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1. Lok Sabha Election Results 2024: Decoding the Verdict

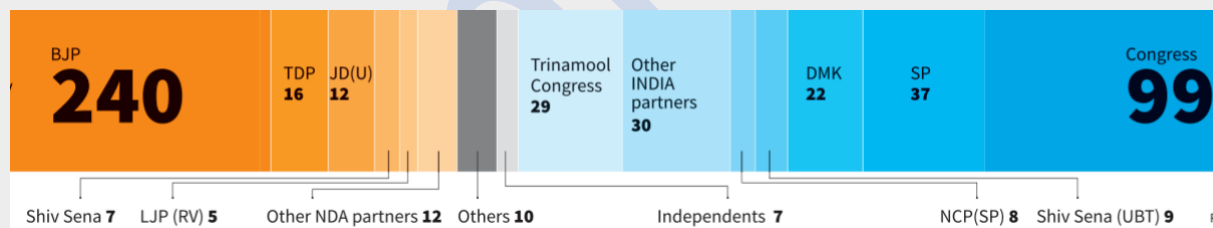
Why in News?

How will the third Narendra Modi government differ from the two previous ones that came to power in 2014 and 2019? The answer will lie in the composition of the Eighteenth Lok Sabha. Here are a few things that will change.

After a decade, back to days of coalitions at the Centre

For the better part of the last 34 years, India has been governed by a coalition of political parties. It is only in the last 10 years that a single political party — the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) — led a majority government at the Centre, crossing the halfway mark in the Lok Sabha elections of 2014 and 2019.

The BJP had won 240 seats, short of the majority mark of 272 by a long way. It will have to depend on its pre-poll allies, the top four being the Telugu Desam Party led by Chandrababu Naidu, the Janata Dal (United) led by Nitish Kumar, Shiv Sena led by Eknath Shinde, and Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) led by Chirag Paswan.



The TDP had won or was leading at 16 seats, the JD(U) had won 12, the Shiv Sena had won 7, and the LJP (Ram Vilas) had won 5 seats. Together, these parties will bring 40 seats to the NDA. The BJP will need all these seats to comfortably go past the half-way mark of 272.

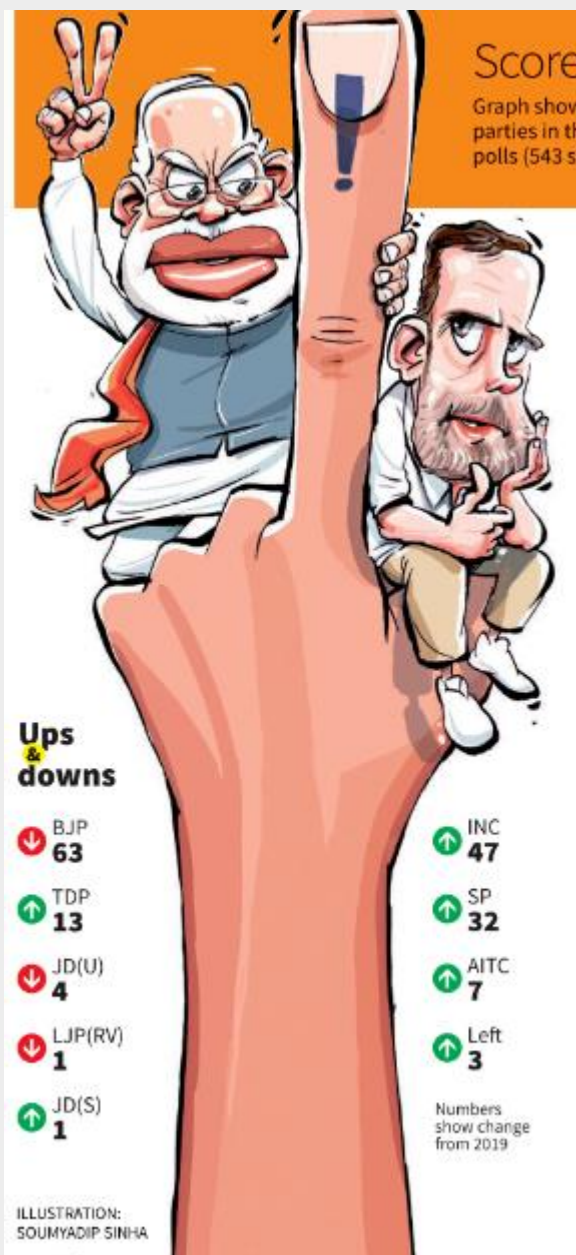
Role of allies: Then and Now

Shiv Sena and JD(U) were BJP allies earlier too, but with a crucial difference. Their withdrawal of support would not jeopardise the NDA government, given that the BJP on its own had 282 seats in 2014, and an even higher tally of 303 seats in 2019.

