



HAL
open science

Gujarat 2022 Elections: Explaining BJP's Hegemony

Christophe Jaffrelot, Mahesh Langa

► **To cite this version:**

Christophe Jaffrelot, Mahesh Langa. Gujarat 2022 Elections: Explaining BJP's Hegemony. *Studies in Indian politics*, 2023, 11 (1), pp.118-133. 10.1177/23210230231166454 . hal-04292055

HAL Id: hal-04292055

<https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-04292055>

Submitted on 12 Dec 2023

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

GUJARAT 2022 ELECTIONS : EXPLAINING BJP'S HEGEMONY

Christophe Jaffrelot, Sciences Po, Centre de recherches internationales (CERI), CNRS, Paris, France.

Mahesh Langa, *The Hindu*

In: *Studies in Indian politics*, 2023, 11 (1), pp.118-133.

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/23210230231166454>

In the 2022 Gujarat elections, the BJP won 156 seats out of 182, breaking the Congress party's record of winning 149 seats under Madhavsinh Solanki's stewardship in 1985 elections. With this historic victory, after the Left front in West Bengal, the BJP is the only party that has won seven consecutive elections in a state. No other party has been able to achieve this feat in the post Independent India.

While doing so, the BJP has reversed a trend that had started in 2007 and that had culminated ten years later: the erosion of the BJP's tally, which, between 2012 and 2017 dropped from 115 to 99, while the Congress increased its presence in the Vidhan Sabha from 61 seats to 77 (with the potential support of half a dozen NCP, JD(U) and independent allies in the assembly).¹ In 2017, while Congress could rely on a new Troika made of Hardik Patel (Patel), Alpesh Thakor (OBC) and Jignesh Mevani (Dalit), the BJP had been saved by its strong performance in large cities and their peripheries. The party had won 15 seats out of 20 in Ahmedabad, 9 out of 10 in Vadodara, and 15 out of 16 in the Surat area, whereas it did not do well at all in the countryside where the Congress prevailed. The BJP had lost ground across regions but particularly more so in Saurashtra, where it had lost 12 seats (from 35 in 2012). By contrast, the performance of the Congress had been pushed by its results in Saurashtra, a region where the agricultural crisis resulting from the low price of cotton, groundnuts and other products has fuelled peasant's distress, particularly among the Patels. The Congress doubled its number of seats compared to 2012 (30 against 16), winning that subregion for the first time in years. All these trends have been reversed in 2022, as evident from table 1.

Table 1: Vote shares of the main parties (in % and number of seats)

Party	2002	2007	2012	2017	2022
BJP	49.8 (127)	49 (117)	48 (115)	49.1 (99)	52.5 (156)
Congress	39 (51)	38 (59)	39 (61*)	41.4 (77)	27.3 (17)
GPP	-	-	3.6 (2)	-	-

¹ Christophe Jaffrelot and Gilles Verniers, "Reading Gujarat verdict: Rural-urban divide underlined, Congress gains for future", *The Indian Express*, 19 Dec. 2017 (<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/reading-gujarat-assembly-elections-verdict-rural-urban-divide-underlined-congress-gains-for-future-bjp-4988810/>).

Party	2002	2007	2012	2017	2022
AAP	-	-	-	0.1 (0)	12.9 (5)

Source: Election Commission of India

* The two seats won by the NCP may be added to the 61 Congress seats. Source: Election Commission of India and Election Commission of India statistical report of 2012 Gujarat Assembly election²

Certainly, the BJP's score is still below 50 % of the valid votes in the rural constituencies (47.65% to be precise) and the more urban the voters are, the more BJP-oriented they also are: the party gets 54.42% of the valid votes in the semi-urban constituencies and 63,23% in the urban ones. But this is not a big issue for its leaders because Gujarat is more and more urbanised and Congress has not made progress in any of these categories of seats. If its score in rural constituencies is ten percentage points above its scores in the urban ones, both remain very low – respectively 30.16 and 20.65 %. Similarly, Saurashtra is the only province where BJP has won less than 50% of the votes (49.21), but Congress has done much more badly this time with 26.57%.

Table 2: Vote share of the main parties by region in 2022

Party	Saurashtra	North Gujarat	Central Gujarat	South Gujarat
BJP	49.2	52.8	53	56
Congress	26.6	32.6	27.7	21
APP	17.85	7.4	10	17.5
Others	6.4	7.2	9.3	5.5

Source: Election Commission of India

The results of the 2022 Gujarat elections can be partly explained by the entry of a new opposition party, AAP. But this new factor accounts only *for the magnitude* of the defeat of Congress and the victory of BJP. The former lost also because of its weaknesses and the former because of its strengths – which tend to transform the ruling party into a structural, majoritarian hegemon.

². Available online at: http://eci.nic.in/eci_main/StatisticalReports/SE_2012/Reports_Index%20Card_ECIAApplication_GujaratState_CEO.pdf

A historic victory largely due to triangular contests

While the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) had already contested the last Gujarat state elections in 2017, the party leaders invested much more time, energy and money in the 2022 ones. First of all, they started their campaign early. After winning Punjab assembly polls in March 2022, AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal turned his attention on Gujarat where he landed with his Punjab counterpart Bhagwant Mann to launch his party's campaign. From March onwards, Kejriwal and his deputy Manish Sisodia came to different parts of the state raising local issues and showcasing its Delhi-Punjab governance model to the voters of Gujarat.

The party led a spirited fight and efficiently articulated concerns like poor quality of education and health, which remained neglected under the BJP regimes, promising free electricity, monthly cash allowance to women and unemployed youth, discarding contractual system in the government staff, ending fixed pay etc. Its messaging enthused many voters spread across various castes and communities, young and old and the party became a political force within no time.

Ironically, the AAP and its leaders attempted to expose the famed Gujarat model of the BJP but at the ground level it targeted the core vote block of the opposition Congress through its high decibel campaign, announcing sops like free power, setting up of neighbourhood health clinics, overhauling the state run schools etc.

Through its creative campaigns digital and offline with Kejriwal holding Townhall meetings in all districts, the AAP was able to draw a section of the youth from the 18-35 years age bracket. Unemployment allowance, free power, better health and education and 'Ek Mauka AAP Ko' (One chance to AAP) or Ek Mauka Kejriwal Ne (One chance to Kejriwal) resonated with the masses.

Kejriwal's campaign model also looked fascinating on the ground as its multi-pronged approach often rattled the ruling party.

For example, his deputy Manish Sisodia visited a few rural schools in Gujarat and live streamed from there to show the pathetic conditions of the rural school infrastructure in BJP's model state.

The AAP's focused campaign around schools forced the ruling party to pay attention to otherwise completely neglected education sector where the state run schools are in shambles and mass vacancies of teachers, extremely low quality of education and shoddy infrastructure³.

