

Haryana

Landslide Victory for Congress

In the jat-dominated politics of the state, the Congress benefited from the negative image of the chief minister and his family. The outcome of the Lok Sabha elections in Haryana proves that a good development record alone does not ensure that a party will perform well in an election, if it denies the people their democratic rights.

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The 2004 Lok Sabha elections saw the Congress and its allies making sizeable gains at the national level. One of the states where the party did exceedingly well was Haryana. The Congress won nine of the 10 Lok Sabha seats in the state, and secured a little over 42 per cent of the votes – a 7 per cent increase from the 1999 Lok Sabha polls. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) secured a little over 17 per cent of the votes – a 12 per cent decrease from the 1999 figures. The Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) vote share fell by over 6 per cent. The Haryana Vikas Party (HVP), which failed to win a single seat, got less than 4 per cent of the votes.

The only Lok Sabha seat the Congress lost was in Sonapat, where party candidate Dharam Pal Singh Malik was defeated by sitting MP Kishan Singh Sanghwan of the BJP. Sanghwan has thus won the Sonapat seat thrice in a row. In 1998, he contested as the INLD candidate; but before the 1999 Lok Sabha elections, he joined the BJP. INLD was the runner-up in five of the 10 seats. In the remaining five, the party stood third in four seats and in the Mahendragarh constituency, party candidate Swami Dharam Dev stood fourth in the electoral race.

Sirsa, which is one of the two Lok Sabha seats in Haryana reserved for dalits, is supposed to be a stronghold of the Chautalas, who hail from Chautala village in the district. This time, the INLD candidate from Sirsa (SC) lost to the Congress candidate and trailed in six of the nine assembly segments in the constituency. In the Kurukshetra constituency, the chief minister's son Abhay Singh Chautala was in the contest against Congress candidate Naveen Jindal. Jindal defeated Chautala by a margin of 1,60,190 votes. The latter trailed in all the nine assembly segments of Kurukshetra.

Bhiwani witnessed a kind of 'star contest'. The sons of two former chief ministers and the son of the present chief minister Om Prakash Chautala were in the fray. Chautala's son and sitting MP Ajay Singh Chautala contested as the INLD candidate, Bansilal's son and former MP from Bhiwani Surender Singh contested as the HVP candidate and Bhajan Lal's son Kuldeep Bishnoi contested as the Congress candidate. In 1999, Ajay Chautala had won by a margin of 27.8 per cent votes. But in 2004, he not only lost his seat but also stood third in the electoral race with only 27.7 per cent votes, nearly 25 per cent less than in 1999. The Congress candidate, Kuldeep Bishnoi, emerged as the winner of the triangular contest. The HVP candidate, Surender Singh, trailed Bishnoi by less than three percentage points and came in second.

The election results indicate a clear defeat for INLD, the ruling party in the state. The critical factors responsible for the defeat

merit attention. The question that arises is whether the defeat was a mere loss of seats, or does it have wider implications with regard to the support base of the party in the state?

In 1999, the INLD had contested the elections in alliance with the BJP. The two parties had won five seats each and together secured nearly 58 per cent of the vote. It has been argued that the collapse of the BJP-INLD alliance led to the defeat of both parties. It would be interesting to examine the electoral history of the state and assess whether the performance of the Congress is any way linked to the nature of alliances formed. In the past two decades, the Congress has indeed performed better in the absence of a strong social or political coalition against it. In the 1984 Lok Sabha elections, there were no alliances in the state and the Congress swept the polls winning all 10 seats. Just three years later, in the 1987 Vidhan Sabha polls, Devi Lal's Lok Dal and the BJP formed an alliance, which won 85 of the 90 assembly seats. In the 1991 assembly elections, there was no alliance and the Congress returned to power with 51 assembly seats. Even in the Lok Sabha polls held the same year, the party won nine seats. Prior to the 1996 Vidhan Sabha elections, the HVP and BJP formed an alliance. Predictably, the Congress' tally was reduced to nine Vidhan Sabha seats, and in the 1996 Lok Sabha polls, the party won only two seats in the state. Between 1996 and 2004, Haryana has been witness to the formation of alliances at the time of elections. This has adversely affected the chances of the Congress. However, in the 2004 elections, the absence of alliances alone does not explain the spectacular performance of the party. This paper attempts to analyse the various factors that played a role in the outcome of the 2004 Lok Sabha elections in Haryana.

