

# GUJARAT ELECTIONS, 2012: AN APPRAISAL

I am proud that I am a human, and I am a Hindu/every moment I  
experience I am big, wide, I am Sindhu.<sup>(1)</sup>

— Narendra Damodardas Modi  
Chief Minister of Gujarat

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## Introduction

The state of Gujarat was a part of the Bombay Presidency during the British colonial rule. After independence, however, the Bombay Presidency was divided into two new states, Gujarat and Maharashtra. On the first of May 1960 Gujarat became a separate state within the Republic of India.<sup>(2)</sup>

There are two major political parties in Gujarat, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress. Over the years, only these two parties have had a strong political hold in the state. From 1960 onwards Congress dominated the state politics until 1995 when the BJP took over. The Congress currently is the main opposition party. The BJP has thus been the majority party since 1995. Keshubhai Patel was the chief minister of Gujarat from March 1995 to 2001.<sup>(3)</sup> Patel resigned in 2001 due to poor performance of the BJP in a bye-election. Following the resignation Narendra Modi became the chief minister for the first time on the first of October 2001 and has since retained the office. Although Modi belongs to one of the most important mainstream political parties, the election in Gujarat has completely been dominated by political personality cults; and Modi is a cult in the state. It is generally known that “BJP is Modi, and Modi is BJP.”<sup>(4)</sup> His leadership has led Gujarat to economic development, and turned it into one of India's economic powerhouses. Now Modi projects himself as the face of a democratic and

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economically strong India. On 20 December 2012 Modi won a third consecutive state election.<sup>(5)</sup>

Modi is the longest serving chief minister of Gujarat. He is controversial as well as a popular political icon not just in Gujarat but all over India. Not only the vast section of civil society and The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s followers consider him the next prime minister of India, the European Union has also ended its decade-long accusations and boycott of Modi on the ground that there is no clear evidence of his involvement in the 2002 Gujarat genocide.<sup>(6)</sup>

The paper attempts to explore the reasons behind Modi's third consecutive victory, including examining the economic growth and development in Gujarat under his rule. It will further focus on the role of the Muslim community in the election. It is also significant to understand the causes of the poor performance of the Indian National Congress in Gujarat. In addition, the paper also analyzes the effect of the latest elections on the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. Finally, it will highlight the prospects of Modi as a candidate for next prime minister of India. Before taking up these questions, it seems pertinent to have an overview of Gujarat.

## Gujarat

Gujarat is located on the coast of the Arabian Sea. The state shares an international border with Pakistan. India and Pakistan have dispute over Sir Creek, which lies on their common border. Gujarat can be divided into three geographic regions, Kuchh, the Kathiawar Peninsula, and mainland Gujarat.<sup>(7)</sup>

Gujarat is India's 10th largest state with a population of 60,383,628. Hinduism is the most dominant religion. 89.1 per cent of the population is Hindu while 9.1 per cent is Muslim. Gujarati is one of the 22 official languages in India. According to the latest census (2011), male literacy rate in Gujarat is 87.23 per cent while female literacy rate is 70.73 per cent.<sup>(8)</sup>

## Election schedule, issues & campaign

Gujarat has 182 assembly constituencies and 26 parliamentary constituencies. The Election Commission of India (ECI) announced the election schedule on 3 October 2012 and polls in Gujarat took place in two phases; first phase on 13 December 2012 and the second on 17 December.<sup>(9)</sup>

Both BJP and the Congress designed their election strategy carefully and tactfully. The 2002 and 2007 Gujarat elections were held in the background of the 2002 Hindu-Muslim riots. As already mentioned, Modi was chief minister during the riots. According to allegations, he provoked, or at least allowed, the massacres that killed thousands of men, women, and children; most of them were Muslims. Some 10 years after the riots Modi propagated 'Sadbhavna mission' (goodwill journey) which was a series of 36 fasts. According to Modi, this was "aimed to strengthen the atmosphere of peace, unity and harmony in the state" The mission was started on Modi's birthday on 17 September 2011 at Ahmedabad, and ended in Ambaji on 12 February the next year.<sup>(10)</sup>

The manifestos of the two main political parties, the BJP and the Congress, for the assembly elections in Gujarat were almost the same with specific emphasis on basic facilities like education, health, agriculture, housing, etc.

