

# India's Hindi Heartland Key to General Elections

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## Summary

*With Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking a second term in India's general elections, scheduled between April and May 2019, the outcome of the poll battle will depend a great deal on how 10 states in the country's Hindi-speaking heartland in north and central India vote. Modi's historic win in 2014 as the first leader in three decades to win a full majority in India's lower house of Parliament, the Lok Sabha, was powered by unprecedented gains for his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in these states. The BJP won over 84 per cent of seats in the Hindi heartland in that election. This paper summarises the political outlook of India's Hindi heartland in 2019, examines key factors at play in each of its constituent states and puts together cumulative data from the various state-wise opinion polls and assembly elections to illustrate how the Indian political chessboard has shifted and the likely prospects as India heads into its national election.*

## Introduction

Whichever way one slices it, India's Hindi heartland holds the key to its general elections in April-May 2019.<sup>1</sup> Prime Minister Narendra Modi's historic victory in 2014, when he became the first leader to win a full majority in the Indian Parliament in three decades, was majorly powered by unprecedented political gains made by his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in this region.

Spread across north and central India, India's 10 majorly Hindi-speaking states (Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Haryana and Delhi) account for as many as 225 (41 per cent) of the total 543 seats in the Lok Sabha, India's lower house of Parliament. BJP won a whopping 190 (84.4 per cent) of these 225 seats in 2014. Overall, these 190 seats in the Hindi heartland accounted for as much 67.3 per cent of the BJP's final tally of 282 in the 2014 Lok Sabha (see Figure 1).<sup>2</sup>

Overall, though 2014 is widely remembered in the popular imagination as a national landslide for Modi because of its seat-share majority in India's first-past-the-post electoral system, it is important to remember that though the BJP had 31 per cent of the vote-share

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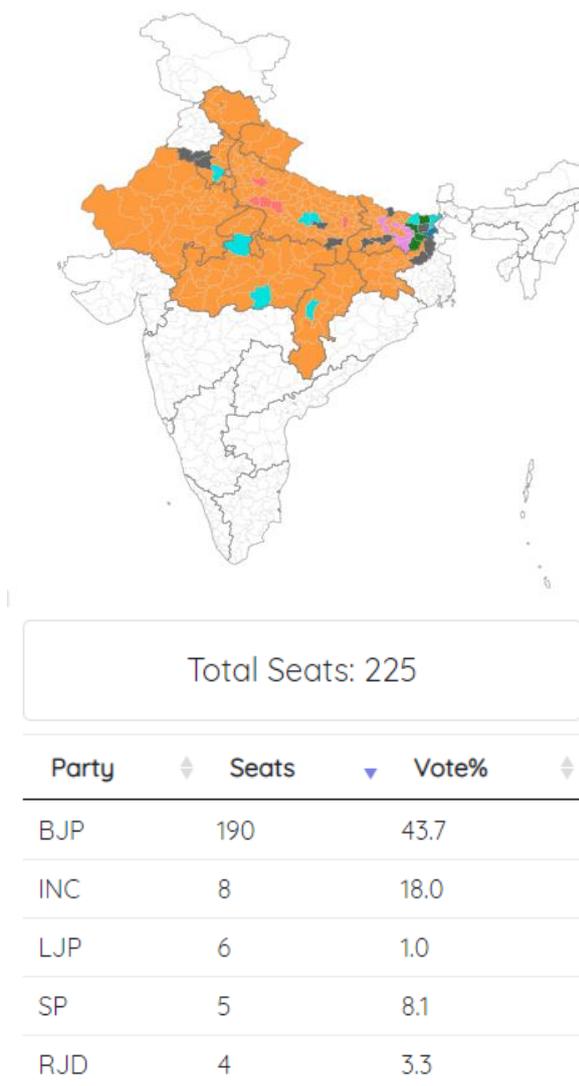
<sup>1</sup> The election is being held in seven phases: with voting on 11, 18, 23, 29 April and 6, 12 and 13 May 2019. Counting of votes is scheduled for 23 May 2019. Election Commission of India: <https://eci.gov.in/files/file/9396-announcement-of-schedule-for-general-elections-to-lok-sabha-and-legislative-assemblies-in-andhra-pradesh-arunachal-pradesh-odisha-sikkim-2019/>

<sup>2</sup> BJP's tally in Lok Sabha shrunk from 282 in 2014 to 268 in 2019 due to subsequent by-polls held in these seats for various reasons. See latest tally on Lok Sabha official page, <https://loksabha.nic.in/members/PartyWiseStatisticalList.aspx>

then, 85 per cent of all BJP seats in that election came from just two geographical regions: the Hindi heartland plus the two west-Indian states of Gujarat and Maharashtra (where BJP won 51 of 76 seats on offer). These numbers underscore the fragmented geographic nature of the 2014 vote, beneath the Modi landslide, and the vital political importance of its core bastions for BJP as it seeks a second term in 2019.

