

**Negotiating Political Spaces :  
The Redefining of the National and the Regional**

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The process of democratic engineering in India and the efforts to expand the democratic space have occupied the spotlight of attention in any analysis of elections in particular and Indian politics in general. In recent years, survey data has provided a window of opportunity to assess the multi-track factors that have contributed to the ushering in of a new phase of competitive democratic electoral politics across the country. This `new politics` has witnessed the Indian citizens asserting their presence in significantly different and refreshingly assertive ways.

The political developments of the 1990s have clearly contributed to the `federalizing of electoral politics` (Shastri 2001, 2003b). The decade has witnessed is the emergence of the state/region as the focal point of electoral choice and articulation of political preferences. A linked trend is the polarization, which Indian politics has witnessed at the state level. While nationally, India has seen the emergence of a multi-party system, at the state and constituency level, there is a bi-polar or at the most a tri-polar electoral contest. The new pattern of electoral outcomes does not represent a political fragmentation of the Indian electorate, but mirrors state specific electoral verdicts. With the rise of state-wide parties, `political loyalties, opinions and social identities are being articulated at the level of the state` (Yadav 1999: 2399). Voters at the state/constituency level have reduced the effective competition to 2 or 3 major political players. This implies that the voter choice at the local/state level is very clearly articulated. However, when this is aggregated nationally, the number of effective players dramatically increases – a near `multiple bi-polarity` (Sridharan 2001. 2004). The political implications of these developments are far reaching and central to the democratic theory debate in the country. The 2004 elections has in some ways redefined the contours of the debate (Yadav 2004). Has the entry into the 21<sup>st</sup> century heralded any major departures from the trends of the previous decade? Does the first national election of this century reflect a continuity from the past or/and represent significant indicators of departure from the electoral traditions inherited from the past decade?

This paper attempts an assessment of the apparent redefining of what constitutes the `regional` and the `national` using the data emerging from the National Election Study 2004<sup>1</sup>. The paper – tentative in its formulations and limited in its sweep, attempts to picture from a citizen's perspective, their perception of what constitutes the `national` and the `regional`. The paper is divided into five sections. After a brief overview, the second section flags the major milestones in the growth and maturity of India's electoral democracy. This review has important implications for possibly explaining the approach and stance that citizens tend to adopt on the the `national` and `regional` question. The third section examines recent trends (since the 1990s) in India's electoral politics which could help indicate the factors and forces that have triggered off the re-defining of `national` and regional spaces. The fourth section looks at important questions from the survey which provide an explanation to the `national` and `regional` question. In the final section the broad conclusions of the study are outlined.

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<sup>1</sup> Wherever relevant, findings of two other studies have also been discussed. The India Component of the World Values Survey was undertaken in 2001. The findings of this study have been quoted wherever relevant. The findings of the State and Society Project, a survey based study of the how common citizens perceive the state (undertaken in 2001) are also discussed.

## II

Five decades of electoral politics in post –Independence India (1952-2005) has witnessed 14 elections to the lower house of the national legislature and an equal number of elections at the state level<sup>2</sup>. For a meaningful analysis of the trends over these decades, four clear phases can be delineated: a) 1952 (First General Elections after Independence) - 1967; b) 1967 – 1977; c) 1977- 89; and d) 1989 to the present. Important developments in three crucial years permit the clear demarcation of these four phases. 1967 saw, for the first time, the defeat of the Congress party in several states of India. In 1977 the Congress faced its first defeat at the federal level and the country saw the formation of a non-Congress government and 1989 marked the end of one party domination in electoral politics. Interestingly, all three developments are linked to the electoral fortunes of the Congress party and critical developments at the state level.

Electoral politics in the first phase, often referred to as the Nehruvian<sup>3</sup> phase, was marked by one party domination at the national level and in most of the states of India. The competition was invariably between the all powerful Congress party and regionally fragmented minor opposition groups. The Congress party too, underscored the inevitability of centralization of power to ensure `nation building`. This phase witnessed the gradual – yet steady – thinning down of the line of distinction between party and government (Shastri 1991: 15). Electoral politics, in this phase, saw an attempt to forge a `broad consensus` on issues, which resulted in what, Kothari had referred to as the `Congress system`. The consensus became possible because of the high level of legitimacy of the `national political elite` and the coalition of diverse social groups that was brought together in that period. The low level of mobilization among the depressed social groups also facilitated this process.

The second phase (1967-77) was witness to increasing tensions between the contestants/parties in the electoral fray on account of the breakdown of the consensus culture that had been so evident in the earlier years. New social alliances across caste groups emerged at the state level and often dictated the nature and direction of electoral outcomes. Non-Congress governments<sup>4</sup> were voted to power in the states on the one hand and Indira Gandhi attempted to increasingly assert her authority within the Congress party on the other<sup>5</sup>. The constitutional provisions were systematically misused and the values that governed the functioning of political

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<sup>2</sup> In all states and union territories taken together 301 elections have been held between 1952 and 2005. In no state – save Uttar Pradesh, have the number of state elections been more than the elections to the lower House of Parliament (Lok Sabha)

<sup>3</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru was the first Prime Minister of India and was in office from 1947 –64.

<sup>4</sup> Till 1989, political parties other than the Congress party were referred to as non-Congress parties. This was reflective of the center stage occupied by the Congress in Indian politics.

<sup>5</sup> Indira Gandhi became Prime Minister in 1966 and continued as Prime Minister till 1977, returning to power again from 1980 to 1984.

institutions were greatly undermined. This phase also ushered in the trend of frequent elections in some states of India, triggered off by instability of state governments in view of their fluid legislative majorities on the one hand and increasing interference of the federal governments in state politics on the other.