So, when Uddhav Thackeray, whose Sena had been a BJP ally with a similar ideology since 1989, and had won 18 seats in the Lok Sabha election of 2019, pulled out of the alliance after the 2019 Assembly polls in Maharashtra, the BJP-led government at the Centre was not affected.

Similarly, the Akali Dal, another long-term BJP ally since 1996, pulling out of the alliance during the farm protests in September 2020 did not matter.

Not anymore. Now, BJP will have to listen to its allies, because they will be key to the stability of the government at the Centre.



Reduced flexibility of BJP

The new and old allies will seek Cabinet berths — maybe important ones, that could impinge on the BJP-led government's flexibility in policy-making.

And the BJP may be required to revisit its coalition dharma. It will have to call periodic meetings of its allies for temperature checks; it will need to get them on board before deciding on hot button issues such as Uniform Civil Code, delimitation of constituencies, judicial reforms, and 'one-nation, one-election'.

In short, the party will have to reset the framework of running a genuine coalition government, and devise mechanisms to accommodate the sensitivities of other parties with their own ethos and ideologies.

Larger role for India bloc

Not just that. Given the smaller difference in seat tallies in the new Lok Sabha, the rival INDIA bloc will have a better chance at putting the government under pressure should some NDA allies break ranks and cross over.

Both Rahul Gandhi and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge did not rule out the possibility of approaching the BJP's pre-poll allies for a shot at forming the government.

Rise of regional leaders and increased pressure on BJP

From the North to the South, East to West, regional leaders have re-emerged to exert influence in the national polity. Chandrababu Naidu will get to wield clout as the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, and as a key partner in the BJP-led government at the Centre. Samajwadi Party's Akhilesh Yadav will now be heard loud and clear in not just the Uttar Pradesh Assembly, where his party with 108 seats out of total 403 has a significant presence, but also in Parliament.

The Samajwadi Party (SP) has trumped the BJP in Uttar Pradesh, the state that contributed 72 seats to the party's tally of 282 in 2014. The SP had won 37 seats in the state that contributes the largest number of MPs — 80 — to Lok Sabha.

The BJP had won only 33 seats, its strength almost halved from the 62 of 2019. In fact, the SP will be the third largest party in Parliament after the BJP (240) and the Congress (99).

Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress (29 seats), M K Stalin's Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (22), the Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) with its 9 seats, and the NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar) with 7 will lend their voice to regional aspirations, and mount pressure on the Central government by speaking up in Parliament.

The Trinamool's performance in the election, winning 7 seats more than in 2019, could mean that Mamata has managed to stall the BJP's juggernaut in West Bengal, at least for now. And the DMK-led alliance has retained all 39 seats in Tamil Nadu.

The verdict in Maharashtra suggests that the people have stood by Sharad Pawar and Uddhav Thackeray, who suffered BJP-supported splits in their parties. The state goes to Assembly polls later this year in October, and the Maha Vikas Aghadi alliance of the Congress, Sharad Pawar's NCP, and the Uddhav Sena is well placed to make a strong bid for power.

Recalibration of power balance, among BJP-RSS and within BJP

Given that the Lok Sabha elections in 2024 too were centred around Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with a high-decibel 'Modi ki guarantee' campaign, the burden of a lower tally will inevitably fall on him. Leaders will not speak openly against the Prime Minister, and will continue to rally around him, but it is bound to reflect in the party's power structure.

What has not gone unnoticed is the performance of Shivraj Singh Chouhan, who delivered a clear majority for the BJP in the Assembly elections just six months ago, and has now ensured a clean sweep in Madhya Pradesh with all 29 Lok Sabha seats falling into the BJP basket. Chouhan has won his own seat, Vidisha, by a staggering margin of 8.21 lakh votes.