They explain why the road to Delhi has metaphorically often passed through Lucknow, as the old political adage goes. This paper examines the electoral outlook for 2019 in the Hindi heartland. It explains the factors at play in each of the states in the region and, by putting together cumulative data from the various state-wise opinion polls, assembly elections and by-polls, shows what has shifted in the polity over the past five years.

**Figure 1: Hindi heartland in 2014: BJP won 84.4% of 225 Lok Sabha seats in this region and it powered its Parliamentary majority (67% of all BJP seats)**



Source: Election Commission of India, Loki.ai

The election in these states is read across seven phases between 11 April-19 May 2019: with different seats in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar scheduled to vote across each of the seven voting phases; Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand to vote in four phases (Phases 4, 5, 6 and 7); Rajasthan (Phases 4 and 5); and Chhattisgarh (Phases 1 and 2) in two phases each; and Delhi (Phase 6), Haryana (Phase 6), Himachal Pradesh (Phase 7) and Uttarakhand (Phase 1) slated to vote in single phases.<sup>3</sup> Let us see now examine the state of play in each of these states.

## **Uttar Pradesh: Mandal vs Kamandal Part Two**

With alliance partners Akhilesh Yadav of the Samajwadi Party (SP), Mayawati of the Bahujan Samajan Party (BSP) and Ajit Singh of the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) starting their joint election campaign with a combined rally in Saharanpur's Deoband, home of Asia's largest Islamic seminary, and Uttar Pradesh (UP) Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath earlier kicking off his campaign with Hindu prayers at the Shakumbhari Devi temple in the same town, the election battle in UP is redolent with the politics of religious symbolism.

At its core, the result in Uttar Pradesh will boil down to what has been called Part Two of the Mandal (signifying caste arithmetic) vs Kamandal (signifying Hindu identity) trope that defined the state's politics through the early 1990s.<sup>4</sup>

UP is fundamental to the BJP's prospects because it won 71 (with 42 per cent vote-share) of the state's 80 Lok Sabha seats in 2014. The state sends more MPs to Parliament than any other state and it formed the backbone of the BJP's victory march in 2014. Though UP repeated a similar voting pattern in the 2017 state election when the BJP swept to power in the province winning 312 (with 40 per cent vote-share) of 403 legislative assembly seats, the caste arithmetic of the alliance means that 2019 may be a different ball game as BJP reverses in two Lok Sabha by-elections -- Gorakhpur and Phoolpur -- in March 2018 demonstrated.

Both stronghold seats were vacated by UP Chief Minister Adityanath and Deputy Chief Minister K.P. Maurya after they moved to the state government and their subsequent loss provided an early indication of the power of a joint opposition combine, unlike previously fragmented battles.

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed and searchable constituency and state-wise breakdown on voting phases, see:

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/elections/lok-sabha-election-schedule>

<sup>4</sup> Subhash Mishra, 'As Yogi and Akhilesh set the election agenda, UP ready for Mandal vs Kamandal Part 2', The Times of India, 20 March 2019, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/lucknow/as-yogi-and-akhilesh-set-election-agenda-up-ready-for-mandal-vs-kamandal-part-2/articleshow/68489612.cms>

**Figure 2: Poll of polls in Uttar Pradesh<sup>5</sup>**

<b>Date published</b>	<b>Polling agency</b>	<b>NDA</b>	<b>UPA</b>	<b>SP/BSP</b>
01 Apr 2019	India TV-CNX	46	4	30
31 March 2019	News Nation	37	1	42
Mar-19	Times Now-VMR	42	2	36
Mar-19	News Nation	35	2	43
Mar-19	ABP News – CVoter	29	4	47
Mar-19	India TV-CNX	41	4	34
Jan-19	Times Now-VMR	27	2	51
Jan-19	ABP News - CVoter	25	4	51
Jan-19	India Today	43	2	35
Jan-19	ABP News- CVoter	31	5	44
<b>AVERAGE</b>		<b>36</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>41</b>

*Source: Opinion poll data compiled by author from various TV broadcasts and media platforms*

An average of polls conducted in UP (Figure 2), whose results have been published since January 2019, currently gives the edge to the SP/BSP alliance with 41 seats, 36 to the BJP-led National Democratic alliance (NDA) and three to the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA). A lot can change by the polling date, especially in an election spread over seven phases, but if this trend holds, then the BJP could be down by about half in UP.