The victory of the Janata Party in the 1977 national elections, was heralded by many as the emergence of a new and welcome phase in India's electoral politics. It was hoped that the developments of 1977, was an expression of the clear emergence of a truly competitive electoral system.

It can be argued that the process of democratic re-engineering which the developments of 1977 sought to usher in were reversed as a result of the electoral politics of the early 1980s, with the return of the Congress party to power at the national level and in many of the states. It appeared as if, a non-Congress government at the national level, was a mere brief `aberration` to Congress monopoly. However, a deeper analysis of the nature of electoral competition in the 1980s reveals, that the `historic elections of 1977` had ushered in certain irreversible trends. The halo of `invincibility of the Congress` at the national level had now disappeared and it was no longer now perceived as the natural and inevitable choice of the electorate, either nationally or regionally. The capacity of the non-Congress parties to forge and sustain a united front against the Congress was now seen as the key to challenge Congress domination (Yadav 1999: 2394).

The above developments provide the necessary backdrop for the analysis of crucial political developments in the 1990s. The politics of this decade has clearly seen the impact of social change on political/electoral processes. With the democratic process `seeping downwards`<sup>6</sup>, new social/political alliances have been formed and this has permanently altered the landscape of India's electoral politics. The markers very clearly shifting and the states were becoming more and more `visible` players. Verily, the states in India emerged as the epi-center of Indian politics and became the effective arena for political/electoral choice. This shift in the `centre of gravity` of electoral politics has also necessitated a searching second look at the role that citizen perception of democratic processes and institutions has played in ushering in the above changes. The electoral politics of the 1990s is assessed in depth in the next section.

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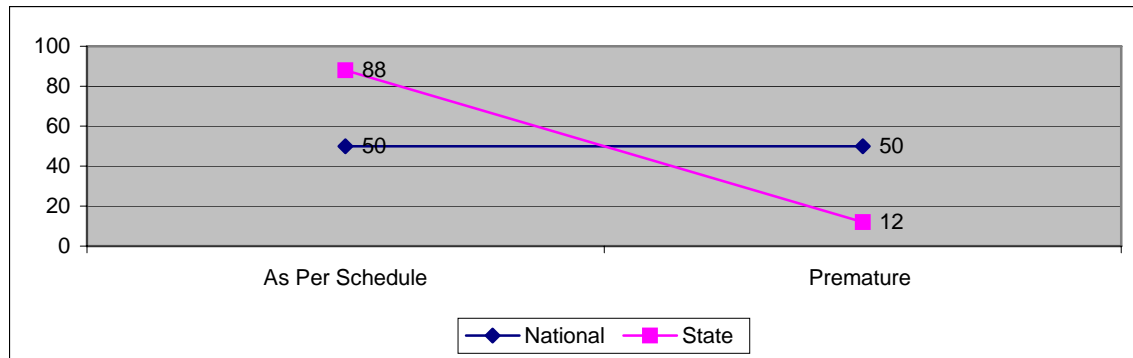
<sup>6</sup> The implication here is that social groups which had earlier been denied their rightful role in the political/electoral process, were now demanding their legitimate share of the `political cake`

### III

The 1990s were verily a decade of frequent elections. This decade provided an opportunity to the Indian voter to express his/her preference in four national elections held in quick succession<sup>7</sup>. However, what needs to be stressed is that the 1990s was a period of `political transition` and each electoral outcome provided ample proof of the clear emergence of a `phase of genuine and irreversible competitive electoral politics` entrenched in state level preferences/choices.

As mentioned earlier in the paper, voter choice appears to be clearly articulated at the state level. The political preferences that voters are indicating at the state level vary significantly from one state to another, resulting in the need for coalitions at the federal level. As a result, electoral alliances are forged keeping in mind the dynamics of state politics resulting in interesting inclusions and surprising exclusions (Shastri 1999b). The new pattern of electoral outcomes does not represent a political fragmentation of the Indian electorate, but mirrors state specific electoral verdicts. With the rise of state-wide parties, `political loyalties, opinions and social identities are being articulated at the level of the state` (Yadav 1999: 2399, Yadav 2004 : 5388-89). Several factors indicate this shift of the `epi-centre` of politics from the center to the state.

*Chart 1*  
**HOLDING OF ELECTIONS TO NATIONAL AND STATE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLIES IN INDIA (1989-2005)**



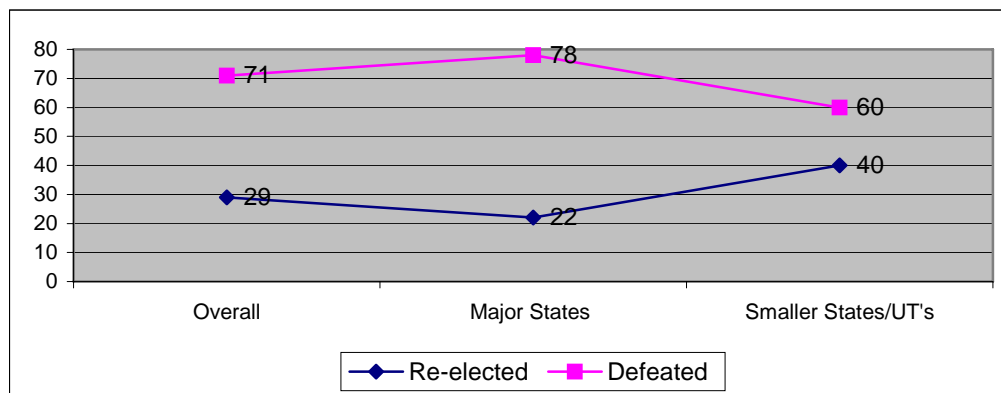
The fact that most states in India witness bi-polar or at the most tri-polar electoral contests is evident in the clear verdict emerging in state elections. Of the 102 different elections held to state legislatures in the period 1989-2005, as many as 90 ( 88%) were held as a result of the completion of the term of the house. Further, even in the case of the remaining 12 elections, only 4 (4%) were necessitated by the inability of any party/alliance enjoying a majority in the House. In the other 8 (8%)

