

Participatory Norm: How Broad-based Is It?

Diversification of voters is not matched by a broadening of the social base of participants in politics. Active participants are still from the more privileged sections of society, with education and class being the determining factors. And although the OBCs have made an entry into active politics in recent years, dalits, adivasis, women and the poor still remain largely at the periphery. Thus, participation of more people in politics, as evidenced in recent elections, does not automatically ensure the entry of the less privileged sections into the political process.

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In a rather undramatic manner, the outcome of the 2004 elections consolidated some of the trends that had emerged through the 1990s in Indian politics. Through a complex interplay of economy, backward caste mobilisation and communalisation of the political process, the 1990s ushered in many changes in the polity. One big change was the beginning of an era of coalition politics. The last three national governments that came to power at the centre in 1996, 1998 and 1999, have been coalition governments. The first two could not last their full term, but the last government to be elected in the 1990s (1999) survived its full term. This in a way marks the beginning of the consolidation of both coalition politics and the state as the theatre of that politics.

One big change that elections to the 14th Lok Sabha brought was the change in the incumbent government. But under this umbrella of mega change, many political changes that emerged in the 1990s remained untouched. Defying a lacklustre campaign, Indian voters took a keen interest in political events, particularly the electoral process, and came out to vote. Attention has been given, and will be given for some time, to the rather dramatic nature of the election results (the drama, though, was mostly caused by media hype about what the results would be), but it is the more undramatic outcome that should occupy the attention of the analyst of Indian politics. In this essay, we try and focus attention on one such issue: that of people's interest and participation in politics. Has participation increased? Who are politically more active than others? These are the questions we intend to probe in the following discussion. Turnout is one very good indicator of people's participation in the electoral process. But there are other indicators of political participation that are generally left out in discussions. In order to analyse political participation, we would like to go beyond the issue of voting and try to look at other aspects such as people's interest and participation in the election campaign and other similar political activities.

This discussion has a specific context. There has been some evidence of the rising levels of participation in the 1990s. If turnout is to be read in terms of increasing participation of the people, the Lok Sabha elections of 1998 and 1999 clearly indicate that more people have voted in these two elections than in earlier elections. Another argument is that in the 1990s, the social composition of voters has changed dramatically. In recent elections, the underprivileged and downtrodden have shown greater participation than the socially and economically privileged classes [Yadav 2000; Alam 2004]. Further, we have already witnessed not only the famous Mandalisation of politics, but also the

stabilisation of the social forces ushered in by Mandalisation, the continuation of the central roles of Laloo Prasad and Mulayam Singh, and moreover, the rise and expansion of the BSP and dalit aspirations symbolised by the leadership of Mayawati. These developments have penetrated Indian politics in such a manner that only by accommodating them did the BJP manage to stage its grand rise in the 1990s. In a sense, this 'silent revolution', according to Jaffrelot (2003) has already stabilised. The heightened sense of confidence these developments have brought to the backward and underprivileged castes must have been responsible for their greater participation in the electoral process. Thirdly, these democratic and expansionary developments were taking place at a time when the polity offered little to these sections by way of protection or material benefits. It is in the context of these three factors that we look at the long-term trends and the findings of the survey data from the National Election Study 2004 (NES 2004).

I Turnout

Intense mobilisation (both caste and communal), a more competitive electoral arena and arousal of interest in the elections caused by the rise of 'local' players in the form of state-based parties, may have contributed to the turnout of around 60 per cent in the 1989, 1998 and 1999 elections. In the 2004 elections, these factors were either absent or were routinised and had lost their initial attraction. No new leader on the horizon, no new scandals, no new issues arose in the campaign. The election was just an ordinary one, perhaps a pale continuation of the previous two or three elections.

Given this fact, the turnout of 58 per cent (down by 2 per cent from the 1999 election) should not be a matter for surprise or concern. If we look at the state-level turnout figures (Table 1), we find that in 13 states, the turnout declined and in as many as 12, it increased (besides AP, where it increased only nominally). While Bihar witnessed its lowest turnout in the past 15 years, Nagaland and Orissa recorded the highest turnout in the same 15-year period. Table 1 makes it quite clear that turnout in this election is a weak continuation of the trend since the late 1980s (1989).

