ISSUE BRIEF

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UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS OF 18TH LOK SABHA ELECTION RESULTS

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June 21, 2024

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

Introduction

The 18th Lok Sabha election results were announced on June 4, 2024, by the Election Commission of India (ECI). Spanning seven phases, India held the longest general elections from April 19 to June 1, 2024.[1] The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP)'s expectations from this election were very high, projected through the slogan '*ab ke bar 400 par*' (this time we will cross 400 seats) for the National Democratic Alliance (NDA – an electoral alliance). For itself, the BJP was projecting a figure of 370 seats, way more than the 303 it secured in 2019.

However, in actual fact, the BJP only managed to win 240 seats out of 543, falling short by 32 seats for a simple majority.[2] Due to this, the BJP has been forced to form a coalition government under the banner of NDA. Its two major coalition partners include the Janata Dal (United) from Bihar, and the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), from the Southern state of Andhra Pradesh. The NDA coalition tally totals 293 seats out of 543.[3] For its part, the Indian National Congress (INC) managed to win 99 seats; while, cumulatively, the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bagged 234 seats in the Lok Sabha. In the 2014 and 2019 elections, the BJP had managed to secure a majority on its own; however, as Figure 1 depicts, the BJP could not repeat that performance in 2024.

1 "General Elections 2024 Schedule," *Election Commission of India*, https://elections24.eci.gov.in
2 For a simple majority in Lok Sabha 272 seats are required. For details please see Election Commission of India, https://elections24.eci.gov.in
3 Election Commission of India, https://elections24.eci.gov.in

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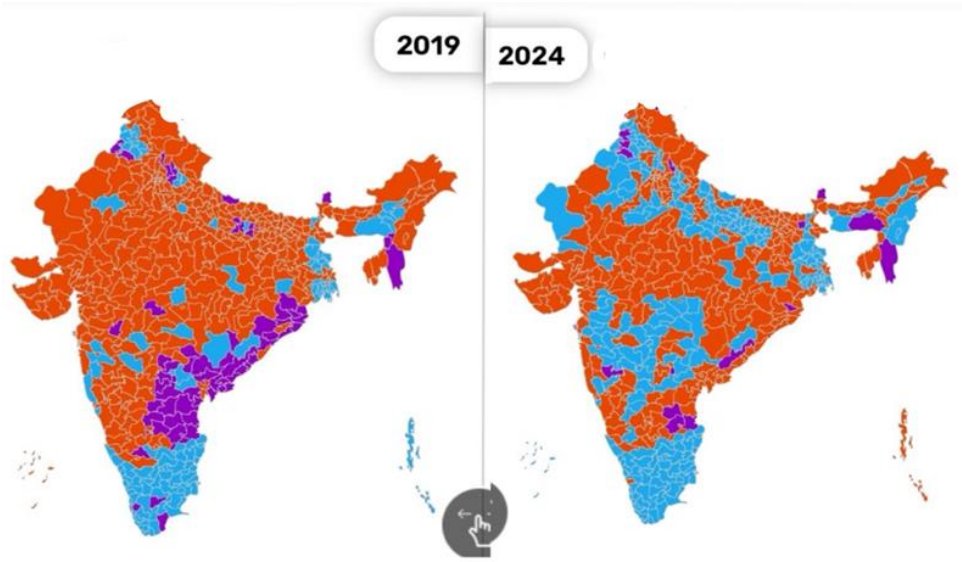

Years	NDA	INDIA	Others
2024	293	234	18
2019	343	127	73

Figure 1: Seats won at Lok Sabha out of 543
Source: Election Commission of India & India Today
(map modified as per the political map of Pakistan)

Outcome of Northern States

The BJP's 'Hindutva' ideology and anti-Pakistan as well as anti-China rhetoric evidently resonated in the northern Hindi Belt of India albeit with lesser impact. In 2019 these elements proved to be highly successful and the BJP managed to secure 163 seats out of 222 in eight states of the North – including Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Punjab, Jharkhand, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, and Punjab.[4] In 2024, however, the BJP's tally was reduced to 134 seats out of 222, a 14 per cent decrease in seat share in the North.[5] This is apparently due to some distinct trends that emerged in the 2024 elections in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, and Rajasthan.

