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What do the Voters Reward: Personality, Party or Performance?

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Abstract

Election results are generally hard to predict, and India is no exception. This paper discusses the factors that are important in explaining the results of the 2009 parliamentary elections in India. Our results show that the voters prefer the candidates who have served in the parliament before, are wealthy and educated, and are affiliated with a large party. Wealth of the candidate is important not only in itself, but also in that it reduces the negative effect of “taint” associated with a candidate facing criminal charges. One important factor however, which dwarfs the effect of all other factors, is the economic performance under the incumbent state governments. Voters forcefully vote in favor of the parties which deliver high growth and reject the ones which do not.

¹ This article is based on author’s joint work with Prof. Arvind Panagariya, and with Prof. Bhaskar Dutta, which was done when she was working at the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy, Delhi. Comments are welcome at pgupta.nipfp@gmail.com.

Section I: Introduction

Election results are usually hard to predict. India is no exception. Even as the question of what the voters care about while casting their votes has remained of perennial interest to the academics and politicians themselves, due to the decline of single party dominance, election results have become particularly unpredictable in India in the last two decades.

In principle, there can be any number of factors which may influence the voters' decision. These may include the personal attributes of the candidates—gender, education, appearance; their party affiliation; caste or religious identity of the voters and the candidates; and finally, for a more discerning voter, the performance of the candidate, or that of the party may matter as well.

In this article, we look at the factors which explain the election results using the data for the 2009 parliamentary elections. We use the candidate-level information for our analysis. A landmark judgment of the Supreme Court in 2002 required every candidate contesting state and national elections to submit a legal affidavit disclosing his educational qualifications, information about his personal wealth, and importantly any criminal cases that he faced. The court also stipulated that wide publicity should be given to the contents of the affidavits so that the electorate could take an informed decision about whom to elect as their legislators. We collected this data, as well as the data on the economic performance under incumbent parties in states to look at the effect of factors related to the candidate's characteristics, their party affiliation or the incumbent's performance on the voting outcome.²

Our results show that party affiliation and the performance of the party at the state level are significant factors determining electoral outcomes. In particular the economic performance of the state under the incumbent party dwarfs all other factors in importance. After controlling for affiliation with a large party or incumbents' performance, only a few of the candidate characteristics are important in influencing the outcome. Among the candidate characteristics, education, age, and most importantly wealth affect the vote share that each candidate gets. Wealthier and more educated candidates get a larger vote share. Wealth is important in explaining why even the candidates facing criminal charges fare well in the elections.

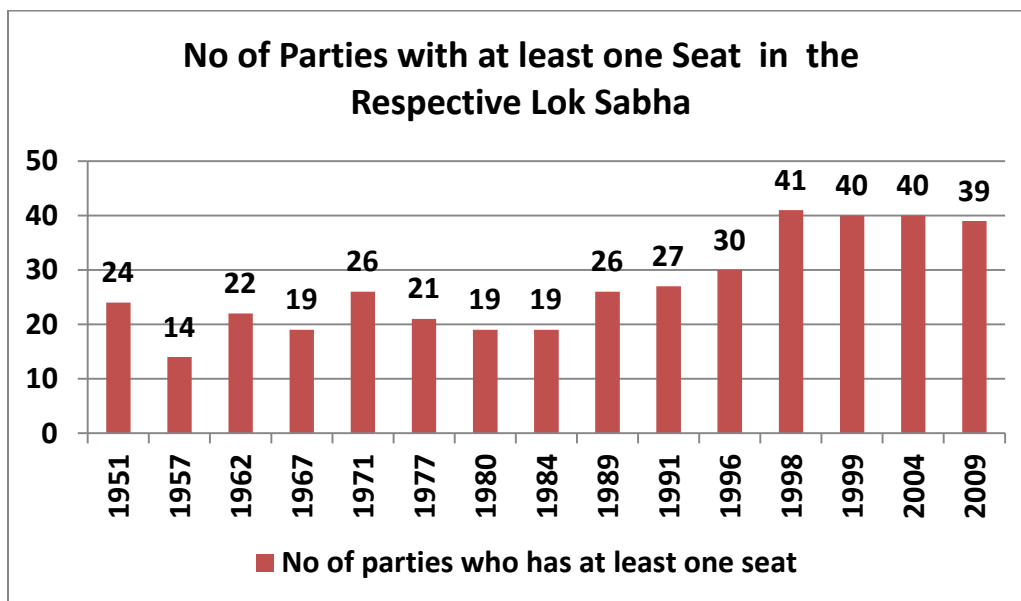
² We derive the data on these variables directly from the Election Commission's website as well as from a website maintained by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), <http://myneta.info>.