Incidentally, this average of current polls is quite similar to what UP would have looked like in 2014, if SP and BSP had been in alliance then and if people had still voted exactly the same way.<sup>6</sup>

A number of caveats apply. First, some of the polls were conducted before the Balakot air strikes against Pakistan and do not account for consolidation of the nationalism theme that BJP has focused on since. Second, Priyanka Gandhi’s entry into the battleground in UP has gained major headlines and may galvanize Congress cadres in some seats like Saharanpur, Kanpur, Unnao, Barabanki, Padrauna and Allahabad. However, a revived Congress vote in places where it has good candidates will also split the anti-BJP vote. Third, the opposition alliance has been hit by the Nishad Party’s exit, which indicates a consolidation among smaller castes towards the BJP, outside of the caste-based parties. Fourth, the alliance votes themselves may be split as the slogan “37 pe lal, baaki sab Shivpal” [vote for the red (SP) on 37 seats. On the rest, vote for Shivpal Yadav] shows – an allusion to the split within the SP itself with party founder Mulayam Singh Yadav’s brother Shivpal forming a separate party.

<sup>5</sup> Average numbers have been rounded off.

<sup>6</sup> Of course, people may vote very differently in state and national elections. Be that as it may, the same vote-shares in 2014, if SP and BSP had been in alliance, would have yielded NDA 37 seats, SP+BSP 41 seats and UPA 2 seats. The results of the 2017 assembly election extrapolated post-facto if SP-BSP had been in alliance would have yielded the opposition alliance 42 seats. Data is from Election Commission of India and data analytics by Rishabh Srivastava, Loki.ai.

## Bihar and Jharkhand: Shifting Alliances

The nature of the BJP's alliance in Bihar, along with how it has divided its seats with Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, is an indication of how, contrary to its imagery as an authoritarian alliance partner, it has adjusted to local factors on the ground and is willing to stoop to conquer. The BJP won 22 of Bihar's 40 seats in 2014 with the Janata Dal-United (JDU) winning only two. Yet, in 2019, the BJP has sacrificed several sitting MPs and is fighting only 17 seats, giving 17 to the JDU and six to Ram Vilas Paswan's Lok Jansatta Party (LJP).

It is facing a formidable joint opposition alliance. In sharp contrast to neighbouring UP, the anti-BJP parties are not splitting each other's votes in Bihar. The grand opposition alliance in Bihar consists of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) (19 seats), the Congress (nine seats), Upendra Kushwaha's Rashtriya Lok Samata Party (RLSP) (five seats), former Chief Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi's Hindustan Awam Morcha-Secular (HAM-S) (three seats), the Vikasheel Insan Party (VIP)(3 seats) and the Communist Party of India-Marxist-Leninist (CPI-ML) on one seat.

**Figure 3: Poll of polls in Bihar<sup>7</sup>**

Date published	Polling agency	NDA	UPA
Mar-19	Times Now - VMR	27	13
Mar-19	News Nation	30	10
Mar-19	ABP News – CVoter	30	10
Jan-19	ABP News -CVoter	35	5
Jan-19	Times Now - VMR	30	25
Jan-19	India Today	27	6
Jan 2019	Spick Media	24	16
Nov 2018	ABP News- CVoter	34	6
<b>AVERAGE</b>		<b>29</b>	<b>11</b>

*Source: Opinion poll data compiled by author from various TV broadcasts and media platforms*

Even so, the NDA vote-shares were so high in 2014 that the picture does not seem to be changing much here, at least in the average of polls (Figure 3) that have been conducted so far.

In contrast, the fickle nature of opposition unity is apparent in neighboring Jharkhand, where the RJD, such a lynchpin of the alliance in Bihar, has walked out of it in Jharkhand and is contesting 14 seats separately. Here, the opposition alliance is limited to the Congress (seven seats), Shibu Soren's Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) (four seats), Babulal Marandi's Jharkhand Vikas Morcha-Prajatantrik (JVM-P) (two seats). The opposition is hoping to cash in

<sup>7</sup> Average numbers have been rounded off.

on anti-anti-incumbency sentiment against the ruling BJP state government and wider tribal identity issues.

The poll of polls (Figure 4) in Jharkhand is showing a declining trend for the BJP, which won 12 of 14 seats in 2014.