In the run-up to the polls, it was clear that the BJP and INLD would probably not enter the electoral arena as allies. Haryana has a history of alliances being formed and broken just before elections. In 1998, Om Prakash Chautala had supported the BJP-led alliance at the centre despite being in opposition to the HVP-BJP government in the state. Earlier, after the 1996 Vidhan Sabha elections, Bansilal had become chief minister with the BJP's support. The alliance managed to win only two seats in the 1998 Lok Sabha elections. Soon after this poor performance and sensing the growing unpopularity of the state government, the BJP withdrew support to the Bansilal government. Within a few months it formed an alliance with the INLD and Om Prakash Chautala was sworn in as chief minister. For the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP had probably anticipated a strong anti-incumbency wave against the Chautala and broke off the alliance a few months before the elections.

A wide range of factors, contributed to the Congress victory in Haryana. As part of NES 2004, voters were asked whether they or their families were traditional supporters of any political party. In Haryana, 35 per cent of the voters identified themselves as traditional supporters of the Congress. Compared with traditional supporters of other political parties, Congress supporters appeared to be more committed as 86 per cent voted for the party and only 5 per cent voted for other parties. Only 22 per cent of the voters identified themselves as traditional supporters of the INLD. While 70 per cent of the traditional INLD supporters voted for the party, 7 per cent voted for the Congress, 9 per cent voted for the BJP and 3 per cent voted for the HVP. Only 16 per cent identified themselves as BJP supporters. Of these, as much as 20 per cent voted for either the Congress or the INLD. The Congress performed very well among voters who did not identify themselves as supporters of any party. Such voters constitute 16 per cent of Haryana's electorate. Of these, 43 per cent voted in favour of the Congress, 20 per cent supported INLD and 18 per cent favoured the BJP. The Congress benefited the most from the politically polarised multi-cornered contest in the state.

It appears as if there was a general wave against the INLD, which worked in favour of the Congress. Was it caused by the people's dissatisfaction with the state government or was it the result of any other factor? The reason does not seem to be the performance of the Chautala government, as the voters rated it as satisfactory. According to NES-2004, 51 per cent of the voters were satisfied with the overall performance of the state government. Interestingly, 28 per cent of these voters voted for the Congress, 18 per cent voted for the BJP, and only 37 per cent voted for the INLD. Needless to say, a majority of the voters who are dissatisfied with the state government voted for the Congress.

Even on the issue of development, the Chautala government scored fairly well. A majority of the voters were of the view that it had worked for the state's development. It is interesting to note that 37 per cent of Congress voters and 54 per cent of BJP voters also held this opinion, though it is not surprising that 83 per cent of INLD voters opined that the government had worked for the state's development. In the survey, voters were asked if the Chautala government had helped the farmers, and 46 per cent responded positively. As could be expected, more than three-fourths of INLD voters held a positive opinion. But again, a relatively high proportion of Congress voters, BJP voters and HVP voters also shared this opinion. A majority of the voters said that the condition of roads had improved under the Chautala government. A high percentage of Congress, BJP and HVP voters felt that the condition of roads had improved over the past four-and-a-half years of the INLD government. However, it received poor rating on law and order and the capacity of the government to control corruption. It is quite unusual that voters who rate a party's performance in the government positively vote for another party in an election. A large number of voters in Haryana were positive when it came to their rating of the state government, but did not vote for the INLD. This indicates that the rout of the INLD was not merely caused by the anti-incumbency factor.