The rest of the article is organized as below. In section II we briefly discuss the recent trends in elections and specifically the results of the 2009 elections. In Section III we analyze which of the personal, party or performance factors mattered in explaining the election outcomes in 2009. In Section IV we particularly look at the factors affecting the electoral prospects of the candidates with criminal charges. The last section concludes.

Section II: Details on 2009 Parliamentary Elections

Outcomes in Indian elections have become increasingly fragmented. As can be seen in Chart 1 below, the number of parties, which have at least one member in Lok Sabha has increased over time, the largest jump occurring in 1998. Thus, in recent years, the formation of government has required a coalition of several parties, and as a result the smaller parties with just a handful of the members of parliament (MPs) come to wield considerable power.

Chart 1: Number of Parties with at least one Member of Parliament in the Lok Sabha



India has more than one thousand registered political parties. These are divided into national, state and unrecognized parties. Any registered party that lacks the status of a state or a national party is an unrecognized party. The Election Commission confers the status of a state party on any party that meets certain thresholds in terms of votes received and seats won in an election. A state party acquires monopoly on the use of its party symbol in the state. A party qualifying as a state party in four states gets the national status and then has the monopoly over

the use of its election symbol over the entire country. It is not unusual for the parties to lose their ‘national’ status once they lose the qualifications for it.

Table 1 reports the broad results of the elections held in 1999, 2004 and 2009. It shows that the national parties numbering six or more have won only a little more than two-thirds of the seats in each of the three elections. Unsurprisingly, in the context, the party winning the largest number of seats has fallen well short of the majority so that each government has been based on a multi-party coalition. Because the party with the second most seats ends up in the opposition, state parties, which together account for approximately 30 percent of the seats have come to acquire great power.

**Table 1: Results of the Elections in 1999, 2004 and 2009
(Number of Seats won by Various Parties in Each Election)**

| Party | | 1999 | 2004 | 2009 |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------|------|------|
| National Parties | Total seats | 369 | 364 | 376 |
| | Indian National Congress | 114 | 145 | 206 |
| | Bharatiya Janata Party | 182 | 138 | 116 |
| | Bahujan Samaj Party | 14 | 19 | 21 |
| | Nationalist Congress Party | | 9 | 9 |
| | Communist Party of India | 4 | 10 | 4 |
| | Communist Party of India (Marxist) | 33 | 43 | 16 |
| | Rashtriya Janata Dal | | 24 | 4 |
| | State Parties | Total Seats | 158 | 159 |
| Samajwadi Party | | | 36 | 23 |
| Janata Dal (U) | | | 8 | 20 |
| All Indian Trinamool Congress | | | 2 | 19 |
| DMK | | | 16 | 18 |
| Biju Janata Dal | | | 11 | 14 |
| Shiv Sena | | | 12 | 11 |
| AIADMK | | | 0 | 9 |
| Telugu Desam Party | | | 5 | 6 |
| Janata Dal (S) | | | 4 | 3 |

| | | | |
|------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Other (unrecognized) Parties | 10 | 15 | 12 |
| Independent candidates | 6 | 5 | 9 |
| Total | 543 | 543 | 543 |

Source: compiled by the author, based on the data obtained from the Election Commission's website.

The last two elections results in particular have defied most post-poll projections and have produced surprising results. Led by the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) had ruled India from 1999 to 2004. But, the BJP suffered major losses shrinking its seats from 182 to 138 in 2004 elections, whereas the the Congress Party improved its score significantly from 114 to 145 seats, though still well short of the 272 seats necessary to form a government. But remarkably, it was successful in cobbling together a coalition that came to be known as the United Progressive Alliance (UPA). The UPA government successfully served its full term until 2009. The 2009 national election yielded a result that was different from the 2004 election: it returned the main ruling party, the Congress party, to power with a larger number of seats as well as with a larger victory margin. Beating even the most optimistic predictions, the Congress increased its tally from 145 to an impressive 206 seats. The Marxist Communist Party suffered the worst losses shrinking from 43 to 16 seats. The BJP also declined from 138 to 116 seats. Thus between 1999 and 2009, the Congress and the BJP had more or less exchanged their positions. How could one explain the relative performance of the Congress Party in 2009? We revert to it below.

