

Voting pattern of citizens in India based on ADR-Daksh Survey

By Aparna Lall

The fact that politics in India has entered a very interesting phase cannot be denied anymore. Growing number of Indian masses, mostly from the burgeoning middle class, which have till now chosen to remain detached and indifferent from active politics, have gradually started following the national political scenario as well as politicians, closely. The battle of politics is getting intense with the fresh arrival of the rebellious waves on the scene, giving tough competition to the so-called 'secular' and 'hardliner' ideologies forcing them to come out of their comfort zone and make new strategies to keep their political stature intact.

Along with the Election Commission of India, many civil society organizations, individual activists and a small section of media and artists have been involved in creating voter awareness to make an informed choice with the aim to decrease the influence of money and muscle power in politics. It will be inaccurate to say that they have failed in their attempt entirely, as people are increasingly becoming aware of the fact that corrupt candidates and politicians with a criminal background have found a stranglehold in Indian politics and it is obviously not a good sign for Indian democracy.

However, the realization that the influence of candidates with a criminal background has been growing steadily in national and regional politics is not deterring people from voting for tainted candidates.

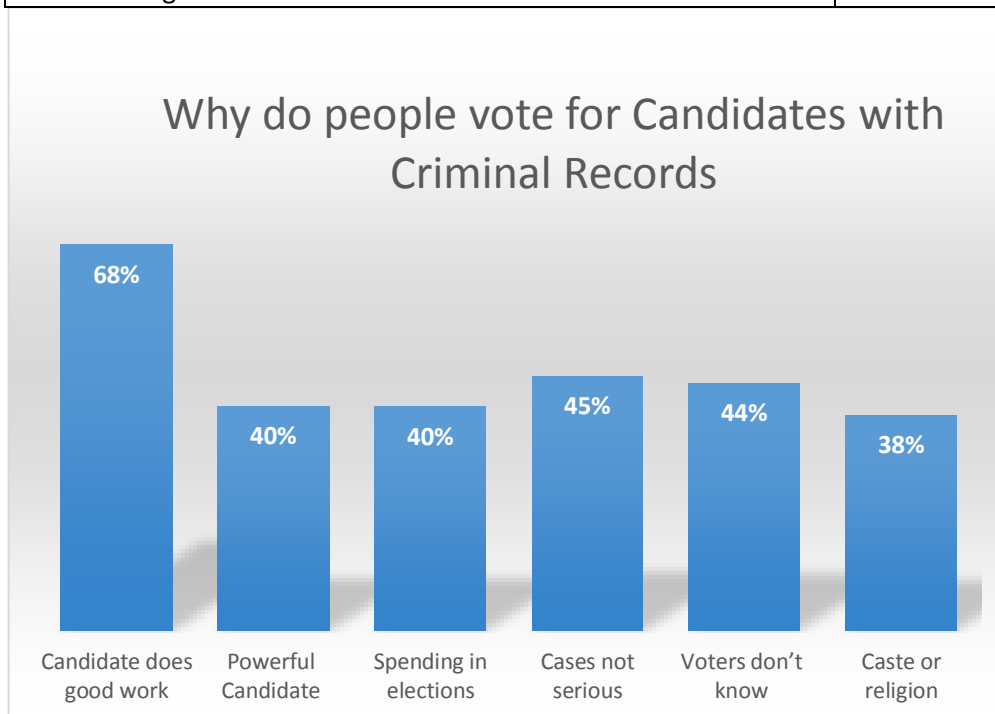
'**ADR-Daksh All India Lok Sabha 2014 Survey,**' which is the largest ever survey conducted in India with over 2,50,000 respondents in 530 Lok Sabha constituencies, has brought out 'disturbing' facts about the voting behaviour of Indian citizens. The survey revealed that a large section of Indians, close to **70 per cent**, do not hesitate to vote for candidates with criminal records if they do "good work" in their constituencies.