Another approach of Kejriwal's campaign was to visit temples, not make any mention of the concerns of the minorities. During the course of campaign, he visited temples in Somnath,

³ Mahesh Langa, "Sisodia ups ante, slams 'Gujarat education model'", *The Hindu*, 11 April 2022 (<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/sisodia-ups-ante-slams-gujarat-education-model/article65311987.ece>).

Dwarka, Rajkot, Surat and many other places in order to make his appeal stronger in the state where the Hindutva led majoritarian politics is an overriding factor.

In many speeches, he had asked the voters if BJP ever took anyone on pilgrimage to Ayodhya where the Ram temple is being built. “Did the BJP ever send anyone to Ayodhya for pilgrimage in the last 27 years from Gujarat?” Mr Kejriwal had asked and added that a poor old woman from Gujarat had expressed her desire to visit the temple in Ayodhya:

“I told her that we must all pray that we get to form the government in the state and we shall send her and others to Ayodhya in an AC train and put her up in a AC hotel and show her Lord Ram’s birthplace in Ayodhya.”⁴

Moreover, During the campaign, AAP targeted different socio-economic strata and communities or castes in a bid to create a base in the state which has mostly seen bipolar contests in last few decades. It also targeted the urban poor through its freebies and track record of the Delhi-Punjab model. It promised ease in GST and VAT refunds to attract small traders and free power to farmers and poor, cash transfer to women and free pilgrimage to elders.

The party projected itself to be an alternative to both the BJP and the Congress. “Both the Congress and the BJP are partners in crime in Gujarat for the last 27 years. AAP is the honest alternative that Gujarat is awaiting,” Kejriwal told reporters during his Gujarat visit in June.

In all, since March to December 2022, Arvind Kejriwal visited 25 out of 33 districts of the state, addressed over two dozen Townhall meetings across the state, held as many roadshows and addressed around 80 public rallies.

Like PM Modi, Kejriwal became a household name and his image enjoyed certain popularity among the masses cutting across the class and caste lines. From riding an auto rickshaw to visiting schools and temples and announcing sops for different constituencies, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had taken the ruling BJP head-on in Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s native State Gujarat⁵.

To counter BJP and Modi who fought the polls on the issues of national security and invoked time-tested Hindu-Gujarati pride and identity, the AAP and Kejriwal were equally walking the same path with its Tiranga Yatra and Kejriwal’s call to put the photos of goddesses on Indian currency bills.

⁴ Mahesh Langa, “Eye on votes, Kejriwal visits Somnath temple”, *The Hindu*, 26 July 2022 (<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/eye-on-votes-kejriwal-visits-somnath-temple/article65686672.ece>).

⁵ Mahesh Langa, “Kejriwal attempts to make a mark in poll-bound Gujarat”, *The Hindu*, 13 Sept. 2022 (<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/kejriwal-takes-on-bjp-in-gujarat-with-polls-around-the-corner/article65885348.ece>).

In fact, the campaigns of BJP and AAP revolved around their top leaders Narendra Modi and Aravind Kejriwal respectively, making them the faces of the party campaign in the state⁶.

The major drawback of the party, however, was that it did not have any leader and its base remained superficial with voters who were fed up with the BJP and but did not see Congress as an alternative to the BJP got attracted to the new party.

Its two main leaders were Gopal Italia, a Patidar from Saurashtra, who was a Police constable and had risen to fame when he threw a show at the then home minister Pradipsinh Jadeja and Isudan Gadhvi, a popular TV anchor whose anti-government news shows on a local Gujarati news channel VTV made him a force particularly among farmers and rural communities in Saurashtra region. Gadhvi was also declared as the CM candidate of the party. However, both lost the polls.

Note that, if AAP was a new comer in Gujarat politics, it did not bring any fresh air from the point of view of corruption – an old motto of Kejriwal before he joined politics: 61 of the party’s 181 candidates declared criminal cases against them according to the Association for Democratic Reforms⁷.

Mukt Congress Gujarat?

By contrast to AAP, the main opposition party, Congress, was very discrete. Throughout the campaign, the party was fighting to lose the polls. It was missing in action, had no presence, no visibility and lacked the will to take on the full-throttled onslaught of the BJP and the new start up AAP.

Rahul Gandhi, while on his Bharat Jodo Yatra - that mysteriously skipped Gujarat -, completely shunned the election meetings, except two rallies in Rajkot and in a tribal pocket in South Gujarat.

For the first time, no member of the Gandhi family participated in the campaigning except these two rallies.

The party high command and particularly the Gandhi family left to the state leaders to fight the crucial polls. With dozens of defections, the party unit became depleted of leaders and in terms of resources, it was no match to the BJP.

⁶ Mahesh Langa, “In Gujarat, Kejriwal’s political moves keep the ruling BJP on its toes”, *The Hindu*, 25 Sept. 2022 (<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/in-gujarat-kejriwals-political-moves-keep-the-ruling-bjp-on-its-toes/article65935136.ece>).

⁷ “Gujarat polls: 61 of 181 AAP candidates have criminal records, show election watchdog reports”, *Scroll.in*, 29 Nov. 2022 (<https://scroll.in/latest/1038545/gujarat-polls-61-of-181-aap-candidates-have-criminal-records-show-election-watchdog-reports>).

Even worse, the faction-ridden local unit failed to show the required intensity and displayed no sense of purpose in the fray in fighting the elections while relying on its flawed strategy of “silent campaign” in which the local leaders carried out smaller meetings as if the party was fighting a municipal or a district panchayat poll.

In the last polls in 2017, the opposition party nearly won the polls winning 77 seats with 41 % vote share, its best performance since 1985. However, instead of building on the spurt, the party unit remained inert and infighting and petty ego tussles of local leaders led to mass defections from the party as almost two dozen legislators left the party between 2017 to 2022.

The opposition party’s lacklustre approach to the election and campaigning provided the new comer AAP to attract communities which otherwise were loyal Congress voters like tribals from North to Central and South regions and Kolis in Saurashtra.

In fact, the AAP played spoiler in about 50 triangular contests, helping to split the opposition vote to the benefit of the BJP, by getting massive — and puzzling — levels of support in the tribal belt and among Koli and other OBCs dominated seats in Saurashtra.

For example, in all seats of Surendranagar districts like Limbadi, Chotila, Dhrangadhra and Dasada, Wankaner and Tankara in Morbi district, Jasdan and Rajkot East, Dhoraji in Rajkot district, Keshod, Dhari, Mangrol, Talala and all the seats of Jamnagar and Dwarka districts, the AAP played a spoiler for the opposition party.