Survey data on Om Prakash Chautala's style of governance provides for an interesting analysis. In the NES 2004, voters reported a very negative view about the chief minister and his sons. The survey indicates a sense of fear of Chautala and his sons. More than 63 per cent of the voters believe that no one

dares to speak against Chautala out of fear of reprisal. Interestingly, 45 per cent of INLD voters also share this opinion. This indicates that a high percentage of even those who vote for the INLD find Chautala's style of functioning overbearing and intimidating. Furthermore, 52 per cent of the voters (including 26 per cent of INLD's supporters) opine that there is more of dictatorship and less of democracy in the state. Moreover, a

Table 1: Summary of Election Verdict

Party	Seats Contested (2004)	Seats Won (2004)	Change since 1999	Vote (Per Cent) (2004)	Change since 1999 (Per Cent)
Congress	10	9	+9	42.1	+7.2
BJP	10	1	-4	17.2	-12
INLD	10	0	-5	22.4	-6.3
HVP	9	0	0	6.3	+3.6

Notes: Total Lok Sabha Seats: 10; turnout (2004): 65.7 per cent, change in turnout as from 1999: +2 per cent.

In the 1999 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP and INLD had a pre-poll alliance. Both allies had contested five seats each. In the 2004 Lok Sabha election, there was no alliance between any parties in the state.

Source: CSDS Data Unit.

Table 2: Party Supporters and Loyalties (Per cent)

	Congress	BJP	INLD	HVP	N
Congress supporters	86	4	1	**	277
BJP supporters	9	66	11	1	127
INLD supporters	7	9	70	3	176
HVP supporters	5	0	8	83	40
Floating voters	43	18	20	4	129

Note: **: Less than 1 but not 0 percentage points.

Source: National Election Study – 2004. Weighted data set. Sample size: 883.

Table 3: Opinion on Performance of State Government (Per cent)

	Congress Voters	BJP Voters	INLD Voters	HVP Voters	N
Satisfied	28	18	37	6	411
Dissatisfied	56	18	7	7	355

Source: National Election Study – 2004. Weighted data set. Sample size: 883.

Table 4: Development Issues (Per cent)

Those Who Agree	Congress Voters	BJP Voters	INLD Voters	HVP Voters	N
Chautala and his government have worked for the state's development	37	54	83	45	421
Chautala's government has helped farmers	34	43	76	29	368

Source: National Election Study – 2004. Weighted data set, Sample size: 883.

Table 5: Other Issues (Per cent)

Improvement in	Congress Voters	BJP Voters	INLD Voters	HVP Voters	N
Law and order	11	22	49	8	175
Conditions of roads	39	45	70	32	375
Electricity supply	17	28	53	14	220
Control over corruption	10	16	42	4	148
Irrigation facilities	11	17	38	2	141

Source: National Election Study – 2004. Weighted data set. Sample size: 883.

majority of voters (including one in four INLD supporter) felt that Chautala and his sons were looting the state. It is noteworthy that a high percentage of INLD voters held a rather negative opinion about Chautala and his sons. The personal image of the chief minister seems responsible to a large extent for the growing unpopularity of his party in the state.

This probably worked in the Congress' favour. But the question is, why did this unpopularity favour the Congress and not the BJP or the HVP? INLD had formed a government in 2000 in alliance with the BJP, and the latter was part of the government till a couple of months before the election. The BJP was thus closely identified with the state government; therefore could not cash in on the growing discontent against it. As far as the HVP is concerned, after the 1998 Lok Sabha elections, the party's influence in the state has been declining steadily. The party has split into many factions and several of its MLAs have defected to join either the INLD or the BJP. The HVP is influential only in the Bhiwani constituency, probably because it is the home constituency of party president Bansil Lal.

