

**State Assembly Elections in India-2011:
West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Kerala**

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Abstract

The governments which worked are getting rewarded by being voted back to power, while those with poor record on developmental work have got the beating from the people. It is a clear indication that people instead of rhetoric, want 'economic growth' and 'good governance.' They have begun to measure their economic gain when they are in the process of selecting a political party and pressing the button at the polling booth. This is a good sign of further strengthening democratic process in India.

Key words: State, India, elections, alliances, party

The results of the five Assembly elections, held in April-May 2011 gave many a surprises. The most striking result was in West Bengal, where the CPI (M)-led Left Front, which had been in office for a record 34 straight years, crumbled under the political assault of the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress- Congress alliance. This was more than mere anti-incumbency. The important message of these elections was that politicians can no longer take people for a ride. Except Assam, the results were dismal for the Congress as it suffered losses in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry and with a thin majority in Kerala. The BJP has much to ponder over the results of these elections as it fared badly everywhere. The writing on the wall was clear that voters discard the parties which do not address the fundamental concerns of the people. One of the important points in, these elections has been the proactive role of the Election Commission of India in containing the misuse of money power and official machinery by the incumbent parties.

West Bengal:

The 15th West Bengal Assembly elections were held on April 18 to May 10 in six phases. These elections recorded nearly 85 per cent polling which was highest ever in the state. The stage was set for a straight fight between the incumbent Left Front, and the TMC-Congress alliance. The BJP contested the elections alone. Going by the trend witnessed during the 2009 Lok Sabha

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elections, the subsequent elections for local bodies and bye-elections, the outcomes for the Assembly elections were on expected lines. By winning 227 out of a total of 294 seats, the TMC-Congress combine reduced the Left Front to mere 62 seats. Although the Mamata Banerjee led alliance got a decisive lead of nearly 7% over the LF in terms of vote share, the Left Front still managed to secure 41% of total votes polled (Special Statistics..., 2011: 142).

The loss for the LF was less in rural areas, however, it suffered a lot in the semi-urban and urban constituencies (Nayyar, 2011). Though the TMC alliance was ahead of the LF even in rural constituencies, but its lead was less in rural constituencies compared to urban constituencies. The punitive nature of the vote can be gauged from the fact that almost the entire council of ministers was wiped out. Bhattacharjee became the first CM since 1967 to lose his seat in the assembly (*The Tribune*, 2011, May 16). All over West Bengal, lightweight candidates, often first time contestants, defeated high-profile, heavyweight Left Front leaders (Patnaik, 2011: 14). The Congress won 42 seats, increasing its tally by 21 since 2006. However there was a decline in its vote share. It was mainly due to the fact that while in 2006, it contested on almost all seats as it has no alliance with any other party. However in 2011, it contested a large chunk of seats to its major alliance partner, i.e., the TMC.

Table-I: The West Bengal Assembly Elections: 2011

Party	Seats Won		Gain/ Loss in Seats	Vote %age		Gain/ Loss in Vote %age
	2006	2011		2006	2011	
CPI	08	02	-06	1.91	1.84	-0.07
CPI (M)	176	40	-136	37.13	30.08	-7.05
All India Trinamool Congress	30	184	+154	26.64	38.93	+12.29
Congress	21	42	+21	14.71	9.08	-5.63
BJP	-	-	-	1.93	4.06	+2.13
Independents & Others	59	26	-33	17.68	16.01	-1.67
Total	294	294		100	100	

Source: Compiled from the Reports of Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

Mamata Banerjee's win was taken mainly as a response to the failures of the Left Front government, i.e., the anti-incumbency factor. Her agitation in Singur, which forced Tata Motors to shift its prestigious small car project from the State, and the state repression in Nandigram in a movement against land

acquisition, gave her a new lease of political life. She came to be seen as a protector of poor farmers (Sen, 2011: 62). It was rightly observed that the defeat of the Left Front, is not just due to the peasant disaffection with its recent efforts at the land acquisition, but more due to widely and intensely resented all-pervasive and oppressive party control over all aspects of local life (Chattopadhyay, 2011: 16). The prevalence of a non-governmental 'bureaucracy' alienated the masses from the Left Front government. Like former Soviet Union, the party bosses, from state to local levels, dictated terms even in day to day matters of government administration. The appointments and promotions in colleges and universities, directly orchestrated from the party office in Alimuddin Street and screened for party loyalty, decimated Bengal's long-enjoyed advantage in academic, intellectual and professional pursuits (Bardhan, 2011: 54). Broadly speaking, the Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee- led Left Front government was attributed to be failing in maintaining law and order (particularly in tackling Maoist menace), or to rein in the cadres or instill some discipline in government employees, policemen, trade unions and teachers, each dominated by party cadres.

