

# The Role of the New Indian Middle Class in Lok Sabha General Elections 2009 and 2014: A Comparative Study

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**Abstract** - Indian democracy in the age of globalisation is highly influenced by the demographic transformation in the society. Dispensing with the erstwhile traditional barriers like casteism, religions and languages, the current Indian society is represented mainly by the new Indian middle class. This class is a convergent one with amelioration of the below-middle class people to this class. Obviously there is hierarchy among this class. Sometimes, the upper rung of the middle class is treated as the elites. This class has good purchase capacity and inclination towards a consumerist life-style. This class, therefore, not politically involved throughout the year but politically active and vibrant in its electoral capacity. This class has become a no-negligible in the election results particularly since 2009. In 2014 itself, the new Indian middle class became decisive in 2014 Lok Sabha General Election. Here, it is an attempt to explore a comparative study of the 2009 and 2014 Lok Sabha General Elections in terms of this class being a determinant and decisive factor.

**Keywords:** Globalisation, New Indian Middle Class, Lok Sabha General Elections

## I. INTRODUCTION

India is a pre-historic civilisation. Now, it is one of the fastest growing States in the world. Socio-economically, it is one of the front-runner Developing States in the world. In 1991, the then Finance Minister of India - an eminent Economist - who became the Prime Minister of India twice later, in 2004 and 2009, Dr. Manmohan Singh launched in the Annual Budget, the LPG (Liberalisation Privatisation Globalisation) Policy. Until before that, the Indian economy had been a closed one. Before this opportunity came along, there had been a political mishap for the national politics of India; the former Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi got assassinated “after the first of three phases of voting in the Lok Sabha elections” (Mukherjee 2016, p. 131). The Indian National Congress (hereinafter, the INC) performed well in those states where the elections took place after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi (ibid, p. 135). Therefore, it can be said that the INC commanded support of the citizens to a great extent, which became a reality in the wake of the elections result on June 18, 1991 (ibid, p. 135). This performance on the part of the INC could not last long. Down the years its electoral popularity fluctuated. In this regard, the reference to the LPG Policy is mentioned because this Policy ushered not only a new kind of economic pattern but also necessary changes in the innate nature of the Indian society itself. This change in the

national economy promoted the development of the Services Sector or the Tertiary Sector by eclipsing the Primary and the Secondary Sector(s). Therefore, the LPG Policy ushered the Structural Adjustments in the Indian Political Economy to a higher extent. The most beneficiary of this Policy has been a new class that is essentially not at par with Marxist views of Class. This new class is the New Indian Middle Class.

The new Indian middle class is a heterogeneous class. “[T]he characteristic feature of the new middle class is its high level of consumption expenditure relative to the earlier understanding of the middle class and its changing consumption habits” (Krishnan and Hatekar 2017, p. 40). This class is identified by the expenditure capability between \$2 and \$ 10 per capita per day (ibid, p. 42). Socio-economically, the members of this class do not have any symmetry; they are rather culturally and ideologically diversified. What is common to all of them is that they are neither rich nor poor. They do have the middle purchase capacity. And, most of them are educated with professional qualifications and employed with the Tertiary Sector of the national economy. “In public discourses, practices of consumption and the depictions of associated lifestyle changes distinguish the new Indian middle class from the older traditional middle class that was held back by the cultural strictures on consumption inherent in Nehruvian state socialism and Gandhian ideals of austerity” (Fernandes 2016 [2011], p. 69; Khilnani 1997). This class prefers being electorally vibrant to being politically active. “After being largely stable between 1999-2000 and 2004-05, the new Indian middle class in India doubled its size between 2004-05 and 2011-12, amounting to nearly half of India’s population” (Krishnan and Hatekar *op. cit.*, p. 40). In other words, members of this class are sick of pursuing day-today party politics. Further, they are not biased ideologically. In this regard, it should be kept in mind that they are free from normative political values. They are, thus, behaviouralists. With the demise of ideologies, they look forward to political and electoral behaviour of the political leaders. Therefore, it is the leadership instead of a certain political brand or ideal that motivates their electoral opinions and decisions. “The rise of the new Indian middle class represents the political construction of a social group that operates as a proponent of economic liberalization” (Fernandes 2006, p. xviii; 2016 [2011], p. 68). This article is going to pursue the

comparative estimate of the new Indian middle class as an electoral determinant by comparing the 2014 Lok Sabha General Election with the 2009 one from myriad demographic and politico-electoral perspectives. However, to establish the views on the basis of the 2009 General Election as the constant factors for comparison with the 2014 General Election, the 2004 General Election result has to be reckoned. Therefore, it is necessary to begin with the comparison between the 2004 and 2009 General Election(s).