<sup>7</sup> Each of these elections was caused by the pre-mature dissolution of the Lok Sabha - save in 1996 – on account of the inability of any political party/alliance to form a stable government.

cases, premature elections were caused because of federal intervention involving the dismissal of the state government/ dissolution of the house requiring an early election to be held. On the other hand, at the national level, 3 of the 6 (50%) elections held in the same period (1989-2005) were caused by the premature dissolution of the House on account of no party/alliance being in a position to form a stable government (See Chart 1). It is also important to record that in only one state of India – Uttar Pradesh, have the number of state assembly elections been more than the elections to the lower house of the national legislature<sup>8</sup>.

A linked factor explaining the `state based` nature of competition, is the fact that since 1989, in all the elections to the national legislature no single party has secured a majority of seats, if the results of these elections were to be broken up state wise, in most of the states (save on a few rare occasions in select states) the electoral results have clearly favoured a particular party/alliance.

*Chart 2*  
**`VOTER VOLATILITY` IN ELECTIONS TO STATE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLIES  
 IN INDIA  
 (1989-2005)**



`Voter volatility` as expressed in terms of voters expressing their dissent against the ruling party/elected legislator, is today pronounced in national elections. Of the 6 national elections held since 1989, in 5 the ruling party at the time of the elections was voted out of power. This trend is an extension of developments at the state level. In the major states<sup>9</sup> of India, 60 elections have been held at the state level since 1989. In 47 of them (78%), the ruling party was voted out of power. In the smaller states of India and union territories (with legislative assemblies)<sup>10</sup>, 42

<sup>8</sup> See footnote 2

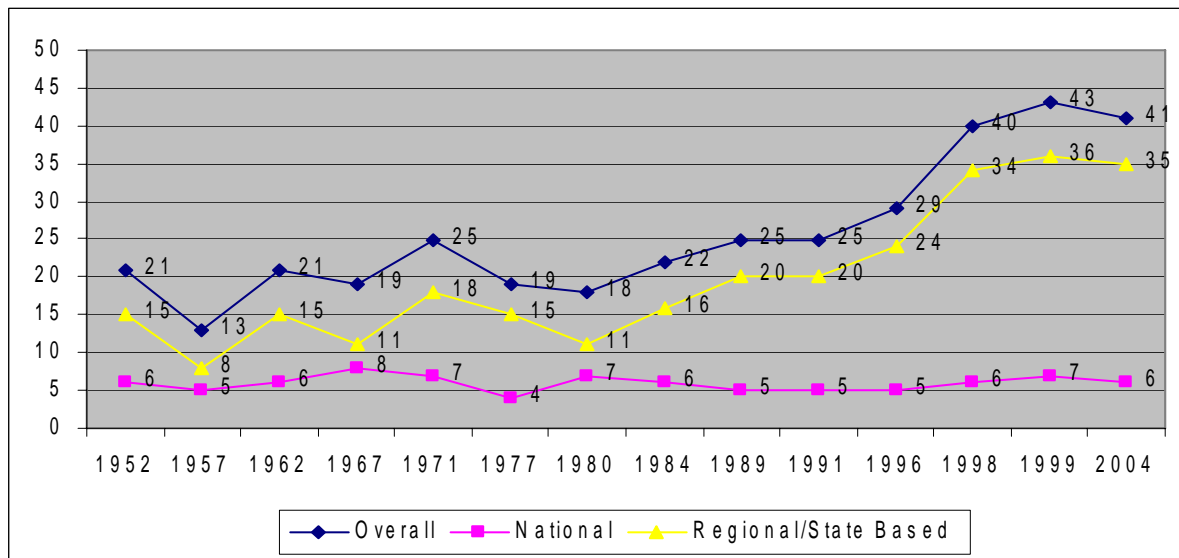
<sup>9</sup> Those with 10 or more seats in the Lower House of the Federal Legislature – Lok Sabha (the House had 543 elected members). There are 17 states in this category.

<sup>10</sup> There are 11 states and 2 Union Territories in this category

elections have been held since 1989. In only 17 (40%) did the ruling party return to power<sup>11</sup> (see Chart 2).

Elections since 1989 have also seen the `regionalisation of the national parties` and state based parties playing a major role in national politics. While the number of national parties has more or less remained the same in successive Lok Sabha's, the state based parties have been registering their presence in large number, especially after 1989 (see Chart 3). In 1998 and 1999, the number of state based parties has crossed 30. This is on account of the fact that the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by the BJP consists of a large number of regional parties. It is interesting to note that the electoral support base of major national parties is also limited to certain regions. The BJP is in the electoral fray on its own volition (without a coalition partner) in not more than 9 states of India (less than one-third of the states). The Congress has a limited electoral presence in one of the largest states of India (UP) and is today increasingly reconciling itself to aligning with powerful regional players (Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Jammu and Kashmir is a case in point). The Janata Dal (all splinter groups) are limited to one or two states. The two Communist parties too, have their electoral support base in not more than four or five states.

*Chart 3*  
**NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PARTIES IN THE LOWER HOUSE OF THE  
 NATIONAL LEGISLATURE – LOK SABHA  
 (1952-2004)**



<sup>11</sup> Yadav argues that competitive politics is yet to take off in the smaller states and union territories (1999:2396).

It is in the context of the politics of the 1990s, that the 2004 national election needs to be assessed. Very clearly, the political canvas across which the 2004 election unfolded, reflected a riot of colours playing out and combining in meaningfully unique and remarkable ways. It is for this reason that the election results continue to be an enigma – an irresolvable paradox for not merely those in the run and tumble of politics but even for those who study political processes as professionals<sup>12</sup>.