Added to these were the atrocities of the Left Front government, discrimination, misgovernance, weak contact with the people and stagnation in the state. On many counts, the people of West Bengal were fed up with the Left Front government. The greatest failing of the CPI (M) was in ruining the state's industries through militant trade unionism (Gupta, 2011). The growing unemployment disillusioned the youth with the Left government. The only jobs created were government and Panchayat jobs, which were distributed almost entirely amongst party cadres. The ideological rigidity of Marxists and Local aggrandisement with the gradual conflation of party and state have brought nemesis (Chattopadhyay, 2011: 17). Another factor for the Left's loss has been its inability to win back its minority vote base, especially Muslims, which has eroded over the years (*Hindustan Times*, 2011: May 16). And, above all, it goes without saying that the Left government could not evolve realistic and pragmatic economic policies, particularly in the era of liberalisation. The CPI (M)'s land reforms of yesteryears were no longer sufficient enough to keep farmers' support intact for the party (Verghese, 2011, May 18). The situation in the state had worsened so much so that state's public debt spiraled up to a record high of Rs. two lakh crores.

Now that the Trinamool has won on the platform of *poribarton* [change], the new government will have to live up to the aspirations for change inspired by the party. The popular expectations can be summed up in the following order of priorities: (i) immediate restoration of the much-needed peace in the countryside— which had been ravaged by years of violent intimidation by power-hungry local CPI(M) leaders and cadres; (ii) end to the prevailing

corruption in the operations of the public distribution system, the panchayati administration, and the centrally-sponsored schemes like the rural employment programmes; and (iii) a reconstruction of West Bengal's economy and society on the basis of provision of jobs, guarantee of social justice, and delivery of civic services (Banerjee, 2011: 15).

Assam:

The 13th Assembly elections in the north-eastern state of Assam were held in two phases from April 4 to 11. The state recorded an overall turnout of 76.03 per cent. The ruling Congress scored a hat-trick with its landslide victory by winning 78 of a total of 126 seats. It was the biggest win ever for any party in the state since 1972. The outcome has enabled Tarun Gogoi to script history by becoming the second politician after Bimala Prasad Chalia to head the state for a third consecutive term (Talukdar, 2011: 131). Its ally, the Bodoland People's Front (BPF), won 12 seats this time, increasing its tally by one since 2006. The two major opposition parties, the AGP and the BJP, suffered a humiliating defeat. The two Left parties- the CPI (M) and the CPI- drew a blank this time. The hopes of the AIUDF and the BPF of becoming kingmakers were shattered by the huge victory of the Congress (Bora, 2011, May 14). Despite gaining majority on its own, the Congress decided to stick to form government in alliance with the BPF.

Table-II: The Assam Assembly Elections: 2011

Party	Seats Won		Gain/ Loss in Seats	Vote %age		Gain/ Loss in Vote %age
	2006	2011		2006	2011	
Congress	53	78	+25	31.07	39.38	+8.31
AGP	24	10	-14	20.39	16.30	-4.09
BJP	10	05	-05	11.98	11.46	-0.52
AIUDF	09	18	+09	9.03	12.58	+3.55
BPF	11	12	+01	9.22	6.14	-3.08
CPI	01	-	-01	1.02	0.52	-0.50
CPI (M)	02	-	-02	1.43	1.13	-0.30
Independents and Others	16	03	-13	15.86	12.49	-3.37
Total	126	126		100	100	

Source: Compiled from the Reports of Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

The Congress government's policy to take the party closer to the common people, especially those from rural areas and from the lower income bracket,

apparently paid rich dividends to the party. The development works, such as, the construction of roads and bridges, the accent on health and education, welfare measures for the poor, farmers, weavers and all marginalized sections of society went down well with the people (Gahilote, 2011, May 23). The freebies, distributed by the Congress coalition government through the panchayats, also won it the support of a large section of the electorate. While the Congress reached out to rural as well as urban voters effectively, the opposition parties' campaign was mostly media-centric and, therefore, could not go beyond urban voters.

