

Rajasthan Elections: Unveiling Political Dynamics

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



As the Rajasthan Assembly's tenure is approaching at its end, the Election Commission of India has officially declared the 16th Rajasthan *Vidhan Sabha* elections, set for 25 November 2023. The results are scheduled to be announced on December 3, 2023. With the election date drawing nearer, all eyes are focused on Rajasthan, speculating whether the Indian National Congress (INC) can be re-elected and could overturn the 30-year-old pattern by establishing their government in Rajasthan again? Following its defeat in Karnataka state elections in May, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) is also leaving no stone unturned in its efforts to secure victory in these crucial elections.

Rajasthan holds the distinction of being India's largest state by land area, with an estimated population of 79.5 million people¹. This north-western state shares its borders with Pakistan to the west and northwest, as well as five domestic borders with the states of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh (MP), Uttar Pradesh (UP), Haryana, and Punjab. The Rajasthan assembly consists of 200 seats spread across 33 districts. Among these 200 seats, 25 are designated for Scheduled Tribes (ST) and 34 are reserved for Scheduled Castes (SC)². The geographically vast and diverse state plays a pivotal role in

¹ Rajasthan Population Projection for the year 2023, <https://www.indiacensus.net/states/rajasthan>, accessed 29th October 2023

² As per Indian election commission of "India's Delimitation of parliament and assembly constituencies order, 2008," 200 Rajasthan Vidhan Sabha seats are spread across 33 districts, https://upload.indiacode.nic.in/showfile?actid=AC_CEN_3_20_00030_200233_1517807324510&type=order&filename=Delimitation%20Order,2008.pdf

India's national political landscape by contributing 25 seats to the *Lok Sabha* and 10 seats to the *Rajya Sabha*. The political arena in Rajasthan is primarily characterized by the presence of two major parties, INC and the BJP. However, it also accommodates the influence of other political entities, including the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), the Rashtriya Loktantrik Party (RLP), and independent candidates, reflecting a multi-faceted political spectrum in the state.

Since the establishment of Rajasthan's inaugural legislative assembly in 1952, the political landscape in the State has witnessed the emergence of several regional political parties. Historical analysis shows the dominance of INC in initial Rajasthani politics. However, in 1993, INC's dominance came to a definitive end, giving way to the ascendancy of the BJP under the leadership of Bhairon Singh Shekhawat. Since that pivotal year, Rajasthan's political arena has experienced a unique pattern, with no single party maintaining governance twice in a row, leading to a sequence of INC and BJP taking turns as the ruling parties. The table below provides a comprehensive overview of election results since 1952.

Rajasthan Legislative Election Results, 1952-2018 ³

Party	1952	1957	1962	1967	1972	1977	1980	1985	1990	1993	1998	2003	2008	2013	2018
BJS/BJP	8	6	15	22	8		32	39	85	95	33	120	78	163	73
Congress	82	119	88	89	145	41	133	113	50	76	153	56	96	21	99
JNP						152	8	10							
BSP											2	2	6	3	6
RLP															3
Independents	35	32	22	16	11	5	12	10	9	21	7	13	14	7	13

In 2018 *Vidhan Sabha* elections, the INC secured 99 seats and it formed the government with the help of BSP. Ashok Gehlot from INC became the Chief Minister of Rajasthan for the third time.

Political Campaigns of INC and BJP

As the election date approaches, political parties in Rajasthan have intensified their campaigns. The two major parties, BJP and INC, are putting in significant efforts to secure government control in the state. Both parties have distinct campaign agendas. The INC has chosen welfare schemes as its primary focus for the state elections. The INC is emphasizing the effective implementation of various schemes, such as the Chiranjeevi health scheme, the old pension scheme, and inflation relief camps in the state. Considering the success of these welfare schemes, the Congress has announced several

³ Rajasthan legislative election results, <https://www.indiavotes.com/vidhan-sabha/2018/rajasthan/268/14>

additional guarantees⁴ such as the '*Grah Laxmi Guarantee*' aimed to provide an annual amount of 10,000 rupees to women who are heads of their families.

