

Bihar's Assembly Election Outcome: Strategic Coalitions and Opposition Failure

Amit Ranjan

Summary

Nitish Kumar and the National Democratic Alliance's return to power in Bihar following the recent assembly election can be attributed to his government's welfare schemes, creating a bigger pre-election caste alliance and the failure of the opposition to resolve its political problems.

In the first assembly election held after the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls – an exercise aimed at updating and [“purifying” the voters list](#) by removing the names of “foreigners” – Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, defying 20 years of anti-incumbency, led the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) to a sweeping victory.

The state witnessed a [historic highest number of voter turnout](#) since 1951, in which 66.91 per cent of the total registered voters cast their votes. The [main political contest in the 243 assembly seats of Bihar](#) was between the NDA and the *Mahagathbandhan* (Major Alliance) in which the former won 202 seats while the latter got 35 and eight seats were won by the others.

Despite many promises made by Nitish in the past, Bihar's economic situation has not improved much. A report by the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog), an Indian government policy think tank, titled *Macro and Fiscal Landscape of the State of Bihar, of 2025*, stated that as of 2022-23, Bihar's annual unemployment rate at 3.9 per cent was above the national average of 3.2 per cent, and while the female labour force participation rate improved to 22.4 percent in 2022-23, it remained [below the national average](#). Bihar's real gross state domestic product, which grew at an average rate of five per cent between 2012-13 and 2021-22, was lower than the national average growth of 5.6 per cent during the same period. The report added that Bihar's nominal per capita income was only 30 per cent of the [national per capita income in 2021-22](#). Due to the lack of employment opportunities in the state, around 30 million out of about 127 million Biharis work outside the state. Nearly 66 per cent of the population are dependent on [an earning member of the household](#).

In spite of the gloomy state of the economy, the NDA returned to power due largely to several key factors such as caste and welfare schemes. The Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs), comprising the Telis and Mallahs, among the other castes, make up 36 per cent of the population, out of which 10.2 percent are Muslim. While many of the Muslim EBCs may not have voted for the NDA, the majority of the [26 per cent Hindus supported the NDA](#). A large section of the upper castes and some of the Other Backward Class members also favoured the NDA. Many of the Dalits and Mahadalits voted for Nitish because of his policies and due to him having Chirag Paswan and Jitan Ram Manjhi as his alliance partners.

Tejashwi Yadav spoke about including A to Z caste, gave 35 per cent of the [tickets to the Yadavs](#). The Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) also gave tickets to the Bumihars such as Veena Devi and Shivani Shukla. Nevertheless, it has not yet come out from its old image of being a Muslim-Yadav party.

Like caste, religious identity is also an important factor in Bihar politics. The Muslims comprise around 18 per cent of the state's population but remain politically underrepresented. In the 2025 election, both the NDA and the *Mahagathbandhan* fielded fewer Muslims than the 2020 assembly election. As a result, the new assembly will have only [10 Muslim members](#). The Muslim-dominated constituencies in [Seemanchal region](#) repose their faith in Asaduddin Owaisi's All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen which won five seats.

Nitish's [welfare schemes](#) also attracted the voters towards him. He has created a strong constituency among the women voters because of policies such as reserving 50 per cent seats in local bodies for women, distributing bicycles to high school-going girls and providing 35 per cent quota to women candidates in [government jobs in Bihar](#). Just before the 2025 election, the government transferred ₹10,000 (S\$160) each to 2.1 million women under the [Mukhyamanthiri Mahila Rozgar Yojana](#) (Chief Minister Women Employment Scheme).

Besides creating a larger caste alliance and promising welfare schemes, the *Mahagathbandhan*'s failure to bridge differences, resolve internal problems and challenge the existing narrative about it provided a political edge to the NDA. Due to differences on seat sharing, the *Mahagathbandhan* alliance partners ended up competing with one another for 11 seats. In this *Mahagathbandhan* fight, [the NDA gained](#). The family feud in the RJD, resulting in Tej Pratap Yadav contesting the election separately, sent a wrong message to the traditional voters of the RJD. Further, the *Mahagathbandhan* failed to strongly counter the NDA's old narrative that the former's win would mean a return of 'jungle raj' (lawlessness) in the state. The fact is that [crime rates in Bihar increased by 80 per cent](#) between 2015 and 2024.

The controversy surrounding the SIR exercise, under which names of [6.5 million voters from Bihar were deleted](#), resurfaced after the election results. [Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said](#) that the election "was not fair from the very beginning" while [Samajwadi Party Chief Akhilesh Yadav's post on X](#) read, "We will not let them play this game any further...We will remain vigilant and thwart the BJP's plans. The BJP is not a party, but a fraud."

Regardless of the allegations, the NDA has returned to power in Bihar. A key challenge now is the state's economy, and it will be important to see how the government deals with the current economic situation.

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Dr Amit Ranjan is a Research Fellow at the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS), an autonomous research institute at the National University of Singapore (NUS). He can be contacted at isasar@nus.edu.sg. The author bears full responsibility for the facts cited and opinions expressed in this paper.