The poll results reflected that the people of Assam still did not pardon the regional AGP's misrule during 1996-2001 when the economy of the state was in the doldrums, while the law and order situation was worst at that time (Special Statistics..., 201: 132). The Gogoi government's achievements in tackling insurgency in the state by bringing in many insurgent groups, including the ULFA, to the negotiation table, coupled with improving law and order situation in the state during the last ten years also had a great impact on the people.

Another important factor behind the massive victory of the Congress was its ability to attract a large number of first-time voters and women voters by fielding new and young faces and also women candidates (Goswami, 2011: 21). On the other hand, the AGP instead of giving chances to young leaders, preferred to field old horses, which had already been rejected by the people in the 2001 and the 2006 Assembly elections (Karmkar, 2011, May 14). Besides, the hobnobbing of the AGP with the AIUDF pushed a large section of the Assamese-speaking electorate, who perceived the AIUDF as the champion of Bengali-speaking immigrant Muslim settlers, towards the Congress. Gogoi refused to go along with AIUDF despite rising calls to do so from within his party. Instead, he preferred to forge an electoral tie-up with small regional formations, like the BPF (Deka, 2011: 29). Also, by adopting a soft anti-migrant policy, the Congress was successful in making a dent in AGP's vote bank. Gogoi's strategy of not playing the politics of minority appeasement has paid him rich dividends (Merchant, 2011, May 23).

The division of votes among the opposition parties also helped the ruling coalition. The AGP and the BJP failed to make any impact in the election because the entire opposition failed to forge an alliance to present a viable alternative before the people. Hence, the people voted for the Congress in the hope of getting a stable government (Karmkar, 2011, May 15). Evidently, the corruption charges, levelled against Gogoi had neither stuck nor manifested into votes. Rabid electioneering by the BJP, with leaders like Varun Gandhi and Narendra Modi, led the minority voters to the Congress camp. Besides,

infighting within the party over ticket distribution served as added impediments for the BJP.

In the ultimate analysis, it may be interpreted as a verdict of the people for stability and continuance of the developmental work started under the leadership of Tarun Gogoi. They could not rely on the alternative that was available. Perhaps, for these and for many other reasons the voters voted for a status quo.

Tamil Nadu:

The 14th Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu held on April 13, witnessed high participation as nearly 78 per cent of a total electorate turned up to vote. The real contest in these elections was between the two grand, but shifting, alliances led by the incumbent DMK and the AIADMK (Special Statistics..., 2011, June 18:138). In this bi-polar contest, the AIADMK-led alliance swept back to power after five years by winning 203 out of 234 seats. The AIADMK won 150 of the 160 seats it contested. It had the majority to form the government on its own. Its important electoral allies, the DMDK, the CPI (M) and the CPI, also registered resounding victories. The AIADMK's minor allies, too, did well, than their previous performance. The DMK suffered an ignominious defeat as it could win only 23 of the 119 seats it contested. Pathetic was the performance of the Congress, a major alliance partner of the DMK-led front. The Congress, which wangled 63 seats from the DMK after a bitter feud, just won five seats, recording its worst performance in Assembly elections in the State. The other allies of the DMK, like PMK, VCK, KNMK, also suffered humiliating defeats. The electoral wave in favour of the AIADMK alliance was so complete that it pushed the DMK-led alliance to the margins in all types of constituencies- be reserved for Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes and rural or urban constituencies (Subramanian, 2011, May 30: 20).

Table-III: The Tamil Nadu Assembly Elections: 2011

Party	Seats Won		Gain/ Loss in Seats	Vote %age		Gain/ Loss in Vote %age
	2006	2011		2006	2011	
AIADMK	61	150	+89	32.64	38.4	+5.76
DMDK	01	29	+28	8.40	7.90	-0.50
CPI (M)	09	10	+01	2.65	2.40	-0.25
CPI	06	09	+03	1.61	2.10	+0.49
DMK	96	23	-73	26.46	22.50	-3.96
Congress	34	05	-29	8.38	9.30	+0.92
BJP	-	-	-	2.0	2.60	+0.60
Independents & Others	27	08	-19	17.86	14.8	-3.06
Total	234	234		100	100	

Source: Compiled from the Reports of Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

While it was expected that the AIADMK-led alliance would emerge victorious because voters everywhere in Tamil Nadu chanted for “a change” [of government], surprisingly the AIADMK cadre itself would not have imagined the victory to be so decisive. The near 12 per cent vote difference between the AIADMK and the DMK alliances showed the extent of voters anger against the incumbent party. The very important factor underlying the AIADMK sweep was its ability to stitch a winning alliance, in particular, with the DMDK. The transfer of Dalit votes to the AIADMK-led alliance also worked for the success of the AIADMK and its allies (Krishna, 201, May 30: 23).