A clear trend which the 2004 elections endorses need to be emphasized. A close scrutiny of the election results clearly entrench the trend of the States of India being central to the nature and direction of electoral politics in particular and political processes in general. The national verdict was clearly a conglomeration of 28 state verdicts (Shastri 2004). The logic of the verdict in one state varies significantly from another. This can be illustrated from several different perspectives. The Table below clearly illustrates and endorses the point that it was 28 different verdicts.

Table 1  
2004 Lok Sabha Election verdict

Area/State	Nature of Verdict
<b>North/Central India</b>	
Jammu and Kashmir	Congress led alliance (includes its alliance partner in the state government the PDP) performs well. NDA (mainly BJP) seat share falls. A PDP –Congress coalition government in power since 2002.
Punjab	Congress performs poorly. The NDA (BJP + Shiromani Akali Dal) gains in seats. Congress is in power in the state since 2002 .
Haryana	Congress sweeps poll. Truncated NDA (mainly BJP) fairs poorly. A regional party is in power in the state since 1999 and the party fairs poorly.
Himachal Pradesh	Congress does well. NDA (mainly BJP) performs poorly. Congress in power in the state and the last assembly elections was in December 2003 .
Delhi	Congress comes up with a spectacular performance. NDA (mainly BJP) loses most seats it held. Congress in power in the state and the last assembly elections was in December 2003.
Rajasthan	NDA (mainly BJP) does well at the cost of the Congress. BJP in power in the state since December 2003.
Uttar Pradesh	A split verdict. The NDA fairs poorly. Regional players the SP and BSP perform well. The Congress led alliance retains its share of seats

<sup>12</sup> In most cases, the pre-poll surveys and predictions were way of the mark. Several months after the results were out political analysts were still grappling with the complexity of issues involved in analysing the outcome. What was the verdict? Which party/parties won the mandate? Which party/parties lost the mandate? These were questions, the answers to which are still strongly contested. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the Prime Minister of India at the time of the elections and whose alliance relinquished power after the polls, said at a party meeting in as late as November 2004 (six months after the results), `we do not know why we lost, those who were victorious do not know why they won` (Times of India 24 November 2004).



	. The SP leads the state government.
Uttaranchal	NDA (mainly BJP) does well. Congress fairly poorly. Congress in power in the state since 2002.
Madhya Pradesh	NDA (mainly BJP) does well at the cost of the Congress. BJP is in power in the state since December 2003.
Chattisgarh	NDA (mainly BJP) does well at the cost of the Congress. BJP in power in the state since December 2003.
<b>South India</b>	
Andhra Pradesh	Simultaneous elections to the state legislature. The Congress led alliance sweeps to power. The NDA (BJP + TDP) fails badly. The TDP (ruling party in the state) loses power.
Karnataka	Simultaneous elections to the state legislature. The NDA (BJP + JDU) does well in the parliament poll. A three way split in the verdict to the state assembly – between Congress, NDA and a regional outfit JDS
Kerala	The Congress led alliance is wiped out. The Left led alliance does well. The Congress led alliance is in power in the state since 2001.
Tamil Nadu	The Congress alliance (led by the DMK) sweeps the poll. The NDA( BJP+AIADMK) is wiped out. The AIADMK is the ruling party in the state and it came to power in the 2001 assembly elections.
<b>West India</b>	
Maharashtra	The Congress led alliance improves its performance. The NDA (BJP+Shiv Sena) seat tally goes down. The Congress led alliance is in power in the state since 1999.
Gujarat	The NDA (mainly BJP) seats tally reduces. The Congress is the beneficiary. The BJP in power in the state and the last state assembly elections were held in 2002.
Goa	The Congress led alliance gains a seat and the NDA (mainly BJP) loses a seat. BJP in power in the state
<b>East India</b>	
West Bengal	The Left Front improves its tally and so does the Congress. The NDA (BJP+ Trinamool Congress) loses seats. The Left Front is in power in the state since 1977. The last assembly elections was in 2002.
Orissa	Simultaneous elections to the state legislature. The NDA (BJP+BJD) does well. The NDA (led by BJD) retains power in the state.
Bihar	The Congress alliance (RJD+ Congress + others) does well. The NDA (BJP+ JDU) loses ground. The RJD led alliance in power in the state. The last assembly elections were held in 1999.
Jharkhand	The Congress led alliance does well and the NDA (BJP+JDU) fails poorly. The BJP led

	alliance is in power in the state. Jharkhand state has not had an election since its creation. It was part of Bihar state where the last elections were in 1999.
<b>North East India</b>	
Assam	The Congress is the ruling party in the state since 2001. In a three cornered contest it won the highest number of seats, though its seat share has dropped as compared to previous Lok Sabha elections.
Arunachal Pradesh	BJP wins both seats and is the ruling party in the state. Has more to do with the state leadership rather than any `national` issues.
Manipur	Congress in power in the state. Was able to win one of the two seats.
Meghalaya	A coalition government in power in the state since March 2003. In the Lok Sabha poll, one seat went to the Congress and one to the Trinamul Congress. Both victories guided by local factors
Mizoram	The Mizo National Front came to power in the state in December 2003. It won the two Lok Sabha seats in the state
Tripura	State elections held in March 2003. CPM in power. Won both the seats in the Lok Sabha poll
Sikkim	There was simultaneous poll to the state assembly too. A regional party (SDF) came to power in the state and also won the Lok Sabha seat
Nagaland	A regional alliance in power in the state in March 2003. The same alliance won the Lok Sabha seat

The above narration leads to one inevitable conclusion. The nature of electoral verdicts since the 1990s reflect a new articulation that asserts the primacy of the `states of India` as basic units of electoral and political analysis. Clear national trends in any given election are difficult to either visualize or conceptualize. The NDA slogan of `India shining` made little headway as it did not capture the imagination of the electorate as the key electoral issues varied from state to state. A political party/alliance winning an overwhelmingly large number of seats from a particular state in a Lok Sabha election or coming to power with a absolute majority in the state assembly is still a reality we are confronted with. The `state` is today, beyond a shadow of doubt the arena of electoral/political contestation. Electoral verdicts since the 1990s more than amplify this trend.