### **BJP election campaign**

Modi launched his election campaign from Gandhinagar on 19 November by addressing rallies. During the campaign, Congress party spokesperson Rashid Alvi said, it is not necessary that 2002 riots will be an election issue for the Congress party this time.<sup>(11)</sup> The BJP tried to cash in on the burning issues of inflation and corruption of the central government.

### **The manifesto**

The BJP released its election manifesto on 3 December 2012. Its main points include the following promises:

- Growth in agriculture
- Employment
- Improving health facilities
- Cheap housing for the poor
- Greater job opportunities for more than 30 lakh youths of the state if voted back to power
- Establishing new superspecialty hospitals
- Providing safe drinking water
- Developing agro infrastructure
- Job opportunities for women.<sup>(12)</sup>

In the election campaign, the BJP focused on basics like health, employment, agriculture, drinking water, and Jobs. Another ‘popular’ point made by the BJP was its ‘anti-Pakistan’ objectives. This time around Modi picked up the Sir Creek issue and wrote a letter to the prime minister demanding that India stop dialogue with Pakistan on the Sir Creek issue. During the election campaign, unlike the past, the BJP didn’t target the Muslims. It marketed itself as the party that could develop India effectively and counter all sorts of threats. The BJP tried to attract the extremists by its hardliner stance.

### **Congress election campaign**

National leaders of the Congress party including Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Sonia Gandhi, and Rahul Gandhi campaigned in the state, where the party is out of power since 1995. They couldn’t achieve any success, though.<sup>(13)</sup>

On 4 December Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit and Gujarat Pradesh Congress Committee chief Arjun Modhwadia released Congress election manifesto. The main points are as under:

## The manifesto

- Industries in backward region; 85 per cent local employment is compulsory.
- Investment to be attracted for sea coast tourism.
- Upto Rs 2 lakh insurance cover, 250 medicines to be free and a medical corporation to be set up.
- Right to forest land; law to be implemented in six months.
- SC, ST, OBC scholarship to be doubled.
- 50 unit free power for residential connections.
- Narmada project to be completed.
- Small dams and irrigation schemes to be introduced.
- Bio-diesel bank: to use wasteland for the production of bio-diesel.
- Cotton export centre at Manavadar; Mango export center at Talala
- Tax on agri equipment, tools, tractors to be reviewed and tax relief given.
- Interest-free loan to students for higher education.
- Tablet PC for students who pass the 10<sup>th</sup> class and laptops for students who pass the 12<sup>th</sup>.
- Crop insurance cover for all farmers
- Agritech mission under the chairmanship of the CM to increase agricultural production.
- 2 lakh new connections for farms every year.
- A public accountability law to be enacted and enforced.
- 62,000 posts vacant in state; huge backlog of other vacancies too. All vacancies to be filled within one year.
- Ship-breaking industry to be revived.
- Vacancies of teachers to be filled in all primary schools.
- Job opportunities for sportsperson with state-level good performances.
- Ferry service to connect the state with Maharashtra through the sea.
- Large dams to be developed as tourist attraction.
- Special scholarships for poor students qualifying for national-level institutes like IIM, IIT, and NID.
- Fully equipped mobile clinics for faraway places with high tribal population.
- Street lights free for villages with population less than 500; 50 per cent concession for villages having population above than that figure.<sup>(14)</sup>

It was an ordinary manifesto for nothing concrete was offered to the voters from different sections of society. Being a ruling party at the Centre, it

was difficult and unwise for them to make unrealistic promises such as jobs and economic benefits to the common man.

