

Election Analysis:

# Indian State Polls Show Janata's Weakness

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## INDIA

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The Indian electorate took to the polls in ten states and two union territories June 10-15, in the first test for India's political parties since the March 16 Lower House elections. The Lower House election had decisively ousted the Congress Party from office after 30 years of uninterrupted government; this time, the voters put the brakes on the Congress's successor, the Janata Party, and made public many of the latter's severe limitations.

In the process, India's voters, more politicized now than at any point in the last 30 years, exploded several fantastic stories circulated by Western and local press agencies. Candidates backed and supported by Jayaprakash Narayan, whom the Western press touts as India's spokesman for "democracy and human rights," were soundly beaten. While the Congress Party was admittedly thrashed and the ruling Janata party got majorities in most states, the electorate gave third parties control of both India's agricultural and industrial heartland.

The only unifying thread in all the returns was that the great loser was Indira Gandhi. Ironically, the biggest winners were those former Congress members who broke with Indira Gandhi's emergency rule period and could evoke in the mind of the voter a sense of the Congress' own founding principles — socialism, secularism, and democracy. The Congress Party, the party of Indira Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, was virtually obliterated in its northern base, but the voters demonstrated how it could make a comeback in the state of Bihar. Although it lost by a big margin (see chart), the state Congress leadership's decision to disassociate itself from the leaders in the party who are linked to Gandhi's "emergency period" policies, to organize in an alliance with the Communist Party of India (CPI) gave it respectability.

In all other state elections, however, the voter was not taken in by the cosmetic guilt and forgiveness performance by many Congress leaders after their Lok Sabha (Lower House) defeat, and it was made clear that the trust in the Congress cannot be restored by merely evoking the images of a "cleansed" party.

The Congress, if it is to continue as a national party

identified with Indian freedom and independence, is faced with some critical tasks: to purge itself in order to dispell the legacy of the emergency period (with or without the consent of Indira Gandhi), and to rebuild its organization from the base upward. Such motion has already begun in the party.

The unevenness of the returns gives away the story of the elections. In the heart of the Hindi-speaking north-eastern belt (the states of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana and the Punjab), the Janata Party won huge majorities mostly on the same arguments it had swept the Lok Sabha polls — i.e, the forced sterilization program and other excesses of the emergency period which are still fresh in the memory of this region. In Uttar Pradesh in particular, the Congress fell from 215 seats (in 1972 elections) to a mere 46, while the Janata Party claimed 351 seats. In Uttar Pradesh, the Congress ran many candidates associated with the emergency rule and the "Caucus" — the name given to the small group of politicians who, along side Indira's son Sanjay, bribed, corrupted and terrorized the population to enforce the emergency atrocities.

### *Janata Victories*

That the Janata party took majorities in eight states and two territories brought happiness to only a few. The party is torn by strife and remains an uneasy mixture of big business, rich farmer, upper caste and landlord interests. Home Minister Charan Singh, the man who violated the Indian Constitution to force the state elections to strengthen his own factional position in the party, has been eclipsed. Many of his candidates were taken off the slates on corruption allegations before the elections, and now many of the winners in his home state of Uttar Pradesh will not necessarily abide by his orders, according to reports. It is yet to be seen who inside the Janata really won the state.

A further dilemma for the Janata is the falling star of its spiritual mentor, Jayaprakash Narayan. The victory of Nandini Sathpathy, a left-wing Janata Party leader in the state of Orissa, comes as a bitter personal setback. Narayan had mobilized all his support and that of many cabinet ministers to oppose Sathpathy publicly, but Sathpathy swept the election by a spectacular 27,000-vote margin (8-to-1 advantage) over JP's candidate, M. Chaudhury. While Sathpathy's candidacy was the center of controversy in the Janata Party in the weeks prior to the election, all sides are now silent on her victory.

Similarly, in JP's home state of Bihar many of his followers and supporters were soundly defeated by Congress or Communist Party candidates. In Bihar, lower castes, aware of the Janata landlord heavyhandedness, refused to vote Janata. Reliable observers believe that this represents a vote by the Indian masses against Narayan's version of "democracy."

Of great significance as well, is the rout the Janata suffered in the southern state of Tamil Nadu where it lost by a 13-to-1 margin to the regional Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (ADMK). The Janata had hoped that it could get a southern mandate which could be followed by dissolutions of other Congress-held south Indian state assemblies. This hope has now faded.

Both the internal confusion and great political potential of the parties of the left was demonstrated in West Bengal, where voters gave the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM) a full majority. In 1962, the Communist Party of India (CPI) split over differences in both domestic and foreign policy. The CPI remained pro-Soviet and maintained the position that an alliance with the Congress Party was feasible and necessary for the unity of democratic forces. The CPM adopted a more Maoist line, chose a more militant path to develop an independent and sectarian base. In the recent Lok Sabha polls, the CPM allied with the Janata to bring down the Congress, while the CPI maintained its alliance with the Congress. The current upsurge of the CPM is in part its entente with the new central government, in part a product of divisions in the Congress and CPI. However, many observers feel that while the CPM's opportunism is unparalleled in the left and many of its leaders are advocates of World Bank proposed austerity schemes, this state government could turn the tables and become the centerpiece to resistance to World Bank dictates.

On the left as well as within the Janata Party and Congress, the political situation is changing, rapidly bringing new political formations into being. The CPM's trade union base, the Congress of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), has made a call to all other unions to forge a united front to defend workers' and peasants interests. Today, the CPI hailed the victory of the CPM in Bengal as being of great significance for all democratic forces.

—Leela Narayan

### Total Indian Election Results

State	Congress	Janata	CPI	CPM	Independent	Other	Seats Decline Seats
Bihar	57	214	21	4	22	5	324/323
West Bengal	20	29	2	168	9	57	295/293
Uttar Pradesh	46	351	9	1	16	—	425/423
Tamil Nadu	27	10	5	12	(DMK) 48	(ADMK) 130	234/234
Himachal Pradesh	9	53	—	—	6	—	68/68
Madhya Pradesh	84	230	—	—	6	—	320/320
Haryana	3	75	—	—	7	5	90/90
Orissa	26	110	1	1	9	—	147/147
Rajasthan	41	150	1	1	6	—	200/199
Punjab	18	24	7	8	2	Akali Dal 58	117/115
Pondicherry	2	7	1	—	3	AIADMK 14 DMK 3	30/30
Delhi	10	46	—	—	—	—	56/56