#### IV

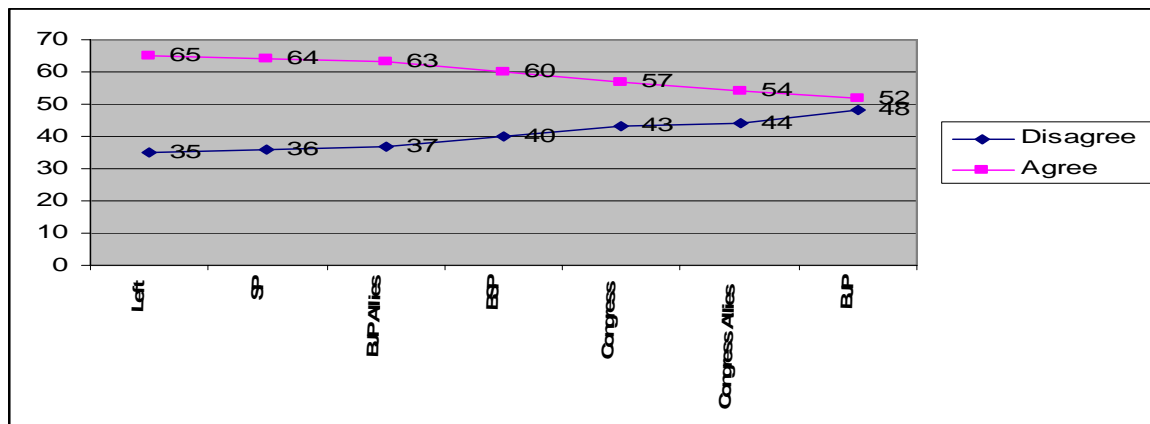
To analyse, the apparent redefining of the regional space, this section seeks to draw inferences from NES 2004 and other linked studies. Two important questions asked in NES 2004 are analysed. As part of NES 2004, respondents were asked, ‘Compared to national parties, regional/local parties can provide better government in the states. Do you agree?’. While a little over one-fourth of the respondents disagreed with this statement, more than forty percent agreed with the view that regional parties appeared more suited to head the government in the states.

*Table 2*  
Compared to national parties, regional/local parties can provide better government in the states.  
Do you agree?  
(n = 25754)

	2004
Disagree	28
Agree	41
No Opinion	31
Total	100

Which are the groups in the country who tend to be more supportive of the claims of regional parties? The answer this question, the response was analysed from multi-track perspectives. Only those who took a stand on this issue have been included in the analysis.

*Chart 4*  
*NES 2004*  
Compared to national parties, regional/local parties can provide better government in the states.  
*Response across supporters of different political parties*

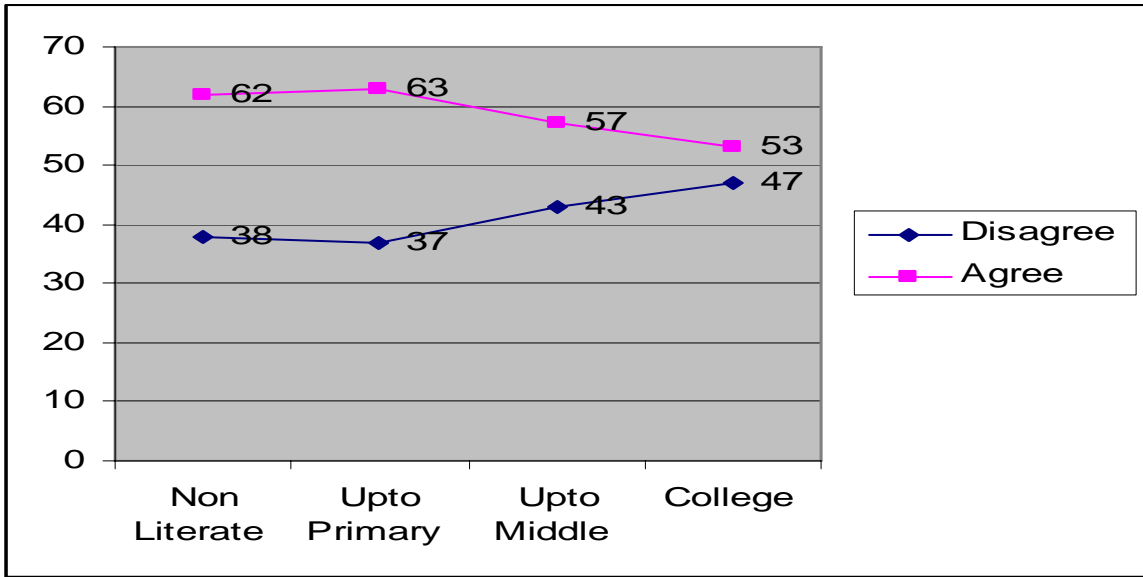


If the voting preference of the respondent in the 2004 elections were to be kept in mind, it is evident that the support for the role of regional parties is the weakest in the BJP, Congress and the allies of the Congress. The highest degree of support for such a stand comes from those who supported the Left, the Samajwadi Party, the BSP and interestingly from the allies of the BJP.