**Figure 4: Poll of polls in Jharkhand<sup>8</sup>**

<b>Date published</b>	<b>Polling agency</b>	<b>NDA</b>	<b>UPA</b>
Mar-19	Times Now - VMR	8	6
Mar-19	News Nation	10	4
Mar-19	ABP News – CVoter	3	11
Jan-19	Times Now-VMR	6	8
Jan-19	ABP News -CVoter	6	8
Jan-19	India Today	7	7
<b>AVERAGE</b>		<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>

*Source: Opinion poll data compiled by author from various TV broadcasts and media platforms*

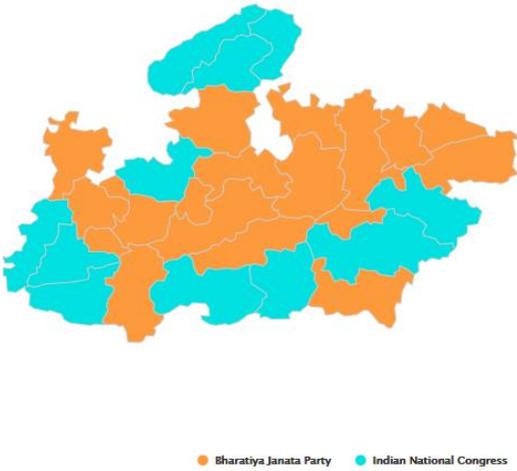
### **Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh: A Little Difference Between State and National Polls**

The Congress party’s assembly election victories in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh in December 2018 opened up the 2019 general election contest. They raised the specter of an opposition revival in the Hindi heartland because the BJP in 2014 had won 62 of 65 Lok Sabha seats here. Simply juxtaposing the 2018 assembly election results on parliamentary constituencies in these three states shows a reduction – if people vote exactly as they did then – of 31 seats for the BJP. This juxtaposition indicates a BJP-Congress scoreline of 17-12 in Madhya Pradesh, 13-12 in Rajasthan and 1-10 in Chhattisgarh (Figures 5, 6 and 7).

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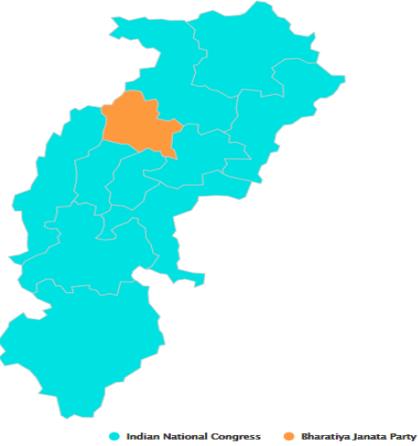
<sup>8</sup> Average numbers have been rounded off.

**Figure 5: Madhya Pradesh assembly 2018 result juxtaposed to Lok Sabha constituencies showed scoreline of BJP: 17, Congress: 12.**



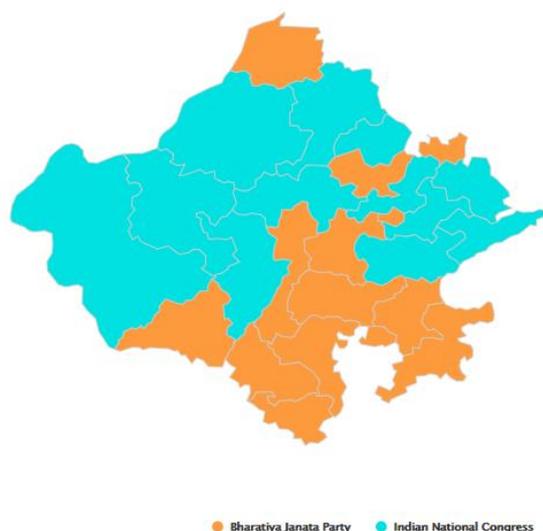
Source: Election Commission of India, Loki.ai

**Figure 6: Chhattisgarh assembly 2018 result juxtaposed to Lok Sabha constituencies showed scoreline of BJP: 1, Congress: 10.**



Source: Election Commission of India, Loki.ai

**Figure 7: Rajasthan assembly 2018 result juxtaposed to Lok Sabha constituencies showed scoreline of BJP: 13, Congress: 12.**



Source: Election Commission of India, Loki.ai

Again, it is important to reiterate that the state assembly results were specific to anti-incumbency sentiment against BJP state governments, all of whom had been in power for at least two terms each. The BJP lost Chhattisgarh comprehensively but its vote-share difference with the Congress in Madhya Pradesh was negligible and it ran a close contest in Rajasthan as well. So what do subsequent opinion polls indicate?

