

India

Narendra Modi's BJP likely to win upcoming Apr-Jun parliamentary elections

- **BJP is slated to secure a victory for a third time**
- **Narendra Modi expected to become the prime minister in June for the third term**
- **INDIA bloc unlikely to pose formidable opposition**

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is expected to lead the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) to victory, akin to the 2019 elections, in the upcoming parliamentary elections scheduled between April and June. The alliance is projected to secure between 305 to 325 seats. The Indian economy is registering the fastest growth globally, which is supportive of a politically stable environment. The political landscape although competitive remains stable supported by strong institutions and a steady economy. However, the landscape is fragmented with several regional and national level parties involved in the upcoming elections. Although the BJP is expected to win, it may experience a decline in support from Muslim voters due to the Ram temple issue, as well as backlash from the farming community over the controversial farm laws. Additionally, the economy's persistent battle with inflation, particularly in food prices will be a key issue among the voters this time. The opposition bloc has made inflation and alleged loss of autonomy of democratic institutions its core campaign concerns. This could potentially diminish the BJP's popularity and result in a lower vote share, necessitating the NDA to collectively form the government. Meanwhile, BJP's campaign remains strong given its track record of a robust economic growth, a steady recovery from Covid-19 pandemic and growing international relevance.

Election Timeline

These elections aim to elect the 543 members of the 18th Lok Sabha. The election process will unfold across seven phases, culminating in the announcement of results on June 4, 2024. Notably, this election is poised to be the largest-ever globally, surpassing even the significant 2019 Indian general election. Furthermore, it will be the longest-held general elections in India, spanning a total of 44 days (excluding the inaugural 1951-52 Indian general election). Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is currently serving his second term, will be seeking re-election for a third consecutive term.

Approximately 960mn individuals, out of a total population of 1.4bn, are eligible to participate in these elections, making it a significant democratic exercise. Concurrently, legislative assembly elections in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha, and Sikkim will be held alongside the general election. Additionally, by-elections for 35 seats across 16 states will also take place during this period.

Indian Parliamentary Framework:

India follows a parliamentary system of government, which means that the executive branch (the government) is derived from and accountable to the legislature (parliament). The Parliament of India consists

of two houses: the Lok Sabha (House of the People; lower house) and the Rajya Sabha (Council of States; upper house).

Lok Sabha

The Lok Sabha is the lower house of Parliament and is composed of members directly elected by the citizens. Its primary functions include lawmaking, financial oversight (such as passing the budget), and holding the government accountable. The Lok Sabha is presided over by the Speaker, who is elected by its members. General elections to the Lok Sabha are held every five years (unless dissolved earlier) using the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system and the Election Commission of India is responsible for conducting these elections across the country.

India is divided into multiple electoral constituencies, each represented by a single member in the Lok Sabha. The delimitation of constituencies is done periodically to ensure fair representation based on population changes. The total members of the Lok Sabha are 545 (maximum strength) and the total constituencies are 543. The states with the most constituencies are as follows:

- Uttar Pradesh: 80 constituencies
- Maharashtra: 48 constituencies
- West Bengal: 42 constituencies
- Bihar: 40 constituencies
- Tamil Nadu: 39 constituencies

The political party or coalition that wins the majority of seats in the Lok Sabha forms the government. Usually the leader of the majority party or coalition becomes the Prime Minister. However, sometimes the leading party may nominate another member as the prime minister. Currently, the leader of the Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP), Narendra Modi is the prime minister of India.

the minimum number of seats required to form a government or win an election is determined by a simple majority. With 543 seats in the Lok Sabha, a party or coalition needs to secure at least 272 seats to attain a simple majority. This ensures that they have more seats than any other single party or coalition, allowing them to form the government and have the confidence of the house to pass legislation and govern effectively. It's worth noting that in practice, political parties often aim for a higher number of seats to form a more stable government and have a comfortable majority to push through their legislative agenda. However, the minimum requirement for forming a government is a simple majority of 272 seats. The current BJP-led National Democratic Alliance coalition holds 353 seats in the lower house, allowing them to comfortably pass legislation.