When the educational level of the respondents is taken into account, it is noticed that the intensity of support for regional parties decreases with access to education

Chart 5  
NES 2004

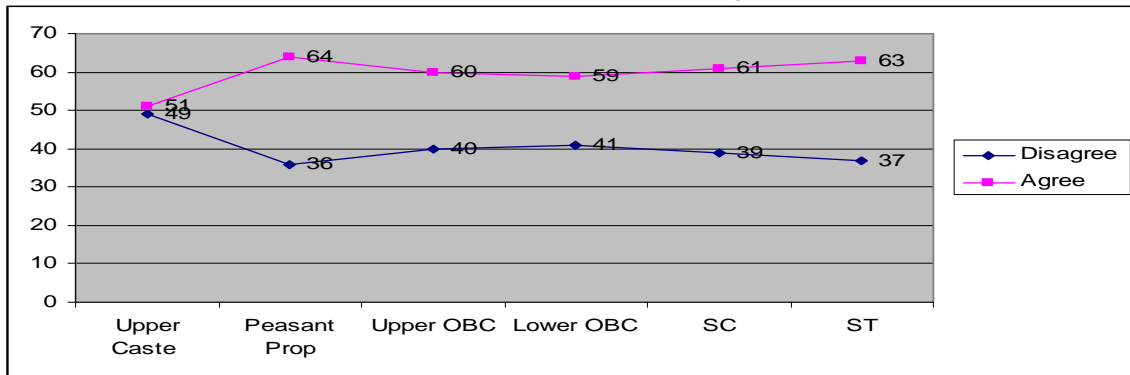
Compared to national parties, regional/local parties can provide better government in the states.  
*Response across education levels*



When the preference to those belonging to different caste groups are taken into account, it is noticed that the upper castes are the least supportive of any move to accord a primacy to regional parties. It is interesting to note that the regional parties draw the highest degree of support from the dominant peasant castes. These castes invariably play a critical role in the politics of most states.

Chart 6  
NES 2004

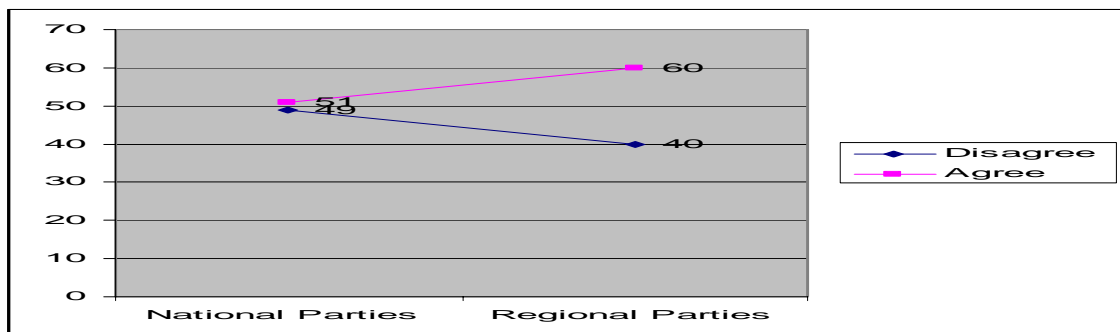
Compared to national parties, regional/local parties can provide better government in the states.  
*Response across caste groups*



The data was also analysed keeping the nature of competition in the state in mind. The response in those states where the electoral contest is essentially between two national political parties and those where a regional party is a key player were separated. From the Chart below it is clear that the response of citizens varies significantly in the two categories of states, with the support for regional parties being less intense in those states where there are only major national players. It also appears, that in such states too, many respondents may have perceived the national parties as being essentially regional.

Chart 7  
NES 2004

Compared to national parties, regional/local parties can provide better government in the states.  
*Response across states depending on nature of competition*



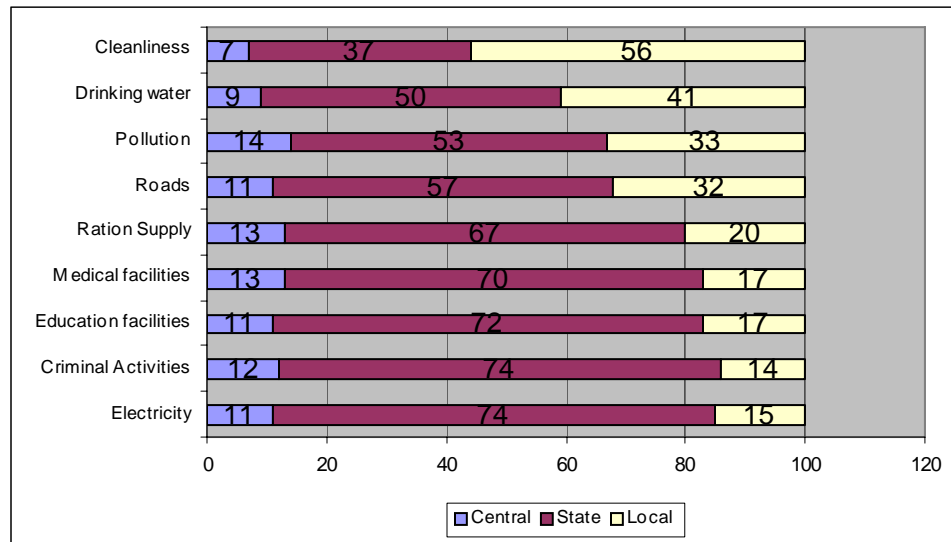
The findings of another study merit attention at this stage. An empirical study was undertaken in 2001, to examine the 'quality of life' of the Indian citizen and their perception of individual and collective needs<sup>13</sup>. As part of the study, citizen response to the role of the state in providing select public goods was assessed. In any federal system the state can be represented either by the central, state, or local governments. Those respondents who had signaled that the state was to be the provider of public goods were asked whether it was the central government, the state government or local government that should provide these public goods. In India, citizens assigned clear and differential responsibility to the various levels of government within the federal system – central, state and local (including both rural

<sup>13</sup> The survey was conducted as part of the 'State and Society Project', jointly coordinated by Pradeep Chhibber, Sandeep Shastri and Richard Sisson as Principal Coordinators. The Lokniti network members were part of the team which undertook the study. A rigorous scientific methodology was employed to generate the sample for the survey. A target sample of 8388 citizens was identified and detailed face-to-face interviews were conducted. The survey was conducted in 18 states of India, which covered nearly 97% of the nation's population. The fieldwork was conducted between January and March 2001. For details see paper Chhibber, Pradeep, Sandeep Shastri and Richard Sisson (2004).

and urban) and express clear opinions about which level of government is responsible for providing what public good.

