

November 2018, Issue 2

Editorial Team: Priyamvada Trivedi, Gilles Verniers and Sudheendra Hangal

This is the second issue of the **TCPD Newsletter**. Our current issue contains experiences of three students who spent time in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan collecting information about the profile of candidates selected by political parties to contest elections. We are also excited to announce the following - a collaboration with two scholars on an on-going project on studying the determinants of political ambition amongst both women and men, an award to one of our team members for her research, a partnership with an organization to co-host public lectures of political intermediaries, two conferences that the Centre is organizing in December and lastly the addition of a new team member.

Project Updates

This past month three of our students spent time collecting data in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Gauri Bansal, a Masters' student from Azim Premji University who is interning at the Centre, spent time in Madhya Pradesh. Kairvy Grewal (4th year undergraduate student at Ashoka) and Manini Menon (3rd year undergraduate student at Ashoka) traveled in Rajasthan. They share their notes below.

Notes from the field: Gauri Bansal

With their clockwork regularity, elections in India are not merely a constitutional phenomenon. In fact, they have the appearance of a festival. The election process has always fascinated me. I have vivid childhood memories of watching the election results unfold on TV with my family and the hours spent after arguing over why a certain party won and why another lost! Elections brought everyone together at home, just like festivals. This past month, I had the chance of observing one such festival - the 2018 Vidhan Sabha in Madhya Pradesh (MP from here on).

Shivraj Singh Chauhan, the incumbent Chief Minister from BJP, is playing every card to entice voters. Starting from farm loan waivers to a bicycle for every girl after she passes high school to name only a few. As told by an eminent journalist I met during my field visit to Bhopal, people are anti-BJP. However as Congress is nowhere in sight, they will end up voting for the BJP. Allegedly, Congress not being in the picture is strategic. Congress is staying on the sidelines to allow people to find faults with the BJP government. A rather clever technique that demands Congress to not do anything until the last moment. A long and interesting conversation with my

source led me into thinking that BJP is indeed a cry-baby. The moment BJP sniffs a blow to its popularity, especially Shivraj, he plays the son-of-the-farmer card. By using his background as a farmer, he has his own way of amassing sympathy. On the other hand, I could hardly see any campaigning from Congress's side as compared to BJP.

I could sense the displeasure to go with BJP because Congress is worse. But one cannot ignore the anti-incumbency effect playing against BJP owing to farmer's distress and other scams like VYAPAM. 13 years of rule and a not-so-improved show by Congress has definitely made it difficult to guess the electoral outcome. Unlike Chhattisgarh, where the disadvantage of anti-incumbency effect is nullified, to some extent, by the pro-poor schemes, MP will reportedly see a close call. It might be similar to the case of Gujarat where BJP won by a small margin or one like that of Karnataka where the party even after winning the highest seats could not form the government. Having said that, if at all Congress manages to push out BJP from MP, the chances of winning subsequent assembly elections will increase. One cannot deny that next year's Lok Sabha election will be a spectacle with both the national parties fighting tooth and nail to win. MP may just offer Congress a chance to redeem itself. We will find out next week on December 11.

Data collection during election time is not an easy feat! The buzz around my favourite festival kept everyone occupied and as a result, left not many to talk to. We spent 2 hours looking for the Press Club's office in Bhopal. One would think Google Maps would have

mapped this but no! After giving up all hope of finding this office, the day before we were to leave, we spotted the office on the way to meet someone else. It was the most unassuming building ever! Expecting someone from the Press to be present and talk to us, we naively asked around only to discover that because of elections, all journalists were out and about but one! He seemed super enthusiastic to help but that help never came. A lesson to remember for the next trip!

A widely circulated Hindi newspaper in the area showed the utmost cooperation and willingness to help us out. If I was asked to write an acknowledgement, the person from Hindi daily would surely find a mention. Without disclosing his sources, this person made a few calls to help us get the information we were looking for. He assured us that it may take a while but he will get us what we need. A significant lesson learned was that information on the sociological profile of candidates can only be done via ground reporting by correspondence. They have been reporting about the same people and area long enough to develop close relations. Hence, journalists or reporters can tell about the sociological background of the candidates.

It was a good learning experience to be on the field in Bhopal. As I could not write about every interesting conversation I had, there are a few things that I learned which will be of use in the future. I learned that sometimes the most obvious of places are of the least help when collecting data. Instead, what usually helps is keeping an open mind. We expected persons from the media offices of popular political parties to talk to us. However, they did not have the time to talk. Rather it was unassuming people in unexpected places who made the required calls to help us get our work done.

