

Haryana: Congress Retains Its Electoral Supremacy

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In every election since the creation of Haryana, the ruling party has been defeated, but this time around there has been a reversal of this anti-incumbency trend. State-level factors played a far more important role than national-level issues in deciding the outcome in the 2009 Lok Sabha election. The Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda factor was in large measure responsible for this tilt as the people had not forgotten the ills of the previous O P Chautala government.

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In Haryana the 2009 general elections were seen as a referendum on the Bhupinder Singh Hooda led Congress government's four-year governance of the state. The incumbent Congress government contested the elections on its "development plank" and banked heavily on its record. The main rivals of Congress, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its ally the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD), formed a pre-election alliance.

The Congress once again managed to win nine out of the 10 Lok Sabha seats without any drop in its vote percentage since the last Lok Sabha elections. The election outcome was remarkable as it marked an important reversal of electoral trends in the state. The electoral history of Haryana shows that it is a state with high levels of electoral volatility.¹ As a result, since the creation of the state there has been a change in the ruling party in every assembly election and the ruling party has suffered in the Lok Sabha elections.

Table 1: Summary of Election Verdict (2009)

Parties	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Vote (%)	Change of Vote since 2004
Congress	10	9	41.8	0
BJP	5	0	12.1	-5.1
INLD	5	0	15.8	-6.6
BSP	10	0	15.7	+10.8
HJC	10	1	10.2	+10.2
Others	170	0	4.3	-9.3

Turnout: 67.4%. Change in turnout as compared to 2004: +2%. Source: CSDS Data Unit.

However, the recently held elections saw a reversal of this trend, as the incumbent Congress Party was able to secure around 42% of the votes polled and retain its tally of seats won in the previous Lok Sabha elections. If for nothing else, the 2009 Lok Sabha elections from Haryana attract attention for this very interesting fact.

Operational Hypothesis

The 2009 election verdict reveals that the Congress was able to retain its tally of seats won in the Lok Sabha elections in 2004 and also secured more or less the same vote share. Its main challengers, the BJP and its ally the INLD, contested five seats each in the state but failed to win even a single one. In spite of the pre-poll alliance, the vote share of the BJP dropped by 5% and that of the INLD fell 6% as compared to the last Lok Sabha elections.

The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) also failed to open its account in the state, but it made impressive electoral gains in terms of the votes polled, increasing its vote share by over 10%. The Haryana Janhit Congress (HJC) managed to win one seat securing around 10% of the votes polled. Apart from the incumbent government being able to beat anti-incumbency, this election also witnessed the victory of the Congress in spite of a coalition between its rivals – the BJP and INLD. This too is a reversal of the existing electoral trend in the state. Earlier elections reveal that the Congress always fared badly and lost elections whenever there was a pre-election alliance among its main opposition parties in the state.

The electoral history of Haryana shows that the state falls in the cluster of states in India with high levels of electoral volatility. More volatile states also experience

larger anti-incumbent swings, but the correlation is not perfect, which indicates that electoral volatility cannot be reduced simply to anti-incumbency (Chhibber and Nooruddin 2008). One of the factors for explaining the highly volatile nature of politics in Haryana can be the existence of political alliance in the state and its impact on the electoral outcome. An analysis of elections held in the last two decades in the state have shown that the Congress has always performed better in the absence of a political alliance between opposition political parties or political coalition against it² (Joshi and Rai 2004).

In this context it becomes crucial to find out the key determinants that explain the verdict in favour of Congress. The operational hypothesis is that the verdict in favour of Congress in Haryana is largely due to the positive image of the incumbent chief minister and perceived satisfaction of the people with the performance of state government. Other factors like the multipolar nature of the contest and fragmentation of opposition votes, imperfect pre-poll alliance of INLD-BJP and people's perception of Congress as the party that can address the issues concerning Haryana might have played a role would also be analysed.

Key Determinants

The key determinants that explain the verdict of Lok Sabha elections in Haryana and the spectacular performance of Congress are: (i) the multipolar contest between the Congress, INLD-BJP, HJC and BSP in the state. The result showed that the Congress was able to retain its vote share of the 2004 Lok Sabha elections but the opposition votes got further fragmented. The mobilisation of a quarter of the votes between HJC and BSP led to the fragmentation of opposition votes that worked in favour of the Congress; (ii) the pre-poll alliance of the INLD-BJP proved to be a non-starter and its combined loss of 12% vote share proved decisive. One reason that could explain the loss of vote share by both the NDA partners could be the poor transfer of votes to each other in this election. This directly benefited the Congress; (iii) the positive image of the Bhupinder Singh Hooda along with high levels of satisfaction with his government tilted the voters towards the Congress.