4 Dr Khurram Abbas, "BJP: south resists, north rejects," *The News*, June 16, 2024, https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1200863-bjp-south-resists-north-rejects
5 Election Commission of India, https://elections24.eci.gov.in

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- **Uttar Pradesh:** Built over the ruins of Babri masjid, the inauguration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya in January 2024 was presumed to guarantee Modi's victory in UP which contributes about 80 seats in Lok Sabha. However, the BJP could only secure 36 seats in UP, while the INDIA alliance got home with 43 seats. The signs of the BJP's unexpected loss were prominent:

    1. Firstly, the BJP has been progressively losing seats in UP since 2019. In 2014, BJP had scored a major victory with 72 seats; however, in 2019, it managed to secure 62 (losing 9 seats) and, in 2024, it ended up with 33 seats (losing 29 seats).

    2. Secondly, Ram Temple, built over the demolished Babri masjid, proved not be a popular plank as the people of UP evidently preferred '*kaam* over Ram,' implying that the people of UP placed greater premium on economic well-being than on religious or communal politics. They expressed that Modi has politicised Lord Ram and spun stories of Ram as someone who is ready to punish Muslims for their supposed offences against India's Hindu majority.[6]

    3. Thirdly, the Samajwadi Party (SP) leader, Akhilesh Yadav, displayed a stronger connection with the people of UP. In addition to his traditional voter base, due to BJP's orchestration of the Ram Temple issue, he garnered the votes of marginalised Muslims and also Yadav communities as well as the UP youth seemingly averse to religious politics. Notably, the BJP candidate failed to win from the Faizabad constituency, where the Ram Temple is located.[7]

- **Bihar:** The BJP conducted an aggressive anti-Pakistan campaig[8] in Bihar as the region elects 40 out of 543 Lok Sabha seats.[9] Though the BJP and its electoral ally Janta Dal United (JDU) won 12 seats each, this number remained lower than in 2019 as both the parties lost 5 and 4 seats, respectively. The regional party Rashtriya Janta Dal gained 4 seats, while Congress also gained 2 seats. JDU is now a coalition partner in the NDA government with the BJP.

- **West Bengal:** West Bengal is also another important state as it elects 42 members of Lok Sabha. The BJP again failed to perform better here as the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC)'s Mamata Banerjee maintained a strong position. Her party won 29 seats, which is an increase of 7 seats

6 Vidya Krishnan, "India Is Starting to See Through Modi's Nationalist Myth," *The Atlantic*, June 5, 2024, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2024/06/modi-india-elections-hinduism-ram/678598/

7 Election Comission of India, https://results.eci.gov.in/PcResultGenJune2024/candidateswise-S2454.htm

8 Maheen Shafeeq, "India's exhausting rhetoric," *The News*, May 22, 2024, https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1191673-india-s-exhausting-rhetoric

9 Election Commission of India, https://elections24.eci.gov.in

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from 2019. On the other hand, the BJP could only secure 12 out of 42 seats, a reduction of 6 seats from 2019. Mamata Banerjee has maintained a stronghold in the region due to:

1. Her qualitative engagement and grassroots hold, welfare-oriented policies such as rural housing and employment schemes, and especially her policies to empower women.[10]

2. Women make up 48% of West Bengal's population. Mamata Banerjee's 'Lakhir Bhandar' scheme, which provided ₹500 per month to women, was doubled to ₹1000- ₹1200 during the election season, which further galvanized her women voter base.[11]

3. She also reached out to Muslims and had criticised the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), National Register of Citizens (NRC), and Uniform Civil Code (UCC) across India.[12]

- **Rajasthan**: Rajasthan produced a somewhat similar outcome as West Bengal. The BJP could also not secure a sweeping victory in Rajasthan as it did in 2014 and 2019 when it managed to win all 25 seats of the state. The BJP lost 11 seats in 2024 and had to settle for 14 seats.[13] This represents a significant dent for the BJP in Western India. The BJP lost seats due to:

1. Farmers' protest in Rajasthan and their unaddressed demands crucially impacted the BJP's electoral prospects. These protests continue in other states, including Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu.

2. The caste and community divisions within Rajasthan became prominent during election season. The tussle between the BJP and Jats, Jats versus Jats and Jat versus Rajputs divided the vote share for BJP. These aspects added a significant barrier to the BJP's win.