Providing some more details on 2009 elections, a total of 8,071 candidates contested the election. Of these, as many as 3,825 or 47.4 percent were candidates with no party affiliations, i.e., they contested as independents; 30 percent of the candidates were affiliated with the national or regional parties and the rest belonged to the unrecognized parties. In all, 372 parties fielded one or more candidates. The average number of candidates per constituency was 15 with the maximum and minimum number of candidates in any constituency being 43 and 3, respectively. Remarkably, as the latter figure indicates, there was not a single constituency with a direct contest between two candidates. Countrywide, 59.4 percent of the voters turned up to vote. The maximum turnout was 90.4 percent (in Tamluk constituency in West Bengal) and the minimum was 25.6 percent (in Srinagar constituency in Jammu and Kashmir). The top four candidates, summing to 2,170 out of a total of 8,071 candidates, accounted for the bulk of the votes polled in

most constituencies. In aggregate, these candidates accounted for more than 90 percent of the total votes polled.

Party affiliations in general, and affiliation to a national or state party in particular played a crucial role in the determining the outcome: candidates with a party affiliation accounted for more than 98 percent of the top four candidates and for the majority of the winning candidates. Only nine winning candidates had contested as independents, while the 534 winning candidates out of a maximum possible of 543 had some party affiliation.

Section III: What Matters in Elections: Personal characteristics, Party, or Performance?

A. Candidate Characteristics: A Typical Candidate/winner in Lok Sabha Elections 2009³

Contrary to the popular belief, Lok Sabha members enjoy a remarkably high level of intellectual accomplishments. Out of 543 members, 260 have either a post-graduate or higher degree or a technical degree (several of the parliamentarians curiously have a law degree). An additional 157 have undergraduate degrees. Thus, four in five members of the current Lok Sabha have an undergraduate or higher degree. There is also a strong pattern of a larger proportion of candidates scoring victory as we move from less educated to more educated groups of candidates. Not only well educated, members of the 2009 Lok Sabha are a wealthy lot as well. Based on officially acknowledged wealth, one in five members of our current Lok Sabha is a dollar millionaire (5 crore rupees or more). Almost another two in five are rupee crorepati. The silver lining, however, is that those with minimal wealth do participate in elections in large numbers even though their success rate is low. Two out of every five candidates in the 2009 election had wealth below 5 lakh rupees. Of these, 14 won the election.

The most disconcerting feature of the parliament, however, is the presence of a large number of members with criminal cases pending against them. The proportion of those with one or more criminal cases registered against them is 14 percent among candidates but 30 percent

³ The section draws on Gupta and Panagariya, April 2011, Our Parliamentarians: Rich, Educated, Criminal? : in The Times of India. http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-04-05/edit-page/29380605_1_candidates-formal-education-educational-qualifications

among the elected members. Thus, victory rate is seemingly higher among the accused than “clean” candidates. Indeed, detailed data show a steadily rising trend of victory rate as we move from groups of candidates with no accusations to those with larger and larger number of cases registered against them. We revert to this issue in the next section.

Based on this information if one could construct a winning candidate with the average characteristics, he would be a wealthy male (with mean assets worth 60 million rupees and median assets worth 12 million rupees) in his mid-fifties, with at least an undergraduate degree. He would come from one of the main political parties. There is a 30 percent chance that he would have at least one criminal case against him and a 15 percent chance that he will have 2 or more criminal cases pending against him, a 14 percent chance that he will have at least one serious criminal case registered against him. There is also 34 percent probability that he had served as a member of the parliament in the previous parliament.

B. Candidate Characteristics vs Party Affiliation

Even as the characteristics of the candidates, which could in turn signal their competence, seem important in determining who would be elected to the parliament, these turn out to be far less important in explaining the outcomes than their party affiliations. The fact that hardly any independent candidates or the candidates of the smaller parties won the election suggests that this is the case. How could one explain the better performance of the candidates of the larger parties, i.e. the national or state parties, in the elections? It could simply be that the larger parties field candidates with better electoral prospects. The other possible reasons could be that the voters are more familiar with the candidates of larger parties since they have a longer track record; prefer them because of their ideology or caste identity; or that the larger parties have a stronger network of party workers to help campaign, and more resources at their disposal to spend on election campaigns, all of which influence the voters in their favor.