This time, the AAP’s entry has completely changed the political configurations and calculations in about 50 seats, badly affecting the main opposition party’s prospects in those seats. The magnitude of the Congress setback was primarily due to the entry of this third player, in what was a two-party system so far. Indeed, AAP got 13% of the valid votes – and 17.85 % in Saurashtra the sub-region where it registered its best scores -, whereas Congress lost 14% of its 2017 votes. Undoubtedly, AAP has attracted former Congress voters who were looking for an anti-BJP alternative. And this competition between the two opposition parties largely explains the abyssal result of the erstwhile dominant party, with 17 seats and 27% of the valid votes. The cumulative vote share of the Congress and Aam Aadmi Party exceeds the BJP’s vote share in 51 seats⁸, which means that the outcome would have been rather similar to the 2017 elections if the anti-BJP vote had not been divided. But the new comer, AAP, has not prevented Congress from winning. BJP has won 156 seats with 52.5 % of the valid votes, which means that the party has attracted new people and that even if all the supporters of AAP had cast their vote in favour of Congress, the BJP would have retained a comfortable majority of more than 100 seats out of 82.

BJP’s majoritarian hegemony

The rather hegemonic position of BJP in Gujarat is reflected in the party’s capacity to transcend caste and class. Till recently, poor voters supported Congress and the richer citizens were, the

⁸ G. Verniers, “Decoding the Gujarat election in 35 charts: Congress woes are self-inflicted, AAP must bide its time”, *Scroll.in*, 13 Dec. 2022 (<https://scroll.in/article/1039572/decoding-the-gujarat-election-in-35-charts-congress-woes-are-self-inflicted-aap-must-bide-its-time>).

more BJP oriented they also were. This linearity is not true anymore and class makes hardly any difference anyway as the CSDS/Lokniti survey shows (see table 3).

Table 3: Class vote by party (in percentage)

Party	Congress	BJP	AAP	Others
Poor	23.3	50.8	12.8	13.1
Lower	28.2	54.3	12.5	5
Middle	32.2	50.4	12.4	5
Rich	25.5	55.7	14.7	4.1

Source: Centre for the Study of Developing Societies/Lokniti

Certainly, the “rich” vote for BJP more than the poor – but the gap between these two extremes has shrunk to five percentage points and the “lower” class people vote more for BJP than the “middle”. On the Congress side the poor are less likely to support the party than any other social category, an unprecedented phenomenon.

Table 4: Caste and community voting preference in 2007, 2012, 2017 and 2022 (in %)

Party	Congress				BJP				GPP	AAP
	2007	2012	2017	2022	2007	2012	2017	2022	2012	2022
Caste and community										
Upper caste	26	26	36	25	69	61	56	62	5	12
Leuva Patel	3	15	35	18	55	63	61	64	18	15
Kadwa Patel	8	7			85	82			4	
Kshatriya	39	44	55	23	47	52	45	46	1	4
Koli	52	39	31	24	42	53	52	59	1	16
Other OBCs	38	32	41	24	54	54	53	58	4	11
Dalit	56	65	53	32	34	23	39	44	1	17
Adivasi	33	46	44	24	38	32	45	53	3	21
Muslim	67	72	65	64	22	20	27	14	1	12

Party	Congress				BJP				GPP	AAP
Others	26	24	45	24	61	69	50	63	1	6

Source: Centre for the Study of Developing Societies/Lokniti.

The voting pattern of castes and religious communities is equally remarkable, in comparison to the previous elections. Upper castes and Patels continue to support BJP more than any other group – respectively at 61.9 (+6 percentage points compared to 2017) and 64.2 % (+3), but some OBCs are not lagging behind by far: 59.1% of the Kolis (7 percentage points more than in 2017) and 57.8% (+5) of OBCs other than Kolis and Kshatriyas are also supporting the BJP. And Kshatriyas themselves have largely deserted the Congress, their party since the rise to power of Madhavsinh Solanki to power in the 1980s: only 22.6% of them voted for Congress (- 22). Kshatriyas are doing what the Kolis, another traditional “vote bank” of the Congress have done in the course of the previous decade. For Congress, the loss of these OBCs’ support is particularly significant because they formed the core of the KHAM coalition of the 1980s, the legacy of their last phase of domination. But in 2022, even Dalits vote more for BJP than for Congress: 43.9% (5 percentage points more than in 2017) against 32.4% (8 percentage points more than in 2017). This trend is even more obvious among Adivasis: 53% of them support BJP, whereas only 24% of them are in favour of Congress. Congress got only 32% of the Dalit vote (-21 percentage points less than in 2017) and 24% of the Adivasis’ (-20) – not much more than AAP (21%).

However, the voting pattern of some of these groups needs to be qualified because there is a class element in some of them, something we had observed before. In 2017, the Patels who were not affluent (mostly peasants) did not support BJP as much as the others, for instance, a development largely due to the repression of their 2015 movement in favour of reservations – and to the role of Hardik Patel as a Congress leader⁹. This class element, that was also visible in the 2014 Lok Sabha election in the Hindi belt and western India, has vanished – the way it has also significantly eroded at the national level during the 2019 election¹⁰. In fact, in 2022, class makes hardly any difference in the case of upper caste, Patels and OBCs. But it did for Dalits and Adivasis: the poorer Dalits are, the more supportive of the Congress they also are and the richer they are, the more BJP- and AAP-oriented they are: while 43.5% of the “poor” Dalits voted for Congress, only 18% of the “rich” ones did. This correlation is also pronounced among the Adivasis: while 44.9% of them supported the BJP when they were “poor”, 69.6% of the “rich” did.

Why are 52% of the people, including the plebeians, voting for BJP?

⁹ C. Jaffrelot, « Quota for Patels? The Neo-middle class Syndrome and the (Partial) Return of Caste Politics in Gujarat », *Studies in Indian Politics*, 4(2) 1–15, 2016, pp. 1-15.

¹⁰ See C. Jaffrelot, “The Class Element in the 2014 Indian Election and the BJP’s Success with Special Reference to the Hindi Belt”, in « Understanding India’s 2014 Elections », *Studies in Indian Politics*, vol. 3, no 1, June 2015, pp. 19 – 38 and C. Jaffrelot, *Modi’s India – Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy*, Princeton Nj., Princeton University Press and Chennai, Westland, 2023, chap. 9, “Towards ‘Electoral Authoritarianism’: The 2019 Elections”, pp. 310-348.

The question “why do the poor vote for BJP?”¹¹ arises because the party is improving its electoral performance in adverse circumstances as most social indicators showed no improvement between 2017 and 2022. While Gujarat continues to register remarkable growth rates and attract industrial investments, these achievements do not benefit society at large. The percentage of underweight children – already very high at 39.3% in 2015-16 – increased, to reach 39.7%. As a result, Gujarat ranks 29 out of 30 states on this indicator¹². The Adjusted Net Enrolment Ratio in elementary education is not improving either and Gujarat, here, is ranked 21st out of 30 states. At Rs. 239.30, the rural daily wage for non-agricultural labour ranked 17th out of 20 states in 2021¹³. According to the NGO, Pratham’s ASER Centre’s Annual Survey of Education Report, only 18% of the children in government schools could do mathematical division in class 5 and only 55% of class 5 students could read Class 2-level texts. In spite of that, in 2020-22, 86 government schools were shut down and the education budget maintained at a very low level – 2.5% of the gross state domestic product...¹⁴. Similarly, infant mortality rate, at 2.5 of every 100 live births in 2019 placed Gujarat at the 12th position among all the Indian states and Union Territories and the maternal mortality rate remained higher than in Karnataka, Maharashtra or Tamil Nadu. In spite of this state of things – that affects primarily the poor – Gujarat continued to spend less than 1% of its GSDP on health¹⁵.