### Voter turnout

Total registered voters in Gujarat are 3.80 billion — 62 per cent of the total population of the state. Some 1,666 candidates took part in the two-phase elections to the state assembly.<sup>(15)</sup> The voter turnout was high. Chief electoral officer (CEO) Anita Karwal said “the turnout in the 2012 polls, 71.3 per cent, is the highest-ever registered in the state,” “Among the many factors responsible was the voters’ slips distributed by the election authorities and the awareness campaign undertaken by the EC and voluntary organizations. It brought the people to the polling booths.”<sup>(16)</sup> In the previous assembly elections, the turnout was 61.5 per cent in 2002 and 59.8 per cent in 2007; whereas, in the parliamentary elections (Lok Sabha), it was 45.2 per cent in 2004 and 47.9 per cent in 2009. In the December 2012 assembly elections, the turnout was 71.3 per cent.<sup>(17)</sup>

#### Votes won by the BJP and the Congress are given below,<sup>(18)</sup>

| Party    | Vote Share % | Change % from 2007 |
|----------|--------------|--------------------|
| BJP      | 48           | -1                 |
| Congress | 40           | 0                  |

### Election results and formation of government

Assembly election results declared on 20 December Modi-led BJP won the third consecutive term. The party won 115 out of 182 seats, while the Congress won 61 seats. On 26 December 2012, Modi took the oath administered by Governor Kamla Beniwal at Sardar Patel Stadium, and formed the government.<sup>(19)</sup>

#### Election Results 2012

| Party                      | Won | Leading | Total |
|----------------------------|-----|---------|-------|
| Bharatiya Janata Party     | 115 | 0       | 115   |
| Indian National Congress   | 61  | 0       | 61    |
| Nationalist Congress Party | 2   | 0       | 2     |
| Janata Dal (United)        | 1   | 0       | 1     |
| Others                     | 3   | 0       | 3     |

**Source:** <[http://zeenews.india.com/state-election-2012/gujarat/gujarat-election-results-2012-narendra-modi-baiters-bite-the-dust\\_817882.html](http://zeenews.india.com/state-election-2012/gujarat/gujarat-election-results-2012-narendra-modi-baiters-bite-the-dust_817882.html)>.

In 2002 the BJP won 127 and in 2007, 117 seats, whereas the Congress got 59 seats in 2007 and 51 in the 2002 elections. In this election, the BJP lost 16 seats by a margin of less than 2 per cent. However, the Congress won 46 per cent seats with a margin of less than 5 per cent. Sixteen women candidates were elected; 12 of them belonged to the BJP and four to the Congress.<sup>(20)</sup>

## Result analysis

There was no anti-incumbency factor in Gujarat. In fact, the Congress played a major role in BJP's victory. It tried to damage the BJP but failed and lost the elections again. There are a number of causes of Congress' weakness in the state; the most important one is the lack of a strong state leadership. Congress made the same mistake as it made in the Uttar Pradesh elections. Most analysts attribute its poor performance to its inability to nominate a chief ministerial candidate well ahead of the elections. In fact, it has no leader in Gujarat of Modi's stature. It was relying on Shanker Singh Waghela, as he has been the chief minister of Gujarat from 1996 to 1997 besides being a former union textile minister. Waghela was chairman of the party's election campaign committee. Popularly called "Bapu" (father), he is a crowd-puller and a popular leader among Kshatriyas and other backward classes (OBCs). But the party failed to cash in on his skills completely as many Congress figures treat him as an outsider. He is also notorious among the Gujaratis as a corrupt and dishonest CM.