Another feature of the trend in turnout during 1989-2004 is that turnout is often higher in assembly elections than in the Lok Sabha elections. Table 2 gives a comparison of the statewide average turnout in the Lok Sabha and assembly elections in this period. It is possible to hypothesise that the people relate more

Table 1: Statewise Turnout: Lok Sabha Elections
(Per Cent)

State	1989	1991	1996	1998	1999	2004	Average
Andhra Pradesh	70.4	61.4	63.0	66.0	69.1	69.9	66.6
Arunachal Pradesh	59.2	51.3	55.0	59.2	72.2	56.3	58.9
Assam	*	75.3	78.5	61.1	71.3	69.1	71.1
Bihar	60.2	60.4	59.5	64.6	61.5	57.9	60.7
Chhattisgarh	—	—	—	—	—	52.1	52.1
Delhi	54.3	48.5	50.6	51.3	43.5	47.1	49.2
Goa	58.2	42.4	56.3	61.2	45.1	58.7	53.7
Gujarat	54.6	44.0	35.9	59.3	47.0	45.2	47.7
Haryana	64.4	65.8	70.5	69.0	63.7	65.7	66.5
Himachal Pradesh	63.9	57.4	57.6	66.3	56.8	59.7	60.3
Jammu and Kashmir	25.7	*	49.0	44.2	32.3	35.2	37.3
Jharkhand	—	—	—	—	—	55.6	55.6
Karnataka	67.5	54.8	60.2	64.9	67.6	64.9	63.3
Kerala	79.3	73.3	71.1	70.7	70.2	71.5	72.7
Madhya Pradesh	55.2	44.4	54.1	61.7	54.9	48.1	53.1
Maharashtra	59.9	48.8	52.4	57.1	60.9	54.4	55.6
Manipur	71.8	69.7	75.0	56.8	65.7	67.4	67.7
Meghalaya	51.9	53.6	61.6	74.4	56.2	52.7	58.4
Mizoram	58.3	58.6	73.4	69.6	65.3	63.4	64.8
Nagaland	74.7	77.1	88.3	45.4	76.2	91.7	75.6
Orissa	59.3	53.8	59.2	58.0	55.6	66.0	58.7
Punjab	62.7	24.0	62.2	60.1	56.1	61.6	54.4
Rajasthan	56.5	47.2	43.4	60.3	53.9	49.9	51.9
Sikkim	72.0	58.8	77.4	67.1	81.7	77.9	72.5
Tamil Nadu	66.9	63.9	66.9	57.9	58.0	60.8	62.4
Tripura	83.9	67.3	79.1	80.9	68.1	66.9	74.4
Uttar Pradesh	51.3	49.2	46.5	55.5	53.5	48.2	50.7
Uttaranchal	—	—	—	—	—	48.1	48.1
West Bengal	79.7	76.7	82.7	79.2	75.0	78.0	78.6
Andaman and Nicobar Islands	71.7	64.3	62.0	63.7	59.5	63.7	64.2
Chandigarh	65.7	57.8	58.4	53.7	48.4	50.9	55.8
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	72.9	66.5	76.9	77.4	74.7	69.0	72.9
Daman and Diu	66.0	67.0	70.7	72.8	71.7	70.2	69.7
Lakshadweep	85.0	80.4	89.0	85.1	80.2	81.5	83.5
Pondicherry	66.7	67.7	75.3	62.8	63.3	76.0	68.6
All-India	61.9	55.9	57.9	62.0	60.0	58.0	59.3

Note: * Elections were not held in Assam (1989) and Jammu and Kashmir (1991).
Source: CSDS Data Unit.

Table 2: Average Turnout (In Percentage) in Lok Sabha and Assembly Elections: Statewise Comparative Analysis

State	Average of Turnout in Lok Sabha Elections, 1989-2004	Average of Turnout in Vidhan Sabha Elections, 1989-2003
Andhra Pradesh	66.6	70.2
Arunachal Pradesh	58.9	74.6
Assam	71.1	76.1
Bihar	60.7	62.1
Chhattisgarh	52.1	71.3
Delhi	49.2	55.4
Goa	53.7	68.8
Gujarat	47.7	59.4
Haryana	66.5	68.5
Himachal Pradesh	60.3	71.3
Jammu and Kashmir	37.3	48.8
Jharkhand	55.6	Na
Karnataka	63.3	68.0
Kerala	72.7	72.4
Madhya Pradesh	53.1	58.3
Maharashtra	55.6	64.9
Manipur	67.7	87.6
Meghalaya	58.4	74.8
Mizoram	64.8	79.4
Nagaland	75.6	71.8
Orissa	58.7	62.9
Punjab	54.4	52.5
Rajasthan	51.9	60.4
Sikkim	72.5	78.6
Tamil Nadu	62.4	64.8
Tripura	74.4	78.0
Uttar Pradesh	50.7	53.4
Uttaranchal	48.1	54.3
West Bengal	78.6	78.3

Note: * Elections were not held in Assam (1989) and Jammu and Kashmir (1991).
Source: CSDS Data Unit.

