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India votes

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Introduction

In May and June 2024, India finalized what the Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government lauded as the ‘largest democratic exercise’ in the world: the national elections for the lower house of parliament that ultimately elects the Indian Prime Minister. In total, up to 969 million Indian citizens were eligible to vote (Pradhan, 2024). The election was conducted freely, an (unfortunately) unusual trend in a region in which voter repression has remained a dominant feature of domestic politics over the past decades. Indian voters ultimately delivered a third straight term to the BJP and Modi - a feat only Jawaharlal Nehru has achieved in post-independence Indian politics. In many ways, Modi’s profound impact on Indian politics since he first came into power in 2014 was thus sustained. Yet, the BJP failed to extend the supermajority it held previously, which had been the explicit electoral objective of the government (Hall, 2024). The elections were also characterized by a strong showing of the political opposition that surprised many commentators, most of whom predicted a resounding victory for the BJP. In an ironic twist, the BJP’s electoral victory thus felt more of a defeat to Modi and the BJP than the political opposition, which has appeared re-energized.

What drove this surprising electoral outcome and what implications is the election likely to have going forward? This paper discusses both the backdrop of the elections and the elections as such. It retraces the approaches to and changes in Modi’s governance models throughout his two first Premierhips, which were characterized by generally positive economic performances (that were then heavily disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic) as well as the entrenchment of Hindu-nationalist ideology that alienated national minorities but was immensely popular among India’s Hindu majority. The paper then examines the outcome of the 2024 elections, highlighting the role economic concerns played in determining the outcome of the votes. It specifically zeroes in on the BJP’s lacklustre performance in Uttar Pradesh, India’s core battleground state and a key constituency for the BJP. Lastly, the paper provides a forecast on the election’s ramifications for India, the region, and New Delhi’s international relations over the coming years.

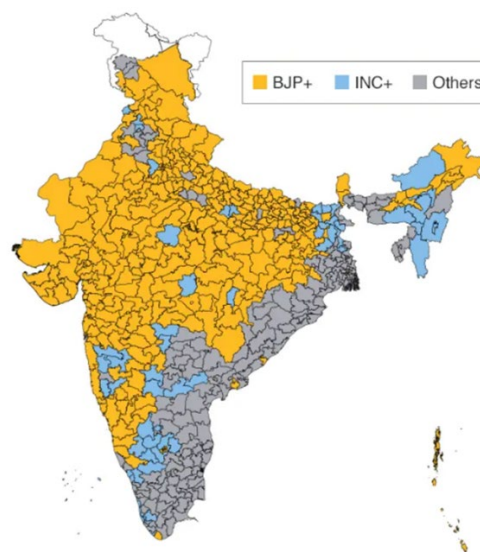
Modi’s dominance: the 2014 and 2019 elections

The Indian national elections operate within a bicameral system. The Rajya Sabha is the upper house of Parliament, and its members are not directly elected by the people but by the elected members of the State Legislative Assemblies, as well as by the members of the Electoral College for Union Territories. The national elections are thus held for seats in the Lok Sabha (House of the People), which is the lower house of Parliament. The Election Commission of India (ECI) is responsible for overseeing the entire electoral process, from the preparation of

electoral rolls to the declaration of election results. Prior to the elections, electoral rolls are prepared or updated to include eligible voters. These rolls list the names of individuals who are entitled to vote in a particular constituency. Political parties and independent candidates nominate their candidates to contest elections in various constituencies. Candidates and political parties then engage in campaigning to garner support from voters via rallies, public meetings, door-to-door canvassing, advertisements, and other forms of political communication. On the designated polling days, held over several weeks, voters cast their votes at polling stations using Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) or traditional ballot papers. After polling concludes, the votes are counted at counting centres under the supervision of election officials. The results are declared constituency-wise. Lastly, the party or coalition that secures a majority of seats in the Lok Sabha forms the government. Afterwards, the leader of the majority party or coalition is appointed as the Prime Minister by the President of India. In short, an electoral victory for a single party or an alliance of parties is determined by the allocation of seats in the Lok Sabha.