In order to consider the first possible explanation we compare the various observable characteristics of the candidates of the larger parties with that of the other candidates. Table 2 below shows that the candidates fielded by larger parties are somewhat older, more educated,

wealthier, a larger percent of them are incumbent members of the parliament, and a larger percent of them are women.⁴

Table 2: Comparing the Characteristics of the Candidates of Larger Parties and Others (averages)

| | Percent of Votes Obtained | Age of the candidates (in year) | Wealth (in Log) | Percent of Incumbents | Percent of Female candidates | Percent of candidates with Criminal charges |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|---|
| Candidates of Large Parties | 19.9 | 50.5 | 15.4 | 16 | 8 | 13 |
| Other Candidates | 1.20 | 43.7 | 13.1 | 0.3 | 6.6 | 4.5 |

Source: Author's Calculations using the data from the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), <http://myneta.info>.

However, a different profile of the candidates is perhaps not the only reason why the candidates of larger parties perform significantly better than the candidates of smaller parties, or the independent candidates. It cannot for example, explain the rather poor performance of Ms Meera Sanyal, a professional banker with ABN Amro Bank, who contested the election as an independent candidate from the Mumbai South constituency in Maharashtra in 2009. Altogether 20 candidates contested the election from Mumbai South, out of which 9 candidates contested as independents, with Ms Sanyal being one of them. The rest of the 11 candidates had some party affiliation, 5 were affiliated with a national or a state party, 2 candidates were affiliated with important regional parties in Maharashtra, Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, and Shiv Sena, and the rest 4 were from smaller political parties.

Ms Sanyal's credentials maybe considered impeccable indeed: she was one of the most educated candidates in fray, had no criminal charges against her, was relatively wealthy and well intentioned as well. However, she managed to garner only 10,000 odd votes, i.e., 1.5 percent of the total votes. The winner, Mr. Milind Deora, of Congress Party who possessed impressive credentials of his own, obtained 272, 411 votes, i.e. about 42 percent of the total votes.⁵ At a second and third place were the candidates from Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, and Shiv Sena,

⁴ Incidentally a larger proportion of them also face criminal charges.

⁵ The fact that Mr. Deora's father had been an incumbent and a union minister in the UPA government possibly helped his electoral performance as well.

respectively, who faced one criminal charge each (and were somewhat less wealthy). These candidates also managed to get a large number of votes, i.e., 25 percent and 23 percent of the total votes respectively; and the vote share of the fourth candidate (from the Bahujan Samaj Party) was still respectable at 5 percent of the total.

The wide divergence in the performance of Ms Sanyal and Mr. Deora or that of the other leading candidates cannot be attributed to their different personal attributes and achievements. Our reading is that despite the fact that many of the factors were on her side, there was one crucial factor which went against Ms Sanyal. She lacked the affiliation with a political party, i.e., either a national or a state party or a regional party dominant in the state. One implication that follows is that the well intentioned Indian citizens who want to contribute to nation building and improve the political discourse by joining the parliament need to first win the support and affiliation of a large national or state party in order to win elections.

The importance of existing large parties in electoral success may decline in India if following the success of the newly formed Aam Admi Party, AAP, in the 2013 Delhi assembly elections it comes to have a sizable presence in the rest of India. Many intellectuals, social activists and professions, much like Ms Sanyal, seem to view it as a viable alternative to contesting elections as independent candidates or to staying away from politics altogether. Indeed Ms Sanyal has already joined the AAP and may contest an election in 2014 as its candidate. It would be interesting to see whether a new party such as AAP would be able to reduce the advantage enjoyed by the older parties, and particularly whether Ms Sanyal herself would fare better than she did as an independent candidate.

C. Incumbency

In principle, incumbency in India can be defined not only for the sitting members of the Lok Sabha, but also for the party in power at the centre (candidates of the largest party or all the parties that formed a ruling coalition), as well as for the party in power in each state (candidates of the parties in power in the state at the time of the 2009 general).