to state governments than to the national government and hence there is greater interest in the former. Since the late 1980s, the states entered into our public arena as the main units at which politics 'happens', that is, at which political choices are engineered and executed. Higher turnout at state level makes the Indian case different from the so-called advanced democracies, where the national elections witness higher turnout than the state or local elections. The findings of the NES 2004 survey also indicate that even in national elections the voters' choice was influenced more by the performance of the state government than that of the national government. In the 2004 elections, the voters in fact stated that even in making the choice for the Lok Sabha election, the state government and its performance mattered to them (for almost one-fourth of the sample, the state government mattered the most in voting in the election, while for another one-fourth – 24 per cent – both central and state governments mattered. Thus, for almost half the sample, the state government was an important factor in making the choice). It is natural, therefore, that turnout should be higher in the election of the more immediate level of government compared with the distant government in Delhi.

Studies in the past have also indicated two other noticeable changes, that have taken place in Indian politics. These are increasing turnout in rural constituencies and also among women voters. It has been reported that, in the last few elections, the rural constituencies have recorded higher turnout than urban constituencies [Yadav 2000: 125-26]. There seems to be very little change in this trend. Even in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, one can see higher turnout in rural constituencies than urban constituencies. A comparison in turnout in rural and urban constituencies during the two Lok Sabha elections held in 1999 and 2004 shows that while the trend of higher turnout in rural constituencies still holds, the gap in turnout among rural and urban constituencies has narrowed slightly (Table 3). In western democracies, we come across the trend of higher turnout among urban voters who also have a higher sense of efficacy. In contrast, in India, during the past two decades we see that there is a higher turnout and higher sense of efficacy among rural voters. Moreover, since 1977, the highest proportion of turnout is always recorded in the 'mixed' constituencies, where the rural electorate is up to 50 per cent. In this sense, the turnout in semi-rural/semi-urban constituencies consolidates the trend of higher voter turnout in rural areas.

It may be useful to note that large numbers of voters in rural constituencies are poor and illiterate. They can hardly meet their daily needs. One can assume that rural voters are poorer than urban voters. Higher turnout among the rural constituencies in some ways also implies that the poor and the underprivileged voted more compared with the rich and privileged sections of society. It is also possible that intense campaigning in rural areas

Table 3: Localitywise Turnout

Locality Type	No of Constituencies	1999	2004
Rural	156	60.7	58.8
Semi-urban	313	61.5	59.1
Urban	74	53.0	53.7

Note: All Lok Sabha constituencies were grouped according to the estimated percentage of urban electorate there: less than 25 per cent 'rural', between 25 and 75 per cent 'semi-urban', more than 75 per cent 'urban'. The estimates are based on a comparison of the 1991 Census figures for urban population with size of electorate in the 1998 elections.
Source: CSDS Data Unit.

has increased during the past 15-20 years. Even this is a sign of the qualitative changes that are taking place in the electoral process during this period. However, this narrative of 'democratic upsurge' also needs to be cautionary in the sense that the rural-urban differences are actually narrowing down and, secondly, there has been a decline in turnout by two percentage points in the rural and semi-urban constituencies, while the urban turnout has marginally increased from 1999.

The same cautionary elaboration is useful in looking at the gender and community composition of the electorate. At the all-India level, it is clear that the turnout is higher among dalits and adivasis, but there are differences in the statewide pattern. This statewide variation should caution us against overemphasising the high turnout among dalits and adivasis. The adivasis record the highest turnout only in Gujarat. In Chhattisgarh and Orissa, the turnout among adivasis is much below the state average turnout. Dalits record a higher turnout in Maharashtra, Orissa and UP. Surprisingly, high OBC turnout is seen in states that are mostly outside of the recent upsurge of OBC politics: AP, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. On the other hand, in UP, along with Delhi, dalits recorded the lowest turnout. Muslims have a low turnout rate across most states. Higher turnout among the Muslims is seen in states with substantial Muslim populations (Assam and Kerala, but not in West Bengal where average turnout itself is very high). Muslims have also voted in large numbers in states with high Muslim mobilisation, like in UP. Most significantly, in Gujarat, where average voting was on the lower side, voting among Muslims crosses the state average. In particular, Muslim turnout is low in AP and Karnataka, where their population is sizeable.

As far as caste is concerned, Bihar, Delhi, Jharkhand, MP, Uttaranchal, Rajasthan and Kerala have a higher turnout among upper castes than among dalits or Muslims or adivasis. In a sense, therefore, the picture is quite complex. If we are comparing the present situation with the one that obtained till the 1970s, then it may be accurate to argue that social deprivation is no more an obstacle for electoral participation. At the same time, comparison across social sections shows that the entry of the underprivileged into the political arena is much more limited, even today, than the entry of the more privileged social sections. The dalit mobilisation and political participation has helped dalits in overcoming social disability in some states, but not in many others. On the other hand, the upper castes still have an advantage, which they exercise in many states. The battle to overcome social disability in political competition is still not fully won, though it is not lost either. This is what seems to be happening in the realm of political participation in India.

