**[India’s new birth](https://www.dawn.com/news/1831727/indias-new-birth)**

[Tahir Mehdi](https://www.dawn.com/authors/510/tahir-mehdi) Published May 6, 2024 Updated 2 days ago

INDIAN [elections](https://www.dawn.com/news/1828519) are no less than a nightmare for psephologists: election experts. To begin with, the scale of the exercise is mind-boggling. Every sixth adult walking on earth is registered as a voter in India.

Add to this the complex interplay of a multitude of political discourses centred on caste, class, religion, ethnicity, language, and ideologies and it becomes impossible to navigate through the maze. However, thanks to robust and trustworthy data on past elections, one can still dig out some features that can help in at least understanding the current scenario.

India has a first-past-the-post poll system. The contestant securing the highest number of votes is declared the winner whether or not he or she gets the majority of votes polled in a constituency. This complicates the correlation between votes polled by a party and the number of seats it wins. To quote an example, the third biggest party in the 2014 election, the UP-based Bahujan Samaj Party, secured 23 million votes but could not win a single seat while the Bengal-based Trinamool Congress polled 2m less votes than the BSP but won 34 of 543 Lok Sabha seats.

There is, however, some method deep inside this madness. Historical data shows that while uncertainty about the number of seats won remains high for a party securing less than 30 per cent of the total polled votes, a simple majority in Lok Sabha (272 seats) comes within its reach as soon as it crosses this mark. The BJP won the majority of seats in 2014 and 2019 while polling 31pc and 37pc of the total polled votes respectively.

Past data also shows that if a party crosses the 40pc mark, it will hit the two-thirds majority (363 seats) jackpot. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s 2024 campaign slogan ‘*abki bar, 400 par*’ is pinned on hopes of bettering the party’s vote share by at least five percentage points. But hold on. A 5pc increase means at least 30m more voters coming out in [support of Modi](https://www.dawn.com/news/1828519) compared to 2019. This would be no mean feat at a time when voters are identifying rising inflation and unemployment as their main concerns while the inauguration of the Ram temple has failed to impress them.

Now that the voter turnout is dropping, will the BJP suffer the most?

Indian voters’ dissatisfaction is already finding expression as fewer people are turning up this time than the previous election. In the first two of the [seven phases](https://www.dawn.com/news/1827980) of voting, the turnout has been almost five percentage points lower than in 2019. The turnout in India has traditionally hovered around 60pc. It was the Modi wave that inspired it to take a leap of faith in 2014 when it reached its highest-ever level of 66.4pc representing an increase of 8.3 percentage points over 2009. The wave pushed it up further in 2019 by one percentage point. The BJP has been the sole beneficiary of a high turnout as no other party could increase its percentage share in the votes in these elections.

But now that the turnout is dropping, will the BJP suffer the most? This is possible but if it succeeds in deflecting this downturn towards regional parties, it may actually benefit from the dip as much as it had from its rise.

Data shows that voters in India have remained evenly poised between regional and national parties. In eight general elections since 1991, regional parties have on average been favoured by 49pc of voters while the remaining 51pc were divided between the two national parties. This in itself is a reflection of Indians’ collective perception of their state.

The BJP couldn’t damage this equation much in its first elections under Modi. As the party increased its share in polled votes by 12 percentage points, Congress lost nine and regional parties three. However, after cowing its arch rival, the sultan of Delhi turned towards the rajas and ranis of India’s 28 states. The BJP’s share in polled votes rose by six percentage points in the second election under Modi while that of regional parties reduced by the same measure.

Since then, the BJP is trying to get deeper into the den of regional parties. The crackdown on leaders of these parties, launched just before elections, implicating them in corruption and criminal cases, is aimed at demoralising their support bases, thereby compensating its own potential loss in polled votes. The BJP, however, has its own Achilles’ heel: new voters instrumental to its phenomenal rise are now disgruntled by unemployment and inflation.

An unprecedented 117m new voters were added to the rolls in 2014 and supplemented by a euphoric turnout; 137m more had appeared in polling stations in this election than previously. The BJP had pocketed a hefty 93m of these. Congress not only failed to attract them, it lost 12m of its 2009 voters. Regional parties, however, braved the Modi wave and added a good 58m to their collective vote bank. The rolls for 2019 swelled further by 78m. Congress held its ground this time sustaining its depleted percentage share of 2014 but regional parties conceded substantial ground to the BJP. Their collective share in votes dropped to 43pc, the lowest since 1984.

Another 58m voters have been added in 2024. Will regional parties reclaim lost ground? Can the BJP continue to shepherd the 150m voters it rounded up in the past two elections? Will they stay loyal to the third avatar of Modi, which now carries a blurred halo? Will INDIA prove to be a new janam for India? We will know the answers on June 4.

If, however, the BJP succeeds in bulldozing the regional half of Indian politics, it will fundamentally change Indian politics. One cannot say whether Modi’s victory in 2024 will finally midwife ‘one nation’ conceived by his party but it will surely smoothen India into ‘one market’ with no local bumps and blips. That may be actually what BJP’s sponsors — the rising Indian capitalist elite — want it to deliver.

*The writer heads the media platform loksujag.com.*

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