

India's parliamentary landscape transformed

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India's corporate media has proclaimed the victory of the Hindu communalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in India's just-concluded general election a massive popular endorsement for sweeping pro-market "reform."

This is a lie. While the BJP, with 31 percent of the popular vote, became the first party in three decades to secure a majority in India's parliament, it and the NDA were victors by default. They were the utterly unwarranted beneficiaries of mass popular anger with the ten year-old Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government—a government that India's workers and toilers rightly associated with rampant inflation, mass unemployment, endemic poverty, and ever widening social inequality.

Any pro-BJP "tsunami" was restricted to the corporate boardrooms, the most avaricious sections of the upper middle class, and the enraged petty bourgeois of the RSS and its network of Hindu supremacist organizations.

India's business houses poured billions into securing the BJP's electoral win. The corporate media, for its part, championed the BJP prime ministerial candidate, self-styled Hindu strongman and Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi, as the protagonist of "development" and whitewashed his role as the instigator of the 2002 Gujarat anti-Muslim pogrom.

The bourgeoisie has embraced the Modi-led BJP as the instrument for pushing through socially incendiary neo-liberal reforms in the face of mass popular opposition. Top on their agenda are massive social spending cuts, the elimination of energy and fertilizer price-subsidies, the gutting of restrictions on layoffs and plant closures, the further shifting of the tax burden onto working people, wholesale privatization, and the lifting of virtually all remaining restrictions on foreign investment.

The Congress-led UPA government repeatedly sought to implement this agenda, but ultimately lost the confidence of domestic and international capital which deemed it was doing so too slowly and hesitantly.

In so far as there was any enthusiasm for Modi and the BJP among Indian working people it was based on lies. Thus as the election campaign ended, BJP leader Subramanian Swamy excitedly told the *Hindu* that the BJP wants to scrap all food-price subsidies and eliminate virtually all income taxes, with the revenue shortfall resulting from the latter measure made up through the sale of natural resources and other public assets; but, explained Swamy, it did not raise such "revolutionary" ideas in its election campaign for fear of being attacked as "pro-rich."

The media claims that the BJP has won a massive popular

mandate are aimed at intimidating the working class and lending legitimacy to the state repression of the popular opposition that will soon emerge to its class war policies.

That said, the elections did reveal a vast erosion of popular support for the Congress Party as well as for the Stalinist parliamentary parties—the Communist Party of India and Communist Party of India (Marxist). In the name of keeping the Hindu communalist BJP from power, the Stalinists have propped up a series of rightwing Indian governments. This included the Congress government that between 1991 and 1996 initiated the bourgeoisie's neo-liberal "new economic policy"—which aims to make India a cheap-labour haven for global capital. Their support was even more important to the Congress during the UPA's first term (2004-9). The Stalinists helped corral a group of regional and caste-based parties into the UPA following the 2004 elections, then sustained it in office for the next four years.

Till now, the Congress has been the Indian bourgeoisie's preferred party of government. During the first four decades of independent India, it formed India's government for all but two-and-a-half years. And over the past quarter century, it is the party that has done most of the heavy-lifting in implementing the bourgeoisie's drive to make India a cheap-labour hub for world capital and in forming a "strategic partnership" between India and US imperialism.

But it has now suffered a historic collapse. Receiving just 19 percent of the vote, the Congress won only 44 seats in the 545-seat Lok Sabha—not enough even to be recognized as the Official Opposition. Hitherto, the Congress had never won less than 114 seats and a 26 percent share of the popular vote.

The Congress has now been reduced to fourth- and even fifth-party status in some of India's largest states including West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

Almost one-fifth of its parliamentary delegation now comes from Kerala, home to less than 3 percent of India's population

In Uttar Pradesh (UP), which with a population of more than 200 million is India's largest state, the Congress managed to hold on to just two seats—those of the party president, Sonia Gandhi, and her son and the heir to the Nehru-Gandhi political dynasty, Rahul Gandhi.

In Delhi, Indian's capital, the largest metropolitan region, and long a Congress-bastion, the Congress won no seats and polled just 15 percent of the vote, trailing far behind both the AAP (Common Man's Party)—a middle-class "anti-corruption party" formed only two years ago—and the BJP.

In Maharashtra, India's second most populous state, the Congress and its UPA-ally the Nationalist Congress Party, which

in the 2009 election had collectively won 25 seats, captured respectively 2 and none. With state polls due by the end of the year, there are loud calls from within the Congress for the resignation of the state's Congress chief minister.