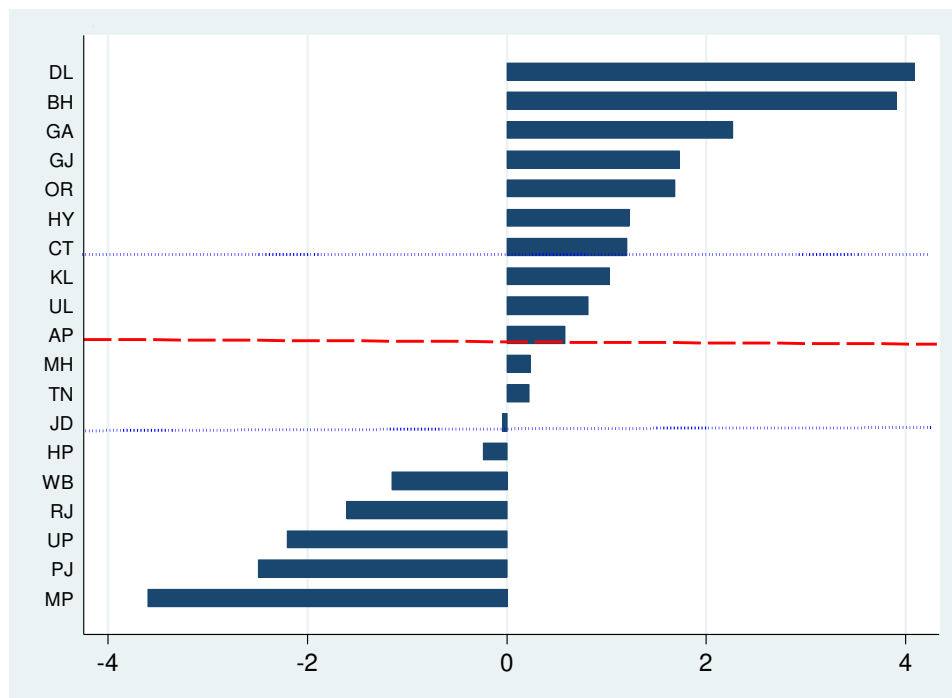
Gupta and Panagariya (2011) analyze the role of incumbency in election outcome at all three levels. The information they collected shows that almost 70 percent of the outgoing members contested the election in 2009, and almost half of them won the elections. Thus more than one third of the members returned to the Lok Sabha. Looking at the data systematically the authors

find that while there is a definite incumbency advantage at all three levels, but this advantage is mediated by the performance of the ruling party in the states, which we turn to next.

D. Performance of the Incumbent Parties in States

We measure performance as the average economic growth in the states from the beginning of the fiscal year 2004-05 to the end of 2008-09. This period approximately coincides with the period between the May 2004 and May 2009 general elections and also defines the approximate period of the incumbency in the states. We rank the larger states, 19 of them, in the declining order of the average growth rate and divide them into three groups: high, medium and low growth. In Figure 2, we depict the deviation of the average growth in the state domestic product from the national GDP growth for each of the 19 states with the states stacked in declining order in terms of their growth rates. The dotted lines in turn divide the states into a high-growth group with seven states and low- and medium-growth groups of six states each.

Figure 2: Difference between the Average Growth Rate of State Domestic Product and the GDP Growth Rate (2004-2008)