The turnout among women presents a similar picture. Not surprisingly, we can draw more or less similar conclusions. Compared with the overall turnout, the turnout among women is still 5 per cent lower. Without exception, the lower turnout among women could be seen in all the states. The only difference is that while in some states the gap is very wide, in states like AP, Karnataka, Kerala, Punjab and Jharkhand, the gap in turnout is less than the average 5 per cent. The only few exceptions have been some of the smaller states of the north-east and union territories like Dadar and Nagar Haveli, Daman Diu and Lakshadweep, where turnout among women has been slightly higher than average turnout. Compared with the average turnout it seems as if turnout among women is only marginally low. But the proportionate turnout among women is a more robust

indicator for assessing women's turnout compared with that of men. If we look at the figures in Table 7, we would notice that the proportionate turnout of women is about 87 per cent. Clearly, compared with men, the turnout among women is much lower.

The social churning that we referred to above has largely bypassed the issue of gender disparity. Bihar stands out for the largest gender gap: 20 per cent. Besides, in Kerala, Gujarat, Rajasthan, UP, Uttaranchal, West Bengal, Orissa, MP and Jharkhand, the turnout of women is the lowest among the various disprivileged social sections. Data on women's turnout over a period of time also suggest a stagnation of the process of increasing turnout among them.

II Participation beyond Turnout

In this analysis of political participation, we do not want to confine ourselves only to the act of voting, since there are other political activities that are important indicators of political participation. Such political activities could be participation in rallies, meetings, or campaigning during election. In this section, we would like to focus on some of these aspects of political participation. Election data released by the Election Commission of India would be of very little help while discussing this issue, but in order to analyse people's participation in these activities, we would rely on the survey data collected through various rounds of NES, conducted by the CSDS.

Table 4: Turnout across States among Social Communities – Lok Sabha Elections 2004
(Per cent)

	All	Dalit	Adivasi	OBC	Upper Caste	Muslim	Women
All-India	58	60	61	58	56	46	54
Andhra Pradesh	70	71	65	74	64	45	67
Assam	69	62	68	67	73	85	64
Bihar	66	49	53	57	66	63	46
Chhattisgarh	52	50	45	58	53	39	47
Delhi	47	45	35	40	50	47	42
Gujarat	45	49	58	42	41	46	39
Jharkhand	56	56	58	52	59	54	52
Karnataka	65	58	66	68	64	48	63
Kerala	71	72	64	69	76	73	68
Madhya Pradesh	48	46	47	46	54	64	43
Maharashtra	54	62	46	58	52	47	49
Orissa	66	70	62	64	69	99*	58
Rajasthan	50	51	46	49	54	44	44
Tamil Nadu	61	60	25	63	54	56	53
Uttar Pradesh	48	62	29	42	50	55	43
West Bengal	78	75	89	90	76	72	71

Note: * Small sample size.

Source: National Election Study – 2004, weighted data set.

Table 5: Turnout among Social Communities – Lok Sabha Elections
(Per cent)

Community	1996	1998	1999	2004	Average
All	58	62	60	58	60
Dalit	62	67	63	60	63
Adivasi	56	62	52	61	58
OBC	60	61	59	58	59
Upper caste	54	62	62	56	58
Muslim	56	65	67	46	59

Note: The turnout figures for the survey have been weighted by the actual turnout figures for all elections and rounded off with 0.5 as the cut-off point.

Source: [National Election Study – 1996, (Sample Size 9613), National Election Study – 1998, (Sample Size 8133), National Election Study–1999, (Sample Size 9418) National Election Study – 2004, (Sample Size 27004)].

The findings of the survey indicate that, over the past decade, the overall interest of the electorate in election campaigns has been steadily increasing. The participation of the people in various election-related activities has also increased over the years. During the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, more than one-third of the people took an interest in the election campaign. While at the national level, one can clearly see a trend of increasing interest of the people in election campaigns, this is not seen in all states. There are some states where people took lesser interest in the election campaign in 2004 than in the 1999 Lok Sabha elections. In Maharashtra and UP, there is a steady decline in the proportion of people who have taken an interest in election campaigns. In Tamil Nadu, Orissa and West Bengal, the interest of the people in the election campaign also witnessed a decline in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections compared with that in 1999.