Additionally, the '*Gas Subsidy Guarantee*' endeavors to reduce the reliance on wood and fossil fuels for cooking by offering subsidized gas cylinders to over 10 million families at the cost of 500 rupees. The '*Godhan Guarantee*' introduces a scheme where the government will purchase animal dung from cattle owners at a rate of 2 rupees per kilogram, using it for biogas production. Furthermore, the promise of Free English Medium Education ensures that students attending Mahatma Gandhi English schools will receive their education free of charge. The '*Free Laptop Guarantee*' extends support to first-year students in government colleges, providing them with free laptops or tablets. Meanwhile, the '*OPS Guarantee*' reintroduces the old pension scheme, offering government employees a reliable post-retirement income source. Lastly, the '*Cheeranjeevi Aapda Bima Guarantee*' presents a safety net with a 15 lakh rupees insurance for Cheeranjeevi families in case of losses due to natural calamities. These pledges represent the core campaign promises and guarantees that the INC is emphasizing in the lead-up to the state elections.

On the other hand, the BJP is making efforts to leverage the popularity of Prime Minister Modi to secure votes.⁵ PM Modi has made several visits to the state and conducted rallies. The party is also propounding "Hindutva" ideology to seek popular vote, while also emphasizing issues such as communal violence, and crimes against women. BJP accuses Chief Minister *Ashok Gehlot* of being responsible for communal violence in society. In the Jodhpur incident in May 2022, stone-pelting between Muslim and Hindu groups over raising different flags at the *Jalori Gate* intersection circle was one of the major incidents highlighted in the BJP campaign. Similarly, communal violence incidents in Karuli, Bhilwara, murder of a Hindu tailor Kanhaiya Lal, and temple demolition in *Alwar* have been BJP's special point of focus. They also allege that INC is practicing 'appeasement' politics to gain votes. Additionally, the BJP is constructing a narrative in Rajasthan that the Congress party is grappling with internal conflicts, lacks unity, and is not adequately addressing the concerns of the state's residents. According to the BJP, this is contributing to a deteriorating law and order situation in the state. Hence, BJP's political campaign is relying heavily on communal politics and lacks any substantial roadmap of development for Rajasthan state.

⁴ Bureau, The Hindu. 2023. "Congress Announces Five New Guarantees in Poll-Bound Rajasthan." *The Hindu*, October 27, 2023, sec. Rajasthan Assembly. <https://www.thehindu.com/elections/rajasthan-assembly/rajasthan-assembly-elections-2023-chief-minister-ashok-gehlots-five-guarantees-to-people/article67465472.ece>

⁵ CNBCTV. 2023. "Rajasthan Election 2023: A SWOT Analysis of the BJP's Electoral Strategy." Cnbctv18.com. October 13, 2023. <https://www.cnbctv18.com/politics/rajasthan-assembly-election-2023-bjp-swot-analysis-congress-narendra-modi-bharatiya-janata-party-18047121.htm>

Factors Influencing Rajasthan Politics:

The upcoming elections in Rajasthan are influenced by several key factors. Firstly, internal conflicts within both the BJP and the Congress play a significant role. The rivalry between Prime Minister Modi and former CM of Rajasthan, Vasundhara Raje, has been a focal point of discussion, particularly with Raje's participation in the elections from Jhalrapatan despite perceived sidelining by the party's leadership⁶. Similar internal dynamics can be observed within the INC, with ongoing differences between CM Ashok Gehlot and Sachin Pilot, although both have presented a united front during the election campaign. These internal conflicts have led both parties to shape a narrative emphasizing their rival's lack of unity. Similarly, the unique political trend of anti-incumbency in Rajasthan, where the same party is not elected consecutively, adds another layer of complexity to the elections⁷. Breaking this pattern is a challenge for the INC, while it could potentially favor the BJP if the anti-incumbency streak continues.

Given the current scenario, these state elections in Rajasthan are expected to be highly competitive, with both parties putting on strong campaigns. It remains to be seen whether the streak of not re-electing the same party continues or comes to an end.

⁶ The Times of India. 2023. "Rivalry between Modi and Vasundhara Raje Is Ruining Rajasthan: Ashok Gehlot." *The Times of India*, October 6, 2023. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/jaipur/rivalry-between-modi-and-vasundhara-raje-is-ruining-rajasthan-ashok-gehlot/articleshow/104199010.cms>.

⁷ PTI. 2023. "Key Issues That Will Decide Rajasthan Elections." *Deccan Herald*. October 9, 2023. <https://www.deccanherald.com/elections/rajasthan/key-issues-that-will-decide-rajasthan-elections-2718431>