The election results knocked out the belief of the DMK leaders that they could win elections by bribing voters with cash. If cash for votes played an important role in the DMK candidates' victory in the previous elections, the Election Commission's proactive attitude stemmed the flow of money to a large extent this time (Subramanian, 2011, May 21-June 3: 20). Despite the DMK government's many welfare measures, the party was not able to return to office. 'Subsidies through welfare schemes that were attractive in the initial years are now perceived as a pittance' (Raj, 2011, May 30: 26). Inflation and rising prices were certainly very important reasons for disillusionment with the DMK. Irrespective of whether the price rise was an outcome of national policy or an international phenomenon, the responsibility was evidently fixed on the state government (Jeyaranjan and Vijayabaskar, 2011, May 28: 14). In addition, the three-year-long power crisis that affected mills, industries, hospitals and agriculture also made people angry. Distribution of free television sets or the promise of mixies and grinders in the absence of access to electricity cannot be an attractive proposition for long.

The 2G scam in which former Union Minister for telecommunications, A. Raja of the DMK had played a major role also weighed heavily on voters' minds. The relationship between the DMK-Congress alliance had become strained after Prime Minister Manmohan Singh demanded and obtained Raja's resignation in November 2010 for his alleged involvement in the 2G scam. The relationship between two parties strained further, during the seat-sharing negotiations, which cost a lot to the alliance (Lakshmana, 2011, May 15). The top Congress leadership had been warned that the continuation of alliance with the DMK would be "suicidal" and lead to "a wash-out" (Ravikumar, 2011, May 14). And, that is exactly what happened.

Besides it, the arrogance of several of DMK's ministers was another important reason for the defeat of the DMK. The voters were also fed up with the overweening domination of Karunanidhi's family members in various spheres—in politics, film distribution, television channels, print media, FM radio channels, textiles, furniture business, and so on. They were disenchanted with the unseemly sibling rivalry between M.K. Alagiri, the Union Chemicals and Fertilizers Minister, and Stalin, Alagiri's younger brother (Letter, 2011, June 4: 5).

One keen observer had rightly observed that, "In Tamil Nadu, as in many states of India, it is not opposition political parties that win elections. It is the ruling parties that lose due to their failure to perform as per the expectations of the people." The Tamil Nadu voters showed that they were not going to mistake welfare largesse for good administration and that cash-for-votes could not bribe them to overlook the misappropriation of state resources and aggrandisement by the political leaders (Editorial, 2011, May 28: 9). What the people want today is performance, which the Karunanidhi government lacked.

Puducherry:

The AINRC-AIADMK alliance made a spectacular victory by securing a two-third majority in the Assembly elections held on April 13, in the coastal UT of smaller Puducherry. It was successful in putting an end to the twelve continuous years of the Congress rule. It was a sweet revenge for N.R.Rangasamy, who floated his own outfit, after resigning from the Congress in January 2011, as he was removed as chief minister in face of revolt against his leadership in 2008. The newly formed AINRC emerged as the largest single party by winning 15 seats. Its main ally, the AIADMK got five seats. The CPI, the CPI (M) and the DMDK, which were part of AINRC- led alliance, however, drew a blank. The ruling Congress suffered a shock defeat as it could win only seven seats. The plight of its ally, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), was even worse. It was able to retain only two of the 10

seats it contested. As for other smaller parties, the PMK lost both the seats it contested and VCK tasted defeat in the lone seat it was allocated (Dorairaj, 2011, May 21-June 3: 133).

Table-IV: The Puducherry Assembly Elections: 2011

Party	Seats Won		Gain/ Loss in Seats	Vote %age		Gain/ Loss in Vote %age
	2006	2011		2006	2011	
Congress	10	07	-03	29.91	26.53	-3.38
DMK	07	02	-05	12.59	10.68	-1.91
AIADMK	03	05	+02	16.04	13.75	-2.29
AINRC	-	15	+15	-	31.75	+31.75
CPI	01	-	-01	3.06	0.94	-2.12
Independents & Others	09	01	-08	38.4	16.35	-22.05
Total	30	30		100		

Source: Compiled from the Reports of Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

It was observed that leaders of the Congress-DMK camp underestimated the strength and winnability of the AINRC. Their argument that the Union Territory depended on the Union government for funds for welfare schemes and development works, which was possible only “by a Congress government”, cut no ice with voters (*The Hindu*, 2011, May 14). Even the combined efforts of the Congress President, Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, and also Kalaingar M. Karunanidhi campaigning for the Congress-DMK alliance, could not catch the attention of people (*Hindustan Times*, 2011, May 16). It was for the first time that the main contenders vied with one another in promising freebies to woo voters. But the electorates gave a verdict against the attempts to use populism as a measure to overcome flak for corruption and misgovernance.