Chart 8

PROVIDING PUBLIC GOODS : ROLE OF CENTRAL, STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT



Only one in every ten respondents favoured a role for the central government. For the problems perceived as being most important, responsibility is clearly assigned by the Indian citizen to their state government (see Chart 8). This may explain why there has been such a high turnover in state governments over the last decade and half. Voters see the state government as responsible for providing a set of public goods. In so far as those public goods are still deemed as important by a vast majority of citizens, state governments have failed to address voters concerns. There are, however, three exceptions. Citizens felt that solving the problems linked to drinking water, roads and cleanliness was not the responsibility of the state government alone but that the local government too, had a significant role to play. The local government is seen as more important for the provision of these public goods than the central government. Local governments were also judged as having the primary responsibility for the cleanliness of the neighbourhood, and secondary responsibility for providing drinking water, control of pollution and maintenance of roads.

To return to NES 2004, the survey posed another question where respondents were asked whether they agreed with the statement that `we should be more loyal to our region first and then to the nation. While nearly two thirds of the respondents agreed with this statement another twenty percent did not approve of the same. As similar question was posed in 1996, when respondents were asked whether the region comes before the nation. More than half the respondents replied in the affirmative. It is important to record that a similar question posed in the World Values Survey found that globally, around 40 percent of respondents identified themselves with the country with the rest identifying themselves with the region or the locality.

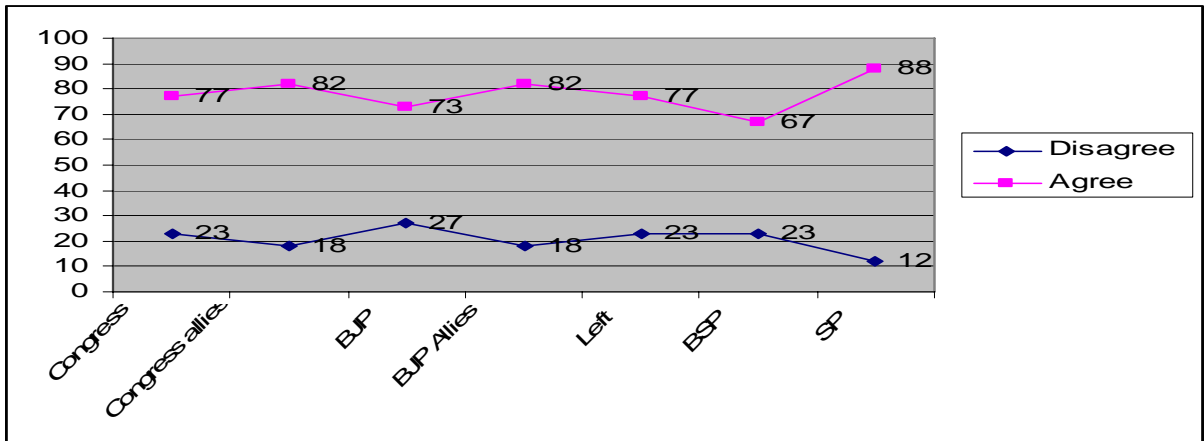
Table 3  
Region Before Nation

	1996	2004
Disagree	20	20
Agree	55	65
No Opinion	25	15
Total	100	100

1996 Question : Region Comes Before Nation  
 2004 Question : We should be loyal to our region first and then to the country. Do you agree?

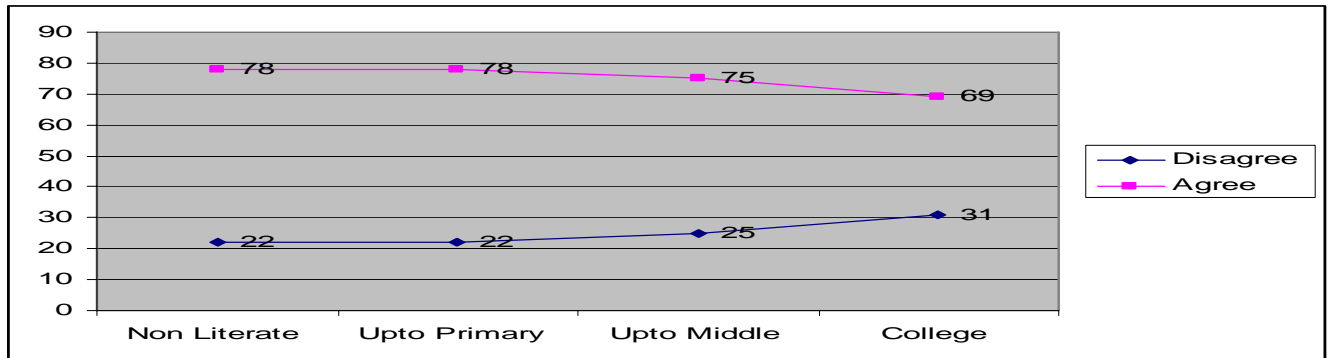
If the response to this question is examined from the point of view of which political party did the respondent vote for, it is noticed that the least support for a regional identity were among those who voted for the BJP. The supporters of the Left and regional parties were quite clear in their support for asserting their regional identity.