## II. ROLE OF NEW INDIAN MIDDLE CLASS IN GENERAL ELECTION 2009: CONTINUOUS SINCE 2004!

The National Election Study 2009 shows that the share of the middle class vote for the INC was 29 per cent that decreased by 1 percentage point over the 2004 Lok Sabha General Election. The alliances of the INC got 8 per cent of the middle class votes, which maintained the status quo. On the other hand, the BJP's share of the middle class votes drastically fell down by 8 percentage points. The same happened to the alliances of BJP as well. Interestingly enough, the Left Front could retain the middle class votes almost the same except a downfall by only 1 percentage point over the previous Election in 2004. Besides, in the 2009 General Election, the INC's share of the Rich votes was 30 per cent while that of the Lower class votes, too, was 30 per cent, as compared to the Poor votes being 27 per

cent. Therefore, it can be said that in the 2009 General Elections the INC commanded support from citizens irrespective of classes.

On the other hand, the result of the BJP should be assessed somewhat differently. The data show that the BJP's share of votes from all classes except the rich fell down as compared to the 2004 elections. While the poor votes for the INC increased by 2 percentage points, it fell down by 5 percentage points in case of the BJP. It denotes that the BJP was not supported by the poor who relied more upon the INC. Almost the same happened to the lower and middle classes. The support from the middle class fell down to the highest extent, that is, by 8 percentage points both for the BJP and its alliances. Therefore, it indicates that the 2009 General Election justified the BJP as the party for the rich. But the problem was that in the wake of the services sector jobs and businesses, the expansion of the new Indian middle class was very progressively high. Therefore, neglecting the new Indian middle class was never a preferable option to any political party, particularly to the BJP which was a serious contestant of the INC in grabbing the power at the Centre. Only the point of hope was that the UPA-NDA gap of receiving votes from a class was the second minimum in case of the middle class following the rich. The UPA-NDA gap for the rich was 7.5 per cent as compared to 11.3 for the middle class, better than the lower class (12.8 per cent) and the poor (15.8 per cent) respectively (Table I).

TABLE I ALL-INDIA RESULT OF MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES BY ECONOMIC CLASS (LOK SABHA ELECTIONS 2009 AND 2004)

Class	UPA-NDA Gap	Congress and Allies		BJP and Allies		Left	
		Vote Share 2009	Change from 2004	Vote Share 2009	Change from 2004	Vote Share 2009	Change from 2004
Rich	7.5	30 and 7	5 and 7	23 and 7	7 and -5	4	-4
Middle	11.3	29 and 8	-1 and 0	21 and 5	-8 and -8	6	-1
Lower	12.8	30 and 6	4 and -4	18 and 5	-4 and -9	7	0
Poor	15.8	27 and 9	2 and -1	15 and 5	-5 and -9	11	3

Source: National Election Study, 2009 and 2004; all data to be read in %

## III. ROLE OF DALIT MIDDLE CLASS BY RURAL-URBAN DISCOURSE IN 2009

The middle class is no more limited to the upper castes only. Thanks to different welfare projects of the government in general and the system of Reservation in particular, dalits and backward castes got the opportunity to get uplifted to a higher stature of the socio-economic life. Further, the reformist policies like "reduction of taxes, deregulation, privatisation and greater access to consumer goods" (Kumar 2012, p. 151) helped the dalits with professional qualifications to enter the new Indian middle class. The dalit vote share was the highest for the INC (27 per cent) whereas the BJP bagged 12 per cent. However, the BSP (Bahujan Samaj Party) led by Kumari Mayawati ji bettered than the BJP. The BSP bagged 21 per cent of the dalit votes. Exploring it in detail, the Rural Middle Class votes for the

INC were 32 per cent as against 13 per cent for the BJP and 18 per cent for the BSP. The Urban Middle Class dalit votes, on the other hand, for the INC were 31 per cent as against 11 per cent for the BJP and 14 per cent for the BSP. Therefore, it is clear that among the dalits, the BJP could not fare well as compared to the INC though the result with respect to the BSP, achieving a considerably good result, was not unexpected at all (Table 2). If, among the dalits, the rural middle class and the urban middle class votes shared by the INC be calculated to the extent of Arithmetic Mean, it would be that the entire dalit middle class — both rural and urban combined — 31.5 per cent  $[(32+31)/2]$  whereas, for the BJP, it was 12  $[(13+11)/2]$  as compared to what was shared by the BSP, that is, 16  $[(18+14)/2]$ . This reiterates that in the 2009 General Election, the dalit middle class votes shared by the INC were the highest, preceding the BSP's and the BJP's respectively.