It also needs to be stressed that the Congress was the main opposition party both in the Lok Sabha and in the Vidhan Sabha. In the latter case, the Congress had extended its support to many popular movements against the state government. Its leaders, like the former leader of opposition and newly elected MP from Rohtak, Bhupinder Singh Hooda, were often seen in processions organised by the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU). For the past 12 years, Haryana has witnessed a hostile relation between the BKU and the state government. The BKU has been demanding a relaxation in the payment of electricity bills for farmers. The agitation had started during the chief ministership of Bhajan Lal in the early 1990s, when he had marginally increased power tariff for the agricultural sector. Over the years, every party that has been in opposition has supported the BKU. In 1996, Bansil Lal won the assembly elections with BKU's support. However, he was unable to fulfil his promises and the BKU started its protests again. The state government used police action against the protesters on various occasions. Traditionally, the BKU, a 'non-political' outfit has supported the Lok Dal. During the regime of Bansil Lal and Bhajan Lal, Om Prakash Chautala had supported the BKU and indeed encouraged the farmers not to pay electricity bills. In the run-up to the 1999 elections, both Bansil Lal and Bhajan Lal stood discredited in the eyes of farmers. Chautala, on the other hand, promised them free electricity. However, learning from the experience of the Badal government in Punjab, Chautala changed his slogan from 'free power' to 'regular power'. Though he won the elections, he too was unable to provide regular power to the agricultural sector and this created tensions between the BKU and the state government. In 2001, the BKU declared that the farmers would not pay electricity bills. Soon after, other peasant unions like the All-India Kisan Sabha also joined the BKU agitation. The stir reached its zenith in May 2002, when

in Kandela village of Jind district, the protesters blocked highways and kept two policemen as hostages. Many BKU leaders were arrested and others went underground. The government then offered to negotiate; on the very same day the police open fired on the protesting farmers. In fact, in May alone, the police had open fired on protesting farmers in several different locations in Jind and Rohtak districts. The way in which the state administration handled the issue spread discontent in the farming community of Haryana. The Congress made it an election issue and this could have worked in its favour too.

With increasing support for the Congress, it would be interesting to see how people from different social backgrounds in Haryana voted. The NES 2004 provides a snapshot of the voting pattern of people from different communities. Jats are numerically, the strongest community in the state. Ever since 1966, when the state was formed, jats have dominated Haryana's politics; 12 out of the 19 state chief ministers have been from this caste. It is often believed that the party which has the support of the jats wins the state elections. Traditionally, the INLD has a strong support base amongst jats. However, in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, the jat votes were divided in a four-cornered contest,

Table 7: Voting Pattern
(Per cent)

	Congress Voters	BJP Voters	INLD Voters	HVP Voters	N
Jats	25	20	38	12	234
Upper castes	40	32	16	4	152
Yadavs and gujjars	49	12	17	8	75
Other OBCs	46	18	14	5	98
Dalits	65	5	7	1	161
Muslims	44	13	17	9	23
Sikhs	36	9	49	0	45

Source: National Election Study – 2004. Weighted data set. Sample size: 883.

Table 8: Rural-Urban Support
(Per cent)

	All Voters	Congress	BJP	INLD	HVP	N
Rural	85	41	16	25	7	683
Urban	15	46	25	8	2	119

Source: National Election Study – 2004. Weighted data set. Sample size: 883.

Table 9: Perception of State Government
(Per cent)

	Agree	Disagree	N
Chautala Government Works Only for Jats			
Jats	23	63	256
Upper castes	58	32	168
Yadavs and gujjars	62	28	86
Other OBCs	50	33	107
Dalits	64	16	176
Muslims	54	32	28
Sikhs	53	35	51

Source: National Election Study – 2004. Weighted data set. Sample size: 883.