At the same time, there is a steady increase in the number of people who participated in at least one campaign-related activity. The surveys indicate that while in 1996 only 8 per cent of the people participated in at least one election campaign activity, such as door-to-door campaigning, or attending meetings, in the 2004 elections the number of people who participated in such activity rose to slightly over 30 per cent (Table 8). What is important to note is that over the years there is a steady increase in the number of people who participated in election campaign activity. It may be said that this is a sign of a healthy and robust democracy and this participation enhances the legitimacy of the electoral process. While at the all-India level one can see increasing numbers

of people who participated in at least one campaign-related activity, there are some states that do not conform to this national trend. In Orissa, UP and West Bengal, the number of people who participated in any election campaign activity during the 2004 elections is slightly less than the number of people who participated in similar such activity during the 1999 Lok Sabha elections.

While over 40 per cent people were interested in the election campaign in 2004, equal numbers were also interested in politics and public affairs in general, that is, beyond election campaigns. Predictably, there is a considerable overlap (69 per cent) between those who are interested in the campaign and those who are interested in politics in general. There is a similar overlap between participation in campaign-related activity and interest in public affairs. While only about 14 per cent of the people acknowledged being members of a political party, there were large numbers of people who identified themselves with the political parties. More than 50 per cent identified themselves as being close to one or the other political party. Obviously, the main national parties lead in this respect, with 17 and 14 per cent of the people saying that they like the Congress and BJP respectively. However, the 1990s have also witnessed some very focused mobilisation. Therefore, identification with smaller parties is also quite considerable: 4 per cent identify with the Communist parties and 3 per cent and 2 per cent identify with the BSP and the SP, respectively.

If looked at from a different perspective, dislike for a party is somewhat significant as a symbolic gesture of interest in

Table 6: Statewise Turnout among Women: Lok Sabha Elections
(Per cent)

State	1989	1991	1996	1998	1999	2004	Average
Andhra Pradesh	67.1	56.9	59.6	62.6	66.4	67.5	63.4
Arunachal Pradesh	56.0	47.8	52.5	57.8	75.4	55.2	57.5
Assam	*	73.3	76.5	59.3	69.5	64.9	68.7
Bihar	50.3	49.4	50.4	56.2	53.3	51.8	51.9
Chhattisgarh	—	—	—	—	—	46.5	46.5
Goa	55.6	38.9	52.5	58.8	40.4	56.9	50.5
Gujarat	49.0	37.1	29.6	55.1	40.8	40.1	41.9
Haryana	59.2	62.3	68.8	65.1	58.3	62.7	62.7
Himachal Pradesh	61.5	53.6	56.0	65.6	54.3	59.0	58.3
Jammu and Kashmir	21.2	*	39.1	39.4	28.6	27.7	31.2
Jharkhand	—	—	—	—	—	48.1	48.1
Karnataka	64.1	49.1	55.5	61.0	65.0	62.7	59.5
Kerala	79.7	73.2	70.3	70.7	69.8	69.0	72.1
Madhya Pradesh	46.7	35.3	47.0	55.9	46.2	38.8	44.9
Maharashtra	55.7	43.0	47.6	53.3	58.0	50.4	51.3
Manipur	70.4	69.9	73.8	55.9	64.0	53.3	64.5
Meghalaya	49.7	49.6	61.0	74.9	53.3	52.0	56.7
Mizoram	56.1	56.9	73.9	69.2	63.1	61.5	63.4
Nagaland	75.7	78.2	85.5	43.1	75.3	90.3	74.7
Orissa	53.5	46.9	54.6	53.2	49.8	63.6	53.6
Punjab	58.3	21.0	61.1	58.1	54.5	60.2	52.2
Rajasthan	49.8	39.4	36.7	55.3	45.9	44.0	45.2
Sikkim	67.7	47.9	73.9	62.5	83.3	76.0	68.5
Tamil Nadu	65.0	61.8	64.8	55.2	55.0	56.8	59.7
Tripura	81.9	61.6	77.5	80.5	65.1	63.5	71.7
Uttar Pradesh	46.5	44.4	41.0	50.2	48.3	41.0	45.2
Uttaranchal	—	—	—	—	—	44.4	44.0
West Bengal	76.9	74.9	80.9	78.0	73.2	75.2	76.5
Andaman and Nicobar Islands	70.2	64.6	61.1	65.2	60.3	63.8	64.2
Chandigarh	65.0	57.5	58.6	52.9	46.5	50.1	55.1
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	73.0	64.9	79.0	79.5	76.7	71.0	74.0
Daman and Diu	69.9	68.8	75.5	75.3	73.7	75.1	73.1
Delhi	51.9	43.5	49.2	48.5	40.9	44.5	46.4
Lakshadweep	89.4	85.4	91.3	87.7	83.4	83.8	86.8
Pondicherry	66.4	68.1	76.1	63.1	63.1	74.9	68.8
All-India	57.3	50.6	53.4	57.9	55.6	53.5	54.7

Note: * Elections were not held in Assam (1989) and Jammu and Kashmir (1991).