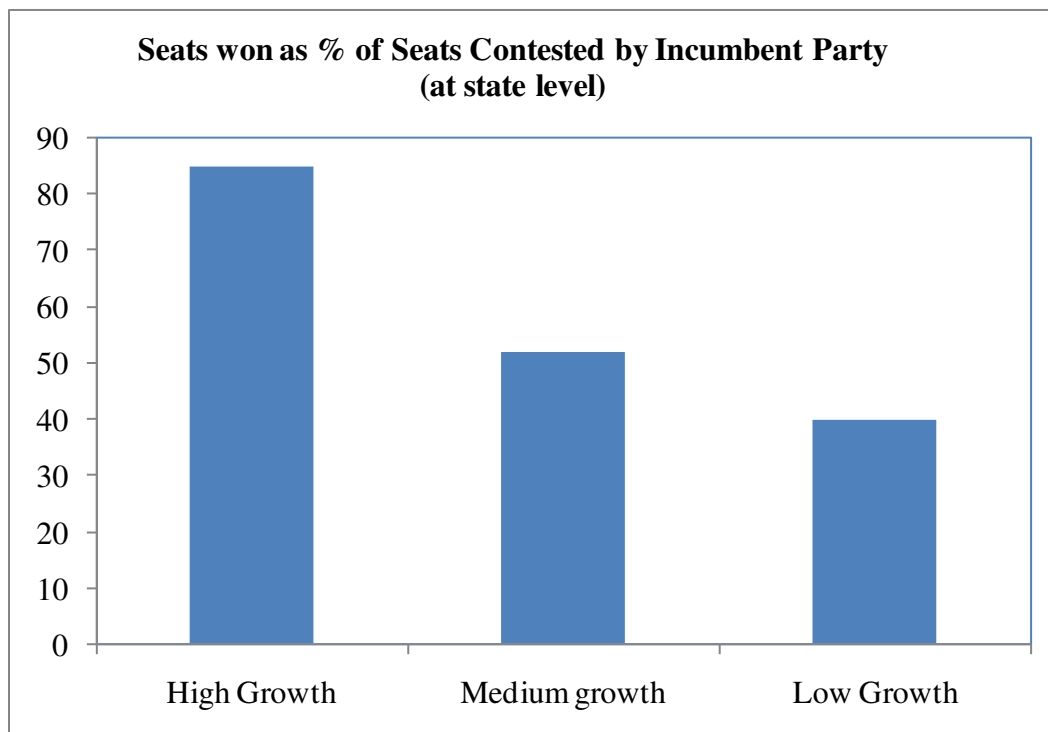


Source: Gupta and Panagariya (2011).

We define the incumbent party as the main ruling party (or two main ruling parties when power is shared) if it was in power in at least between 2005-2007. If there was an election for the

state legislative assembly in 2008 or 2009 and the party ruling until 2007 lost this election, it was still considered the incumbent party for purposes of the national elections held in April-May 2009. The underlying logic is that the electorate would treat the party that was in government for several years prior to 2009 responsible for the policies and performance of the state rather than the party that took over the government in the year just preceding the general election.

Figure 3: Proportion of the Candidates of the Incumbent Party in the State Winning the National Election (sorted by the state's growth rates)



Source: Gupta and Panagariya (2011).

The key question we ask is the following: what proportion of the candidates fielded by the state incumbent party won the national election? The outcome is depicted in Figure 3. Remarkably, incumbent parties in the high-growth states won 85 percent of the seats they contested. In contrast, those in medium and low growth states could win only approximately 52 and 40 percent of the seats contested, respectively. This strong relationship between growth performance and election outcomes is obtained through econometric methods by Gupta and

Panagariya (2011). Quantitatively, the effect of growth was found to be much larger than the effect of personal characteristics of the candidates or their party affiliations.

E. Explaining the Superior Performance of the Congress in 2009 Elections⁶

As we discussed earlier, the 2009 parliamentary election returned the Congress Party to power with more seats than even the most optimistic predictions. From 145 seats in 2004, the Congress increased its tally to 206 seats. Attributing this gain to the stellar growth performance at the national level, as done by some in the Indian press, is too simplistic, because the Congress's electoral performance varied widely across states. For instance, it won just nine out of 72 seats in the states of Bihar, Orissa and Chhattisgarh. Despite the high growth they experienced, these states voted overwhelmingly against the Congress. Clearly we need a more nuanced analysis to explain the increase in the Congress tally.

Our analysis in the previous section offers a part of the explanation: states that the Congress had ruled and where growth performance was superior, it was able to retain and perhaps even increase its tally there. For example, in Haryana and Delhi, two of the fastest growing states, where the Congress was the incumbent party, it won most of the parliamentary seats, increasing its tally from 15 seats in 2004 to 16 seats in 2009 out of a total of 17 seats. But this factor by itself is not sufficient to explain the rise of the Congress tally from 145 in 2004 to 206 in 2009.

Table 3: Additions to the Congress tally in 2009 over 2004 election

| | High-growth states | Medium-growth states | Low-growth states |
|-------------------------|---|--|---|
| Congress Government | 1 (Delhi, Haryana) | 8 (Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra) | |
| Non Congress Government | 2 (Bihar, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat) | 10 (Jharkhand, Kerala, Uttarakhand) | 42 (Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) |

The larger part of the gains made by the Congress comes from states that had non-Congress governments and did not perform economically well. In these states, the state

⁶This section draws on Gupta (2011).

incumbent parties lost large number of seats, which the Congress and its allies were able to pickup. Table 3 provides the full details of the gains made by the Congress. In the states of Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh where the Congress was in the opposition and the growth record of the incumbent state governments turned out to be poor, it made huge gains, picking up 42 extra seats. The Congress's ally Trinamool Congress made similar gains in West Bengal, another slow growing state ruled by a rival party. It added 17 seats to its tally in the state, making it easier for the Congress to put together a coalition government. The Congress more or less maintained its 2004 position in most of the medium growth states with Kerala as the major exception. In that state, the Congress added as many as 13 seats though it also lost 3 seats between Jharkhand and Uttarakhand.