Table 6: Fear Factor
(Per cent)

Those Who Agree	Congress Voters	BJP Voters	INLD Voters	HVP Voters	N
Under Chautala's rule no one can speak against him	68	69	45	76	508
People are afraid of the terror of Chautala and his sons	64	58	30	64	437
In Chautala's regime there is more dictatorship and less democracy	65	53	26	56	419
Chautala's sons are looting the state	64	49	24	58	409

Source: National Election Study – 2004. Weighted data set. Sample size: 883.

with 38 per cent voting for the INLD, 26 per cent for the Congress and 20 per cent for the BJP. The HVP also drew a majority of its votes from the jat community.

The other community that is numerically strong in the state is the dalits. Although dalits constitute 20 per cent of Haryana's population, they have not had much of a say in state politics. Dalits in Haryana have traditionally been loyal to the Congress. This time too, 65 per cent of them voted in its favour. Not surprisingly, the Congress won the Sirsa and Ambala Lok Sabha seats, reserved for dalits. The Congress also enjoyed a significant lead among voters from all other communities except Sikhs. Among the latter, the INLD polled 49 per cent votes, 13 per cent more than the Congress. In the pockets of Haryana where the Sikh population is concentrated, the Akali Dal (Badal) has a strong organisational structure. Traditionally, Prakash Singh Badal's faction of the Akali Dal had supported the INLD.

The jat hegemony in Haryana politics has not left much room for the upper castes to play the role they have in the politics of other Hindi-speaking states. Though they constitute 19 per cent of the state's population, politically they are not very influential. However, among the upper castes, 40 per cent voted for the Congress, 32 per cent voted for the BJP and only 16 per cent voted for INLD. The Congress was also the most popular party among OBC voters. The Muslims also voted in favour of the Congress in large numbers. Looking at the voting pattern of voters from different communities makes it clear that in this election the Congress enjoyed an appeal that cut across castes and communities.

The Congress also enjoyed a clear lead among both urban and rural voters, but did better in urban areas than in rural areas. The BJP also performed better in urban areas, where 25 per cent voted for the party; only 16 per cent of rural voters voted for the BJP. Haryana is a predominantly agricultural state and 85 per cent of its population lives in rural areas. INLD draws its support mainly from rural areas, which is evident from the fact that one-fourth of the rural voters supported the INLD compared with 8 per cent urban voters. Even the HVP performed better in rural areas than urban ones.

The jat population of Haryana is concentrated mainly in rural areas. A majority of them are agriculturalists and the INLD has strong roots in the jat community. The founder of the INLD and Chautala's father, Devi Lal, represented peasant politics and was seen as a jat leader. INLD's popularity among jats is evident from their voting pattern. Furthermore, over the years there was a perception that the INLD worked only for jats. The survey tried to assess the people's opinion on this issue. Not surprisingly, a majority of voters including nearly one fourth of the total jats in the state agreed with the statement that the Chautala government works only for the jats. This feeling is strongest among dalits. Chautala has indeed maintained the INLD's image of a predominantly 'jat party'. But this time it has lost ground even among the jats.

In a state where polls are due early next year, the Lok Sabha elections are indicative of the political mood of the Haryana voter. In the 2000 Vidhan Sabha elections, the INLD won 47 of the 62 seats it contested and the BJP won six seats out of the 29 seats it contested. The Congress won only 21 seats out of 90. With the break-up of the alliance between the INLD and the BJP, and the popular perception about the chief minister and his sons as indicated in the survey, it appears difficult for the INLD to

return to power after the next assembly elections. Moreover, a victory as robust as the Congress' in the recent general elections will boost the spirits and morale of the party.

The verdict of the 2004 Lok Sabha elections in Haryana once again proves that denying the people democratic rights by virtue of power does not work in India. A good development record and merely working for the people does not ensure that a party will perform well in an election. It is essential that the style of functioning and governance should also be basically democratic and fair. In this country, politicians may or may not win elections through creating social coalitions based on caste and community, or through their patronage networks. But the message is clear that no party or individual can win an election only by use of 'money-power' and 'muscle power' and by violating the fundamental rights of the people. ■■

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