Modi, who had previously served as Chief Minister of Gujarat, won his first Lok Sabha election against the Indian National Congress (INC) candidate Rahul Gandhi in 2014. Modi's electoral campaign heavily focused on Modi's developmental record in Gujarat, which had grown faster than any other Indian state since he had become Chief Minister in 2000 (Ghatak & Roy, 2014). However, the so-called 'Gujarat Model' had also been built on extensive business-state collusion with regional capitalists, including Mukesh Ambani and Gautam Adani (Findlay & Lockett, 2020). Modi also profited from the corruption controversies surrounding INC at the time, providing him with the space to frame himself as a political outsider and as someone who would 'clear out' India's seemingly broken political system. Led by Modi, the BJP managed to win a total 282 seats in the Lok Sabha, with the INC winning only 44. Support for the BJP was particularly pronounced in central and northern India (see Figure 1), areas that are predominantly Hindu.

Figure 1: The 2014 Lok Sabha elections



Source: Dale & Jeavans (2019)

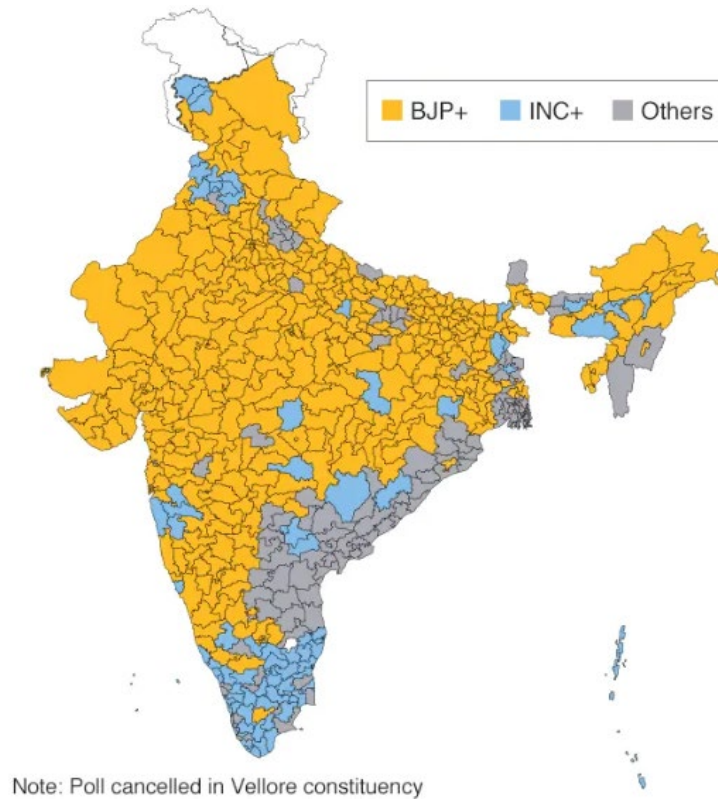
The Indian economy witnessed significant economic growth during Modi's first stint in office. Modi launched a Goods and Services Tax (GST) that aimed to streamline the complex tax structure in India by replacing multiple indirect taxes with a unified tax regime (Sridharan, 2018). This was seen as a significant reform to boost the ease of doing business in India and create a common national market. The Modi administration also initiated the hallmark 'Make in India' industrial policy, which seeks to promote domestic manufacturing and attract foreign investment in various sectors, with the goal of transforming India into a global manufacturing hub (Vohra, 2024). Through the 'Digital India' initiative, the government aimed to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy by promoting digital infrastructure, e-governance, and digital literacy (Ray, 2021). The perhaps most controversial economic policy of the first Modi government was the demonetization of high-denomination currency notes (Rs. 500 and Rs. 1000) in 2016 to curb corruption, black money, and counterfeiting, which led to significant disruptions in the Indian economy and was widely criticized at the time (Gettleman, 2018). Despite the policy failure surrounding demonetization, Modi's reform attempts were successful at stimulating domestic and foreign investment and advancing economic growth, which made India into one of the world's fastest-growing economies.

The second defining component of the first Modi government was the increased state support for Hindu-nationalist practices throughout India. The government promoted the BJP's Hindu-nationalist agenda by the appointment of individuals with affiliations to Hindu nationalist organizations to key positions in key educational and cultural institutions (Jaffrelot, 2021). The growing reach of Hindu nationalism also played out in cultural practices such as the protection of cows, considered sacred in Hinduism (Jaffrelot, 2021). Modi's Hindu-nationalist flagship project was the construction of a Ram temple at the site of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, a space which has long been disputed between Hindus and Muslims and has now become the epitome of Modi's Hindu-nationalist vision for India (Mashal & Kumar, 2024). Under Modi, the construction of Ram Mandir became an explicit objective of government policy. Modi also played on his Hindu-nationalist credentials following an attack by Pakistan-backed terrorists on Indian security units in Pulwama in Jammu and Kashmir in February 2019. In response, Modi ordered airstrikes on alleged training camps on the Pakistani-administered side of Jammu and Kashmir and deep inside Pakistan, which strengthened support among his Hindu-nationalist base ahead of the 2019 elections. Overt support for Hindu nationalism thus featured prominently during Modi's first premiership.