Chart 9  
 NES 2004  
 We should be loyal to our region first and then to the country Do you agree?  
 Response across supporters of different political parties



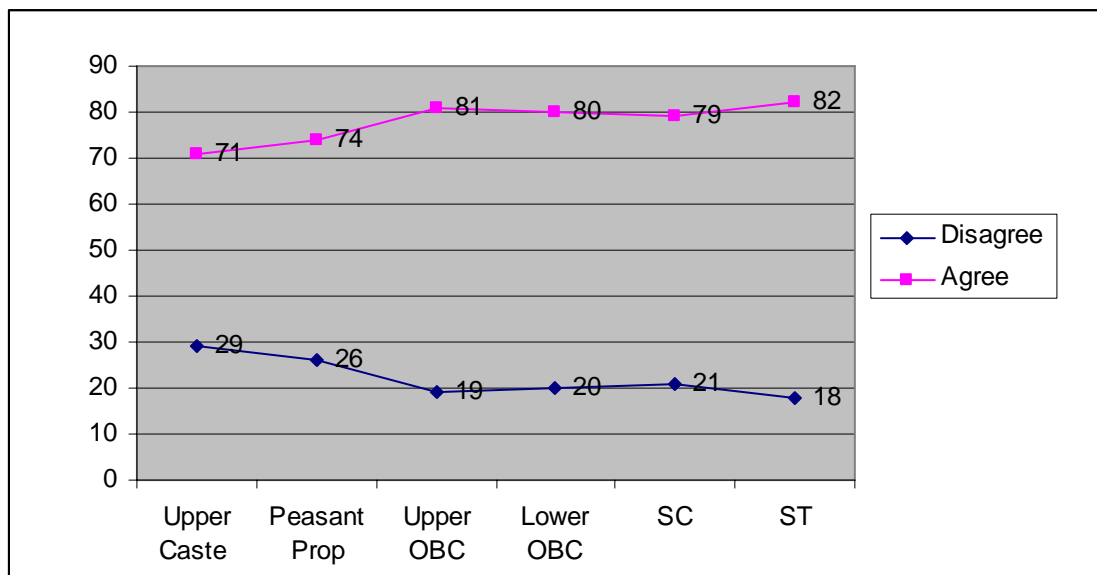
If the respondents education level were taken into account, the lowest support for the regional identity is among those who have had the benefit of college education.

Chart 10  
 NES 2004  
 We should be loyal to our region first and then to the country Do you agree?  
 Response across education levels



Across caste groups it is noticed that the support for a regional identity is lower among the upper castes and peasant proprietary classes and more significant among the OBCs, Dalits and Tribals.

Chart 11  
 NES 2004  
 We should be loyal to our region first and then to the country Do you agree?  
 Response across caste groups



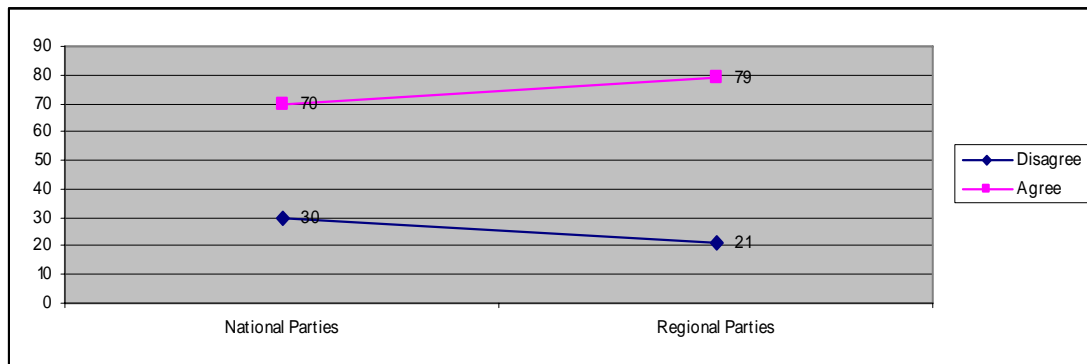


If the nature of political competition in the states is to be taken into account, it is noticed that in those states where the national parties are the main players, there is a lower degree of support for the regional identity as compared to the other states where there is a powerful regional party.

Chart 12

NES 2004

*We should be loyal to our region first and then to the country Do you agree?  
Response across states depending on nature of competition*



A similar battery of questions was posed as part of the World Values Survey. The India component of the World Values Survey (conducted in 2001) indicates trends which are very similar to what has been noticed in NES 2004 (Shastri 2003a).

The analysis of the data emerging from NES 2004 (further supported by the findings of the State and Society Project Survey 2001 and the World Values Survey 2001) further confirms the trends that the aggregate election data point out to. The arena of electoral contestation and the focus of political activity is clearly the `states of India`. The voters too seem to identify more with processes, issues and politics at the state and local level.

## V

The study clearly points out the fact the state/regional identity is increasingly being articulated by the common Indian citizen. This regional identity is today assuming new forms and expressing itself in significantly different ways. This fact is often ignored by the important players in the political process (say political parties) and causes a further disconnect between the citizens and mediators of political power.

Over the years, one party domination came to be challenged through multi-track strategies ultimately resulting in the emergence of a competitive party system. It is important to note that the electoral process was the `site` at which all these changes were negotiated - peacefully, incrementally and without any major aberrations. The transition from a one party dominant system to a competitive party system has been democratically engineered. However to take the process logically forward, political players need to accept the increasingly legitimacy of the `state` as the arena for political contestation. Their inability to reconcile with this development would only create new zones of tension within the political/electoral process.

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