

## ANALYZING PRE-POLL ELECTIONEERING IN DELHI

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February 4, 2025

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

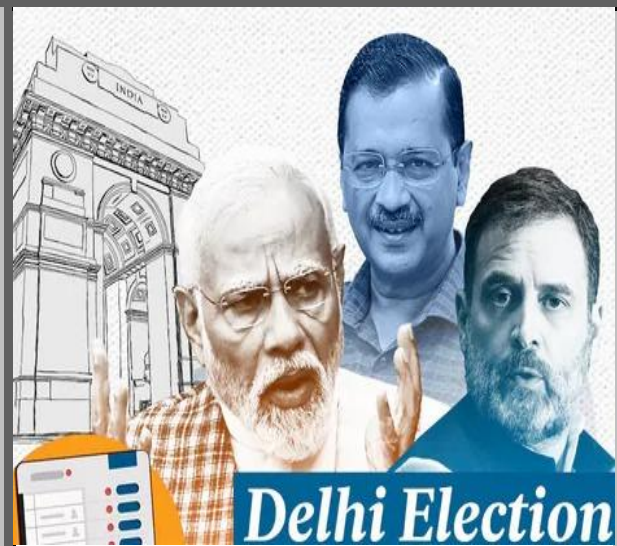


Image Courtesy: Mint

### Background

Legislative assembly elections in Delhi are scheduled for 5 February 2025 -- to be held in a single phase and the results slated to be declared on 8 February. Having a population of around 33.8 million, Delhi has 15.5 million registered voters of which 8.37 million are men and 7.23 million women.<sup>1</sup> The Election Commission of India has set up 13,766 polling stations around the Capital, deploying paramilitary forces for smooth balloting. Delhi is being contested among three major parties, the incumbent Aam Admi Party (AAP) of Arvind Kejriwal; the Indian National Congress (INC) spearheaded by Rahul Gandhi; and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. These parties are vying hard and utilizing all possible means to secure a majority. The AAP has been in power for the last two terms as Kejriwal secured overwhelming majority of 67 and 62 seats out of 70 in the 2015 and 2020 elections, respectively. Before AAP, INC had formed government for 17

<sup>1</sup> Tribune News Service, '1.55 cr registered voters in Delhi; Largest electorate in Vikaspuri', Tribune India, January 7, 2025. <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/delhi/1-55-cr-registered-voters-in-delhi-largest-electorate-in-vikaspuri/>

years. It has been 27 years for the BJP trying unsuccessfully to secure a majority in Delhi's legislative assembly.<sup>2</sup>

### Electoral Agendas of the Political Parties

Besides AAP's formidable position of having had clear majority in the last two elections, Delhi is witnessing aggressive campaigning by the BJP where Prime Minister Modi himself has been holding public rallies.<sup>3</sup> Although it appears to be a three-way contest between AAP, BJP and INC, the INC has not pursued a really robust campaign like the others. Multiple factors will be impacting the poll results including voter sentiments, governance records, and campaign strategies of respective political parties. February 3 was the last day for electioneering, and all major political parties ended their campaigns by promising major welfare schemes and tax relief in case of their victory. While AAP's electoral agenda revolved around pledges of development in areas such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure, the BJP and INC strongly criticized the incumbent (AAP) government for corruption, poor healthcare in terms of deteriorating air quality in Delhi, and complaints regarding the water quality and sanitation. The just-presented Union Budget-2025 by the BJP Government could be a high-scoring factor for the party in the Delhi polls as the middle class is seriously concerned about tax relief. Prime Minister Modi has called it the "most middle-class friendly Budget in India's history."<sup>4</sup>

### Analyzing the Electioneering

Delhi's demographic dynamics can help explain the political parties' electoral strategies. There are around 20 percent Dalit voters, 13 percent Muslims, and 40 percent middle-class voters, which makes them the decisive segments in the polls.<sup>5</sup> The political parties have primarily targeted on securing the support of these dominant sections of the electorate. Traditionally, Dalits and Muslims have supported AAP because of its policies on education, free electricity in the slums, and AAP's resolute opposition to the BJP. While AAP is exuding confidence about maintaining this support

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<sup>2</sup> Gulam Jeelani, "Delhi Election 2025: Number of voters, date of polling and results," *Mint*, 3 February 2025, <https://www.livemint.com/elections/delhi-election-2025-number-of-voters-date-of-polling-and-results-find-all-key-details-here-aap-bjp-arvind-kejriwal-11738557753229.html>.

<sup>3</sup> "PM Modi shores up BJP's campaign; Rahul slams Kejriwal" *Business Standard*, January 30, 2025, [https://www.business-standard.com/elections/delhi-elections/delhi-polls-pm-modi-shores-up-bjp-s-campaign-rahul-slams-kejriwal-125013000031\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/elections/delhi-elections/delhi-polls-pm-modi-shores-up-bjp-s-campaign-rahul-slams-kejriwal-125013000031_1.html).