**Figure 8: Poll of Polls for Madhya Pradesh shows a BJP-Congress scoreline of 22-7<sup>9</sup>**

Date published	Polling agency	NDA	UPA
Mar-19	News Nation	21	8
Mar-19	ABP News – CVoter	23	6
Jan-19	Times Now-VMR	23	6
Jan-19	ABP News -CVoter	23	6
Jan-19	India Today	18	11
Nov-18	ABP News - CVoter	22	7
Oct-18	Times Now	21	8
Oct-18	ABP News- CSDS	23	6
<b>AVERAGE</b>		<b>22</b>	<b>7</b>

Source: Opinion poll data compiled by author from various TV broadcasts and media platforms

<sup>9</sup> Average numbers have been rounded off.

**Figure 9: Poll of Polls for Chhattisgarh indicates a BJP-Congress scoreline of 6-5<sup>10</sup>**

DATE PUBLISHED	AGENCY	NDA	UPA
Mar-19	Times Now - VMR	6	5
Mar-19	News Nation	5	6
Mar-19	ABP News – CVoter	6	5
Jan-19	ABP News -CVoter	5	6
Jan-19	India Today	5	6
Jan-19	India TV - CNX	5	6
Oct-18	Times Now	8	3
Oct-18	ABP News- CSDS	9	2
<b>AVERAGE</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>

Source: Opinion poll data compiled by author from various TV broadcasts and media platforms

**Figure 10: Poll of Polls for Rajasthan indicates a BJP-Congress scoreline of 18-7<sup>11</sup>**

DATE PUBLISHED	AGENCY	NDA	UPA
Mar-19	Times Now - VMR	20	5
Mar-19	News Nation	17	8
Mar-19	ABP News – CVoter	20	5
Jan 2019	Republic Tv - CVoter		
Jan-19	Times Now-VMR	17	8
Jan-19	ABP News -CVoter	18	7
Jan-19	India Today	15	10
Jan-19	India TV - CNX	15	10
Nov-18	ABP News- CVoter	17	8
Oct-18	Times Now	24	1
Oct-18	ABP News- CSDS	18	7
<b>AVERAGE</b>		<b>18</b>	<b>7</b>

Source: Opinion poll data compiled by author from various TV broadcasts and media platforms

Overall, opinion polls in these three states are currently averaging to a number of 46 out of 65 seats for the BJP, down by 16 seats compared to 2014. This is a significant reduction for the BJP from 2014, but about half as much as the 31 number that the assembly election results indicated in December 2018. Having almost maxed out seats in these three states in 2014, the BJP’s losses are natural and expected in these states in 2019. The question is how

<sup>10</sup> Average numbers have been rounded off.

<sup>11</sup> Average numbers have been rounded off.

much it stems the tide here. Opinion polls indicate that it may be holding up better than the assembly elections seat-share numbers indicated.

### Poll of polls: Conclusion

In the smaller states of Himachal Pradesh (four seats), Uttarakhand (five seats), Delhi (seven seats) and Haryana (10 seats), weighted averages of polls are currently showing similar trends to 2014. An alliance between the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Congress would have negatively impacted the BJP in Delhi and Haryana. It may still happen but until such an alliance is worked out, the BJP remains the frontrunner in these two states.

To conclude, here is a summation of the poll of polls for Hindi heartland states.

**Figure 11: Poll of polls in Hindi heartland**

STATE	NDA	UPA	SP/BSP/OTHERS
Uttar Pradesh	36	3	41
Bihar	29	11	0
Jharkhand	7	7	0
Madhya Pradesh	22	7	0
Chhattisgarh	6	5	0
Rajasthan	18	7	0
Haryana	6	3	1
Delhi	5	0	2 <sup>12</sup>
Uttarakhand	4	1	0
Himachal Pradesh	4	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>44</b>

*Source: Opinion poll data compiled by author from various TV broadcasts and media platforms*

This shows that the NDA could be down to 137 seats in the Hindi heartland. This is 57 seats less from its 2014 performance. The UPA, in this summation, is currently around the 44 mark and the SP-BSP and other non-UPA and non-NDA parties are at the same level. If this trend in the opinion polls is correct, then it indicates two things. First, while the NDA has certainly lost momentum since 2014, especially in UP, overall in the Hindi heartland, it may not be losing enough to be displaced. Second, while the UPA and other opposition parties are making significant gains, these are not as much as the dents that a truly united opposition would have made in the NDA. Third, the BJP will be looking to offset at least some of these losses in

<sup>12</sup> This figure is for AAP

the Hindi heartland in new catchment areas in West Bengal, Odisha and possibly Kerala, along with its recently-acquired new partners in the Northeast.

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