Source: CSDS Data Unit.

Table 7: Statewise Proportional Turnout among Women Compared with Men
(Per cent)

State	1989	1991	1996	1998	1999	2004	Average
All-India	86.7	83.4	86.1	88.3	87.0	89.1	86.8
Andhra Pradesh	90.9	86.2	89.7	90.2	92.4	93.4	90.5
Arunachal Pradesh	90.3	88.2	91.7	95.8	108.9	97.3	95.4
Assam	*	95.3	95.2	94.6	95.5	87.7	93.7
Bihar	72.9	70.8	74.7	78.0	77.6	81.3	75.8
Chhattisgarh	—	—	—	—	—	80.7	80.7
Delhi	92.2	82.7	95.2	91.0	89.9	91.0	90.3
Goa	91.5	85.1	87.4	92.6	81.5	94.7	88.8
Gujarat	81.9	73.3	70.8	87.1	77.1	80.2	78.4
Haryana	86.0	90.6	95.6	89.8	85.4	92.2	74.5
Himachal Pradesh	92.8	87.8	94.7	97.9	91.8	99.0	94.0
Jammu and Kashmir	71.7	*	67.9	81.7	80.3	68.4	74.0
Jharkhand	—	—	—	—	—	76.9	76.9
Karnataka	90.6	81.5	85.7	88.6	92.8	93.8	88.8
Kerala	101.0	99.6	97.8	100.1	98.8	93.2	98.4
Madhya Pradesh	73.9	66.8	77.4	83.3	73.5	68.7	73.9
Maharashtra	87.5	79.7	83.5	88.0	91.2	84.8	85.8
Manipur	96.3	100.8	96.7	96.9	94.9	89.7	95.8
Meghalaya	91.9	86.3	98.0	101.4	90.4	97.2	94.2
Mizoram	92.9	94.3	101.4	99.1	93.4	95.9	96.1
Nagaland	102.4	102.6	94.0	90.7	97.6	97.6	97.5
Orissa	83.3	78.3	86.1	85.2	81.4	93.1	84.6
Punjab	87.8	79.5	96.6	93.9	94.7	95.8	91.4
Rajasthan	79.7	72.6	74.3	85.4	75.3	79.8	77.8
Sikkim	89.3	69.6	91.5	87.5	103.8	97.0	89.8
Tamil Nadu	94.7	93.6	94.0	91.0	90.2	88.2	91.9
Tripura	95.4	84.8	96.2	99.1	91.7	90.7	92.9
Uttar Pradesh	84.3	83.6	80.4	83.9	83.4	75.6	81.8
Uttaranchal	—	—	—	—	—	84.8	84.8
West Bengal	93.8	95.6	96.0	97.2	95.5	94.2	95.4
Andaman and Nicobar Islands	96.5	100.8	97.5	104.2	102.4	100.5	100.3
Chandigarh	98.3	99.0	100.7	97.6	93.5	96.5	97.6
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	100.1	95.5	105.2	105.2	105.2	105.5	102.7
Daman and Diu	112.4	105.3	114.0	106.9	105.4	115.0	109.8
Lakshadweep	110.4	112.6	105.1	106.1	108.0	105.7	107.9
Pondicherry	99.0	101.2	102.0	101.1	99.6	96.9	99.9

Note: * as in Table 6.

Source: CSDS Data Unit.

politics. Negative identification with political parties is much less. If there were more than 50 per cent people, who identified themselves as being close to a political party, only about one-fifth mentioned their dislike for any party. While 5-6 per cent people mentioned their dislike for the Congress or the BJP, 2 per cent disliked the BSP and 1 per cent disliked the RJD. It is easy to mention one's liking for a particular party, but to declare one's dislike is a more reliable sign of deep involvement in party politics. Therefore, we can surmise that these 19 per cent people (proportion of total sample) who expressed their dislike for a party are those, who are most actively involved in party politics. The participants in the campaign have a larger share of those who identify with any party or are members of political parties.