An in-depth analysis of public opinion based on the data from National Election Study 2009 (NES 2009)³ was done to find out whether there is evidence that this was the most important factor.

The findings of the survey clearly point out that the Hooda government's image as a development-oriented government enabled it to counter the logic of anti-incumbency and keep at bay its main opposition BJP-INLD alliance in the elections. The electorate in Haryana seemed to be satisfied with the Congress government in the state, as more than six out of 10 voters expressed satisfaction with the performance of the incumbent government. A majority of voters who voted for the NDA and more than four out of 10 voters of HJC also reported satisfaction with the performance of the Congress government in Haryana. The performance of the state government was also highly rated by voters from different social groups. Table 2.2 shows that around six out of 10 voters from different caste communities also expressed satisfaction with governance in the last four years in Haryana.

The voters were asked to assess and rate the efficacy of the Hooda government as compared with its predecessor Om Prakash Chautala's government. Table 3 shows that the Hooda government had a net advantage of 32 percentage points over Chautala's government. The highest rating for the Hooda government was reported from voters in urban settings with 60% reporting that it is better than the previous government. The Hooda government was better rated than Chautala's primarily on issues of governance but the component of personal image also seems

to weigh on the minds of the urban voters. During the Chautala regime people in Haryana held a very negative perception about the chief minister and his two sons. There was a sense of fear among the people about Chautala and his sons (Joshi and Rai 2004). It seems that the urban voters still remembered the negative image and misgovernance of the Chautalas' and rated their party poorly.

Voters were additionally asked to comparatively assess and rate the political party that was best suited to handle issues

Table 2: High Levels of Satisfaction with Performance of State Government

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Net Satisfaction Score
All respondents	64	26	+38

Table 2.1: Even NDA Voters Were Satisfied

Congress voters	86	8	+76
NDA voters	56	37	+19
BSP voters	42	49	-7
HJC voters	47	32	+15

Table 2.2: Satisfaction across Communities

Jats	69	25	+44
Upper Castes	59	27	+32
Yadavs and Gujjars	60	29	+31
Other OBCs	70	19	+51
Dalits	60	32	+28

"No opinion" (10%) excluded from the analysis.

"net satisfaction score" is defined as satisfied with state government minus dissatisfied. Question: What is your assessment of the work done by the Congress government in Haryana in the last four years – would you say you are satisfied or dissatisfied with it? (Probe further whether "fully" or "somewhat" satisfied or dissatisfied.)

Source: National Election Study 2009; Weighted data sets. All figures in per cent.

Table 3: Voters Rated Hooda's Regime Better Than Chautala's Rule

	Hooda Government Better	Chautala Government Better	Net Advantage Hooda Government
All respondents	50	22	+32

Table 3.1: Voters of Different Parties Preferred Hooda Government

Congress voters	78	5	+68
NDA voters	23	49	-26
BSP voters	35	24	+9
HJC voters	30	20	+10

Table 3.2: Rural Urban Differentials in Rating Hooda Government

Rural	46	24	+22
Urban	60	12	+48

Table 3.3: Gender Divide in Rating Hooda Government

Male	55	21	+34
Female	41	22	+19

"No Opinion" (13%), "Both Equally Good" (8%) and "Both Equally Bad" (7%) excluded from analysis.

Question: If we compare the present Bhupinder Singh Hooda-led Congress government with the previous Om Prakash Chautala led INLD-NDA government which one has been better?

Source: National Election Study-2009; Weighted Data Sets. All figures in per cent.

concerned with the state. The Congress was rated better than the INLD, BJP and BSP in protecting the interests of farmers, handling law and order and also for finding a solution to the Satlej-Yamuna

canal interstate dispute. The popularity of the Congress seems to be one variable that expresses the overall satisfaction with the government and the positive rating the government enjoys on issues of development.

Demographic Patterns of Voting

The positive image of Bhupinder Singh Hooda and his governance led to a subtle change in the caste profile of Congress supporters in the state. Hooda's efforts at mobilising the Jats did succeed as the Congress enhanced its vote share by 17 percentage points among this powerful community that accounts for about a quarter of the state's electorate. This shift of Jat votes in favour of the Congress largely accounts for the poor show of the BJP's ally INLD that has traditionally enjoyed massive support from the Jats.