Modi may not only have to accommodate but also actively deploy moderate voices to expand his acceptability in the coalition government and in Parliament, which will represent a wider political spectrum than before.

When the new Cabinet is constituted, Modi may not have the kind of free hand he had in 2014 and 2019. RSS, the ideological parent of the BJP, which works quietly on the ground for the party, may put forward its own suggestions.

The BJP, which has grown in strength over the past decade, did not necessarily consult the RSS on government affairs. BJP-RSS relations during the NDA government under Atal Bihari Vajpayee had been starkly different. The RSS claims that it does not seek power, but it has always influenced the political agenda of the party.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express & the Hindu

2. Two lakh plus NOTA votes in Indore: Why NOTA was introduced, its consequences

Why in News?



The BJP's Shankar Lalwani has won in Indore with a massive 10.09 lakh margin, receiving 12,26,751 votes. His nearest competitor: NOTA, with 2,18,674 votes.

The extraordinary result in Indore is the most votes that the "None Of The Above" (NOTA) option has ever received in any constituency to date. The previous NOTA record-holder was Gopalganj, Bihar, in 2019, when 51,660 voters chose this option.

When and why was the NOTA option introduced?

The Supreme Court directed the Election Commission of India (ECI) to introduce the NOTA option for voters in September 2013, in order to protect the secrecy of voters' choice.

In 2004 the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) had approached the apex court seeking directions to the ECI for measures to protect the 'right to secrecy' of voters to exercise their franchise. They argued that the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961 violated the secrecy aspect as the Presiding Officer (from the ECI) maintains a record of voters who choose not to vote along with the signatures or thumb impressions of each voter who exercises this right.

Moreover, with the introduction of EVMs, the court noted that anyone present in the polling booth would know if a voter has decided not to vote, as the machine would not emit any light or sound (as it does when a vote is cast). The court noted that the ECI in 2001 sent a letter to the Ministry of Law and Justice seeking the introduction of a NOTA option in EVMs and ballot papers to protect voter secrecy as well as allow voters to "express his dissent/disapproval against the contesting candidates and will have the benefit of reducing bogus voting."

The court accepted this reasoning and the suggestion from the ECI's letter, stating that political parties would be "forced to accept the will of the people and field candidates who are known for their integrity", and directed the ECI to install a NOTA button in EVMs.

What happens if NOTA receives the highest number of votes in a constituency?

NOTA has no legal consequence attached to it — even if the highest number of votes in a seat are polled for NOTA, the second most successful candidate wins. This has never happened (in Lok Sabha elections), but the Indore result, as well as other local body elections, show that it remains a distinct possibility.

Currently, the apex court is considering another petition for elections to be considered "null and void" if NOTA receives the highest number of votes in the constituency.

The petition invokes Maharashtra, Haryana, Puducherry, Delhi, and Chandigarh as examples of states and union territories where the State Election Commission passed orders declaring NOTA as a "Fictional Electoral Candidate" in local elections (including elections for panchayats and municipal bodies). If the votes for NOTA exceed the votes received by all other individual candidates, fresh elections will be held in these states and union territories.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

3. With 135 seats in kitty, Naidu set to become A.P. CM for fourth time

Andhra Pradesh	
Assembly Constituencies	175
* Status of Top Five Parties	
Parties	Leading/Won
TDP	135
JnP	21
YSRCP	11
BJP	8

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) national president Nara Chandrababu Naidu is all set to become the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh for the fourth time after handing a crushing defeat to Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's YSR Congress Party in the Assembly election, which was held simultaneously with the Lok Sabha election in the State.

The TDP, which is part of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) along with the Jana Sena Party (JSP), secured 135 seats.

Mr. Reddy had stormed to power by securing 151 seats in the 2019 election. The TDP won just 23 seats.

Relevance: GS Prelims

Source: The Hindu

4. BJP breaks Naveen's 24-year grip on Odisha

Odisha	
Assembly Constituencies	147
* Status of Top Five Parties	
Parties	Leading/Won
BJP	78
BJD	51
INC	14
IND	3
CPI(M)	1

In what can be described as a historic upset, the 24-year-long tenure of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik came to an end, with the aggressive BJP poised to form government in Odisha.

The BJP won 78 seats, while the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) got 51, and the Congress 14. The halfway mark for forming the government is 74 in the 147-member Assembly.

Relevance: GS Prelims

Source: The Hindu