## Muslims of Gujarat

Interestingly, the BJP performed well in most constituencies with a high Muslim population, and managed 12 out of the 19 seats which had Muslim voters as the determining factor. Although Muslims comprise 9 per cent of Gujarat's 60 million population, when it comes to representation in the state legislature, only two of them (from Congress) were elected to the 182-seat assembly in the 2012 elections.<sup>(21)</sup>

Ironically, in the 2007 state elections, total Muslim winners were five; but all of them were from the Congress. To avoid annoying the Hindu voter, the BJP has never fielded any Muslim candidate in the state elections.

| Poor Representation    |          |
|------------------------|----------|
| Muslim MLAs in Gujarat |          |
| 2012                   | 2 (Cong) |
| 2007                   | 5 (Cong) |
| 2002                   | 3 (Cong) |
| 1998                   | 4 (Cong) |
| 1995                   | 1 (Ind)  |
| 1990                   | 1 (Cong) |
| 1985                   | 7 (Cong) |

**Source:** <<http://www.hindustantimes.com/Specials/Coverage/Gujarat-Assembly-Elections-2012/Chunk-HT-UI-GujaratAssemblyElections2012-TopStories/A-couple-of-token-Muslims-in-House-but-Gujarat-doesn-t-care/SP-Article10-979185.aspx>>.

In 1990, when there was a nationwide wave against the Congress, only one Muslim candidate got elected. It was a major decline from the seven Muslim MLA's in 1985. A prominent Muslim leader in Gujarat, Asifa Khan, who defected from the Congress to the BJP, said: "The BJP legislators are doing more for the Muslims. The idea behind chief minister Narendra Modi's Sadhbhavana Yatra was to bring Muslims back to the mainstream."<sup>(22)</sup>

The only serious attempt to win Muslims over to the BJP was made by Modi with his Sadbhavna programmes. But this was after eight years of running Gujarat on an anti-Muslim platform. Modi fought two assembly elections and two Lok Sabha elections on the theme of *Hum panch hamare pachees*, (1 Muslim husband X 4 wives = 25 children), and relief camps (set up for riot-stricken Muslims) as 'baby producing factories.' Gujarat has not sent a single Muslim to the Lok Sabha for over 20 years.<sup>(23)</sup>

In 2010, Muslims supported the BJP in the civic polls in which the party swept all the six municipal corporations on account of 30 per cent Muslims voting for it.<sup>(24)</sup> This tremendous political transformation came after eight years of the Gujarat massacre of 2002. But, somehow, the larger section of Muslim community remains distrustful of Modi. Despite his Sadbhavna stage shows, the Muslims know that, at the root, Modi has no sympathy for the minorities. Modi's fasting and Sadbhavna meetings were well-managed events where many bearded people with caps came on the stage pledging allegiance of loyalty to Modi. But at the same time, Modi got exposed as he refused to wear a cap offered by a Muslim. Disappointment also came when Modi did not award any election ticket to the Muslim community even after Sadbhavana.<sup>(25)</sup>

While mentioning another viewpoint, retired Indian Supreme Court Judge Katju wrote an article in a Pakistani newspaper, *The Express Tribune*, in which he condemned the Narendra Modi-led government, and said that Muslims did not feel safe under his rule. He said: "The truth is that Muslims in Gujarat fear that if they speak out against the horrors of 2002, they may be attacked and victimised. In the whole of India, Muslims (who are over 200 million of the people of India) are solidly against Modi."<sup>(26)</sup>

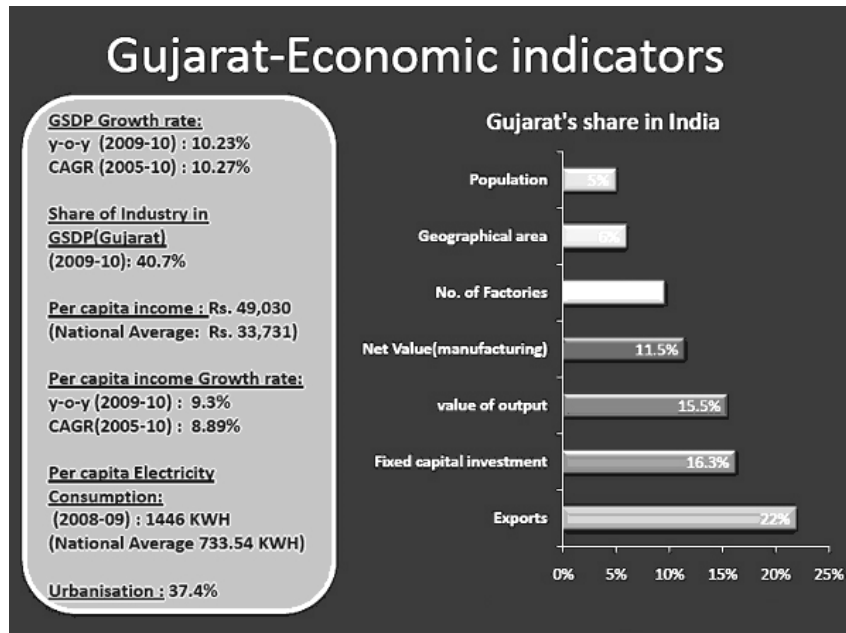
### **Economic progress under Modi's rule**