Kerala:

The 14th Assembly elections in Kerala, held on April 13, witnessed nearly 75 per cent turn out. As in the last three decades, the main contest was between two main fronts: the Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the United Democratic Front (UDF). However, the composition of the two fronts had undergone a slight change this time. The final outcome of the election followed a pattern of government alternation in every Assembly election held since 1980. The ruling LDF lost power to the opposition, the UDF (*Special Statistics...*, 2011, June 18: 135).

Unlike elections in the past three decades, the Congress-led United Democratic Front got only a wafer thin majority this time. It managed to secure just 72 seats in the 140-member Assembly, while the LDF's tally was 68 (Somanath, 2011, May 22: 13). The difference in vote-shares between the winning alliance, the UDF (45.8 per cent), and the runner up, the LDF (44.9 per cent), was less than one per cent of the total votes polled in the state. Never before has the state witnessed so narrow a margin in terms of votes (Rajendran, 2011, May 28: 11). Though the Congress was the leading party in the ruling coalition, it had only 38 members in the Assembly, less than the leading opposition party, the CPI (M), which had 45 (Mitra, 2011, April 4: 40). The Muslim League staged a big comeback by winning 20 out of 24 seats it contested. The KC (M) also performed better by winning nine seats. 'The dependence of Congress on the communal parties has increased after this election' (Radhakrishnan, 2011, May 30: 29). The BJP's hopes of opening its account in the Assembly did not materialize this time as well. The only consolation for the party was that its vote share in the state rose from 4.71 per cent to 6.2 per cent (Dasgupta, 2011, April 4: 40). Another interesting feature was the washout of some smaller parties. The independents could not get even a single seat.

Table-V: The Kerala Assembly Elections: 2011

Party	Seats Won		Gain/ Loss in Seats	Vote %age		Gain/ Loss in Vote %age
	2006	2011		2006	2011	
Congress	24	38	+14	24.09	26.71	+2.62
IUML	07	20	+13	7.30	8.24	+0.94
KC (M)	07	09	+02	3.26	4.70	+1.44
CPI (M)	61	45	-16	30.45	29.52	-0.93
CPI	17	13	-04	8.09	8.98	+0.89
Independents and others	24	15	-09	26.81	21.85	-4.96
Total	140	140		100	100	

Source: *Compiled from the Reports of Election Commission of India, New Delhi.*

The LDF had lost a significant ground in the 2009 Lok Sabha and 2010 local bodies elections. But its electoral prospects had improved considerably as the ire of people had cooled down (Devasia, 2011, May 14). The conviction of R. Balakrishna Pillai, irrigation minister in the former UDF government, by the Supreme Court in a corruption case filed by Achuthanandan came as a big jolt for the UDF. The involvement of the Muslim League leader Kunhalikutty in a sex scandal that surfaced in 1990's, also tarnished the image of the UDF

(Letters, 2011, June 4: 4). Though the UDF leaders alleged personal vendetta behind Achuthanandan's moves and accused him of having ulterior motives, but it failed to make an impact on the masses.

The Chief Minister's image as a crusader against corruption got a boost. Achuthanandan set out to turn the tide against his opponents. His popularity was evident in his campaign rallies, where thousands waited patiently to catch a glimpse of him. This was in sharp contrast to the campaign rallies of Sonia Gandhi and Rahul, which were noted for their poor attendance (Dasgupta, 2011, May 23: 27). It was noted that Rahul Gandhi's reference about Achuthanandan's old age during the campaign had a negative impact on the voters (Mohan, 2011, June).