This analysis still does not inform why the Congress was the major beneficiary of the losses incurred by the incumbent parties in states with non-Congress governments that performed economically poorly. While it predicts the losses to the incumbent party, it does not explain why the voters then choose the candidates of one or the other party. There is some tentative evidence that the main opposition party is the major beneficiary when voters reject the incumbents but further work is required to establish this hypothesis more definitively.

While one cannot predict the outcome in future elections accurately on the basis of this analysis, what one can conclude from it is that the outcome may be expected to depend significantly on the growth record of the incumbent state governments. Our results also suggest that in future elections it would be too naïve to predict election results based solely on the anti-incumbency factor, as done by some pundits. A more careful approach would combine the status of incumbency of various parties in state governments with their performance as incumbents.

Section IV: Candidates with Criminal Charges

A. Why do the Candidates with Criminal Charges do well in Elections?

As we saw in the previous section there is a sizable presence in Indian elections of candidates and winning candidates who bear criminal charges. The picture however is more nuanced than often painted in the media. For a start, it must be understood that under the Constitution, no one sentenced to imprisonment of two or more years for a criminal offence is permitted to contest elections. Therefore, none of the candidates, let alone elected members, can be actual criminals

sentenced to two or more years behind the bars. The popular perception and assertion that a third of Parliament consists of criminals are, thus, exaggerated.

Second, the data on criminal charges is likely to be subject to some error: there may be candidates who are accused of crimes they have not committed, and there may also be candidates who have not been accused but have committed crimes.

Third, it is important to recognize that not all charges involve serious crimes. For example, under Sections 143 and 149 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), a person can be sentenced to two or more years in prison for merely participating in an unlawful rally. Likewise, Section 148 of the IPC allows the violation of an order by a public servant to be punished by two or more years in prison. The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) rightly classifies these charges as 'non-serious' even though conviction under them would bar an individual from contesting elections.

Evidence from other countries shows that when the information about corrupt politicians is made available to voters, it influences their voting decisions, resulting in corrupt politicians getting fewer votes in their re-election bids. On the contrary in India, though it has been almost a decade since the information on criminal charges on the candidates was made public and disseminated widely by the civil agencies, it seems the voters have not really factored it in their voting decisions in any significant way. Thus, not only a large percentage of candidates with criminal charges contest elections, as earlier, but an equally large percentage of them also get elected.

One reason why candidates facing criminal cases fare well in elections could be that voters have a preference for candidates belonging to their own ethnic group irrespective of candidate characteristics. This implies that a politician belonging to the ethnically dominant group in a constituency may win even if he is of lower *quality* (as suggested by Banerjee and Pande (2009)).

Another possibility is that in the constituencies they contest, all major candidates have such cases pending against them, thus, leaving the voters little choice (the “there is no alternative” hypothesis). However, in general, in each constituency, voters do have a choice between the candidates with serious charges and candidates with no serious charges against them. Of the 231 constituencies in which there were candidates with serious criminal charges against them, in 152 none of the other two candidates from the top three candidates had a serious

charge against them. In 31 constituencies there were two out of three top candidates, who had a charge against them, and only in 6 constituencies all three of the top three candidates had charges against them. So the view that voters do not have a viable alternative does not seem to hold currency.

The most promising explanation for why candidates with criminal charges fare well in elections seems to be that they are wealthy. Indeed, Dutta and Gupta (2012) find evidence to corroborate this hypothesis. They show that while voters tend to penalise candidates with criminal charges, but they also tend to vote for wealthier candidates. The positive effect of wealth on the vote share higher for the candidates with criminal charges. In addition, a large number of these “tainted” candidates are affiliated with a large party, and some of them may be incumbents, and therefore enjoy the associated benefits of name recognition, patronage and access to the official machinery.

Table 4: A Comparison of Candidates with and without Criminal Charges⁷

| | % Votes | Age | Log Assets (in 1000s) | Education Index | Incumbent (percent) |
|---|---------|---------|--------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Candidates with out Criminal Charges | 5.9 | 45.7 | 13.7 | 2.57 | 4 |
| Candidates with Criminal Charges | 15.4*** | 47.2*** | 15.1*** | 2.71*** | 10*** |
| Total | 6.59 | 45.8 | 13.81 | 2.58 | 5 |

Source: Dutta and Gupta (2012). *** indicates that the values of the respective variables for candidates with charges and the other candidates without criminal charges are significantly different from each other at 1 percent level of significance.