On the back of their extensive public support, Modi and the BJP repeated their impressive electoral feat in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections by gaining a supermajority, consolidating the BJP's position in power. In the 2019 elections, the BJP alone registered a total of 300 seats, with the INC registering just over 50 seats. BJP performance was particularly strong in the states such Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. INC and smaller, regional parties, in contrast, provided a stronger (but weakened) performance in southern India. In comparison to the 2014 elections,

the BJP particularly gained support in India's north-eastern region and in south-eastern constituencies (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: The 2019 Lok Sabha elections



Source: Dale & Jeavans (2019)

Emboldened by the improved electoral performance, the second Modi government doubled down on a series of contentious political moves that appealed to its Hindu-nationalist base. In August 2019, the government abrogated Article 370 of the Indian constitution, which fundamentally altered the constitutional status of Jammu and Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state at the time. Article 370 of the Indian Constitution granted special autonomous status to Jammu and Kashmir, allowing it to have its own constitution, flag, and autonomy over internal affairs, except for defence, foreign affairs, finance, and communications. It also limited the Indian Parliament's legislative jurisdiction over the state. The abrogation of Article 370 thus effectively stripped Jammu and Kashmir of its special status. Additionally, Article 35A, which granted special privileges and rights to permanent residents of the state, was also revoked. Concurrently with the abrogation of Article 370, the government bifurcated the state of Jammu and Kashmir into two separate union territories: Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh. The Union Territories would be directly governed by the central government, with a lieutenant governor appointed to administer each territory. The government argued that the abrogation of Article 370 was necessary to integrate Jammu and Kashmir more closely with the rest of India, promote

development and investment in the region, and address issues related to terrorism and separatism (India Today, 2019). The decision to end the region's special constitutional status was met with significant criticism, both domestically and internationally. Critics argued that it was unconstitutional, as it was done without the consent of the state assembly, which was dissolved at the time (Deshmane, 2019). They also expressed concerns about the manner in which the decision was implemented, including the imposition of draconic restrictions on communication and movement in the region (Amnesty International, 2023). The move sparked further tensions with Pakistan, which claims Jammu & Kashmir as its own territory. However, the abrogation of Article 370 had been a long-standing objective of the BJP (Ahmed & Ul-Huque, 2024). As such, the decision was a clear nod to Modi's Hindu-nationalist core support.

The second highly controversial legislation was the passing of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in December 2019. The CAA aimed to provide expedited Indian citizenship to persecuted religious minorities from three neighbouring Muslim-majority countries: Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. Specifically, it offered a path to citizenship for Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians who had entered India before 31 December 2014 due to religious persecution in any of these countries (Amnesty International, 2024). The CAA attracted significant controversy for excluding Muslims from its purview, which, critics argued, was discriminatory and violated the secular principles of the Indian Constitution (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Critics also raised concerns about the potential exclusion of other persecuted religious and ethnic minorities, such as Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar. The CAA was widely perceived as being linked to the National Register of Citizens (NRC), a proposed nationwide exercise to identify undocumented immigrants residing in India. Critics feared that the combination of the CAA and the NRC could be used to target and disenfranchise Muslims, particularly those unable to provide documentation proving their citizenship (Payton, 2020). The passage of the CAA triggered protests across India, with demonstrators protesting its discriminatory nature and its impact on India's secular fabric. The protests were particularly intense in states with large Muslim populations, such as Assam and West Bengal (Sarkar, 2024). The CAA thus faced multiple legal challenges, with petitions filed in various courts questioning its constitutionality and compatibility with India's secular principles. Internationally, the legislation attracted international attention and criticism, with several countries and human rights organizations expressing concerns about its implications for religious freedom and minority rights in India. Its exclusionary nature was, once again, a move by the BJP that intensified Hindu-nationalist governance in India.

