



# **What the assembly poll results are about, apart from the continued rise of Narendra Modi**

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📺 Narendra Modi's rise continues unabated. (Reuters/Amit Dave)

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Oh what a glorious thing democracy is! If you add the number of festivals, weekends, hours spent in bad traffic, and election days in a typical working-age Indian's life, chances are that she or he is actually beaver away for less than half the year. If we just had elections to all our state assemblies and parliament's lower house at the same time, that alone would give national productivity a big upward kick.

But that is not about to happen. Instead, there have been elections or by-elections nearly every month since April.

Here are a few key takeaways from the latest celebration of our enfranchisement:

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- The Congress party has sunk to an ignominious third position in both Haryana and Maharashtra. If this does not trigger the reckoning that ought to have followed the rout the party suffered in the Lok Sabha elections, then we will be thinking “Congress” when we say “implode” instead of the Aam Admi Party. Both Sonia and Rahul Gandhi have been decisively discredited as campaigners by the voters, and it is time the party found somebody not in the Nehru-Gandhi-Vadra *parivar* (family) to lead it. That is not likely to happen in a hurry: we have not heard much about the two-volume post-mortem conducted by former defence minister A.K. Antony, except that the Gandhis were blameless for the party’s defeat in May.
- The Maharashtra assembly results have tempered the Narendra Modi tsunami that was unleashed in May and will slightly crimp the triumphalism of Bharatiya Janata Party president Amit Shah. Even though Shah said Haryana and Maharashtra were two big blows in ridding India of the Congress party, the BJP’s failure to win an outright majority in Maharashtra will bring some pause.
- Little noticed was the Samajwadi Party’s whisker-thin Follow Y



in the Kairana assembly constituency in Uttar Pradesh, by a margin of just 1,099 votes. Still, it was an important win for Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav because the seat was earlier held by the BJP's Hukum Singh, who was accused of involvement in last year's Muzaffarnagar riots but won the May Lok Sabha election from the same parliamentary constituency. Last month, the Samajwadi Party had won two of the three other seats in western UP that were rocked by the riots. Clearly, the BJP's 'love jihad' campaign has backfired, even if Amit Shah celebrated the 'fall' of a second North Indian state, Haryana, after the BJP swept 71 of 80 Lok Sabha seats in UP.

- After Congress's losses in both Haryana and Maharashtra, the big question is: what sort of opposition will the BJP have in India? If the Gandhis are reduced even further to figureheads by a hapless but helpless rank and file, is there a regional leader who could take up the national opposition leadership mantle? Please let me know if you can think of a dazzling contender.
- There is some hope in the battle against corruption. In the Jalgaon City and Jalgaon Rural constituencies in Maharashtra, the incumbent legislators are both in prison on corruption charges and both fought elections from behind bars. The good news is that both Gulabrao Deokar of the Nationalist Congress Party and Sureshkumar Jain of the Shiv Sena lost.
- But this is scant comfort when the Indian National Lok Dal, whose two top leaders Om Prakash Chautala and his son Ajay Singh Chautala are serving ten-year prison terms for corruption, emerged as the second-biggest party in Haryana. Ajay Singh's son Dushyant, who won a Lok Sabha seat for the INLD in May, lost from the Uchana Kalan assembly constituency. Confused? Ajay Chautala's younger brother

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Abhav and Aiay's wife Naina won, though, so the descendants of Chaudharv Devi Lal are all set to be the principal opposition group in the Jat-dominated state. In Maharashtra, the NCP, which was accused by its recent bedfellow Congress of corruption, had no hesitation in offering "unconditional" support to the BJP to form the Maharashtra government. This is of a piece with Tamil Nadu, where former chief minister Jayalalithaa, released on bail on Friday from a Bangalore prison cell by the Supreme Court after her conviction on corruption charges, was welcomed home in Chennai by ecstatic supporters who formed a 24-kilometre-long human chain from the airport to her home.

- Both the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Congress Party made a mistake by breaking up with their alliance partners—respectively the Shiv Sena and the Nationalist Congress Party—in Maharashtra. If they had been together, the BJP-SS with a 47.2% share of the votes cast might have got even more seats than the 121+61 they now have. Congress-NCP got a combined 35.2% vote share, marginally lower than the 37.38% they together won in the 2009 assembly elections, but their combined seats fell to 87 from 144.
- The All India Majlis Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen is one of the biggest gainers in the Maharashtra election. So far it has been confined largely to Andhra Pradesh and is well known in Hyderabad. In 2009 the AIMIM won only 0.02 per cent of the votes and a total of 11,186 votes in the two constituencies it fought for in Maharashtra (it forfeited its deposit in both because of its low score). This year AIMIM seems set to win two seats with 0.09 per cent of the vote.
- Raj Thackeray's Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, which has set its course by a very chauvinistic lodestar, had its nose comprehensively rubbed in the electoral dirt by the voters. It

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won only one solitary seat, Junnar—a precipitous fall from the 13 it won in 2009. Its vote share fell to 3.1% from 5.71%. But what a huge swing that was in terms of seats.

- Incidentally AIMIM's votes were slightly outstripped by the number of people (463,381) who voted None Of The Above (NOTA)—the disgusted dissidents who did not want any party to win in Maharashtra.
- Maharashtra's defeated chief minister Prithviraj Chavan, who stood for election for the first time from the Karad South constituency, won by 16,418 votes. Small consolation for the well-regarded politician who could not shake off all the negative baggage from his Congress predecessors. In Haryana, Congress's Bhupinder Singh Hooda retained his Assembly seat by a margin of 47,185 votes. Not bad considering his 2009 margin was 72,100 votes.

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