The manner in which the BJP is attracting voters from all social groups, including OBCs, Dalits and Adivasis can be explained primarily by the role of Narendra Modi and the strengths of BJP.

The Modi factor

The exercise the BJP had undertaken a little more than a year before the assembly election, showed the key role Modi played in Gujarat politics. In September 2021 the ruling party conducted a complete change of guard in the state, sacking the then CM Vijay Rupani and his entire cabinet and replacing him with politically novice and one time legislator Bhupendra Patel, whose only qualification that perhaps the high command considered was that he was a Patel but had no base of his own.

Bhupendra Patel took over with complete new cabinet, most of them did not serve as ministers before. With Patel’s installation as CM, Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself took the rein of Gujarat directly in his hands, ending the previous arrangement in which Home Minister Amit Shah handled Gujarat since Rupani was his protege. All political and administrative decisions during the Rupani regime had the stamp of Amit Shah but that drastically changed after Bhupendra Patel’s elevation and PMO directly took the control of Gujarat administration.

¹¹ C. Jaffrelot has already explored this question regarding the last Lok Sabha elections. See C. Jaffrelot, « Class and Caste in the 2019 Indian Election—Why Have So Many Poor Started Voting for Modi?», *Studies in Indian Politics* (Sage), 7(2), November 2019, pp. 1-12. The hypothesis we are not exploring here pertains to the role of welfare programme like the Jan Dhan Yojna and the Ujjwal Yojna which are more associated with the central government (see C. Jaffrelot, “Populist welfarism in India: how Modi relates to the poor?”, in A. Dieckhoff and E. Massicard, *Contemporary Populists in Power*, New York, Palgrave, 2022, pp. 211-236).

¹² “Gujarat Report Card” (<https://i.redd.it/1yrr8tqrqj0a1.jpg>).

¹³ Neha Shah and Atman Shah, “The ‘Gujarat development model’ is proof that trickle-down economics is a fantasy”, *Scroll.in*, 27 Nov., 2022 (<https://scroll.in/article/1038161/the-gujarat-development-model-is-proof-that-trickle-down-economics-is-a-failure>).

¹⁴ Neha Shah and Atman Shah, “The ‘Gujarat development model’”

¹⁵ *Ibid*.

PM Modi's face, leadership, his strong Hindutva credentials and macho version of nationalism that he champions has helped the BJP win a landslide in Gujarat. In fact, his persona and all that he stands for has dwarfed a range of serious policy and governance issues that confronted the ruling party in his home state before the polls. The issues that incumbent faced included high price-rise or inflation, rising unemployment, the COVID-19 chaos, the Morbi bridge disaster¹⁶, unrest among the state employees, corruption in the state administration, farm sector crisis, lack of livelihood opportunities in tribal belt and many others.

A day after the BJP stormed back to power in Uttar Pradesh, and also retained Uttarakhand, Manipur and Goa, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was in his home state Gujarat to kickstart the BJP's poll campaign in the state on March 11, 2022. Sporting a saffron cap, PM Modi waved to the party workers and public standing on both sides of the road as his open car, decorated with floral garlands, traversed the 10 km distance from the airport to Srikamalam, the state BJP headquarters between Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar. His two-day visit to his home state launched the party's campaign and in the ensuing months, frequency of his visits only increased as he crisscrossed the state for launch or opening of new projects, presiding the government welfare programs or socio-religious events.

Since March to December 2022, PM Modi was in Gujarat every month practically once or twice physically and as many times through his online presence, a new and innovative method that has gained momentum post the Covid-19 pandemic.

In all, the Prime Minister addressed around 100 public rallies, both during the poll campaigning in November after the announcement of the poll schedule and before that during his regular trips to the state, a dozen roadshows traversing all the 33 districts and directly touching as many as 120 assembly seats from March to December 2022.

During his protracted and extensive campaigning in Gujarat, the PM first pushed the development narrative talking, giving forward looking statements about future, cleverly blaming the past governments (particularly Congress party).

For example, in tribal dominated Dahod, he laid the foundation for a new railway engine manufacturing factory; in backward district Banaskantha, he inaugurated new dairy plants, as part of Gujarat's successful dairy cooperatives, Amul; in Vadodara he laid the foundation of new aircraft manufacturing site to be jointly developed by Tata and Airbus.

With development narrative, he blended Hindutva (communal) to polarise the voters. For example, in June while inaugurating a revamped temple on the Pavagadh hill, near Vadodara, he asserted that India is now witnessing "cultural independence that started with Sardar Patel renovating Somnath temple"¹⁷ after Independence¹⁸. He unfurled a flag (dhwaja) after

¹⁶ In Morbi, a pedestrian suspension bridge over the Machchu river collapsed on 30 Oct. 2022, causing the deaths of 135 people. The bridge had been reopened five days before and could therefore figure in the BJP's election campaign as one of its government's achievements.

¹⁷ Mahesh Langa, "PM Modi inaugurates revamped temple destroyed by 15th century Gujarat ruler", *The Hindu*, 18 June 2022 (<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/pm-modi-inaugurates-revamped-temple-destroyed-in-15th-century-gujarat-ruler/article65540229.ece>).

¹⁸ Modi, who is Chairman of Shri Somnath Trust, that had been initiated by Sardar Patel and K.M. Munshi, visited Somnath too during his election campaign.

inaugurating a revamped Mahakali temple which was destroyed by 15th century Gujarat Muslim ruler Mahmud Begda (1458 to 1511), and declared, addressing a small gathering on the Pavagadh hill:

For five centuries and 75 years of Independence, there was no dhwaja atop Mahakali temple. Today, the flag once again unfurls on the temple. This flag is not only a symbol of our faith and spirituality but it shows that centuries change, eras go by, but our faith remains eternal and strong.

The 11th century temple has been redeveloped with new spire and flag atop after a dargah or a Muslim shrine which stood atop the temple for nearly 500 years, was shifted with the consent of its caretakers. It is said that during Begda's reign; a shrine or Sadanshah Pir Dargah was built after the spire of the temple was destroyed. Now, the shrine has been shifted "amicably" paving the way for redevelopment of the temple with a spire and flag atop.

Another classic example of mixing development with Hindutva was displayed in October 2022 when the Prime Minister, while declaring Modhera village in North Gujarat as India's first 24x7 solar-powered village, talked about how invaders (Muslims), in the past, tried their best to raze the historic Sun Temple in Modhera and the atrocities they committed on the people of the region.