More broadly, the BJP's approach to governance also became increasingly centralized. The Modi government centralized power within the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), shrinking the autonomy of other government institutions and established decision-making processes, which led to the weakening of checks and balances (Bhattacharya, 2023). Moreover, the government faced criticism for its response to dissent and criticism, including the use of sedition laws and other legal measures to target activists, journalists, and political opponents to suppress freedom of speech and expression (Hari, 2022). The most high-profile case was the arrest and temporary political ban of Rahul Gandhi, the de facto head of the INC (Ellis-Petersen, 2023). During Modi's second stint, the BJP also expanded its control over political narratives through

channels such as state-owned media outlets, social media platforms, and the sale of private news platforms to political allies, including the Adani Group (Jaffrelot, 2021). The government has also been accused and criticized for electoral malpractice, voter suppression, and the use of divisive tactics to polarize voters along religious or caste lines (Jaffrelot, 2022).

In contrast to the first Modi government, his second Premiership was characterized by a less positive macroeconomic performance. The government prioritized infrastructure development, particularly in sectors such as transportation, energy, and digital connectivity. Initiatives such as the 'Smart Cities Mission' and the expansion of rural electrification, for instance, aimed to improve infrastructure (The World Economic Forum, 2023). Despite continued economic growth, job creation remained a significant challenge during the second Modi government. The government launched various initiatives such as "Skill India" to enhance the employability of the workforce and promote entrepreneurship. However, the pace of job creation was slower than desired, leading to intensifying concerns about unemployment and underemployment (Purohit, 2024). By 2020, the Indian economy appeared to slowly begin running out of steam.

In early 2020, India was then hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. India faced a severe public health crisis due to the pandemic as the country witnessed a sharp increase in the number of COVID-19 cases, leading to strain on healthcare infrastructure and resources. In response, the Modi administration implemented various measures such as lockdowns, social distancing guidelines, and mass vaccination drives to contain the spread of the virus. These measures, often poorly implemented, specifically hit marginalized groups (Oak & Mayer, 2020). The pandemic also had a profound impact on the Indian economy, leading to disruptions across various sectors. The lockdown measures imposed to contain the virus resulted in the closure of businesses, disruption of supply chains, and loss of livelihoods for millions of people. The informal sector, which employs a significant portion of the population, was particularly hard hit (Gururaja & Ranjitha, 2022). India experienced a sharp contraction in GDP growth as a result of the crisis, with GDP contracting by around 7.3% in 2020-2021 (Dhingra & Ghatak, 2021). This contraction was primarily driven by declines in consumption, investment, and exports due to the economic disruptions caused by the pandemic and the associated lockdown measures. As economic activity collapsed, unemployment increased significantly. The economic effects of the pandemic thus compounded the challenges of an already decelerating economy.

In sum, the 2014 and 2019 elections translated into increasingly encompassing victories for the Modi-led BJP government, during which time, Modi focused on consolidating BJP rule (Verma, 2023). The period was also marked by the entrenchment of Hindu nationalism as the guiding principle of governance, as was seen in legislations and decisions such as the abrogation of Article 370 and the CAA. Furthermore, Modi worked toward entrenching his personal brand as the spearhead of the BJP, creating an increasingly personalized form of messaging. In the buildup to the 2024 elections, the BJP's strand of Hindu nationalism as well as Modi's personal brand thus appeared unassailable.

The 2024 elections

Against the backdrop of the BJP's institutional and Modi's personal dominance, the chances of the political opposition in the 2024 elections appeared slim, leading to the formation of an INC-led, anti-BJP opposition group. The opposition organized itself within the framework of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), which included the INC as well as 26 smaller (and often regional) parties, including Mamata Banerjee's All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) from West Bengal. While INDIA thus consists of a series of political parties that respond to several constituencies with various demands, the emergence of INDIA indicates the extent to which non-Hindu-nationalist elements were concerned about the prospect of a potential third successive BJP government. As highlighted elsewhere, "*what glued them [the INDIA parties] together was a shared perceived threat: what they call Modi's tightening grip on India's democratic institutions and Parliament, and his strident Hindu nationalism that has targeted the country's minorities, particularly Muslims*" (Saaliq & Pathi, 2024).

