

# ISAS Brief

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## **Delhi Elections in India: Middle Class Anger and New Political Equations**

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Delhi, when compared to other Indian states, might be insignificant in its size. After all the state of Delhi (which was till recently a Union Territory), shorn of the parts of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana that make up the sprawling National Capital region, is only 1,500 square miles and has 70 Assembly seats and 7 seats in the national Parliament. But by virtue of being India's capital, elections in Delhi command much more attention than those in the Indian states that are far larger. Delhi has 11.5 million registered voters; the whole of Australia has only 14 million.

### **The Aam Aadmi Party**

This time the interest in Delhi's polls, held on 4 December 2013, was higher than usual due to the presence of a new political entity, the Aam Aadmi (which in Hindi means the common man) Party (AAP). Indeed, Delhi recorded a turnout of 67 per cent, more than 10 per cent higher than the turnout in the state polls held in 2003 and 2008, showing the heightened interest generated in the polls. The AAP, which really grew out of the anti-corruption movement headed by activist Anna Hazare in 2011, has made the Delhi elections much more difficult to call than usual. Hazare has retired to his village in Maharashtra and has nothing to

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do with the AAP; he has even claimed that the AAP is unfairly using his name. But the AAP, led by Hazare's one-time fellow-traveller Arvind Kejriwal, had generated the maximum buzz in the run-up to the polls.

Whether this will translate into votes, and more importantly seats, will only be known on 8 December when the results are announced. The AAP, however, has not been shy of predicting great things for itself. Noted political scientist, Yogendra Yadav, who is also a member of and strategist for AAP, has forecast that his party will win 32 per cent of the votes topping both the Congress and the BJP. Other polls have pegged the AAP much lower, with one predicting that it might win as many as 20 seats, which itself would be an extraordinary achievement for a new party. While Yadav is known for his election analyses, his prediction, even if exaggerated, has its logic. If the AAP did not project itself as a serious player, voters would feel that they were wasting their vote on the party. The AAP's strategy seemed to have worked, with a significant spike, according to the Election Commission, in the turnout of young voters who are the most likely segment to vote against mainstream parties.

While the AAP has suffered from lack of organisation and quality candidates, both not so surprising for a young party, it has partly made up for this by its high visibility. There is little doubt that some of the middle class and underclass anger at mainstream political parties and widespread corruption will benefit the AAP. Conversations in Delhi on Election Day revealed that many undecided voters, both from the middle class and the poorer sections, have decided to give the AAP a try. But whether that will translate into seats is a moot question. There is an earlier example of the Loksatta Party formed in 2006 in Andhra Pradesh on an anti-corruption platform by a former bureaucrat. While it had some support in Hyderabad, it won only one seat in the last Andhra Pradesh Assembly polls. AAP will of course do much better, not only because of the prevailing mood among the middle classes but also because of the intense media coverage that they have got.

## **The fate of the BJP and Congress**

Enough said about the AAP. What about the ruling Congress and the opposition BJP, conventionally the two main contenders in Delhi? Some opinion polls have predicted that the BJP will scrape through and form the government. The BJP has reposed its faith in Harsh Vardhan as its chief ministerial candidate, much to the chagrin of Vijay Goel who fancied his chances for the CM's chair. While outwardly dissension has not been allowed to boil over, it seems there is discontent within the party which might affect its chances. A greater problem for the BJP would be the AAP possibly cutting into some of the anti-incumbency votes which might damage the BJP's prospects.

Most opinion polls have predicted that the Congress will do badly and fall short of a majority. Sheila Dikshit, the three-time Chief Minister of Delhi, has been badly singed by the anti-rape agitation of 2012 and the general perception of breakdown of law and order. In addition, the corruption scandals that have engulfed the central government have affected the Delhi Congress because of its location in the country's capital. Factionalism, which is the bane of

the Congress everywhere, is very much present in Delhi too. There are local Congress leaders like central minister Ajay Maken who have openly shown their dislike of Dikshit and expressed their chief ministerial ambitions. Indeed, Dikshit faces a tough electoral contest in her own constituency of New Delhi where she is pitted against AAP's Kejriwal and BJP's Vijender Gupta.

The other player in Delhi is the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) which won a significant 14 per cent of the votes in the 2008 elections. But this time around its campaigning has been low key with its party chief, Mayawati, who was voted out of power in Uttar Pradesh in 2012 not making too many appearances in Delhi. The BSP's vote bank is the Dalits and lower castes who make up a significant number of the working class population of the city. The 12 seats reserved for Scheduled Castes are by no means the taken-for-granted preserve of the BSP. Which way Dalits vote might be a deciding factor in providing one of the main players with the necessary edge to form government.

Whatever the election result, the Delhi election will be a referendum on whether new political parties can do well at least in urban settings. This has become increasingly important as India becomes more urbanised. A host of exit polls, done after the elections, have predicted a good showing by the AAP ranging from six to an improbable 31 seats. All of them are united in the prediction that Congress will suffer severe reverses with the maximum seats forecast for the party being 24. The exit polls predict that the BJP will gain at the Congress' expense but might fall short of a simple majority. The AAP, with a handful of seats, could then hold the key to formation of the next government. That might turn out to be a hung House since the AAP has been formed on the plank of opposition to the mainstream parties and would find it ideologically difficult to align with either the BJP or the Congress.

In the meantime, most exit polls have forecast that the BJP will win in the three states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh for which the results will also be announced on 8 December. But clearly Delhi will be the one result to watch out for because of its uncertainty and novel mix of politics.

**Table 1: National Capital Territory of Delhi**

Population, 2011 census	16,753,000
Electors, 2013	11,507,000
Literacy, 2011	86%
Polling stations	11,763
Electors per polling station	980
Scheduled Tribe pop.	<1%
Scheduled Caste pop.	2,812,000 (17%)
Sex ratio (females per 1,000 males)	866
Urban population	97%

**Table 2: National Capital Territory of Delhi, Elections, 2003-4 and 2008-09**

	<b>2003-04</b>	<b>2008-9</b>
<i>Seats in national parliament</i>	7	7
<i>Won by Congress</i>	6	7
<i>Won by BJP</i>	1	0
Seats in state assembly	70	70
Won by BJP	20	23
Won by Congress	47	43
Voter turnout	53.4%	57.6%
Seats reserved for Scheduled Tribes	0	0
Seats reserved for Scheduled Castes	12	12

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