Rajya Sabha

The Rajya Sabha is the upper house of Parliament and represents the states and union territories of India. Its members are not directly elected by the people but are elected by the elected members of the State Legislative Assemblies (MLAs) using a single transferable vote system.

Voting process

Votes are cast by marking a ballot paper or using electronic voting machines (EVMs), depending on the technology adopted in the particular constituency. More recently, most voting is done through EVMs, which have come under criticism in recent years. Opposition parties have in the past state elections alleged that EVMs have been rigged to allow for the ruling party to secure a victory. The candidate who secures the highest number of votes in a constituency is declared the winner and is elected to represent that constituency in the Lok Sabha.

Main Political Parties

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP):

Currently ruling, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has emerged as a dominant force in Indian politics in the past three decades. The party's ideology is often associated with Hindu nationalism, or Hindutva. The BJP has in its ongoing term (and the one before) advocated for cultural revivalism and economic reforms. Led by the Narendra Modi, the party has championed issues such as national security, development, and cultural pride. In terms of economic reforms the party has undertaken reforms associated with foreign trade (signing several FTAs), manufacturing sector push, introduction of goods and services tax, demonetisation etc. On the social and governance front, the party tried to introduce farm laws, which were repealed. Meanwhile, it successfully abolished the practice of triple talaq in India, abrogated Article 370 (thereby taking away Kashmir's special state status and dissolving its state constitution). The BJP in its ongoing term also re-built the controversial temple in Ayodhya, which is expected to be a political leverage gathering move, in the upcoming elections. The BJP had secured a mammoth 37.7% in 2019 elections and a similar performance is likely in 2024.

Looking ahead, BJP remains a favourite. In terms of policy, continuity is expected. The BJP's re-election would mean a continued push for foreign engagement, increased manufacturing sector impetus and strong push for projects and infrastructure development.

Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA bloc)

On the opposite end of the political spectrum, opposition forces have joined hands, setting aside ideological differences in a bid to form a unified front against the dominant BJP. This coalition, named INDIA, brings together 26 parties, both national and regional, united by a common objective: to dislodge Prime Minister Modi and his party from power. The overarching theme of this election revolves around the BJP's prolonged tenure in governance and the opposition's resolve to curb its sway.

Though specific strategies are yet to be fully disclosed, there exists a general consensus among opposition parties that countering the BJP necessitates a state-centric approach, with a focus on fielding formidable candidates. This recognition serves as the cornerstone of INDIA's strategy, aimed at challenging the BJP's hegemony. Key parties in the INDIA bloc include the Indian National Congress, Samajwadi Party, Shiv Sena, National Congress Party (NCP). From a policy perspective, the INDIA bloc should it come to power will face a formidable challenge aligning the interest of several parties within the coalition. A more regional focus from specific parties is expected, which could be in the way of passing legislation. Further, the bloc has not yet nominated a prime ministerial candidate.

The coalition's disparate composition, characterized by a lack of common ground beyond the shared objective of defeating the BJP, has hindered its appeal to the electorate. Furthermore, the bloc has failed to articulate a distinct governance vision that sufficiently sets it apart from the ruling party. Complicating matters, the coalition includes factions that have historically been rivals at the regional level, leading to challenges in negotiating seat-sharing arrangements in certain states.

The absence of a clear prime ministerial candidate for INDIA has also contributed to voter skepticism. While the Congress party may prefer to nominate one of its leaders, such as Rahul Gandhi, non-Congress members of the coalition view him as a weak contender with limited popularity. Alternatively, selecting Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge could mitigate controversy, but his appeal among the electorate remains constrained. Voters remain wary of the potential for instability, recalling the tumultuous period of the late 1980s marked by frequent changes in government leadership, which precipitated political and economic turmoil. These partisan considerations are likely to fuel distrust within the coalition and further alienate voters, thereby posing significant challenges to its electoral prospects.