TABLE II VOTE CHOICE AMONG DALITS BY LOCALITY AND CLASS IN 2009

Class	Congress		BJP		BSP	
	Dalit Vote Share (%)	Difference from Other Social Groups	Dalit Vote Share (%)	Difference from Other Social Groups	Dalit Vote Share (%)	Difference from Other Social Groups
Rural Upper	31	1	12	-11	19	15
Rural Middle	32	3	13	-9	18	15
Rural Lower	20	-8	11	-8	24	20
Urban Upper	39	10	15	-11	7	2
Urban Middle	31	3	11	-8	14	11
Urban Lower	26	-2	6	-6	19	17
Total	27	-2	12	-8	21	18

Source: NES 2009

#### IV. ROLE OF ADIVASI MIDDLE CLASS IN 2009

The adivasi people, too, showed their participant culture considerably. As much as 58.5 per cent middle class and 58 per cent lower middle class people cast their votes across India (Table III). The objective calculation shows that the Arithmetic Mean of the total adivasi voter turnout (N) was:

$$N = \Sigma x/n = (63.5 + 58.5 + 58 + 57.6 + 52.9)/5 = 58.1$$

Whereas the total adivasi turnout in the 2009 General Election was 58.1 per cent, the middle class and lower middle class turnouts were 58.5 per cent and 58 per cent respectively. Therefore, the total middle class turnout was in terms of Arithmetic Mean:  $MC = (58.5+58)/2 = 58.25$  per cent which was even 0.15 per cent higher than the total adivasi turnout in the 2009 Lok Sabha General Election.

TABLE III ADIVASI TURNOUT PERCENTAGES BY SOCIAL CLASSES IN 2009

Class	Percentage
Rich	63.5
Middle Class	58.5
Lower Middle	58
Poor	57.6
Very poor	52.9

Source: NES 2009 Data set;  
Adivasi sample size: 3338

#### V. GENERAL ELECTIONS 2009 AND 2014 COMPARED: PLACE OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

Another perspective of comparison between the two General Elections is the class composition, turnout and party preferences among the middle class in the 2009 and 2014 General Elections. In these General Elections, the middle class compositions among the voters were 20 per cent and 36 per cent. It indicates to the sharp expansion of the middle class. This has been feasible mainly due to the professional expertise and expansion of the Tertiary Sector of the national economy. Thus, this becomes the new Indian middle class. As to the voter turnout, the middle class turnouts were 60 per cent and 69 per cent in 2009 and 2014 General Elections respectively. Therefore, the middle class turnout in the 2014 General Election increased approximately by almost 1 percentage point more than double over its turnout in the 2009 General Election  $[\{(36 \times 69)/100\} - \{(20 \times 60)/100\}]$  (Table IV).

Further, so far as the class-wise party preferences are concerned, the INC lost middle class votes by 31.03 per cent approximately  $[\{(29-20)/29\} \times 100]$  whereas the BJP gained middle class votes by 45.45 per cent approximately  $[\{(32-22)/22\} \times 100]$  in comparison with the 2009 Election. This proves that the middle class choice in favour of the BJP sharply increased in 2014 as compared to 2009 and also vis-à-vis the INC (Table IV).

TABLE IV CLASS-WISE COMPOSITION, TURNOUT & PARTY PREFERENCE (2014 AND 2009)

Class	Class Composition		Class-wise Turnout		Class-wise Party Preference			
	2009	2014	2009	2014	Congress		BJP	
					2009	2014	2009	2014
Poor	41	20	57	60	27	20	16	24
Lower	33	33	59	68	29	19	19	31
Middle	20	36	60	69	29	20	22	32
Upper	6	11	57	67	29	17	25	38

Source: National Elections Study 2014 and 2009

## VI. MIDDLE CLASS VOTER TURNOUT BY RURAL-URBAN DISCOURSE: COMPARISON BETWEEN 2009 AND 2014

The middle class voter turnouts in 2014 were 71 per cent in rural areas, 66 per cent in town or city and 57 per cent in the metropolitan regions as against 61 per cent, 59 per cent and 52 per cent respectively (Table V). This indicates to two types of observations; first, in all cases, the middle class people voted the highest in number in the 2014 General Election, except being the same as the upper middle class, thereby, indicating to the replacement of the regime at the Centre. This explanation seems to be justifiably inferred in the light of the second observation that irrespective of regions — whether rural, urban or metropolitan — the total voter turnout being 189 in 2014 [ $\Sigma X_{2014} = (69+63+57)$ ] was higher than 166 in 2009 [ $\Sigma X_{2009} = (59+58+49)$ ] by 23 percentage points (189-166). Therefore, the 2014 General Election was more of justifying the Demand Polity (Rudolph and Rudolph 1997, pp. 177-85) than the 2009 one.