<sup>4</sup> Archis Mohan, "Will Budget tax relief help BJP energise Delhi's middle class voters?" *Business Standard*, February 3, 2025, [https://www.business-standard.com/politics/will-budget-tax-relief-help-bjp-energise-delhi-s-middle-class-voters-125020300016\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/politics/will-budget-tax-relief-help-bjp-energise-delhi-s-middle-class-voters-125020300016_1.html).

<sup>5</sup> Swastika Sruti, "AAP vs BJP: A Neck-and-Neck Battle For Delhi, Key Factors That Could Decide The Winner," *NewsX*, February 3m 2025, <https://www.newsx.com/india/delhi/aap-vs-bjp-a-neck-and-neck-battle-for-delhi-key-factors-that-could-decide-the-winner/>.

base, the BJP has promised expansive welfare schemes to woo the voters. Among other things, the BJP has promised concrete houses in the slums and the continuation of the present welfare schemes. While launching the election manifesto at the party's State office, BJP's National President, JP Nadda said: "We have taken women, youth, unorganized labourers, middle income group into consideration. All the public welfare schemes running in Delhi will continue even if the BJP government is formed. All those schemes will be strengthened in a more effective way and they will also be made free of corruption."<sup>6</sup> About the Muslims, the BJP is hoping that the INC-AAP split will divide Muslim votes, thus creating a favourable position for the BJP. However, the Muslim vote evidently remains in favour of AAP because of the INC's ostensible lack of solid messaging to the Muslims. In 2020, the BJP had criticized the welfare schemes of the AAP, which actually backfired as the dominant groups such as Dalits, Muslims and middle-class felt threatened about their existing benefits. This year, the BJP has learnt from AAP and pledged the continuation of these welfare schemes. Additionally, the party has also announced INR 2500 for women and housing schemes for slum dwellers. The lower-income groups including the Dalits and Muslims are looking for the party that could offer them maximum benefits. However, the tilt of the middle class seems towards the BJP because of the latest tax relief announced, which may well prove to be a game-changer.

Kejriwal has positioned AAP as a 'pro-people' party prioritizing governance issues rather than basing the electoral rhetoric on identity politics. He has also emphasized the issue of statehood for Delhi, underscoring that the BJP's control over the Lieutenant Governor's office is a hindrance to effective governance. Throughout his previous election campaigns, Kejriwal promised full statehood for Delhi.<sup>7</sup> The BJP, on the other hand, has criticized AAP's leader for not prioritizing public issues and instead waging a fight against the Centre. Union Home Minister Amit Shah in a rally at Jangpura said: "States having a double-engine BJP government have progressed in the last 10 years. Delhi has been left behind. They keep making excuses and fighting with the Centre like a crybaby."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "Delhi election manifesto by BJP launched: Party promises to continue welfare schemes in national capital," Economic Times, January 17, 2025, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/elections/assembly-elections/delhi/delhi-election-manifesto-by-bjp-launched-party-promises-to-continue-welfare-schemes-in-national-capital/articleshow/117327945.cms?from=mdr>.

<sup>7</sup> "Will give statehood to Delhi, make it free from LG," ANI, October 6, 2024, <https://www.aninews.in/news/national/politics/will-give-statehood-to-delhi-make-it-free-from-lg-arvind-kejriwal20241006171128/>.

<sup>8</sup> "Delhi left behind as AAP kept fighting with Centre: Union Home Minister Amit Shah," The New Indian Express, February 3, 2025, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/delhi/2025/Feb/03/delhi-left-behind-as-aap-kept-fighting-with-centre-union-home-minister-amit-shah>.

## Challenges to Political Narrative

Despite the tall promises, there are challenges for the contesting parties based on their respective electoral agendas as well as track record of governance. While AAP is aiming to benefit from its development and governance record, the BJP has managed to halt the implementation of the AAP policies because of its control over the municipality. The corruption charges levelled by the BJP and INC will also be a challenge for the Aam Admi Party in sustaining its support base and vote share, and even after the polls to ensure the continuation of the welfare schemes. While Kejriwal continues to single-handedly brave the challenge posed by the two dominant national parties, the BJP and INC, Prime Minister Modi is himself aggressively campaigning for the BJP in the Centre. Though it looks like Kejriwal Vs Modi, the BJP's inability to present a strong candidate for the post of Chief Minister can raise concerns among its supporters.

## Conclusion

As the INC looks like a distant contender, will AAP be able to secure a third consecutive term, or the BJP will finally establish its rule in the National Capital? AAP seems to fare better because of its previous track record. Although the corruption charges by the BJP and INC can impact the final outcome, AAP's overall public support looks intact thus far. The early poll predictions have also favoured the Kejriwal's party with the majority of the women, Dalits, and Muslims favouring AAP. But even if AAP comes to power, it will still remain a challenge for it to counter the BJP's influence and control through the Lieutenant Governor.