Indian National Congress (INC)

The Indian National Congress, otherwise referred to as the Congress holds a storied legacy as the party that spearheaded India's struggle for independence. Positioned as a centrist, secular force, the Congress' ideology centres around welfare policies and inclusive governance. Over 10 Indian prime ministers have come from the Congress. With a history intertwined with the likes of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, the Congress continues to be a formidable presence in Indian politics. However, the party has lost favour among the citizens owing to unclear manifesto, lack of clear leadership and several allegations of corruption. However, in recent state elections, the Congress managed to regain some vote share. Congress secured less than 10% of seats in the 2019 elections. The pervasive influence of the Gandhi family within the Congress party has led to a sense of alienation among the public. Many perceive the family's prominent role as emblematic of dynastic politics, overshadowing the party's focus on promoting credible economic development policies. As a result, Congress's declining national stature has undermined its effectiveness as an opposition force, limiting its capacity to mount a substantial challenge to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) independently.

It is noteworthy though that the Congress is the glue in the INDIA bloc and will look to secure the prime ministerial candidate but depending on their vote share and the chance of it being small, it may be unlikely. However, Kharge remains a key prime ministerial candidate alongside Rahul Gandhi.

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)

Representing the marginalised and oppressed sections of society, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) was established in 1984 by Kanshi Ram. Rooted in the principles of social justice and Dalit empowerment, the BSP strives to uplift Scheduled Castes (Dalits), Scheduled Tribes (Adivasis), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Its leader, Mayawati, has been a prominent voice advocating for the rights of these communities. The BSP is a dominant force in state politics in Uttar Pradesh (most populous state).

Samajwadi Party (SP)

With a stronghold in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, the Samajwadi Party (SP) espouses socialist ideals and secular values. Founded in 1992, it emphasizes social justice, welfare schemes, and the empowerment of marginalized sections of society. Led by figures like Mulayam Singh Yadav and Akhilesh Yadav, the SP also wields significant influence in one of India's most populous states.

All India Trinamool Congress (AITC)

Emerging as a regional powerhouse in West Bengal, the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) champions the cause of regional autonomy and secularism. Founded by Mamata Banerjee in 1998, the party advocates for the interests of West Bengal while also promoting welfare policies and inclusive governance. With a focus on grassroots activism, the AITC has carved a niche for itself in state politics. Trinamool Congress although part of the wider INDIA bloc is not on a seat sharing agreement with it and will contest elections on its own. The BJP has been aiming to make inroads into West Bengal as Mamata is a key player and a potential prime ministerial candidate.

Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M))

Representing the left-wing spectrum, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) advocates for socialism, secularism, and pro-poor policies. Established in 1964, the CPI(M) has a strong presence in states like Kerala, West Bengal, and Tripura. With a commitment to Marxist principles, the party remains a vocal critic of capitalist excesses and communalism.

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)

Born out of the anti-corruption movement, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) entered the political arena in 2012 with a promise of clean governance and people-centric politics. Led by Arvind Kejriwal, the party focuses on anti-corruption measures, participatory democracy, and grassroots activism. It has made significant inroads in the national capital, Delhi, and aspires to expand its footprint nationally. Currently the AAP holds two states - Delhi NCR and Punjab.

Shiv Sena

A regional force in Maharashtra, the Shiv Sena espouses regionalism, Hindu nationalism, and cultural conservatism. Founded in 1966 by Bal Thackeray, the party advocates for Marathi pride and Hindu interests. Over the years, the Shiv Sena has evolved into a key player in Maharashtra politics, often forming alliances with national parties to wield influence. Although earlier a key BJP ally and part of the NDA, the Shiv Sena is now part of the INDIA bloc.

Election Scenarios

Scenario 1: BJP wins elections with clear majority (35% probability)

The primary determinant of the BJP's prospects in the upcoming 2024 elections will undoubtedly be the enduring popularity of Narendra Modi. Rather than a referendum on the BJP as a political entity, the election is expected to primarily revolve around Mr. Modi's performance at the helm. The BJP's recent electoral victories in various state elections in late 2023 further validate Mr. Modi's continued appeal among the

electorate. Despite overseeing a significant consolidation of power, fostering a more conformist media landscape, and diluting checks and balances within India's federal structure, Mr. Modi's popularity remains unwavering. In both the 2014 and 2019 elections, the BJP successfully tapped into majoritarian sentiments, a trend expected to persist in 2024. The party's Hindu nationalist agenda continues to resonate with the country's vast Hindu majority, particularly in the populous Hindi-speaking regions of northern India.