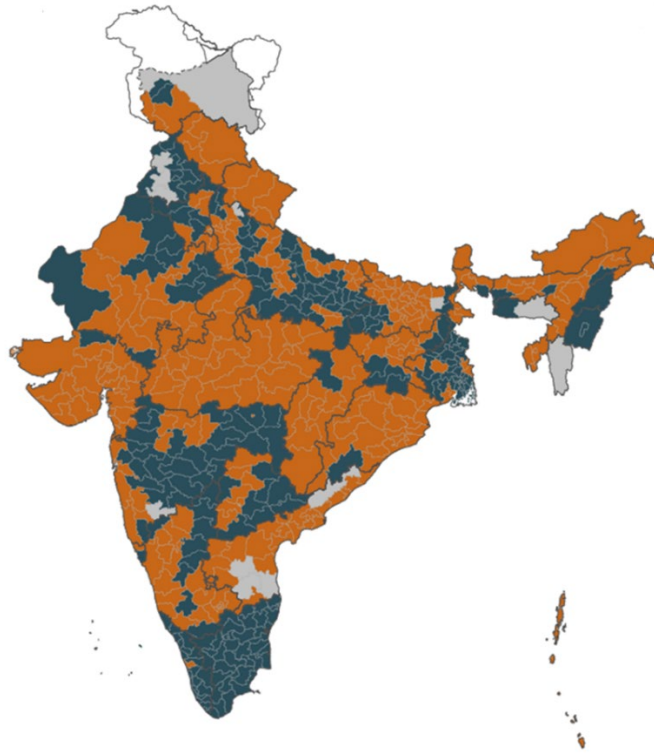
Despite the various challenges the BJP faced during Modi's second premiership, the party was confident it would continue expanding a supermajority that would further consolidate its grip onto power. However, parts of the BJP's campaign significantly differed from the party's previous approach to campaigning in the buildup to the 2014 and 2019 elections. In both instances, the BJP had deployed an extensive and well-oiled electoral machine that had combined nationwide campaigns with localized, grassroots messaging that brought the party message to the forefront of local voters (Jaffrelot, 2021). The 2024 campaign, in contrast, was heavily Modi-centric. Modi commanded podiums throughout the country, with other high-ranking politicians such as Home Minister Amit Shah and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath barely featuring in the campaign (Landrin, 2024). Even the BJP's electoral mantra, "Modi's guarantees", focused on Modi rather than a broader policy agenda with discernible policy positions that would address electoral concerns such as inflation and unemployment. In a word, the campaign was betting on the brand of Modi and the Hindu-nationalist messaging he has long epitomized.

Although the BJP recorded an electoral victory in the elections, it lost overall electoral support while the INDIA alliance garnered significant votes in comparison to the 2019 elections. The BJP won a total of 240 seats, losing 63 seats. The INC, in contrast, gained 47 seats when compared to its 2019 performance. All in all, the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) won a total 293 seats, enough to form a ruling majority, whereas INDIA rose to 232 seats (AJLabs, 2024). Modi has since been confirmed as leader of the NDA and will thus once again serve as Prime Minister. However, the BJP's (relatively) poor electoral performance means that it now depends on coalition partners to govern, which will allow the coalition partners to leverage their strategic role while restricting the BJP's ability to govern without contest. For the first time since 2014, the political opposition also managed to put aside political differences to provide an electoral alternative to the BJP, even if only in the short term.

The perhaps most remarkable element of the 2024 performance has been the BJP's poor performance in Hindi-heartland states that have long been considered a safe electoral base for

the party. As highlighted in Figure 3, INDIA specifically gained support in central India as well as parts of the ‘Hindi belt’ in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

Figure 3: The 2024 Lok Sabha elections¹



Source: BBC (2024)

Especially the result in Uttar Pradesh is worth analysing in greater depth. Uttar Pradesh, governed by BJP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, arguably remains the most important state for the BJP and Indian politics as a whole. Home to more than 240 million voters, translating to 80 Lok Sabha seats, Uttar Pradesh is by far India’s largest state. Simply put, winning in Uttar Pradesh is decisive for parties operating on a national scale. Following independence, electoral politics in Uttar Pradesh was dominated by the INC before local voters increasingly began switching electoral support toward the BJP in the 1990s and 2000s (Kohli, 2012). In many ways, the state is emblematic of contemporary Indian politics due to its continued economic developmental challenges, its polarized Hindu-Muslim relations, and its centrality for the Ram Mandir dispute as the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya is located in Uttar Pradesh’s Faizabad district. Furthermore, Yogi Adityanath, known for his particularly militant form of Hindu nationalism, is a close political ally of Modi and has been touted as a potential successor of Modi following Modi’s eventual departure from politics (Mukherjee, 2024). During the 2014 and 2019

¹ Brown: BJP, dark grey: INDIA, light grey: other parties

elections, Uttar Pradesh constituencies continuously provided electoral backing for Modi (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). Simply put, Uttar Pradesh, always a key electoral battleground for Indian elections, was expected to be an easy electoral win for Modi and the BJP.