Over the last two years, the Congress-led government pushed through the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh—hitherto a Congress stronghold—on the calculation this would provide it with electoral dividends. In the end it won just 2 seats in Andhra Pradesh down from 33 in 2009.

Sharing in the Congress's electoral debacle was a series of regional parties. Many of these are, or until recently were, Congress allies. The Tamil Nadu-based DMK lost all its Lok Sabha seats, after serving in the UPA for nine of its ten year in office. The DMK leadership was implicated in a kickback scandal tied to the UPA's auctioning off of telecom spectrum—one of a series of mega-corruption scandals arising from the Congress-led government's fire-sale, or in some cases outright gifting, of public assets to big business.

The Jammu and Kashmir National Conference, a UPA constituent and the governing party in India's only Muslim majority state, also saw its Lok Sabha delegation eliminated.

Pivotal to the victory of the BJP, which won 100 more seats than its previous best-ever total, was its strong showing in northern and western Indian, especially Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Bihar—the core of Hindi speaking India and two of the country's poorest states.

In UP, the BJP won 71 of 80 seats, up from 10 in 2009. Its gains came largely at the expense of the Samajwadi Party (SP)—which although not part of the UPA had provided it with its majority in several key votes—and the Bahujan Samaj Party. Both the SP and BSP purport to represent India's historically oppressed lower caste groups, but in fact speak for a tiny privileged elite nourished by India's reservations (affirmative action) system and have fully supported and implemented the Indian bourgeoisie's neoliberal agenda.

In Bihar, the BJP made gains at the expense of the Janata Dal (United), which until last year was the second largest party in the BJP-led NDA. No sooner had the JD (U) broken its 17-year alliance with the BJP, than the Stalinists began touting it as a “secular party” and prospective member of a “non Congress, non BJP” Third Front. With the JD (U) reduced from 21 to 2 seats in the national election, the JD (U) Chief Minister of Bihar, Nitish Kumar, has announced his resignation.

An important factor in the BJP's electoral breakthrough was the support it received from a large number of new regional allies. Recognizing the concurrence of popular anger against the UPA over its callous indifference to the impact of double-digit inflation and massive joblessness with corporate India's disenchantment with the government for not moving aggressively enough against working people, some two dozen regional bourgeois parties enrolled in the NDA in the run-up to the elections. This swelled it to almost 30 constituent parties and extended its reach into virtually all parts of India.

While the BJP has increased its support beyond its traditional areas of strength in northern and western India, it remains very much a minority party in eastern and southern India. It holds just 3 of the 63 seats from West Bengal and Odisha. And of the 129 seats

from the four south Indian states—Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka—it won only 21, although its Andhra Pradesh ally, the Telugu Desam Party, did win a further 16.

In West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Odisha, the lion's share of the seats, were won by rightwing regional parties, respectively, the Trinamul Congress, AIADMK, and BJD. All have previously been part of the BJP-led NDA, but ultimately calculated they could carve out a stronger role for themselves in their own states and on the national stage by posing as both anti-Congress and anti-BJP.

In the 2009 election, both the BJD and AIADMK thought it to their benefit to have the Stalinists' blessing as “secular, pro-people” parties, but this election spurned their overtures for an electoral alliance.

With its NDA allies, the BJP polled 38 percent of the popular vote nationally, 15 percentage points more than the Congress-led UP. Five other parties—the Trinamul Congress, SP, BSP, AIADMK, and Communist Party of India (Marxist)—each won between 3 and 4 percent of the popular vote.

For the second national election in a row, the Stalinists were by any definition among the biggest losers. The Communist Party of India (CPI) won just one seat and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM only 9, not enough to maintain its status as one of five officially-recognized national parties. In West Bengal, where it formed the state government for 34 years consecutively ending in 2011, the CPM-led Left Front won just two seats. Nationally the four-party Left Front saw its share of the popular vote reduced from 7 to 4.5 percent.

The parallel collapse in support for the Stalinists and Congress is no coincidence. The Left has hurtled to the right in lock-step with the traditional ruling party of the Indian bourgeoisie. Claiming the restoration of capitalism by the Stalinist bureaucracies in the Soviet Union and China proved “socialism is a far off cry,” India's Communist Parties have claimed that there is no alternative to the bourgeoisie's economic “reform” program. While propping up Congress led national governments, the Stalinists in those states where the Left Front held office, West Bengal and Kerala, implemented what they themselves described as “pro-investor” policies, slashing public spending, banning strikes in IT and IT-enabled industries, and using police and goon violence to suppress peasant opposition to land expropriations for big business projects.



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