The inauguration of a Ram temple in Uttar Pradesh in January 2024 underscores the BJP's sustained reliance on this approach, further bolstering its appeal. Despite occasional communal tensions with minority groups resulting from this agenda, the BJP remains steadfast in its commitment. While the party's economic track record presents a mixed picture, with inflationary pressures affecting the cost of living and limited progress in formal employment generation, India's robust growth trajectory and visible advancements in urban and rural infrastructure are poised to bolster support for the incumbent.

Welfare schemes introduced by the BJP government have garnered significant support across various demographic segments, including women, youth, farmers, and migrants. These schemes are expected to continue playing a pivotal role in bolstering the BJP's electoral prospects, potentially expanding further in the next term. Furthermore, Mr. Modi's perceived elevation of India's global stature, evident through high-profile foreign policy endeavours such as India's G20 presidency, successful lunar missions, and state visits to the US, resonates positively with the urban electorate, further tipping the scales in favor of the BJP.

Therefore, a clean majority win for the BJP is a high probability scenario. The BJP itself is forecasting over 400 seats. However, in our view this is overly ambitious. Our expectation is that the BJP will secure 300-310 seats in the upcoming elections.

Scenario 2: NDA alliance secures a majority (45%)

The second scenario, in our view, is more probable and extends to the BJP-led NDA alliance. As seen in 2019, the BJP alongside its allies forming the NDA will secure a majority. A total of 305-325 seats are likely to go to the alliance. The BJP will see some loss of vote share among the Muslim voters given the strong Hindutva move of the Ram temple and this coupled with the backlash from the farming community over the farm laws will dent BJP's majority. Another crucial factor is the economy's continued battle with inflation. Food price inflation particularly has been chipping away at disposable income, especially among low and middle income households. This will draw criticism from both the urban and rural communities and could affect the BJP's popularity. As a consequence, lower vote share is possible for BJP independently and therefore the NDA will collectively for the government.

Scenario 3: INDIA bloc secures a win in the election (20%)

There is a small probability that the INDIA bloc may be able to secure sufficient vote share in different regions to dislodge the BJP. This will come on the back of the public wanting change (given the two terms of BJP) as opposed to aligning with the manifesto or ideology of the bloc. Domestic caste dynamics will continue to exert significant influence on the outcome of the election. Congress has been advocating for a caste-based census to be conducted at both state and national levels, aiming to counter the BJP's efforts to consolidate a united Hindu vote bank. However, the political landscape is shaped by the shifting allegiances within the

Other Backward Classes (OBCs), the largest single voter bloc in India, constituting approximately 40% of the population.

The BJP had garnered support from the OBC community in 2019, a trend that has seen many OBC voters aligning with the BJP, departing from their traditional allegiance to the Congress party. But there is a chance that the voters may return to their traditional choice and this could sway the result of the elections.

Opinion Polls

Opinion polls have Modi and the BJP in the lead across the country. The seats expected to be won by the NDA range between 335 to 399. The latest of these polls conducted earlier this month have the NDA winning 399 seats, just shy of the 400 target put out by the BJP campaign. In more detail the estimates of different opinion polls are listed below:

Opinion Polls - Lok Sabha Election

Polling agency	Date published	Sample size	NDA		
			INDIA	Others	
India TV- CNX	01/04/2024	179,190	399	113	31
News 18	01/03/2024	118,616	411	105	27
ABP News	01/03/2024	41,762	366	156	21
India TV- CNX	01/03/2024	162,900	378	98	67
Times Now - ETG	01/03/2024	323,357	358	110	40
Zee News	01/02/2024	167,843	377	93	73
India Today- Cvoter	01/02/2024	149,092	335	166	42
Times Now - ETG	01/02/2024	156,843	366	104	73

Source: Local Media

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