Table 8: People Who Took Interest in Lok Sabha Election Campaign
(Per cent)

State	1996	1999	2004	Average
All-India	33	32	40	35
Andhra Pradesh	10	20	29	20
Assam	31	50	57	46
Bihar	24	22	45	31
Delhi	39	12	38	30
Gujarat	36	12	17	22
Haryana	28	27	43	33
Himachal Pradesh	25	26	51	34
Karnataka	26	25	48	33
Kerala	72	36	53	54
Madhya Pradesh	20	24	40	28
Maharashtra	21	17	14	17
Orissa	27	50	28	35
Punjab	23	15	52	30
Rajasthan	22	32	39	31
Tamil Nadu	58	59	56	57
Uttar Pradesh	46	37	33	39
West Bengal	42	60	39	47

Notes: Question Wording: 'Now let us talk about the campaign during the election. How interested were you in the election campaign this year—great deal, somewhat or not at all?'

- The question had been asked with identical wordings in all the surveys reported in the table.
- Answer categories 'somewhat' and 'great deal' have been merged together and reported in the table as percentage of those who took interest in the campaign.

Source: National Election Study – 1996, 1999, 2004.

Table 9: Participation of People in Any Election-Related Activity for Lok Sabha
(Per cent)

State	1996	1998	1999	2004	Average
All-India	8	13	21	32	18
Andhra Pradesh	6	7	18	25	14
Assam	9	1	12	45	17
Bihar	5	11	17	36	17
Chhattisgarh	–	–	–	22	22
Delhi	10	12	13	19	14
Gujarat	1	15	8	22	12
Haryana	6	7	19	35	17
Himachal Pradesh	2	–	9	37	16
Jharkhand	–	–	–	23	23
Karnataka	6	8	17	25	14
Kerala	21	28	20	38	27
Madhya Pradesh	4	12	11	35	16
Maharashtra	4	6	13	22	11
Orissa	4	11	25	24	16
Punjab	7	9	8	37	15
Rajasthan	2	13	26	36	19
Tamil Nadu	7	7	19	24	14
Uttar Pradesh	12	21	26	25	21
Uttaranchal	–	–	–	34	34
West Bengal	20	32	47	46	36

Source: [National Election Study – 1996 (Sample Size 9613), National Election Study – 1998 (Sample Size 8133), National Election Study – 1999 (Sample Size 9418), National Elections Study – 2004 (Sample Size 27004)].

Among the participants, two-thirds identify with some party, over one-fourth dislike a particular party, a little less than one-fourth (22 per cent) are members of some political party. Among those who participated in election campaign activity, almost one-fourth (24 per cent) are also members of some cultural or social organisation.

However, in spite of the increase in political mobilisation based on caste and community identities, membership of caste-based or religious organisations is still very low (only over 3 per cent of the total and 6 per cent among the campaigners). These findings suggest that 'campaign participants' are really involved in politics and are not just casual or accidental campaigners. Besides, these details also introduce us to an interesting fact: that the participatory norm may actually be becoming stable, widespread and significant in the political process. If democratic politics is about investing 'agency', then our data suggest that ordinary Indians may just be undergoing the process of transformation from the role of client-recipient-spectator of the political game to being active participants, or at least ringside referees of that game.

With many other changes in Indian politics, one change also noticeable is that in the patterns of election campaign, which is becoming more and more media-driven. This is to say that most of the political parties rely heavily on both electronic and print media for election campaign. This is what was witnessed during the 2004 Lok Sabha elections. The two important political parties, Congress and BJP, depended heavily on the media. The effort was to send the message of the parties through interviews, press briefings, press conferences and debates in both the print and electronic media. Though a large number of voters could not be contacted thus, among the educated urban middle class this campaign through the media seemed to have worked a bit. People who watch news on television or read newspapers frequently are slightly more interested in political activities compared with others. Interest in the campaign increases as exposure to media increases. Among respondents with high exposure, 55 per cent were interested in the campaign. Predictably, interest in the campaign was high among the educated, among upper-income groups and among men. However, defying other factors, a high proportion of adivasis (almost 45 per cent) were interested in the campaign, followed by the upper castes (over 43 per cent). Interest in public affairs is also mainly restricted to the well-educated, upper income, upper caste, and urban voters.

Following from this, association with political parties is also high among the educated, upper-income sections. However, equal proportions of respondents from rural and urban areas are members of a political party (14 per cent). Almost one-fifth of the upper OBCs are party members, followed by the adivasis (15 per cent). More than membership of a party, negative identification is a stronger indication of political affiliation. One would therefore expect very few people from only specific sections to openly dislike a political party. However, the increasingly cleavage-based politics in the country has produced sharp polarities. This is not restricted to any particular section; every section looks up on some party as adversarial. Thus, while one-fifth of Hindus say that they dislike some party, more than 21 per cent Muslims also admit to this. Except adivasis, among whom only 13 per cent say that they dislike a party, among other caste groups, this proportion is between 18 (lower OBCs) and 22 per cent (upper castes). Rather than political participation, this has more to do

with sectional parties, which represent one social section and in the process, become unacceptable to others.