Achuthanandan's performance as chief minister and his personal image was a positive factor for the LDF. It was observed that 'the same pattern holds for the ratings of the work done by the LDF government on specifics, such as, roads, water supply, electricity supply, condition of schools, hospitals and the law and order situation (Krishnakumar, 2011, May 21-June 3: 23).' The LDF government faced no major corruption scandals and performed well in the social sector. The neo-liberal reforms, resulting in large-scale land eviction, were haltingly slow in Kerala due to interventions from groups and persons including the chief minister. The management of the state's finances was creditworthy and there was no treasury closure during the previous five years. The growing discontent in the UDF camp over the Congress' 'big brother' attitude towards the smaller parties was a major factor that went against the front (*The Trinune*, 2011, May 14). There was rising factionalism, with the fear of ignored rebels contesting, and also the divide within the Congress on who will be the chief ministerial candidate. There were two front runners- Opposition leader, Oommen Chandy and KPCC president, Ramesh Chennithala, both of whom were contesting the polls (Dennis, 2011, June 18: 128). The determined effort made by the BJP to prove its strength in the state has also affected the UDF to a great extent. Though the BJP has not been able to achieve its objective of opening its account in the Assembly, the party has considerably improved its vote share in several seats. This affected the UDF all the more.

In spite of all these, the LDF lost by a narrow margin. Its failure in implementing many promises made during the election campaign in 2006, such as, action against price hike, land reforms in favour of the SCs and STs, industrial development, creation of job opportunities, education reforms to address the poor, etc, created a negative image for the LDF. The LDF government failed to resolve the issue related to the admission of students in self-financed colleges. The CPI (M)'s attempt in particular to undertake

reforms in the education system, and its strategy to forge alliances with perceived religious fundamentalist groups also created controversies, damaging the LDF's image as a secular party. The war within the party also cost a lot to the LDF. The LDF rule was plagued with constant bickerings among Pinarayi Vijayan and Achuthanandan. Also the Muslim and Christian vote banks proved crucial for the Congress-led front bagging a wafer-thin majority.

Conclusion:

The people of West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Assam and Puducherry gave decisive mandates to the parties of their choice in the Assembly elections. It was only in Kerala where the UDF trounced the rival LDF by a wafer-thin majority, raising doubts over stability. The electoral mandate was a balance for the UPA which wrested power in West Bengal and Kerala, retained it in Assam, while losing out in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. For its main constituent, the Congress, the results were more disappointing when compared with the 2009 Lok Sabha election results. The corruption scandals and misgovernance took away the Congress' advantage. It was only in Assam where the Congress scored a hat-trick with its landslide victory in the Assembly. While it was the minor partner of the TMC in West Bengal, in Kerala it was under pressure from powerful smaller parties, such as, the IUML and the KC (M).

The 2011 Assembly election results once again confirm the fact that the regional parties have come to dominate the politics in many Indian states. The Congress' regional allies, the Trinamool Congress, the IUML and the KC (M), have emerged stronger than the Congress after the 2011 round of Assembly elections. This is bound to make them more demanding and aggressive. The outcome has demonstrated the failure of the BJP, as out of over 800 Assembly seats, its figures remained in single digits. For the Left, it was a colossal setback, more so in West Bengal but also to a lesser extent in Kerala. This was not merely an electoral loss but a major defeat of a bastion. The Left has to introspect and rethink after this huge loss in West Bengal. The Left's defeat has buried the 'Third Front' idea for at least the current national election cycle.

One lesson of the 2011 Assembly elections is that the national parties must strike a balance between giving a state leader room to grow while enforcing its broad discipline over policies and personnel. It is pretty much evident now that, if you want to win a state, you must empower state leaders instead of depending on national leaders. With the win in Assam, Tarun Gogoi has joined the illustrious list of 'empowered chief ministers' who have been re-

elected more than once. If the CPI (M) had shown greater faith in the octogenarian Achuthanandan, the LDF would perhaps have won Kerala with ease. Mamata Banerjee, on her part, has proved how among other things, the individual charisma can uproot a regime of 34 years.

The 2011 Assembly election verdict also shown that in most states, the anti-incumbency factor played an important role, which was in contrast with the previous Assembly elections in Bihar, Orissa and Gujarat where incumbents were re-elected with resounding victory. It was only in Assam where people seemed to be satisfied with the performance of the Congress government and enabled Tarun Gogoi to head the state for a third consecutive term. It can be said that governance, based on a development agenda and efficient delivery of public service can become a determining factor in Indian politics in beating anti-incumbency factor and winning elections. The lesson is clear that any roll back or backtracking from the electoral promises would fuel popular wrath. The electorates gave a verdict against the attempts to use populism as a measure to overcome flak for corruption and misgovernance. It is a clear indication that people, instead of rhetoric, want 'economic growth' and 'good governance.' This is a good sign of further strengthening democratic process in India. These elections have shown that good governance pays rich dividends and parties have to deliver to get a positive response from voters.

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