What they (invaders) had not done to raze the temple? What atrocities were not inflicted by them on the people of Modhera," he said, adding "the same Modhera and this temple today has shown the way to the world to fight climate change by becoming the first solar-powered village in the country."¹⁹

However, Modi did not only project his "Hindu Hriday Samrat" face: he also claimed that he was a plebeian in contrast to the leaders of the Congress, presented as coming from the elite: like in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections, he claimed: "I am a commoner's son, I am sevak, sevadar..."²⁰ Such a discourse is typical of national-populists who combine ethno-religious identity politics and a strategy of victimization vis-à-vis the liberal establishment. Addressing a meeting in Surendranagar, Modi added: "You [Congress] address me as 'Neech', 'Belonging from lower caste' and also Maut No Sodagar. You also address as Gandhi Nali No Kido (Sewer worm)"²¹.

¹⁹ "PM Modi begins three-day Gujarat visit; to inaugurate projects ahead of election", *The Hindu*, 9 Oct. 2022 (<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/pm-modi-declares-modhera-in-gujarat-as-indias-first-24x7-solar-powered-village/article65988847.ece>)

²⁰ "PM Modi addresses public meeting in Surendranagar, Gujarat", *DeshGujarat*, 21 Nov. 2022 (<https://www.deshgujarat.com/2022/11/21/live-pm-modi-addresses-public-meeting-in-surendranagar-gujarat/>).

²¹ "They don't discuss development PM Modi reacts to Aukat remark of Congress", *DeshGujarat*, 21 Nov. 2022 (<https://www.deshgujarat.com/2022/11/21/they-dont-discuss-development-pm-modi-reacts-to-aukat-remark-of-congress/>).

Besides Modi's key role, another variable needs to be factored in: BJP's organisational strengths

BJP's organisational strengths and caste politics

Matching Prime Minister's leadership is the BJP's organisational strength with unlimited resources that micromanage every booth across the state. On November 21, the party announced a "carpet bombing campaign"²², a warrior-like discourse which reflected its capacity to saturate the public space.

But the BJP did not only rely on this old technique. It adopted a ruthless approach to bring in new faces and infuse fresh blood into the party's body system. Accordingly, it denied tickets to as many as 44 legislators including former CM Rupani, his deputy Nitin Patel, a Patidar stalwart, former top ministers like Pradipsingh Jadeja, Bhupendrasinh Chudasama and Saurabh Dalal, who had won multiple elections and many others²³. For example, in Ahmedabad city, the BJP had 12 out of 16 legislators in the city. This time, the party dropped all and fielded new faces.

Before and during the campaigning, top cabinet ministers from the Centre visited various parts of the state and major announcements related to developmental projects from various departments and ministries were made while CMs of the BJP ruled states like Yogi Adityanath and Himanta Biswa Sarma from Assam addressed poll meetings in remote locations.

Besides, the BJP is probably attracting voters from new, plebeian, caste groups because it selects its candidates in a very sophisticated manner. At the national level, it nominated non-dominant OBC and non-dominant-Dalit candidates and got most of the votes of these jatis which resented the Yadavs' and Jatavs' domination, for instance. In Gujarat, in 2022, it similarly hand-picked a very large number of Kolis – 19 – and they all won. 26.5% of the BJP candidates came from the OBCs this time, more than Patels (26%) and upper castes (17%).

Beyond the quantity, one needs to look at the "quality" of the candidates that BJP nominated. In 2017, the BJP's performances had been badly affected in Saurashtra by the shift of the Patels' votes in favour of Congress. This time, BJP nominated Ramesh Tilara in Rajkot South because of his role in the Trust of the Shree Khodaldham Temple (the most popular temple of the Patels in the region) and because of his close relations with Naresh Patel, an influential leaders among the Leuva Patels – who dominate the region²⁴.

Last but not least, the BJP continues to be associated to Hinduism by the majority community. All the more so as Congress tends to become the party of the Muslims, the only group whose

²² "BJP announces 2nd phase of carpet bombing campaign on 93 seats in Gujarat", *DeshGujarat*, 21 Nov. 2022 (<https://www.deshgujarat.com/2022/11/21/bjp-announces-2nd-phase-of-carpet-bombing-campaign-on-93-seats-in-gujarat/>).

²³ Hours before the BJP candidate list was made public these 44 legislators sent a letter to the party leaders "with requests to not be considered for candidature" (J. Shah, "BJP's Gujarat poll strategy explained").

²⁴ J. Shah, "BJP's Gujarat poll strategy explained"

members are majoritarily in favour of Congress: Muslims voted for this party at 64.4% in 2022. This is a clear reflection of the polarisation of the Gujarati electorate along communal lines: Congress appears as “the party of the Muslims”, whereas BJP can claim that it is the party of the Hindus, irrespective of their caste and class, and plays the Hindutva card for that. During the Gujarat campaign, addressing a rally in Kheda district, Amit Shah argued that Muslims had been taught a lesson by Narendra Modi in 2002²⁵:

“During the Congress rule in Gujarat, communal riots were rampant. Congress used to incite people of different communities and castes to fight against each other. Through such riots, Congress had strengthened its vote bank and did injustice to a large section of the society ... But after they were taught a lesson in 2002, these elements left that path. They refrained from indulging in violence from 2002 till 2022. BJP has established permanent peace in Gujarat by taking strict action against those who used to indulge in communal violence”²⁶.

The way the 11 men who have been released from jail in the Bilkis Bano gang-rape case – a decision cleared by Amit Shah, the Home Minister - have been felicitated officially and the nomination of BJP candidates who were connected more or less directly to the 2002 pogrom illustrate the ways in which this episode reflects the continuation of the BJP’s polarization strategy. Muslim political representation is a collateral casualty of this narrative: there is only one Muslim MLA in Gujarat now, the lowest in the state’s history where 9 percent of population is Muslim. This is a reflection of the very small number of candidates fielded by the main parties: not only BJP has not nominated any Muslim candidate since 1997, but the number of Muslim Congress candidates has dropped to 6 and AAP has given tickets to 3 Muslims only. During the election campaign, the Sangh Parivar made several moves aiming at polarizing Gujarat even more. Like in previous campaigns, the party chose this moment for imposing the “Disturbed Areas Act” (see the Box) to neighbourhoods of new towns, including Dhandhuka²⁷, Morbi²⁸, Borsad and Petlad²⁹ - even when there was no major clashes between communities. This decision fostered Muslims ghettoization and helped BJP to secure the Hindus’ votes by claiming that the party was protecting them from the Other³⁰.

The speeches Yogi Adityanath made in Gujarat reinforced the polarization dimension of the BJP campaign. Incidentally, he was welcome by BJP supporters by bulldozers, the instruments he uses in his state, Uttar Pradesh, to destroy Muslims’ homes. During this bulldozer rally he was hailed as the “bulldozer baba” and invited to export his demolition policies in Gujarat³¹.

²⁵ “In 2002, Narendra Modi taught a lesson to ‘anti-social elements’ in Gujarat, says Amit Shah”, *Scroll.in*, 25 Nov. 2022 (<https://scroll.in/latest/1038352/in-2002-narendra-modi-taught-a-lesson-to-anti-social-elements-in-gujarat-says-amit-shah>).

