or so and impose regressive conclusions about the three main contestations of our time as a national consensus.

The possibility of a closure is also a reminder of the task for groups and forces outside the electoral contestations. If this moment of closure is the result of an inability of the political establishment to respond to historical opportunity and to popular urges and aspirations, the occasion calls for a concerted attempt to forge a new instrument of alternative politics. Those who watch the narrow 2004 horserace with fear

and dismay may like to look for signs of an alternative kind of politics.

<b>Lok Sabha Elections, 2004: Regional Battleground</b>						
<i>ZONE/State</i>	<i>Seats in Lok Sabha</i>	<i>Performance in Lok Sabha elections 1999</i>			<i>Elections 2004: Best case scenario for two fronts</i>	
		<i>NDA</i>	<i>Congress</i>	<i>Others</i>	<i>NDA</i>	<i>Congress and allies</i>
<b>WEST</b>						
Maharashtra	48	13 BJP 15 SS	10	6 NCP	Gains of 10 seats or more for SS-BJP	Pre-poll alliance with NCP may help retain existing seats
Gujarat	26	20 BJP	6		Repeat of assembly poll performance; additional couple of seats	Retains existing seats, gains few seats from BJP
Rajasthan	25	16 BJP	9		Improve assembly poll performance; extra couple of seats	Retains existing seats
MP	29	21 BJP	8		Repeat of assembly poll performance; near clean sweep	Retains its seats in alliance with BSP
Chhattisgarh	11	8 BJP	3		Retains its seats	Split seats with BJP, in alliance with NCP/BSP
<b>EAST</b>						
Bihar	40	11 BJP	2	6 RJD	Keeps its	Major gains for

		18 JD(U)			losses below 5 seats	RJD, some for Congress
Jharkhand	14	11 BJP	2	1 RJD	Losses contained to a couple of seats	Major gains for Congress
W Bengal	42	8 TMC 2 BJP	3	29 LF	Losses contained to a couple of seats	Congress gains a couple of seats; LF gains 5 seats from TMC
Orissa	21	10 BJD 9 BJP	2		Losses contained to 5 seats or so	Gains 10 seats or more
Assam	14	2 BJP	10	1 CPML	Gains of 5 seats or more for BJP and AGP	Losses contained to a couple of seats
SOUTH						
AP	42	29 TDP 7 BJP	5		Contains losses to 5 seats or so	Gains of 15 seats or more in alliance with TRC/ Left
Tamil Nadu	39	4 BJP	2	22 DMK+ 11 ADK+	ADMK allies with BJP, retains current tally	Rainbow coalition led by DMK sweeps the state
Karnataka	28	7 BJP	18	3 JD	A few additional seats for BJP; JD damages Congress	Retains or contains losses to a couple of seats
Kerala	20		11 UDF	9 LDF	No stakes here	Retains current level despite factionalism
NORTH						
UP	80	25	9	26 SP 14 BSP	Retains or contains losses to 5 seats or so; SP dominates the rest	Congress-BSP alliance gains 20 extra seats

Delhi	7	7	0		Splits seats with Congress	Congress sweeps as in assembly polls
Haryana	10	5 BJP 5 INLD	0		Contains losses to a couple of seats	Congress sweeps in alliance with HVP/BSP
Punjab	13	2 SAD 1 BJP	8		Major gains for SAD/BJP	Contains losses to a couple of seats
J&K	6	2 BJP	0	4 NC	BJP retains one; NC retains some	Congress upsets BJP; PDP defeats NC
All India	543	182 BJP 128 Allies	114		NDA crosses the majority mark with BJP around 170	Congress: 175 Allies: 75 Left: 50

**Footnotes:**

1. For an elaboration of this formulation and a discussion of the structural attributes of this phase, see Yogendra Yadav, 'Electoral politics in the time of change: India's third electoral system, 1989-99', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21-28 August, 1999, pp. 2393-9. An earlier version of the article appeared as 'The Third Electoral System', *Seminar* (480), August 1999.

2. Some of the points made in a short hand in the first part of this essay have been elaborated in Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar, 'From hegemony to convergence: party system and electoral politics in the Indian states, 1952-2002', *Journal of Indian Institute of Political Economy* XV (1&2), January-June 2003. Many of the points made here originated in conversations with Professor Suhas Palshikar.

3. For a systematic examination of evidence on this, see 'Understanding the Second Democratic Upsurge: Trends of Bahujan Participation in Electoral Politics in the 1990s' in Francine R. Frankel, Zoya Hasan, Rajeev Bhargava and Balveer Arora eds., *Transforming India: Social and Political Dynamics of Democracy*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 120-145.

'Politics' in Marshall Bouton and Philip Oldenburg eds. *India Briefing: A Transformative Fifty Years*, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1999, pp. 3-38.

4. The following paras summarise the findings of a post-mortem of these verdicts with the help of post-poll surveys, first reported in a series of state specific articles by Yogendra Yadav and Sanjay Kumar in *The Hindu*, 8-12 December 2003.

5. See Ajit Kumar Jha, 'NDA on a slide', *India Today*, 25 August 2003. Oddly, the previous report of the same series in February 2003 had found a BJP wave based on fairly similar data.