Not surprisingly, a significantly large segment of the population (**nearly 40 per cent**) also ignore the criminal background of the candidates if they are of their own caste and religion. **Table I** and **the graph** show the voting behaviour of Indian citizens. The questionnaire was formulated to determine the various aspects of – why people vote-- and the participants were asked to rate those aspects on a point scale of 10.

Table I

Why people vote:	Overall Score (on a scale of 10)
Party	6.70
Candidate	7.28
PM Candidate	5.98
Caste/religion	5.11
Distribution of 'gifts'	4.36
<i>Do you think people should vote for seriously tainted candidates?</i>	Percentage
Percent who responded to the question	55%
Yes	22%

No	78%
Yes/No "knowledge and opinion questions": Do you know	
Do you know "Gifts" for vote is illegal	69%
Do you know Candidates distributing 'gifts'	34%
Do you know You can get candidate criminal record	35%
Why do people vote for those with serious criminal records:	
Candidate does good work	68%
Powerful Candidate	40%
Spending in elections	40%
Cases not serious	45%
Voters don't know	44%
Caste or religion	38%



Source -- ADR-Daksh All India Lok Sabha 2014 Survey

The outcome of the survey cannot be ignored because an analysis of self-sworn affidavits of candidates by Association for Democratic Reforms' (ADR) has revealed that even those who face serious criminal charges are voted to power more than once.

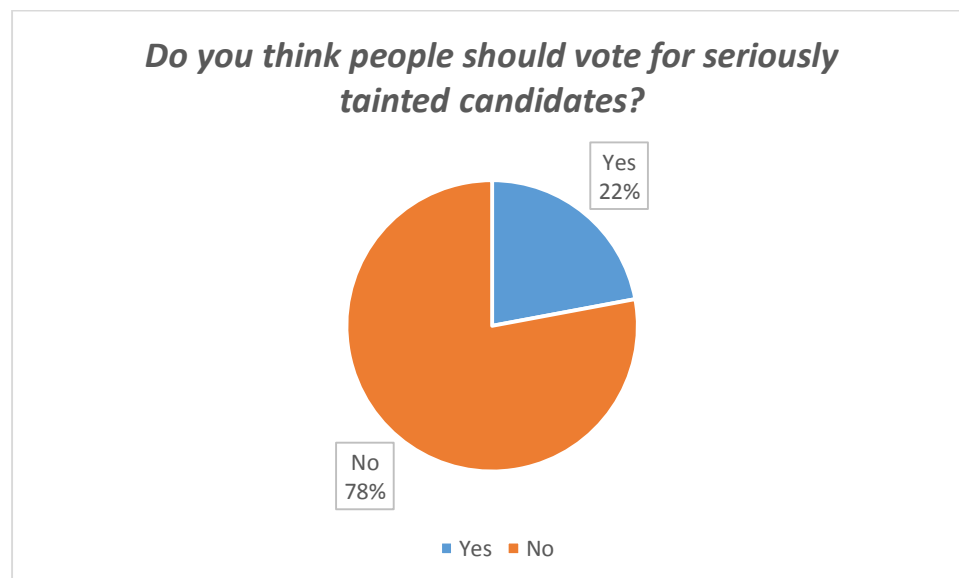
ADR's analysis of **8,882 winners** covering all Assembly and Lok Sabha elections between 2004 and September 2013 found that **2497 (28 per cent)** MPs/MLAs had **9,993** pending criminal cases against them while **1,187 (13 per cent)** candidates had **4,824** serious criminal charges including murder, rape, corruption, extortion, dacoity, etc. That translates into more than one serious case for every two winners.

Among the **8,882** winners, over **3,450** candidates had contested the elections more than once. Of them, there were **849** with a criminal record for the first time they contested, and **631** who had a criminal case the second time they contested. About **474** of them had the same cases pending against

them for at least four years. This means that a person facing serious cases can complete the term of an Assembly or Lok Sabha before the cases are disposed off.

It is ironical that when asked if people should vote for seriously tainted candidates, **78 per cent** of the participants in **ADR-Daksh Survey** answered in the negative but around **69 per cent** people accepted that they ignore the criminal background of the candidate if they do 'good work' while voting.