The Congress also gained significantly among the lower Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in the state. However this gain was offset to some extent as the Congress lost nearly one-third of its support among the dalits, the second largest community in the state and the one most loyal to the Congress so far. The principal beneficiary of the desertion of dalit voters from Congress was the BSP that posted a significant swing of 35 percentage points in its favour. The BSP was able to mobilise dalits in this election and emerge as the second largest party in the state in terms of vote share along with INLD. The vote share of BSP increased phenomenally among the dalits from 21% in 2004 to 56% in 2009. However among other caste communities, the vote share of BSP remained the same as it was during the 2004 general elections.

Table 4: Congress Gains Jats and Lower OBC Communities, Losses among Dalits (in %)

Caste/Community-wise Swings for...	Congress Vote Share 2009	Congress' Gain/Loss since 2004
Jats	42	+17
Upper castes	35	-5
Yadavs and gujjars	46	-3
Lower OBC	54	+8
Dalits	34	-35

Source: National Election Study 2004 and 2009; Weighted data sets. All figures in per cent.

The changing caste equation also ensured that the revival of the BJP-INLD alliance remained a non-starter. The vote share of the alliance was 12 points lower

than their combined vote share in what was a bad election for them in 2004. Instead of gaining from the alliance synergy, they actually lost the only seat they won last time. The Jat votes of the INLD and the Bania-Punjabi votes of the BJP did not transfer to each other in this election. This time 5% of those who voted for BJP in the last elections did not vote for NDA. The results strengthen the belief that the BJP might have done much better if it could have formed an alliance with HJC as this new outfit secured 10% votes and won a seat.

To conclude, it can be said that the voters in Haryana believed that the Congress government did succeed in good governance and delivering basic goods and services in the state. Most people seemed to be satisfied with the performance of the Hooda government and rated it much higher than the Chautala administration. The positive image of the government combined with faith of the voters in Congress benefited the Congress. The Congress also gained from the multipolar nature of contest in the state and an imperfect alliance among its main challengers BJP-INLD. Governance based on a development agenda and efficient delivery of public service can become a determining factor in Indian politics in beating anti-incumbency and winning elections. The analysis reveals that image management along with the perceived satisfaction of voters with the incumbent government can be an important factor in determining the electoral outcome even in a state where there is a multipolar contest and fragmentation of opposition votes. The polarisation of dalit votes by the BSP has made it a formidable force in the state and must caution for the Congress. Any further loss of dalit votes by Congress and consolidation of BSP among this social community may be detrimental in shaping the future electoral outcome in Haryana.

NOTES

- 1 Electoral volatility is defined as the "net electoral change between two consecutive elections" (Bartolini and Mair 1990: 19). Aggregate levels of electoral volatility, measured as the net change in vote shares for parties competing in the elections, are used as a convenient proxy for the cumulation of individual vote shifts.
- 2 In the general elections held in 1984 there was no pre-poll alliance between any parties in Haryana,

which saw the Congress sweep all the 10 seats in the state. In state assembly elections in 1987, the Lok Dal led by Devi Lal forged an alliance with the BJP winning 85 out of the 90 assembly seats in the state. Without any alliance in 1991, the Congress returned to power, winning 51 of the total 90 seats elections. In the parliamentary elections held in the same year the Congress won nine of the 10 seats it contested. In the state assembly elections in 1996, the Haryana Vikas Party (HVP) and the BJP formed an alliance. The Congress fared poorly, winning just nine assembly seats. Its poor performance continued in the general elections held the same year and the party won only two Lok Sabha seats. In the general elections held in 1999, the INLD contested the elections in alliance with the BJP as part of the NDA. The NDA swept the elections winning all the 10 seats and the Congress drew a blank. In the general election held in 2004, the INLD-BJP alliance broke before the elections. This once again benefited the Congress and it performed well winning nine out of 10 seats.

- 3 National Election Study (NES) 2009 a post-poll survey was conducted by CSDS, Delhi. Seven hundred and three randomly selected respondents in Haryana spread across 76 locations (polling stations) were interviewed using a standard-structured questionnaire. A multistage stratified random sample was drawn using the probability sampling method. The 72 locations were spread across 18 assembly segments and covered all the 10 parliamentary constituency of the state. The fieldwork was conducted after voting finished on the evening of 7 May 2009, and was completed by the evening of 19 May 2009. The Haryana component of the survey was conducted under a UGC Major Research Proposal titled "Lok Sabha General Election 2009: A Behavioural Study of Political Attitudes and Opinion in Perspective of Political Communication" (F5-34 (3)/2008(HRP)) granted to Harish Kumar, Department of Journalism and Mass Communications, Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak, Haryana by University Grants Commission, Delhi. We sincerely thank him for sharing the data with us.

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