TABLE V CLASS-WISE VOTER TURNOUT IN RURAL-URBAN LOCATIONS

Class	Village		Town/City		Metro	
	2009	2014	2009	2014	2009	2014
Poor	58	63	56	57	44	50
Lower	60	70	60	64	50	56
Middle	61	71	59	66	52	57
Upper	59	71	53	59	57	69
Total	59	69	58	63	49	57

Source: Sridharan 2014, p. 74

## VII. SUCCESS OF NEW INDIAN MIDDLE CLASS: 2009 AND 2014 COMPARED

The new Indian middle class is basically based in the urban regions. In 2009, the urban middle class vote share of the INC and its alliances was 31 per cent (23+8), the same as the urban rich, which was 12 per cent higher than that of the BJP and its allies, that is, 19 per cent (16+3) (Table 6).

This analysis has to be tallied with the increase in the voter turnout to ensure the success rate of the NDA (the BJP and its allies) (Table 7). This Table shows that the voter turnout increase in case of the NDA sharply improved over 2009 and its success rate was 96 that justifies that the NDA won 67 seats out of 70 where the voter turnout increased by 15 percentage points over the 2009 General Election (Verma and Kumar 2014, p. 9). Similarly, in case of the constituencies where voter turnout increased between 10 and 14.9 percentage points, out of the total 145 seats, as many as 125 seats were won by the NDA making the success rate 86 per cent. In case of the constituencies where voter turnout increased between 0.1 and 9.9 percentage points, the NDA won 123 seats out of 267 seats, which transpired the success rate to be 46 per cent. Therefore, in the constituencies where increase in the voter turnout was even more than 10 percentage points, the NDA fared well. This makes it clear that the NDA's triumph in the 2014 Lok

Sabha General Election was not unthinkable as well as unexpected (ibid, pp. 8-9).

TABLE VI VOTE BY CLASS (URBAN VOTERS), 2009

Class	Congress	Congress Allies	BJP	BJP Allies	Others
Rich	23	8	20	3	45
Middle Class	23	8	16	3	50
Lower Class	22	9	11	5	52
Poor	24	15	7	5	49
Very Poor	18	18	12	5	47

Source: NES 2009

TABLE VII INCREASE IN VOTER TURNOUT AND NDA'S SUCCESS RATE IN 2014

Increase in Voter Turnout in comparison to 2009	Total Seats	Seats won by NDA	NDA's Success Rate
More than 15 percentage points	70	67	96
Between 10 and 14.9 percentage points	145	125	86
Between 0.1 and 9.9 percentage points	267	123	46

Source: Election Commission of India

## VIII. PARTY CHOICE OF DIFFERENT CLASSES AND CASTE/COMMUNITY IN 2014

The next observation on middle class in 2014 is the party preferences of the voters. It needs to be remembered that in 2014 all castes/communities except the Muslims supported the BJP instead of the INC. The middle class belonging to the upper caste preferred the BJP to the INC by 31 per cent. The middle class belonging to the OBC, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe preferred the BJP to the INC by 38 per cent. Among them, the OBC middle class vote for the BJP over the INC was the highest (17 per cent). This proves higher popularity of the BJP among the middle class irrespective of castes among the Hindus. However, three observations are incidentally significant; first, it is not that the Muslim middle class did not vote for the BJP at all. The BJP got support of 11 per cent of the Muslim middle class voters. Secondly, the highest support of the Muslims, which the BJP achieved in the 2014 General Election, belonged to the middle class itself. The supports of the Muslims belonging to the upper middle class, the lower class and the poor in favour of the BJP were 7 per cent, 10 per cent and 4 per cent respectively as compared to 11 per cent support from the middle class Muslims (Table VIII). Thirdly, in terms of the upper caste vote-gaps between the INC and the BJP, the middle class acquired third position (31 per cent) as compared to the upper middle class (42 per cent) and the lower class (37 per cent). Only the poor class vote-gap between the INC and the BJP (24 per cent) was lower than that of the middle class and, that too, by 7 per cent (31-24 per cent) (Table VIII).