However, voters in Uttar Pradesh failed to turn up for Modi. In 2014, Uttar Pradesh voters delivered 71 seats for the BJP, a number that had already fallen to 62 in 2019. In 2024, however, the BJP was relegated to a total of 36 seats – seven less than the Samajwadi Party, a left-leaning party that had joined the INDIA coalition in 2022. Particularly notable was the BJP's defeat in Faizabad, the constituency home to the Ram Mandir.

Why did the BJP fail (when compared to its previous electoral performance) so spectacularly in Uttar Pradesh? On the one hand, INDIA played on continued issues surrounding inflation and unemployment, which the BJP government failed to meaningfully address despite being in power for years (Kapoor, 2024). INDIA representatives also warned that the BJP winning 400 Lok Sabha seats would mean that it could revise the constitution and undermine the constitutional rights of the Dalits, a low-caste group that forms a key electoral bloc in Uttar Pradesh (Kapoor, 2024). Support for INDIA was thus particularly pronounced among lower-caste voters (Pandey, 2024). The BJP's role was ultimately undermined both by a lacklustre economic performance that had caught up with local voters as well as fears of what an even more assertive Hindu-nationalist, BJP-led state consisting primarily of high-caste politicians would mean for the rest of the state.

More generally speaking, the question of economic performance has featured prominently in explaining the broader outcome of the election. Despite India's broadly positive macroeconomic performance since Modi came into power, the kind of economic development pursued by the BJP has, as noted above, depended on structures that have created highly unequal development trajectories. As Milan Vaishnav, director of the South Asia Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, has noted: *"You have a booming economy for people higher up on the socioeconomic ladder, but people lower down are really struggling"* (Pathi & Saaliq, 2024). Especially for lower class and lower caste voters, economic issues such as unemployment and continuously high inflation remain potent everyday issues that the BJP, despite its economic record, has not managed to sufficiently address. In this sense, the BJP's reduced majority expresses discontent with components of the key narrative Modi has sought to establish about the BJP (and himself) since the early 2000s.

Crucially, the potency of economic issues also indicates the electoral and political limits of the BJP's brand of Hindu nationalism. The narrative of protecting and consolidating Hindu culture functioned well for the BJP as an electoral strategy in the last two elections, despite continued economic issues. Now, however, it appears that Hindu nationalism has become less effective as a rallying cry. This may be partially due to the aggression underlying the ideology and the unifying effect this has had on political opposition in the country, as mentioned above. However, Hindu nationalism was ultimately also unable to distract voters from the continued developmental issue facing the Indian state and the Indian economy. For the moment, Modi has thus been contained.

Wider implications for India and the world

As discussed, the elections will inevitably have a profound impact on India's domestic political landscape in the coming years. The BJP and the political persona of Modi have been contained and ultimately weakened by an electoral outcome that expresses dissatisfaction with his increasingly Hindu-nationalist style of governance. Dissatisfaction also extends to the government's economic performance. Clearly, state ideology and culture are crucial for the Indian electorate, yet economic issues cannot be ignored. For the first time since Modi came into power in 2014, the BJP thus finds itself in a weaker position than previously. The pressure is now on to deliver on governance objectives long touted by the party, especially regarding rural development and significant and far-reaching poverty reduction.

The outcome of the election will also decisively shape political dynamics by reintroducing potentially contentious coalition dynamics into the political fray. The loss of the supermajority means that the BJP now heavily depends on its NDA coalition partners for policy development and implementation. This, in turn, weakens the political leverage of the BJP while strengthening the influence of smaller parties that are less integrated into patronage networks. Furthermore, they are likely to provide a greater check on the extent of Hindu nationalism as well as the erosion of checks and balances analysts have been able to observe in recent years and especially since 2019. Whilst the BJP remains the most dominant political power in India by a significant margin, Modi's skills as a politician will be tested in a novel manner by the complexities of coalition politics. This will likely provide a limit on how extreme BJP policy can be on various policy matters.