Modi is attempting to project himself as a generous politician with a track record that proves he could be the one to get India's economy back on track. Gujarat is the only state in India where consumers get an uninterrupted power supply for nearly 24 hours a day. In 10 years, Gujarat's auto mobile industry has grown from one modest plant to an expected capacity of 700,000 cars in 2014, including billion-dollar investments announced last year by Ford and Peugeot.<sup>(27)</sup>

India's business community is supportive of Narendra Modi, in advance of India's next general elections. Their backing was obvious, for the chairmen of some of the country's biggest companies, led by Ratan Tata of the Tata Group, along with ambassadors, said that they prefer red Modi's style of leadership in India. Businessmen said that Modi was the sort of leader India needed, and that they would welcome him as prime minister. Modi is seen as a rare example of a chief minister without involvement in bribes or extortion.<sup>(28)</sup>

For example, Tata said he was grateful to Modi for providing him with land for his company's Nano mini-car factory. Nano investment came to Gujarat more than four years ago, after political hassles in West Bengal. The Tata Group also has major chemical, power and other interests in Gujarat. Mukesh Ambani, who runs Reliance Industries (RIL), another leading group with big stakes in

Gujarat, praised Modi as a “leader with a grand vision”. Anand Mahindra, the chairman of the Mahindra car-and-tractor group, said that Gujarat compared favourably with China “in terms of deliverables.”<sup>(29)</sup> Chanda Kochhar, the CEO of ICICI, a leading financial-services business, praised Modi’s state as “one of the fastest-growing regions in the world”. Together these leaders represent the elite within the business elite. Jahangir Aziz, senior Asia economist said, “Under Modi’s government, there has been significant improvement in infrastructure growth, significant improvement in industrialization, as well as agriculture.”<sup>(30)</sup>



Source: CMIE, Socio-Economic Review: 2010-11

## Hindutva, Modi, and prime ministership of secular India

Despite a controversial past as discussed earlier, Modi has established a reputation of an economic reformer. His prime ministerial ambitions have come at a time when Hindutva politics is losing its national appeal in India. At present, even hardcore RSS sympathizers only pay lip service to Ayodhya and the ‘mandir vaheen Banayenge’ slogan. Modi realised that Gujarat alone could never make him prime minister because the state has only 26 Lok Sabha seats.<sup>(31)</sup> Moreover, Gujarat is inclined to communal politics where Muslims are barely 10 per cent of total population. It pays to inflame the 90 per cent against the 10 per cent. But such a tactic can never work in states like Assam with Muslim population of 31 per cent, or West Bengal (25 per cent), Bihar (18 per cent), or UP (19 per cent).<sup>(32)</sup> These are the states that send about 200 members to the Lok



Sabha. Modi is trying to project himself acceptable to both Hindus and Muslims following in the footsteps of Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Modi fielded no Muslim candidate for the 182 seats in the state assembly elections. This is proof enough that he is not secular. One more issue is that the BJP is faced with a leadership crisis. In the absence of leaders like Vajpayee, Jaswant Singh, Yashwant Sinha, Pramod Mahajan, L.K Advani, and the most prominent Hindutva face, Bal Thakray's death now means that the BJP is losing its grip on national politics. In other words the party cannot produce a strong, visible, and charismatic high command at the centre.