Notes from the field: Kairvy Grewal and Manini Menon

While driving around the city, it was evident that it was election season in Jaipur. Most hoardings were sprawling with Modi, Amit Shah and Vasundhara Raje's larger than life portraits. In order to get a sense of selection procedures of candidates, we decided to visit party offices. The BJP party office as always was busy with activity. We tried to talk to a politician but he asked us to wait. After half an hour of waiting, he looked at us and walked right out. After interacting with many party workers, we realised that their idea of selection procedure was 'winnability'.

According to them, this idea of winnability didn't have much to do with caste, gender or family politics. However, our data collection told us otherwise. We

expect that selection procedures of parties were contingent on the kind of party it was rather than the candidates. In the case of BJP, we see trends of them 'playing safe' in the sense of selecting incumbents not on the basis of their profiles but on the basis of the community support (vote bank) they get. Especially in the context of selecting women candidates, BJP hasn't given out many tickets to women this time. The women who have been awarded tickets are mostly those who have run and won in the past, have family connections, and/or a caste vote bank.

For the INC, family politics and caste seemed to be the emerging trend in the profiles of the candidates. In certain constituencies like Jodhpur, INC tried to give tickets to candidates who belonged to certain communities. These communities had not been represented by the INC in the past. This seemed to be a tactic to increase the size of the vote bank. Like the BJP, most women who were awarded tickets were not just strong candidates but also had a strong hold in their respective community.

In the case of AAP, the party office was empty with no sight of activity. According to an AAP party worker, their criteria of selecting a candidate was contingent on access. He believed that most women in Rajasthan were not willing to get out of the *purdah* and show interest in politics, but if they wanted to, they could get a ticket. He asserted that AAP only awarded tickets to candidates who didn't have criminal records. That seemed to be the only selection criteria.

According to the locals of Jaipur and Alwar, BJP seems to be losing out on popularity. Vasundhara Raje has also lost out on her vote bank. BJP lost by quite a margin in the bypolls as well. The locals seemed disgruntled by Vasundhara Raje's government because she had not waived off farmer's loans. Some believed that she wouldn't have won last term but she won owing to the Modi wave. People's apathy seemed very evident during Modi's rally. Modi's choice of the rally location was extremely interesting. Modi's speech was also intriguing because he constantly was trying to reinvent his identity as a Dalit, throwing in many quotes by Ambedkar. At the same time, he tried to criticise the workings of the Congress campaign.

Research Updates

Research Funding

[Susan Ostermann](#) and [Julia Kowalski](#), from the Keough School, [University of Notre Dame](#), Indiana, have earned a competitive grant from their university to work on **TCPD**'s survey of political ambitions of women and men leaders of panchayat in Haryana. They will be joining us this winter to help conduct the survey and collaborate on the data it produces.

TCPD Research Workshop

Our workshop continues to meet on a weekly basis to discuss on-going research. Our semester schedule can be viewed [here](#).

External Engagements

Conference Participation

Saloni Bhogale presented at the [Grace Hopper Celebration India](#) (organized by AnitaB.org in partnership with ACM India) in Bangalore. The title of her poster was "Computational Methods to understand the Indian Parliament". She was awarded the third prize for her poster presentation. Congratulations Saloni!

Partnerships

TCPD joins the [Centre de Sciences Humaines, New Delhi](#), in the organisation of a series of lectures on political intermediation in India. The purpose of this series is to trigger a public conversation on the various forms and figures of political intermediation and on new forms of political participation in India. This project is funded by the Fond D'Alembert, French Institute in India.

Work with Us

We are looking for research assistants to help us with qualitative field research and data collection on main parties' candidates in the following states: Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal between February 2019 and May 2019. If interested, please email us (tcpd-contact@ashoka.edu.in) with a one page letter and a CV by December 15, 2018.

Events

Past Events

November 21 - Carole Spary (University of Nottingham) discussed her book *Performing Representation: Women Members in the Indian Parliament* at the **TCPD** Research Workshop.

Upcoming Events

- December 7 - Telangana and Rajasthan elections
- December 11 - Election results for Chhattisgarh, Mizoram, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana and Rajasthan announced
- December 13-14 - [Conference on Empirical and Computational Social Sciences in India \(ECSSI\)](#)
- December 15 - ECSSI Computational Workshop
- December 21 - [LIA SPINPER Conference](#)

Other Updates

TCPD team

Hem Nath Mishra has joined **TCPD** as its Assistant Manager - Administration. Welcome Hem!