While INDIA's electoral performance and the parties' ability to cooperate must be applauded, INDIA does not present a long-term governance alternative to the BJP. INDIA brings together a wide set of political parties and forces with various interests, ideologies, and regional concerns. These actors converged in their aim to prevent a further consolidation of BJP dominance, which they effectively collaborated on. However, any future collaboration will be restrained by the lack of a shared vision for the future of India. As Daniel Markey (2024) has noted, the drop in seats should also not detract from Modi's unique role in 21st century Indian politics: Modi "*remains the single most popular Indian politician, a globally recognized statesman and a uniquely capable leader at the head of a massive party machine with resources, connections and influence across Indian society*" (Markey, 2024). As such, the crucial success story of the INDIA coalition is the stronger return of the INC, which has long been considered as weakened by internal infighting and the dynastic politics of the Gandhi family. INDIA's and especially the INC's political performance provides a positive prospect for the future of political plurality in India. In effect, the success of INDIA and the resurgence of the INC shows that Indian democracy is alive and well – and probably in a better state than commonly expected.

While the 2024 elections will have profound effects on the Indian domestic political landscape, its implications for Indian foreign policy are likely to be less significant. Under India's policymaking system, parliamentary oversight over foreign policy is limited, meaning that the PMO retains much independence in making foreign policy decisions. Furthermore, the BJP's

foreign policy conduct has not been overtly shaped by its underlying Hindu-nationalist ideology. As Markey (2024) notes, “*a muscular nationalism appears widely popular beyond the BJP faithful, and it has been difficult to discern precisely where Modi’s worldview deviates in a specifically Hindu nationalist direction*”. Indeed, Indian foreign policy conduct prior and before Modi toward key regional and extra-regional actors (think of China, Russia, Pakistan, and the United States) has been mostly guided by a pragmatic and non-ideological approach. As foreign policy remains a marginal electoral issue and the PMO retains foreign policy control, foreign policy is unlikely to change significantly. That said, the reintroduction of coalition dynamics may undermine consensus on specific policy challenges, for instance on how to respond to Chinese border transgressions in the Himalayas.

In conclusion, the outcome of the 2024 elections in India marks a significant turning point in the nation's political trajectory. The electoral verdict, characterized by a discernible discontent with the BJP's governance, particularly its centralizing tendencies and economic performance, has challenged the hegemony enjoyed by the party since 2014. With the BJP now reliant on coalition partners, the dynamics of governance are set to undergo a notable shift, potentially tempering the party's more extreme policies and promoting a greater emphasis on consensus-building. However, while the coalition of opposition parties, exemplified by the resurgence of the INC, showcases the vitality of India's democratic landscape, it also highlights the absence of a cohesive alternative vision for governance beyond the BJP. Despite these domestic shifts, the impact on Indian foreign policy is likely to be marginal, given the limited parliamentary oversight and the pragmatic, non-ideological approach that has historically guided India's engagement with the global community. Thus, while the 2024 elections signal a new chapter in India's domestic politics, the fundamental contours of its foreign policy are poised to remain largely unchanged.

Conclusion

In sum, the 2024 elections in India have constrained the power of Modi and the BJP and signify the continued strength of democratic and pluralistic governance. The electoral outcome, characterized by a clear dissatisfaction with the governance under the BJP and a fear of BJP dominance, particularly concerning its centralizing tendencies and economic performance, underscores a shift in public sentiment that will concern Modi and the BJP. Particularly noteworthy is the reduced appeal of Hindu nationalism as the main guarantor of electoral support. This trajectory is most visible in Uttar Pradesh. As the BJP must now navigate a political landscape shaped by coalition dynamics, Indian politics has regained the space to pursue more inclusive and consensus-driven decision-making processes. However, despite the resurgence of the INC-led coalition, the Indian political landscape also possesses no unified alternative vision for governance beyond the BJP. While the electoral outcome translates into a victory for democracy, the BJP remains a weakened but still dominant political entity.

While these domestic shifts hold implications for the trajectory of Indian governance, the impact on foreign policy is likely to be more subtle, given the enduring pragmatism that has traditionally guided India's global engagement. Despite the electoral churn, the core tenets of

India's foreign policy, characterized by a pragmatic approach to international engagements, are poised to persist.

While domestic trends in India will undoubtedly shape its foreign policy in some ways over time, the effects of the 2024 elections are more likely to be felt in India than abroad.

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