



Indian Election Results 2024: Modi Returns for Third Term with Reduced Numbers

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Summary

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi had declared before the general elections that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) would win 370 seats and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) over 400 in the general elections. The results announced on 4 June 2024 saw the BJP win 240 seats and fall well below the majority mark in the Lower House of the Parliament (Lok Sabha). The reasons for the result could be traced to Modi's weakening attraction among voters compared to the last two general elections, the absence of a grand narrative in the BJP's campaign, the salience of issues like unemployment and a robust campaign by the opposition.

When the results of the six-week-long Indian general elections were announced on 4 June 2024, there were few who were betting on the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) falling below the majority mark of 272 seats in the Lower House of the Parliament (Lok Sabha). This was especially so given that all the exit polls had predicted a handsome majority for the BJP and its allies. However, the results proved most pundits wrong and left Prime Minister Narendra Modi's campaign promise of crossing 370 seats for the BJP and 400 for the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in tatters. In the end, the BJP alone won 240 seats, a drop of 63 seats from 2019, and the NDA 293 out of 543 seats in the Lok Sabha. The opposition Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) surprised everyone by winning 232 seats and the Congress nearly doubled its tally from 2019 to 99 seats.

Although Modi is returning for a third successive term, only the second prime minister since Jawaharlal Nehru to do so, he returns with a diminished stature and, for the first time, as part of a coalition, with the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and Janata Dal (United) being the major allies.

The broad reasons for the result could be traced to Modi's weakening attraction among voters compared to the last two elections, the absence of a grand narrative in the BJP's campaign, the Ram temple issue failing to pay the expected electoral dividend, the salience of issues like unemployment and a robust campaign by INDIA.

The specific factors behind the verdict can be traced to results in certain critical states which send the most members of parliament. First, while there were several who were correct in pointing out that Modi's target was virtually impossible to achieve, there were hardly any who saw a significant decline for the BJP in the Hindi belt. However, that is what happened in the biggest state in India, Uttar Pradesh (UP), which sends 80 members of parliament to the Lok Sabha, and where the BJP won 62 seats in 2019. In 2024, contrary to most predictions, the BJP dropped to 35 seats and the seats share of its main rival, the Samajwadi Party (SP),

rose spectacularly from five to 37. This decline was a reflection of discontent among voters on issues like unemployment as well as fears among sections like the Dalits that the BJP was bent on changing the constitution if it received a huge majority. The BJP's poor performance was also an outcome of smart ticket distribution by the SP which casts its net well beyond its traditional support base of the Yadavs.

In the wake of BJP's poor performance in UP, Faizabad – the constituency where the Ram temple was consecrated with fanfare in January 2024 – slipped out of the party's hand to the SP. It also saw prominent faces like Union minister Smriti Irani getting voted out. Even Modi saw a sharp decline in his margin of victory in Varanasi in eastern UP from over 450,000 votes in 2019 to around 150,000 in 2024. The other states in the Hindi belt which saw the BJP losing seats were Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand and Haryana.

Maharashtra in western India, where the BJP and its allies won 43 seats in 2019, was expected to be a tough contest due to the split in the Shiv Sena and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and its factions contesting against each other. So it proved, with the BJP and its allies – factions of the Shiv Sena and NCP – falling to 18 seats and the BJP alone to nine. In contrast, the opposition, comprising the Congress, the Uddhav Thackeray faction of Sena and the Sharad Pawar wing of NCP, winning 29 seats.

The BJP had expected to make up for some of its losses in northern and western India – though it had never anticipated what actually transpired – by winning more seats in eastern and southern India. That too did not play out as expected. It was only in the eastern state of Odisha that the BJP swept the polls winning 20 of the 21 seats as well as winning a huge majority in the Assembly elections which were held simultaneously. However, in West Bengal, where Modi had addressed several rallies during the campaign, the BJP came a cropper against the Trinamool Congress (TMC). The BJP fell to 12 seats from their 2019 tally of 18 while the TMC surged to 29.

Southern India was the big hope for the BJP in reaching a majority or beyond in the Lok Sabha. However, despite some significant gains, the BJP fell short. It received the same number of seats as in 2019 with the majority of seats coming from Karnataka (17 seats) and Telangana (eight seats). In Andhra Pradesh, where the BJP was in alliance with the TDP, it won three seats. One of the more notable wins in the south was in Kerala where the BJP opened its account for the first time by winning in Thrissur. In Tamil Nadu, despite a concerted campaign, the BJP did not win a single seat though it increased its vote share to 11 per cent.

Overall, the election verdict returns a diminished Modi who will have to contend with allies for the first time. For the opposition, particularly the Congress, the results signify a revival that it will look to build on.

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