3. Gujjars, another significant segment in Rajasthan, preferred to choose Congress due to their discontent with Jats and Dalits.[14]

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10 Suhrid Sankar Chattopadhyay, "Welfare wins in West Bengal," *The Hindu*, June 11, 2024, https://frontline.thehindu.com/election-2024/west-bengal-lok-sabha-election-results-2024-trinamool-congress-mamata-banerjee-welfare-schemes-narendra-modi/article68262715.ece

11 Kamalika Sengupta, "Mamata Banerjee doubles income support for women to protect her turf ahead of Lok Sabha election," CNBC, https://www.cnbctv18.com/politics/mamata-banerjee-doubles-income-support-for-women-to-protect-her-turf-ahead-of-lok-sabha-election-19013361.htm

12 "Mamata Banerjee reaches out to Muslims in Malda LS seats that TMC never won," *Hindustan Times*, April 30, 2024, https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/kolkata-news/mamata-banerjee-reaches-out-to-muslims-in-malda-ls-seats-that-tmc-never-won-101714491153031.html

13 Election Commission of India, https://results.eci.gov.in/PcResultGenJune2024/partywiseresult-S20.htm

14 Neerja Chowdhury, "In absence of a wave, ripples in Rajasthan's 'Jat land': BJP and Modi versus local factors," *Indian Express*, April 20, 2024, https://indianexpress.com/article/political-pulse/rajasthan-jats-bjp-modi-versus-local-factors-lok-sabha-polls-9279732/

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Outcome of Southern States

Unlike the Northern states, the Southern states have been resisting the 'Hindutva' ideology. Therefore, the BJP has depended on alliance politics in the region. In 2014, the BJP managed to secure a 16.2 per cent seat share in five major Southern states, i.e., Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh. This figure slightly improved from 16 to 22 per cent in 2019, mainly due to BJP's victory in Karnataka. The BJP maintained the 22 per cent vote share in 2024 as it secured 29 seats out of 129 seats in South India. Though not as substantial as anticipated, the BJP secured notable gains in South India, which led analysts to believe that the BJP has perhaps now become a national party as it caters to South India and the Northern Hindi belt.[15] While the BJP could not manage to secure any seats in Tamil Nadu, distinct and significant observations from other South Indian states include:

- **Karnataka**: Although Karnataka contributes only 28 of 543 seats in Lok Sabha,[16] it is a crucial state for BJP as it is the only southern state where the BJP has continuously won since 2014 without the support of regional parties. The BJP won 17 seats in 2014; 25 seats in 2019; and then back to 17 seats in 2024 (as it did in 2014).[17] Though BJP won, its seat share decreased by 8 due to the following factors:

    1. Siddaramaiah government implemented the five guarantees it promised during the state election last year remained popular. These include free travel for women, free electricity up to 200 units, unemployment allowance, cash support to women, and free rice every month for those below poverty line families.[18]

    2. The failure of leadership and poor performance by the regional party Janta Dal-Secular (JDS) led to the loss of its stronghold.[19]

    3. BJP propagated that Lord Ram had spent 5 years in exile in Karnataka. This helped the BJP to manipulate the religious sentiments in the state. Therefore, Ram Mandir's inauguration evidently played some role in the BJP's success.[20]

15 "If Modi Can't Handle a Coalition, RSS Could Replace Him With Someone Like Gadkari, *The Wire,* June 16, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z46uhFZZd5U&t=2830s.
16 Election Commission of India, https://elections24.eci.gov.in
17 Election Commission of India, https://elections24.eci.gov.in
18 Amitabh Tiwari, "Why BJP Faces An Uphill Battle In Karnataka, Its 'Gateway' To South," *NDTV*, March 29, 2024, https://www.ndtv.com/opinion/why-bjp-faces-an-uphill-battle-in-karnataka-its-gateway-to-south-5332263
19 Venkatesha Babu, Can Janata Dal (Secular) survive the challenges facing it?," *Hindu Business Line*, May 6, 2024, https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/elections/can-janata-dal-secular-survive-the-challenges-facing-it/article68145694.ece

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- **Kerala**: This is one of the smallest Southern states contributing only 20 seats to Lok Sabha. For the first time, the BJP managed to make inroads in Kerala by winning one seat.[21] In 2019, INC had secured 19 of 20 seats. This time, INC managed to win 14 seats while the regional Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) secured 2 seats.[22] BJP's inroads in the region are due to the reason that:

    1. In addition to galvanising the Hindu population of Kerala, the BJP also won the support of the Christian community. The BJP has learnt that the 'Hindutva' project cannot grow in Kerala and, therefore, they have revised their strategy to reach out to minorities including Christians.[23]

    2. Though the conspiratorial 'Love Jihad' theory, which suggests that Muslim men deliberately marry Hindu and Christian women to convert them to Islam, has been widely debunked, the BJP with the support of Christian clergy and Bollywood, purportedly utilised 'love jihad' to galvanise the Hindu and Christian voter base in Kerala.