Table II

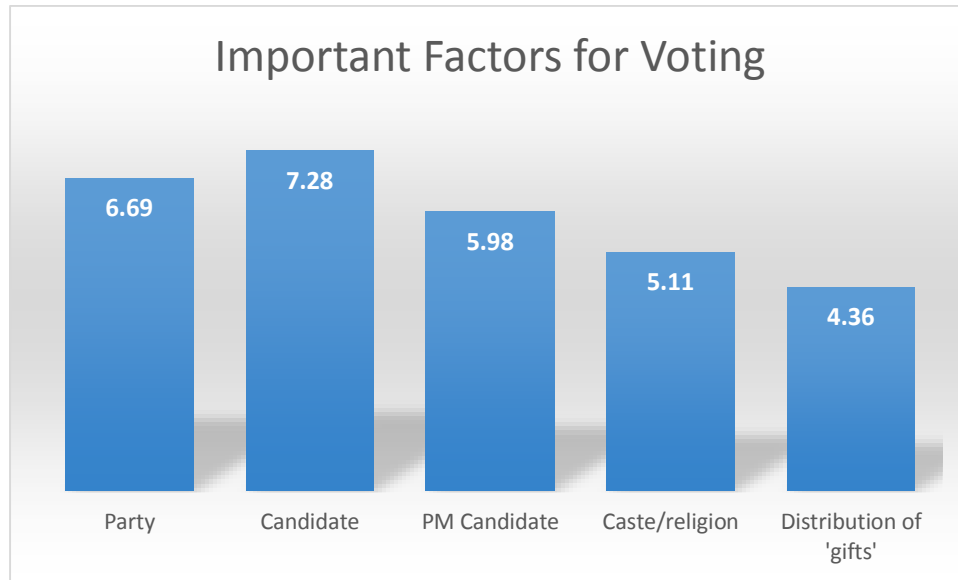


Source -- ADR-Daksh All India Lok Sabha 2014 Survey

ADR's analysis of self-sworn affidavits of candidates also showed that while only **12 per cent** of candidates with a "clean" record win on an average, nearly double the percentage (**23 per cent**) of candidates with some kind of criminal record win. Strikingly, **23 per cent** of all those with serious criminal charges also win. It is, therefore, quite obvious that 'winnability' increases manifold with the combination of wealth and criminal record and this partly explains the strong tendency of political parties to continue fielding people with badly tainted records.

The survey also tried to identify the important factors that people take into account before voting for a particular candidate. **Table III** shows the issues that come into the mind of people while voting and the participants have rated those aspects on a point scale of 10. It was found that while voting, the citizens give most importance to the candidate himself, followed subsequently by his party, PM candidate from the party, caste/religion of the candidate and distribution of 'gifts' ahead of the polls.

Table III



Source -- ADR-Daksh All India Lok Sabha 2014 Survey

Having mentioned these facts, it is very important to note that a big section of population still believes that they have little say in everything happening in the political scenario of the country. While some rural people feel it is not in their hand to change their destiny and thus that of the country, some of the educated urban class feel that one vote of theirs cannot make a difference. Either they do not vote, or vote on the basis of incomplete information. The figures in **Table I** also made it clear that **44 per cent** participants had no knowledge about the criminal background of their candidates and they did not inquire about the same.

However, it is important to mention here that people's mind set is changing gradually and they are realizing the importance of making an informed choice for their better future. Increasing number of people are visiting Myneta.info, adrindia.org and many other such websites and calling on different helpline numbers to know the criminal, financial and educational background of their people before voting. So it will not be inappropriate to say that things are moving in the right direction, though slowly, and a light is visible at the end of the tunnel.

The belief that voting is not only their constitutional 'right' but also a 'duty' towards their country has to be ingrained in the minds of the Indian citizens because this will pave the way for the better people to enter politics and improve the governance in the future.

Ends

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