²⁶ Cited in “Amit Shah accused of inciting communal passion: Demand to postpone Gujarat polls”, *Counterview*, 28 Nov. 2022 (<https://www.counterview.net/2022/11/amit-shah-accused-of-inciting-communal.html>).

²⁷ “Gujarat: Dhandhuka town brought under Disturbed Areas Act”, *The Indian Express*, 21 Nov. 2022 (<https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/ahmedabad/gujarat-dhandhuka-town-disturbed-areas-act-8239199/>).

²⁸ “No major clashes but Disturbed Areas Act for Morbi, Congress asks why”, *The Indian Express*, 9 Nov. 2022 (<https://indianexpress.com/article/political-pulse/no-major-clashes-disturbed-areas-act-morbi-gujarat-congress-bjp-8257375/>).

²⁹ “Governor imposes Disturbed Areas Act in areas of Borsad and Petlad», *DeshGujarat*, 18 Oct. 2022 (<https://www.deshgujarat.com/2022/10/18/governor-imposes-disturbed-areas-act-in-areas-of-borsad-and-petlad/>).

³⁰ Parimal A Dhabhi, “Explained: What has changed in Gujarat’s Disturbed Areas Act”, *The Indian Express*, 19 Oct. 2020 (<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/gujarats-disturbed-areas-act-amendments-6723215/>).

³¹ «Gujarat poll : BJP workers welcome Yogi Adityanath with bulldozer rally, hail demolishing houses», *Maktoob*, 20 Nov. 2022 (<https://maktoobmedia.com/2022/11/20/gujarat-poll-bjp-workers-welcome-yogi-adityanath-with-bulldozer-rally-hail-demolishing-muslim-houses/>).

In parallel, the BJP accused Congress of “appeasing Muslims” on the basis of videos showing Congress MLAs praising Muslims in a meeting³². In reaction, the Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel emphasized that, by contrast, “The BJP people snatched away the hajj subsidy”³³.

BOX BEGINS HERE

This law had been passed to replace “The Gujarat Prohibition of Transfer of Immovable Property and Provision for Protection of Tenants from Eviction from Premises in Disturbed Areas Act, 1986”, that had been passed in the wake of the 1985 riot. Then, communal violence had resulted in “distress sale of properties in riot-prone localities”, where families living in minority pockets had fled, selling their house or flat at a give-away price.³⁴ According to the 1991 law, “any person intending to transfer immovable property situated in a disturbed area [...] [had] to make an application to the Collector for obtaining previous sanction”. The collector then had to inquire “whether the transfer of immovable property [wa]s proposed to be made by free consent of the persons intending to be the transferor and the transferee and for a fair value of the immovable property...”³⁵ The Disturbed Areas Act prescribed six months imprisonment and a fine of Rs 10,000 if one broke the law.³⁶ The new law endowed a great deal of power to the bureaucracy who used it in a selective manner: “Muslims have been allowed to sell their place to Hindus whereas the reverse has not been possible and the Act has become a

³² « Another video of another Congress leader; BJP alleges Muslim appeasement”, *DeshGujarat*, 21 Nov. 2022 (<https://www.deshgujarat.com/2022/11/21/another-video-of-another-congress-leader-bjp-alleges-muslim-appeasement/>).

³³ « Gujarat CM slams Congress as the opposition party goes all out to appease Muslims”, *DeshGujarat*, 19 Nov. 2022 (<https://www.deshgujarat.com/2022/11/19/gujarat-cm-slams-congress-as-the-opposition-party-goes-all-out-to-appease-muslims/>).

³⁴ Sharik Laliwala, C. Jaffrelot, Priyal Thakkar and Abida Desai, “Paradoxes of Ghettoization: Juhapura ‘in’ Ahmedabad”, *Indian Exclusion Report, 2019-2020*, New Delhi, Three Essays Collective with Centre for Equity Studies, 2020, pp. 103-136. <https://spire.sciencespo.fr/hdl/2441/1ni56132699n1r9hm18of0urkr/resources/2021-jaffrelot-paradoxes-of-ghettoization-india-exclusion-report-2019-20.pdf>, p. 110.

³⁵ “Gujarat Act No. 12 of 1991. The Gujarat Prohibition of Transfer of Immovable Property and Provision for Protection of Tenants from Eviction from Premises in Disturbed Areas Act, 1991”, (<https://www.indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/4609/1/disturbedareasact.pdf>).

³⁶ S. Laliwala, “Gujarat's Enduring Muslim Ghettos: Laws like Disturbed Areas Act (1991) and amendments severely segregate the minority”, *Daily O*, 15 July 2019 (<https://www.dailyo.in/politics/gujarat-disturbed-areas-act-1991-muslim-ghettoisation-juhapura/story/1/31485.html>).

tool to stop Muslims from mixing with others in major cities: They cannot expand in the pockets they still occupy in Ahmedabad and those who fled the city at the time of riots have not been allowed to come back”.³⁷ In 2009, the Gujarat assembly amended the law to further enhance powers granted to the Collectorate who could now hold a *suo moto* inquiry and take temporary possession of a property his or her owner intended to sell. This amendment has made acquisition of properties in mixed areas even more difficult for members of the local minority.

The 1991 law was misinterpreted from another viewpoint: while Section 3(1) of the Act allowed the state government to declare an area disturbed where “public order [...] was disturbed for a substantial period by reason of riot or violence of mob”, this emergency measure has continued in peacetime, more than 15 years after the last major riot or mob violence in Gujarat. Not only that, but the list of disturbed areas kept expanding. In 2013, new areas, where no riot ever taken place, in Surat and Vadodara, were also classified as communally disturbed. During state elections, BJP candidates even canvassed on the theme, claiming that the coming of new Hindu-dominated localities under this law would bring them security.

Excerpted from Christophe Jaffrelot, *Gujarat Under Modi. Laboratory of Today's India*, London, Hurst, 2023.