- **Andhra Pradesh:** The regional party Telugu Desam Party (TDP) managed to secure 16 out of 25 seats of the region,[24] defeating the ruling Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP) which lost 18 seats and managed to secure only 4. s[25] The growing distrust and underperformance of YSRCP led to its defeat. The BJP, which managed to secure only 3 of 25 seats on its own, with TDP's 16 seats has increased NDA's vote share to 76%. The TDP is now a coalition partner in the NDA government led by the BJP.

- **Telangana:** Both the BJP and INC secured 8 seats each in Telangana. BJP had won 4 seats in 2019, and 5 seats early in 2014. The notable gains made by both BJP and Congress are due to misgovernance of the regional party Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) formerly known as Telangana Rashtra Samithi.[26] Congress and BJP filled this vacuum as:

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20 Amitabh Tiwari, "Why BJP Faces An Uphill Battle In Karnataka, Its 'Gateway' To South," *NDTV*, March 29, 2024, https://www.ndtv.com/opinion/why-bjp-faces-an-uphill-battle-in-karnataka-its-gateway-to-south-5332263

21 Election Commission of India, https://elections24.eci.gov.in

22 Election Commission of India, https://elections24.eci.gov.in

23 "BJP's win in Thrissur, rise in vote share in other seats mark political shift in Kerala: Analysts," *Economic Times,* June 6, 2024, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/elections/lok-sabha/kerala/bjps-win-in-thrissur-rise-in-vote-share-in-other-seats-mark-political-shift-in-kerala-analysts/articleshow/110760104.cms?from=mdr

24 Election Commission of India, https://elections24.eci.gov.in

25 Election Commission of India, https://elections24.eci.gov.in

26 Ajay Gudavarthy, "Telangana: What Explains the Decline of BRS?," *The Wire,* October 27, 2024, https://thewire.in/politics/telangana-what-explains-the-decline-of-brs

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1. Congress introduced welfare schemes such as free bus rides for women, free power up to 200 units for those below the poverty line, and gas cylinders for ₹500. These promises remained popular among voters. The Congress leader Rahul Gandhi himself campaigned there which helped garner the support of those middle-class Hindus who resisted the 'Hindutva' project.

2. Likewise, Narendra Modi and Amit Shah campaigned on behalf of the BJP. Several BRS members joined BJP, due to which the vote bank of BRS moved into the BJP camp. Lastly, the 'Hindutva' factor played a prominent role in attracting Hindu voters, who make up 85 per cent of the population.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the BJP could not win as many seats as it expected in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. The BJP's 2024 toolkit depended on the Ram Temple, polarization, hate politics, fissures, 'Hindutva'-inspired policies, and anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistan rhetoric. While 'brand Modi' remained popular as a majority of the voters supported Modi's electioneering strategy, it is increasingly visible that a significant share of the Indian electorate rejected these divisive political narratives and evasion of debate on the BJP's actual performance. It was evident that the people of India were more concerned with socio-economic issues such as unemployment, poverty, inflation, health, communal harmony, women's safety, sanitation, and corruption. These aspects were not given a prominent part in 'Modi ki Guarantee' (Modi's assurance). Hence, the BJP ended up with 63 seats less than it had bagged in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. The opposition also performed more confidently and coherently than in the 2014 and 2019 elections. Evidently, the opposition's efforts to focus the discourse on BJP's performance and framing of elections as a battle to save the Constitution of India played a prominent part as well.

It remains to be seen how the coalition government under Narendra Modi will function as this is an uncharted territory for him. It is unclear whether the BJP and 'brand Modi' will alter their political narratives to accommodate their coalition partners. There are other questions as well: Will the BJP replace Modi as PM to retain power in case things become difficult with coalition partners? As RSS leader Mohan Bhagwat hinted in his latest speech, will the RSS-led BJP dilute or adopt a moderate version of their 'Hindutva' project to continue with its long-term planning for India or to converge with the secular approach of coalition parties or to further expand in the South? Will this lead to shifting the outlook and agenda of BJP? Only time will tell.

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