

India: The juggernaut has crashed

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There isn't just one big story in the Delhi election; there are two. The first is the staggering victory of the Aam Aadmi Party, which polled 54.3 percent of the vote, even higher than the Janata Party's 52.6 percent in the landmark post-Emergency "wave" of 1977. No party outside Sikkim has ever matched AAP's Delhi seat-score of 95.7 percent.

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The second, perhaps more important, story is the rout of the BJP, in particular of Narendra Modi. Modi and his loyal accomplice-acolyte Amit Shah staked their all in the election, initially designed to capitalise on Modi's "charisma". Their strategy followed the recipe perfected for their Lok Sabha victory: polarise voters on caste, class and religious lines (by inciting anti-Muslim violence as in Muzaffarnagar); appeal to crass Hindu-supremacism, sectarian identities and jingoism; hype up the skewed, inequality-enhancing "Gujarat model" to win upper-caste-upper-class elite votes; and run a super-saturation-level corporate-funded campaign.

They should have known better: post-May, the strategy has produced diminishing returns in 50 by-elections, and more importantly, in the Maharashtra, Haryana, Jharkhand and Jammu and Kashmir assembly elections. In Maharashtra, the BJP, aiming to win a majority, spurned an alliance with the Shiv Sena, but had to crawl back to it. In Jharkhand, its score plummeted from 12 out of 14 Lok Sabha seats to 37 out of 81 assembly seats. In Kashmir, the boastful "Plan 44+" failed.

Finally, in Delhi, Modi's charisma proved decisively non-existent. So Modi-Shah roped in Kiran Bedi, and drafted the Union Cabinet, 120 MPs, and one lakh RSS volunteers into the campaign. Yet, the BJP was comprehensively humiliated. At work here weren't local or campaign-specific factors, but much larger ones, including Modi's nationally declining popularity.

Let's face it: the "Modi Magic" isn't working. Not only has he failed to live up to his promise of "less government, more governance", higher growth, and more jobs—a hugely important (if chimerical) lure deceptively propagated during the April-May campaign. All of Modi's big-ticket schemes including "Swachh Bharat", Jan Dhan Yojana and "smart cities" amount to empty sloganeering.

Worse, Modi is increasingly seen as pro-rich, elitist—the Rs 10-lakh suit will haunt him worse than 'India Shining' did the BJP—and anti-poor. His government has savagely cut the National Rural Employment Guarantee budget, and is preparing to severely restrict the Public Distribution System for food. Its new land acquisition ordinance is unabashedly pro-corporate and meant to displace millions of farmers without public hearings, and social or environmental impact assessment. It has already had a negative impact in outer Delhi.

Delhi's poor and dispossessed punished Modi by overwhelmingly voting for AAP, which strongly supports pro-poor measures. They were joined in significant numbers by Dalits (15 percent-plus of the population), Muslims (11 percent), and a melange of social groups, many of whom feel revolted

by the hysterical anti-minority hate-speech, ghar-wapsi and Godse-worship campaigns launched by the Sangh Parivar with a wink from the top bosses, including Modi. There's a growing realisation that this isn't the "lunatic fringe" of the BJP; it's the BJP itself.

Delhi will have a major national impact — not least because that's where the Modi juggernaut was halted, and where it crashed. Bihar will be the first test of the BJP's decline if Nitish and Lalu hold together. AAP is bound to grow in other states. But it must make critical decisions, and wisely: how to reflect its constituency's diversity and manifesto's promises in ideology/programme/policy including secularism; how to expand its political vision; and how to fight jointly with other forces that advance its cause and help reshape India. These decisions will determine its near-term future.

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<http://www.prafulbidwai.org/index.php?post/2015/02/13/The-juggernaut-hasn%E2%80%99t-only-be-en-halted%2C-it-has-crashed>