TABLE VIII PARTY PREFERENCE OF VOTERS BY DIFFERENT CLASSES AND CASTE/COMMUNITY IN 2014

Caste/Community	Poor		Lower		Middle		Upper	
	Cong.*	BJP	Cong.	BJP	Cong.	BJP	Cong.	BJP
Upper Caste	13	37	11	48	15	46	13	55
OBC	15	28	15	37	16	33	14	37
SC	17	22	18	22	20	27	17	25
ST	28	33	31	36	25	39	26	53
Muslims	41	4	34	10	42	11	27	7
Others	19	17	23	18	22	24	31	16

\*By 'Cong.' denotes the Indian National Congress or the INC or Congress  
Source: CSDS Data Unit, Delhi (2014)

### IX. PARTY CHOICE OF NEW INDIAN MIDDLE CLASS THROUGH AGE GROUPS IN 2014

Finally, the observation on the new Indian middle class goes with respect to the age-group of the voters. The votes of the age group of 18-22 belonging to the middle class in favour of the BJP was the second highest (40 per cent) following the middle class (44 per cent), which was higher than that related to the lower class (35 per cent) and the poor (24 per

cent). In case of the vote-gap, too, between the INC and the BJP, the middle class was the second highest (23 per cent) following the upper middle class (33 per cent) as compared to the lower class (17 per cent) and the poor (1 per cent). Here is another comparative observation on the middle class votes for the INC and the BJP is that the middle class vote-gap between the political parties was the highest (23 per cent) among all of the age-groups.

TABLE IX PARTY PREFERENCE OF VOTERS BY DIFFERENT CLASSES AND AGE GROUPS IN 2014

Age Group	Poor		Lower		Middle		Upper	
	Cong.*	BJP	Cong.	BJP	Cong.	BJP	Cong.	BJP
18-22	23	24	18	35	17	40	11	44
23-25	24	25	18	34	21	32	16	43
26-35	19	27	21	33	19	33	17	40
36-45	18	24	17	30	20	32	15	36
46-55	19	22	21	31	20	31	20	35
56 and above	20	22	18	28	23	29	21	35

\*By 'Cong.' denotes the Indian National Congress or the INC or Congress  
Source: CSDS Data Unit (2014)

### X. CONCLUSION

All observations prove that the BJP was the first choice of the upper middle class, in the 2014 General Election. The next class in favour of the BJP coming to power has been the middle class. In fact, with the basic observation that the BJP was not a first choice for the lower class and the poor, and that it was the first choice of the rich, it has to be mentioned here that what became decisive to the triumph for the BJP in the 2014 Lok Sabha General Election was the middle class that appeared and grew in the wake of globalisation as the new Indian middle class. Incidentally, it is a valid question as to why the new Indian middle class voted for the BJP in 2014! Speculations vary with respect to so many reasons ranging from the Hindu consolidation to corruption. In reality, it has been found out that 38 per cent of the upper middle class felt that the economic opportunities in terms of employment did deteriorate while 21 per cent claimed that it improved as compared to 34 per cent saying that it maintained the status quo (Sridharan, op. cit., p. 75). Similarly, 34 per cent of the middle class felt

that the employment opportunity fell down a compared to 20 per cent claiming to have improved and 35 per cent claiming the retention of the status quo (ibid, p. 75). Besides, most of the upper middle class and the middle class gave positive responses to the BJP/Modi pledges in favour of the infrastructural expenditure instead of subsidising the poor (ibid, p. 75).

Therefore, the new Indian middle class aspirations were properly accommodated by the promises that the BJP/Modi campaign made in the 2014 General Election. This class might have been highly influenced by the media. Television and "the war in....social media [were] about to change the rules of old-style debates and political jousts" (Sardesai 2014, p. 235). In 2014, the Modi-wave influenced the middle class voters to a great extent (Verma, A. K., 2014, p. 91). In fact, it is a question of debate whether their choice was Modi ji or the BJP. In fact, the survey result of the upper middle and middle class shows that Modi ji as the Prime Ministerial nominee was supported by 23 per cent of this class over any other candidate from the BJP (Sridharan,

op. cit., p. 75). Therefore, at the threshold of the 2019 General Election, it is a prime requirement to keep the observation on whether the new Indian middle class would retain its determinant electoral role in the imminent Lok Sabha election.

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