Another problem with Modi is that internationally he remains a controversial figure, even after a decade of the 2002 riots. The United States has not allowed him entry into the country, although the United Kingdom recently renewed relations with the Gujarat government after a gap of some years. It remains to be seen how India's relations with Pakistan will be affected should Modi become prime minister.

### **Modi and Pakistan**

If a BJP-led coalition wins majority seats in the Lok Sabha in 2014 and Modi becomes the prime minister of India, this will have a direct impact on Indo-Pakistan relations. It is appropriate here to understand Modi's policy designs vis-à-vis Pakistan. His statement on the killing of Osama bin Laden on Pakistani soil is helpful in understanding his approach towards Pakistan. He stated: "It is time that Indian government bring together all humanitarian forces of the world to form a group against Pakistan to defeat terrorism."<sup>(33)</sup> This statement also reflects that Modi being Indian premier would be a threat to regional peace, security, and development, staking the lives of millions of innocent civilians.

On the occasion of Pakistan's former interior minister Rehman Malik's visit to India, on 15 December 2012, Modi wrote a letter to the prime minister of India:

I am writing on a serious issue of talks being held on Sir Creek being handed over to Pakistan. Any attempt to hand over Sir Creek to Pakistan would be a strategic blunder considering the history and sensitivity of the region. I would earnestly request you to stop this dialogue with Pakistan at once and Sir Creek should not be handed over to Pakistan. I am writing to you at this juncture as I was told that a decision is being taken on Sir Creek issue on December 15. I would request you to stop taking any decision on this crucial issue on December 15th. After the elections are over in Gujarat, I shall seek your time to discuss this issue with you.<sup>(34)</sup>

Though there is an assumption that this letter was an election stunt, yet it shows that for his own interest he can exploit the situation as he did over the recent Line of Control (LoC) clashes. After the LoC incidents, the 22-member delegation from the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry that had gone

to Ahmedabad for the three-day ‘Vibrant Gujarat’ conference was asked by Modi to leave. Gujarat government officials said that the presence of the Pakistani delegation at the conference would have embarrassed the BJP leadership as it had taken a strong position against the Centre’s response to the LoC ceasefire violation. The Pakistani guests who were expected to attend the inaugural session of the conference, were asked to stay indoors at their hotel in Ahmedabad and were even not allowed to go sightseeing.<sup>(35)</sup>

Modi concluded his election campaign for the 2012 Gujarat Assembly elections on 15 December 2012 with these words: “If Sardar Patel was alive, Afzal Guru would have been hanged very promptly and Pakistan would never have asked for Sir Creek.”<sup>(36)</sup>

## Conclusion

Gujarat’s chief minister has emerged as a strong candidate for prime minister of India. Now Modi is trying to reshape his image. His approach seems to be working in Gujarat, but such an autocratic style would be difficult to apply at the national level, especially in an era of coalition governments.

After Modi’s 2007 victory, there were same sentiments, opinions and statements that he would become the next prime minister after the 2009 Lok Sabha elections. However, the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA), won the elections ending all such speculations. Now again, in 2013, there is almost the same atmosphere, and some observers believe that Modi could become the next prime minister; but it is not an easy task specially when Hindutva forces are weakening and support for right-wing political parties like the BJP is dwindling. Moreover, Modi has not proved to be a successful national level player to muster the support of as many parties as required for the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) to form a government.

If we examine Modi’s economic achievements, we notice that Gujarat’s development narratives are no longer any secret now. Modi has been praised by all for his impressive and positive approach towards the industrial sector of the country. Big names such as mentioned above all share good relations with the Gujarat chief minister.<sup>(37)</sup>

On India-Pakistan relations, however, the crucial question still remains unanswered: What will be Modi’s deportment if he becomes the Prime Minister of India.

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