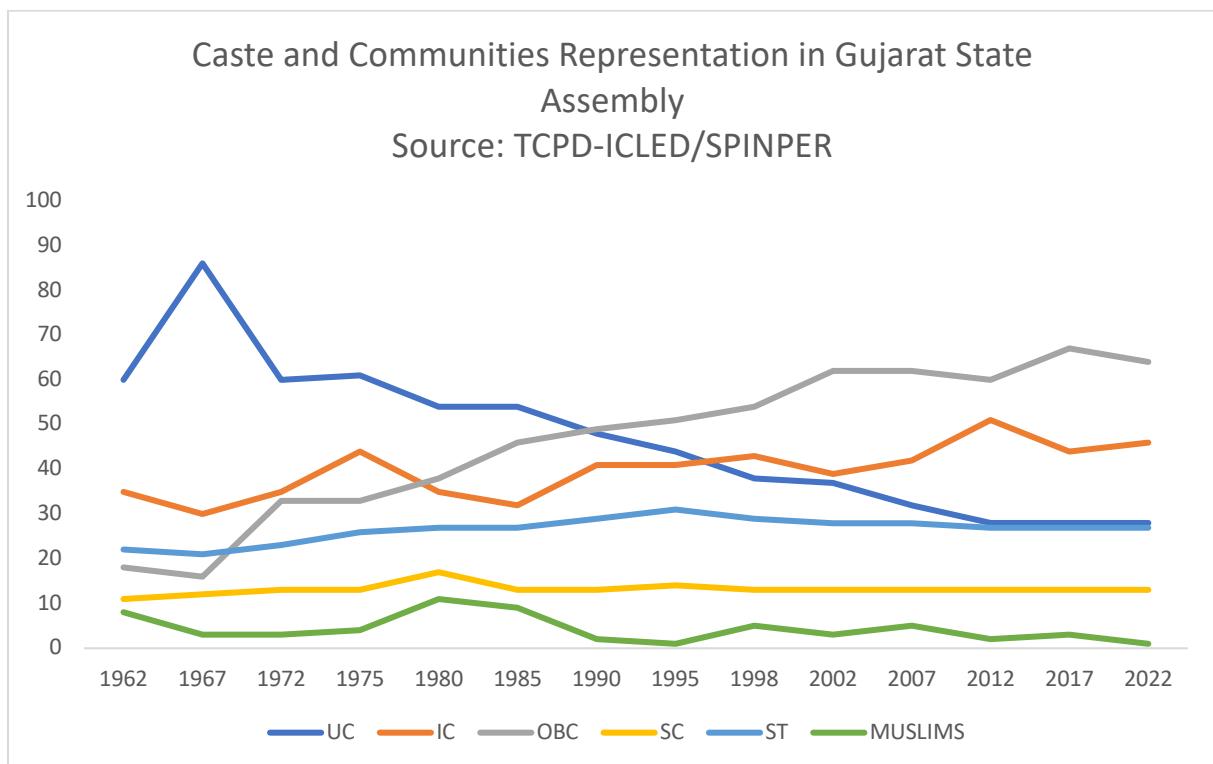
BOX ENDS HERE

The implications for democracy (and BJP) of the “Gujarat model”

BJP’s hegemony, in Gujarat like elsewhere, has a negative impact on democracy from five different points of view.

³⁷ C. Jaffrelot and S. Laliwala, “The segregated city”, *The Indian Express*, 26 May 2018 (<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/muslims-in-india-hindus-jains-gujarat-love-jihad-5191304/>).

First, in terms of caste, the democratisation process in terms of the inclusion of new plebeians in the political scene has reached a plateau and remains selective. Certainly, the state Assembly has become more plebeian under the BJP rule, as Kushabhai Patel, Narendra Modi and their successors did not reversed the trend initiated by Madhavsinh Solanki in the 1980s, but it has lost its momentum: while, between 1975 and 1985, the number of OBC MLAs had jumped from 33 to 46 in one year, between 1995 and 2017 it has increased from 51 to 67 only in 22 years. In 2022, it was even a little bit reduced at 64. The Patels who, marginally increased their tally from 44 to 46, have been the main beneficiaries of this shift. Not only the upper castes are now stable at 28 since 2012, the Patels are asserting themselves as the dominant political force³⁸.



Not only the process of democratisation has reached a plateau in the assembly, key ministerial portfolios remain in the hands of upper and dominant castes. The BJP has appointed 10 ministers from OBC-SC-ST backgrounds, but it continues with a Patel chief minister and the most influential ministries like home, finance, revenue, energy-petrochemicals, roads and buildings, remain in the hands of forward castes: executive power is still theirs, while plebeians are accorded a more important place in the legislature only.

Secondly, the growing representation of marginal groups in the state assembly does not apply to all of them. Women remain largely absent from the assembly. There are only 15 women out of 182 MLAs in 2022, a number that reflects the small number of candidates: the BJP, the Congress and the AAP fielded only 37 women out of 542 candidates (respectively 17, 14 and

³⁸ These figures reflect the way all the parties nominate their candidates: here, there is hardly any difference between BJP, Congress and AAP. For instance, they have respectively given tickets to 10, 12 and 9 Rajputs, 19, 15 and 12 Kolis and 15, 18 and 11 Kshatriyas. The gap is more pronounced vis-à-vis the Patels: BJP nominated 46 Patels candidates and the BJP only 39 (whereas they were 51 on the list of AAP).

6 (9, 8 and 3 %) ³⁹. Muslims, given the growing assertiveness of Hindu majoritarianism, have become almost invisible on the political scene: not only BJP has not nominated any Muslim candidate since 1998, but Congress followed suit and, as a result, there is only one Muslim MLA in today's assembly, Imran Khedawala, a Congress candidate from Jamalpur-Khadia, a constituency of old Ahmedabad where Muslims are over-represented. Never before, since its creation, had Gujarat had so few Muslim MLA ⁴⁰.

Thirdly, in terms of class, the elitist character of BJP, that is so evident from its policies, including its taxation policy, was particularly striking during the last Gujarat election. While politics has become an economic activity in which rich entrepreneurs have invested across the board, this is particularly true on the BJP side: 154 of the party's candidates were crorepatris in 2022 (against 142 on the Congress side and 62 on the AAP side) according to the NGO ADR ⁴¹. Besides, Gilles Verniers points out that "BJP candidates were much richer (average assets of ₹14 crore) than Congress candidates (₹6.5 crore) and AAP candidates (₹3.1 crore)" ⁴². Here again, one needs to look at class within caste as "BJP's Patel candidates declared, on average, ₹25.4 crore of assets, against ₹8.8 crore for Congress's. BJP's Koli candidates were also much richer on average than Congress' Koli candidates (₹9.4 crore against ₹1.9 crore)." Hence Verniers' conclusion: "caste may not be the best factor of differentiation between parties" – it used to make a big difference, but, today, class may be a more revealing variable and it shows that, while BJP may welcome more non-upper caste politicians, they come from the super-rich, something that is well in tune with the brand of crony capitalism Modi initiated when he was Chief Minister ⁴³.

Fourthly, BJP has established its domination by exerting a debilitating influence on the political system through its predatory attitude vis-à-vis the opposition. In Gujarat like elsewhere, including Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, BJP has brought opposition politicians into its fold by resorting to all kinds of stratagems. In Gujarat, the saffron party has routinely inducted Congress leaders in different areas to strengthen its base particularly in rural and tribal pockets where the party is not able to win on its own. In last two decades, around 100 Congress leaders, more than 50 legislators and parliamentarians, have joined the ruling party. Most of the time turn coats have been paid large sums of money or have been rewarded by tickets or ministerial portfolios. In Gujarat, 20 Congress MLAs joined BJP between 2017 and November 2022. 10 of them have been given tickets and many of them are now cabinet ministers like Balwantsinh Rajput, Kuvarji Bawalia and Raghavji Patel, three top cabinet ministers in the government. Other Congress leaders were nominated too, including Hardik Patel, the face of 2015 Patidar quota agitation, who won the Viramgam seat (his hometown) and Alpesh Thakor (who won the Gandhinagar South seat). Another senior tribal politician, Chhotubhai Vasava who was not part of Congress, but who had started his own party, the Bharatiya Tribal Party – that had won two seats in 2017 – was coopted: he discontinued his party and announced that

³⁹ G. Verniers, "Decoding the Gujarat election in 35 charts

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ "Gujarat polls", op. cit.