B. Criminality and Corruption⁸

Our analysis also shows that the presence in parliament of a sizable number of members with pending criminal charges against them does not necessarily have to do with the level of corruption in the government. None of the members charged with bribery and corruption in the

⁷ Candidates with charges are the candidates who faced at least two charges.

⁸ Discussion draws on Gupta and Panagariya, September 2011, [Crime tainted MPs have little to do with high-level corruption](http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2011-09-21/news/30184646_1_criminal-charges-criminal-offence-corruption): in The Economic Times.
http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2011-09-21/news/30184646_1_criminal-charges-criminal-offence-corruption

second UPA government's second tenure - A. Raja, Suresh Kalmadi and Kanimozhi - had a single criminal charge against them. Nor do some well-known perpetrators of corruption in the cabinet have criminal charges pending against them. Thus in thinking about how to reform the system, it is important to treat corruption and the presence of potential criminals in Parliament as separate issues. Regarding the latter, as a minimalist measure, the media and NGOs should exert pressure on the governments against the appointment of the members facing serious criminal charges to positions of power. Naming and shaming ministers with serious criminal charges may discourage their appointment.

In terms of serious reforms, a reform suggested by Bimal Jalan, himself a former member of the Rajya Sabha, seems the most promising. Accordingly, cases against those elected to legislative bodies should be subjected to time-bound disposal. In this manner, one could preserve the right of individuals to contest election without being proven guilty. At the same time, it would ensure that those who know that the cases against them are tight and would result in conviction will refrain from entering the fray to avoid speedy trials.

However, what makes the reform of the system politically difficult is that among the contestants, those with criminal charges or even serious charges are spread across all major political parties. Indeed as Table 5 shows state parties have the largest proportion of candidates who face at least two criminal charges, followed by the national parties, which fielded more than a tenth of the candidate facing such charges. Smaller parties and independents had a smaller proportion among them who faced such charges.

Table 5: Candidates with Criminal Cases across Party Types

| Party Type | Number of Candidates | Number of Candidates with least 2 Criminal Cases | % of Candidates With at least 2 Criminal Cases |
|------------------------|----------------------|--|--|
| | I | II | III: (II/I)*100 |
| National Parties | 1353 | 176 | 11.5 |
| State Parties | 585 | 108 | 15.6 |
| Unrecognized Parties | 1790 | 110 | 6.2 |
| Independent Candidates | 3659 | 124 | 3.4 |

Source: Dutta and Gupta (2012)

Looking at some of the largest parties, in the 2009 elections, of a total of 440 candidates that the Congress fielded, 52 had serious criminal charges pending against them. The numbers were not

too dissimilar for the BJP: 48 candidates with serious criminal charges out of a total of 431. Proportionately, Lalu Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal took the cake, fielding 11 out of 44, or a hefty 25% of the candidates, with serious criminal charges. AIADMK from Tamil Nadu came a close second with 5 out of 23 facing serious charges. Remarkably, only one out of 22 contestants put up by DMK, whose candidates have figured prominently in the 2G scandal, had serious pending criminal charges.

Section VI: Conclusion

Using the data for the 2009 parliamentary elections, we have discussed the factors that influence election outcomes. We found that even though individual characteristics matter, and party affiliations matter as well, the incumbent party's performance, measured by economic growth, has the largest effect on election outcomes. The incumbents who deliver high growth in states are rewarded in elections at the centre as well. We also touched upon the reasons candidates with criminal charges fare well in elections, and point to the "wealth advantage" that they enjoy. Our view is that reducing their presence would require a consensus among parties - since they are widespread across all parties - eliminating their wealth advantage, and making their conviction speedier.

While one cannot predict the outcomes in future elections in India based on the discussion in this article, what one can still conclude is that the outcome will depend significantly on the growth record of the state economies under the incumbent state governments. Our results also suggest that in future elections it would be naïve to predict elections results based solely on the anti-incumbency factor, as has been done by some scholars in the past. A careful approach would combine the incumbency status of various parties in the states, with the economic performance of these states under during their tenure.

While a common theme across articles in this book has been that political considerations affect the choices that the policy makers make, the main message that has come out of our research, summarized in this article, is that the voters have increasingly been rewarding good performance, or good policy choices. This is reflected not just in the results of the elections at the central level, but perhaps also seen in the assembly elections in several states such as Bihar, Orissa, and Delhi, where performing governments, across parties were reelected for several subsequent terms. These observations only affirm that the electorate is intelligent and while

politicians may try a “politics first agenda”, voters regard performance as important, and the wiser of the politicians would take note of it.

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