In order to identify who constitute the most active and involved citizens on political indicators, we constructed an index of political interest and activity and tried to capture a class of active citizens. Less than 9 per cent are at least nominally politically active. Further, only a small group of 3 per cent is high on the political activity index.¹

Table 10 gives us an idea about the composition of this group of active participants. While religion and locality do not make much difference, our typical activists come mostly from the educated, upper class backgrounds and they are mostly from the OBCs or upper and intermediate castes. Exclusion of women, dalits and adivasis is another feature of this group.

III Conclusions

Three broad conclusions can be drawn from our review on political participation and involvement.

Firstly, voter turnout has remained at robust levels. The 1990s may have brought about two improvements. One was the overall increase in turnout, and the other was the change in the composition of the voters. Both these may be seen as gains in terms of the consolidation of the democratic norm. As we enter the next decade, these gains have remained more or less stable, but have not expanded further. Perhaps it may be worthwhile to caution ourselves about the possibility of the reversal of these trends. This won't happen through a decline of turnout among the less privileged sections, but through a reassertion by the more privileged sections. The 1990s saw the women, dalits, adivasis, and OBCs relying more and more on the vote as an instrument of democratic assertion. Now, if the men, upper castes, and upper and middle classes also employ the vote as their counter-weapon, then the 'democratic upsurge' of the 1990s may recede in the years to come. Secondly, data suggests that the participatory trend is showing a significant increase. From 1996 to 2004, more and more people are getting interested in elections and are participating in campaign activity at least at the minimum level. This has two implications. One is that this trend indicates the expansion of the participatory norm. The secular growth of participation and involvement in elections enables us to project that the 'democratic upsurge' in this respect is likely to continue and perhaps become stronger. A staggered schedule of assembly and Lok Sabha elections contributes to this trend. Instead of producing the so-called electoral fatigue, it has helped people in getting more exposure to politics and consequently a greater sense of

Table 10: Active Citizens among Social Sections
(Per cent)

Social Section	Proportion of Active Citizens
Rural	4
Urban	3
Male	5
Female	1
Poor	3
Rich	4
Hindu	4
Muslim	3
SC/ST	3
OBC	4
Upper caste	4
Primary school pass	2
More than primary education	5

Source: National Election Study – 2004; Weighted data set.

intimacy with and control over the political process. At the same time, the expansion of the participatory norm also underlines the legitimacy of the endeavour called electoral politics. There are many possible criticisms of the electoral political process as it unfolds in India. And yet, defying cynical rejections of elections, people seek to make the most out of them. People are trying to convert electoral politics into a minimal insurance against non-democratic political options. This can be a valuable input in the elitist debate over electoral reform. Nobody would deny the limitations of our electoral process. However, the base line is that this same electoral process gives people a sense of power. In other words, in spite of all the limitations of the electoral process, people have succeeded in instituting their own democratic meaning in this process.

Thirdly, a careful reading of the data from the series of election studies (NES '96, '98, '99 and '04) also alerts us to the limitations of this expansion of the participatory norm. While, as noted in the discussion of the 'democratic upsurge', some democratisation of the profile of voters has taken place, this process has not necessarily penetrated participation in campaign-related activity. Thus, we have a paradox here. Diversification of voters is not matched by a broadening of the social base of participants and the active citizens. Active participants are still from the more privileged sections of society. Education and class are the determinants of who will be the participants in politics and who will be the more involved citizens. However, in one respect, some advance has taken place. In the group of active participants, the OBCs have forced their entry. But we still find that dalits, adivasis, poor and women are mostly outside the threshold of active politics. This makes our political activity extremely biased towards the 'established'. In fact, this limitation must be seen as a counter-balance to the trend mentioned above: more and more people participate in politics, but that does not *automatically* ensure entry of the less privileged sections into the political process. 

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Note

1 Index of political participation has been formed on the basis of responses for many questions about involvement in election-related and other political activities. In total, responses for 10 questions were taken into account for this index. These were questions on interest in election campaign, participation in campaign-related activities like participation in election meetings, distributing leaflets, making political donations or contributions, general interest in politics, any party which people like, membership of any political party and membership of other organisations other than political party. Based on answers to these questions, a sum of scores was tabulated, which gave the maximum score of 22 from that of a minimum score of 10. The respondents were classified into four groups; those with score between 10 and 12 were classified as occasional participants, those with scores of 13 to 15 were classified as irregular participants, those with scores of 16 to 18 were regarded as regular participants and finally those with scores of more than 19 were considered as active participants.

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