⁴² Gilles Verniers, "Number theory: In Gujarat polls, class, not caste, differentiated parties", *The Hindustan Times*, 16 Dec. 2022 (<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/in-gujarat-polls-class-not-caste-differentiated-parties-101671128869240.html>).

⁴³ C. Jaffrelot, "Business-Friendly Gujarat Under Narendra Modi – The Implications of a New Political Economy", in C. Jaffrelot, Atul Kohli and Kanta Murali (eds), *Business and Politics in India*, New York, Oxford University Press and Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2019, pp. 211-233.

his son would contest as an independent from the Dediapada seat that he had won seven times. Jumana Shah points out that “Murmurs abound that BJP had a role in triggering this rift”⁴⁴.

Last, but not least, the domination of BJP is problematic, from the point of view of democracy, because of the equation between Narendra Modi and Gujarat which tends to be the sub text of the party’s hegemony. The way Modi saturates the public sphere helps him to project himself as the embodiment of the majority community and, therefore, makes his party the only game in town. “I have made this Gujarat” was Modi’s slogan in 2022; it was “Gaurav Gujarat” in 2002. These mottos convey the same message: “I am Gujarat!” As Christophe Jaffrelot and Sharik Laliwala argued, “Modi’s brand of national populism, like elsewhere in the world, tends to transform cultural majorities into political majorities, making alternation in power more difficult”⁴⁵. Modi embodies Hindu Gujaratis in such a way that they are unbeatable. Like many other national populists, including Netanyahu, Trump, Bolsonaro, Orban and Erdogan, Modi is delegitimizing the opposition which is seen as an enemy – as an adversary – by presenting it as anti-national (or anti-Gujarat when he canvasses in his home state). On 20 Nov. 2022 he twitted, for instance, “Opposition only keeps defaming Gujarat and abusing the people of the state”⁴⁶. Modi’s BJP does not only delegitimize the opposition but any institution likely to interfere with its politics, including the Election Commission that has ceased to make any decision against the party. After Amit Shah declared that Muslims had been “taught a lesson” in 2002, EAS Sarma, an ex-secretary to the Government of India seized the Election Commission, invoking the Model Code of Conduct that such statements violated – something that was also evident from the decision not to announce the Gujarat elections and the Himachal Pradesh elections at the same time, a disconnect that allowed the government to publicise new projects, and inaugurate the Morbi bridge that had been completed in haste⁴⁷.

Note that the sentiment that the elections are a foregone conclusion is not very motivating and less and less Gujarati citizens participate in what is supposed to be the main pillar of democracy. In 2022, the turn out dropped from 68.4% to 64.8%. It had already declined between 2012 and 2017. This trend stands in stark contrast with what is observed in most of the other states. The opponents to BJP seem to be particularly discouraged, because Gilles Verniers points out that “The BJP won in 61 of the 68 seats where participation decreased by more than 5%. This could indicate that some voters who might have voted for an opposition candidate chose to stay at home. As the defeat of the Congress was widely expected, it may have discouraged some of their voters”⁴⁸.

Conclusion

⁴⁴ Jumana Shah, “BJP’s Gujarat poll strategy explained”, *India Today*, 15 Nov. 2022 (<https://www.indiatoday.in/india-today-insight/story/bjps-gujarat-poll-strategy-explained-2297619-2022-11-15>).

⁴⁵ Christophe Jaffrelot and Sharik Laliwala, “Lessons from BJP’s win in Gujarat 2022”, *The Indian Express*, 29 December 2022 (<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/bjp-gujarat-2022-elections-results-pm-modi-8349532/>).

⁴⁶ Cited in a very interesting article by Darshan Desai, “Gujarat’s Maker, Its Pride, Its Fall Guy: BJP’s Slogans Say About Modi and His Campaigns”, *The Wire*, 21 Nov. 2022 (<https://thewire.in/politics/narendra-modi-gujarat-election-slogans-bjp>).

⁴⁷ “Amit Shah accused”, op. cit.

⁴⁸ G. Verniers, “Decoding the Gujarat election in 35 charts

Several lessons' can be drawn from the recent BJP's historic victory and Congress' unprecedented debacle in Gujarat – lessons which may be useful for understanding politics in India beyond Gujarat.

First, the division of the opposition to BJP is bound to help tremendously the ruling party to retain power. The entry of AAP in Gujarat shows that in a state like this one, the party cannot compete with BJP – for AAP, to replace BJP in the state would take years – but can weaken the opposition. This conclusion applies to the national scene too.

Second, the Congress may very well get marginalized in Gujarat – the way it has disappeared from UP and Bihar – if it does not rebuild its organization and solve its leadership problem (a remark which can apply to the state and national leaders).

Third, BJP's hegemony is taking India back to the heydays Indira Gandhi's Congress, in the early 1970s, when the dominant party could attract voters equally massively from all castes and classes. In the 1970s, one of the party's slogans was "Indira is India and India is Indira". Similarly, Modi learned in Gujarat that a politician can claim to embody a people. But here again, implications for the national scene are obvious: in 2014, Modi had Twitted "India has won!", because he had won.

In fact, Gujarat appears more clearly than ever as the laboratory of his 2014 and post-2014 strategy, identity-based polarization remaining his main political asset. In contrast to Indira's Congress' hegemony, Modi's BJP's is based on the transformation of an ethno-religious majority into a political majority, a clearly anti-democratic process which implies that the dominant party is the only game in town and his chief the only legitimate leader, making alternation in power almost impossible.

In the long run, BJP's strength may be its main weakness, in Gujarat and in India at large. A major limitation of the BJP in Gujarat has much to do with its dependence vis-à-vis Narendra Modi. The Prime minister was, once again, the party's key campaigner in 2022. This 20-years old pattern systematically finds expression in mass meetings and tours across the state. Besides, the state unit of the party is remote controlled from New Delhi, the way some Pradesh Congress Committees were under Indira Gandhi during the 1970s and 1980s. This is evident from the way Chief Ministers are selected. There are pros and cons in this modus operandi. On one hand, the state BJP government gets a lot of exposure and resources: Gujarat is like the showcase of India and, therefore, New Delhi helps the state to perform, as evident from the massive investments made in the province. But what will happen when Modi leave the scene? Congress never fully recovered from the debilitating effect of Mrs Gandhi's centralisation and personalisation of power...