

Five Indian States Go to Polls: A Test for the 2024 General Elections?

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Summary

Five states across India will go to elections in November 2023. The elections could be seen as a test of the popularity of the Bharatiya Janata Party, Congress and regional parties in the run-up to the general elections. However, Assembly results are often not a good indicator of the outcome of the general elections.

Five states in India – Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Rajasthan and Telangana – will go to elections between 7 and 30 November 2023. The results will be announced on 3 December 2023. Besides their geographical spread, the political situation is distinct in these five states. Unusually, only one of these states – Madhya Pradesh – has the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in power. In Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, the Congress is the incumbent whereas in Telangana and Mizoram, regional parties – the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) and Mizo National Front (MNF) respectively – are in power. In Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, the BJP and Congress will directly face off with each other. Besides the specificities in each state, these will also be the last set of polls before the general elections in 2024, holding clues to the voters' mood.

While anti-incumbency will be a factor in all the states, particularly in Rajasthan, the closest contests are likely to be in the neighbouring states of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh in central India. When the last elections were held in Madhya Pradesh in 2018, both the Congress and BJP had won virtually the same vote share at around 41 per cent. However, the Congress won marginally more seats with 114 to the BJP's 109 in the 230-seat Assembly. The Congress formed the government with the help of members of the legislative assembly (MLAs) from smaller parties and independents. However, the government fell a year later when 22 Congress MLAs defected to the BJP following Congress leader and former Union minister Jyotiraditya Scindia's switch to the BJP. This paved the way for the return of the BJP and a fourth term as chief minister for Shivraj Singh Chouhan. This time, the contest could be as close. An [opinion poll by ABP-CVoter](#) predicts that the difference in vote share between the two parties will be miniscule with the Congress likely to win a few more seats. There could be a re-run of the happenings of 2019 where the BJP, with deeper pockets and influence, is likely to triumph eventually.

A somewhat similar situation could be brewing in Chhattisgarh where the ruling Congress might be marginally ahead of the BJP in terms of vote share but the seat share of both parties could be similar. The ABP-CVoter has forecast that the BJP could win in 39 to 45 out of 90 constituencies, while the Congress could end up with 45 to 51 seats. However, the incumbent Chief Minister and Other Backward Classes leader, Bhupesh Baghel, still retains considerable popularity. According to a [NDTV survey](#), 39 per cent of those surveyed said they prefer Baghel as chief minister, compared to 24 per cent for the former BJP chief

minister, Raman Singh. The BJP though has preferred to fight the elections without a chief ministerial face.

Only the northern state of Rajasthan, where incumbent governments are usually voted out every election, might see a decisive verdict. According to the ABP-CVoter, the BJP could win around 130 of the 200 seats in the Rajasthan Assembly whereas the Congress could drop to below 70 seats. [Other opinion polls](#) too have predicted a comfortable victory for the BJP. There is a close contest being predicted in Telangana – the only southern state going to elections – where the BRS and Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao have been in power for two successive terms and ever since the state was carved out of an undivided Andhra Pradesh. Unlike the past two elections, however, the BRS (formerly known as the Telangana Rashtriya Samithi) faces the prospect of a tough contest. The [ABP-CVoter survey](#) forecasts that the BRS and Congress could win a similar number of seats – between 50 and 60 – in the 119-member Assembly. The BJP is likely to be a distant third. Given the tight contest, all the political parties are looking for pre-election allies. So far, the Congress seems to have been the most successful in attracting allies. It has tied up with one of the smaller regional parties, the Telangana Jana Samithi. The YSR Telangana Party has also given its support to the Congress. The Telugu Desam Party (TDP), which is currently in a mess with party leader N Chandrababu Naidu in jail, is not contesting the elections, something which could work to the Congress' advantage. The BRS, on the other hand, has [successfully wooed leaders](#) from the Congress, BJP and TDP to switch loyalty and join its ranks.

In Mizoram, where elections were held on 7 November 2023, we could see a hung verdict with both the ruling MNF and the Congress not being able to cross the majority mark in the 40-seat Assembly. There is a third player – Zoram People's Movement – in the fray and its support could prove to be decisive for whoever wants to form the government. The BJP, which had won its first ever seat in Christian-majority Mizoram in the 2018 Assembly elections, is unlikely to make significant gains.

The five state elections will be a test of the popularity of the BJP, Congress and regional parties in the run-up to the general elections. However, Assembly results are often not a good indicator of the outcome of the general elections. This is especially so in contemporary India where Prime Minister Narendra Modi has an outsize influence on national elections and has virtually turned it into a presidential-style contest.

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