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# DPG EVENT BRIEF

## India's 17th Lok Sabha Elections

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## ABOUT US

Founded in 1994, the Delhi Policy Group is among India's oldest independent think tanks with its primary focus on international and strategic issues of critical national interest. Over the past decades, the Delhi Policy Group has established itself in both domestic and international circles, particularly in the area of national security.

In keeping with India's increasing global profile as a leading power and the accompanying dynamism of India's foreign and security policy, the Delhi Policy Group has expanded its focus areas to include India's broader regional and global role; India's initiatives to strengthen its strategic periphery; India's political, security and connectivity challenges and policies across the Indo-Pacific; and the strategic partnerships that advance India's rise.  To support these goals, the DPG undertakes research, publishes policy reports and organises conferences on strategic and geo-political, geo-economic, and defence and security issues.

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*The views expressed in this piece are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Delhi Policy Group as an Institution.*

## Cover Photographs:

*(Photographs top to bottom)*

*Prime Minister Narendra Modi flashing the victory sign at the BJP headquarters in New Delhi on May 23, 2019 after his historic win in the Indian general elections. Source: NDTV*

*Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his way to address the newly elected MPs of the National Democratic Alliance in the Central Hall of the Indian Parliament on May 25, 2019. Source: Twitter/ Narendra Modi*

*The President of India Shri Ram Nath Kovind inviting the leader of the NDA, Shri Narendra Modi, to stake his claim to form the government of India on May 25, 2019. Source: Twitter/ President of India.*

# India's 17ᵗʰ Lok Sabha Elections
by
## Mohit Musaddi and Gopika Shinghal

Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) to an emphatic win in the 2019 general elections held from April 11 – May 19, 2019. He also created history by leading the first non-Congress majority government (2014-2019) to re-election with an even stronger majority.

The 2019 mandate is unprecedented. The BJP won in 303 of the 542 seats being contested, up by 21 from the 282 it won in 2014 and 31 more than the 272 seats needed for a simple majority in the Lok Sabha. The BJP has crossed the triple century (300 seats) mark, the first time for any single political party since 1984.
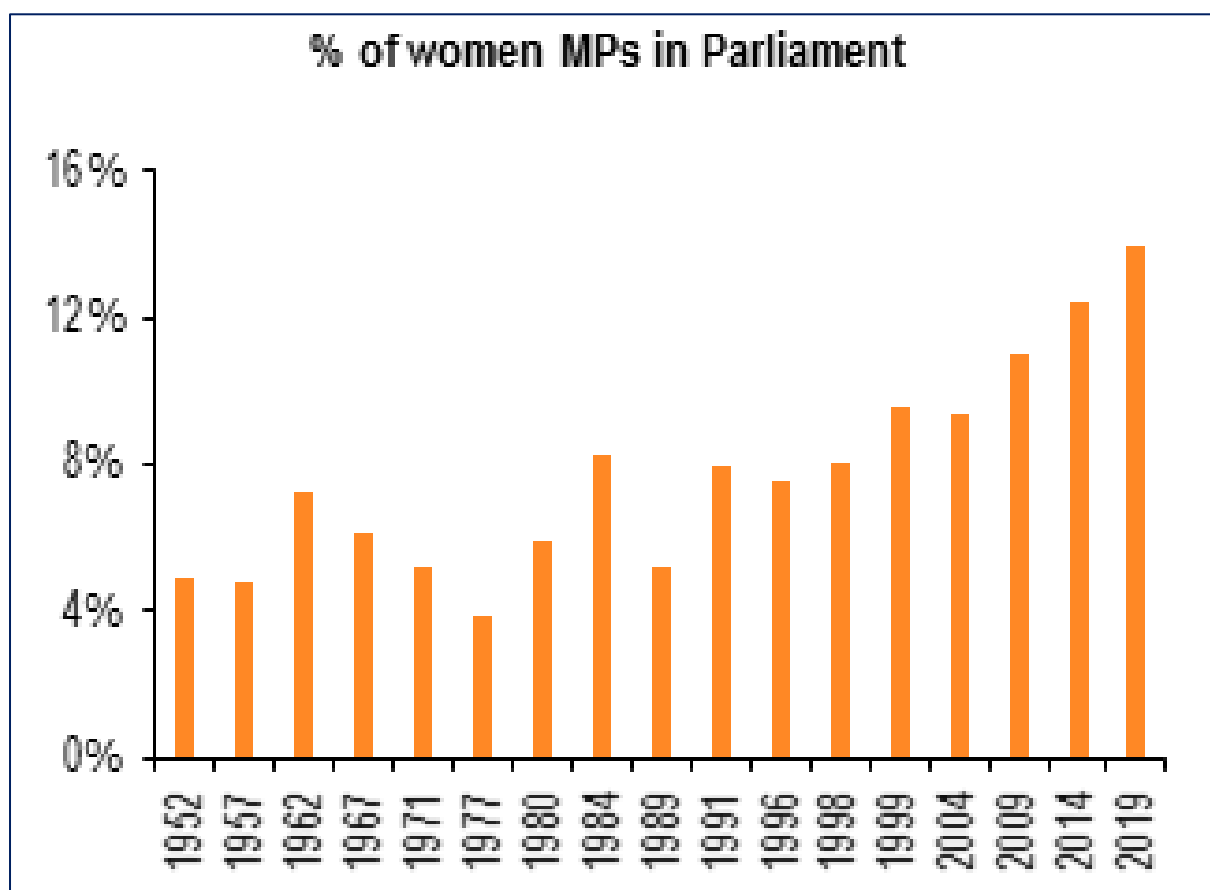


*Prime Minister Narendra Modi flashing the victory sign at the BJP headquarters in New Delhi on May 23,2019 after his historic win in the Indian general elections.*
*Source: NDTV*

The election was a celebration of India's enduring commitment to liberal democracy. The Election Commission of India conducted the largest ever electoral exercise on the planet to date, involving a total electorate of 900 million Indian citizens. Voters were eligible to exercise their franchise in one of seven phases depending upon the region they were domiciled in. An estimated 15 million of the electorate aged 18-19 years comprised first time voters,
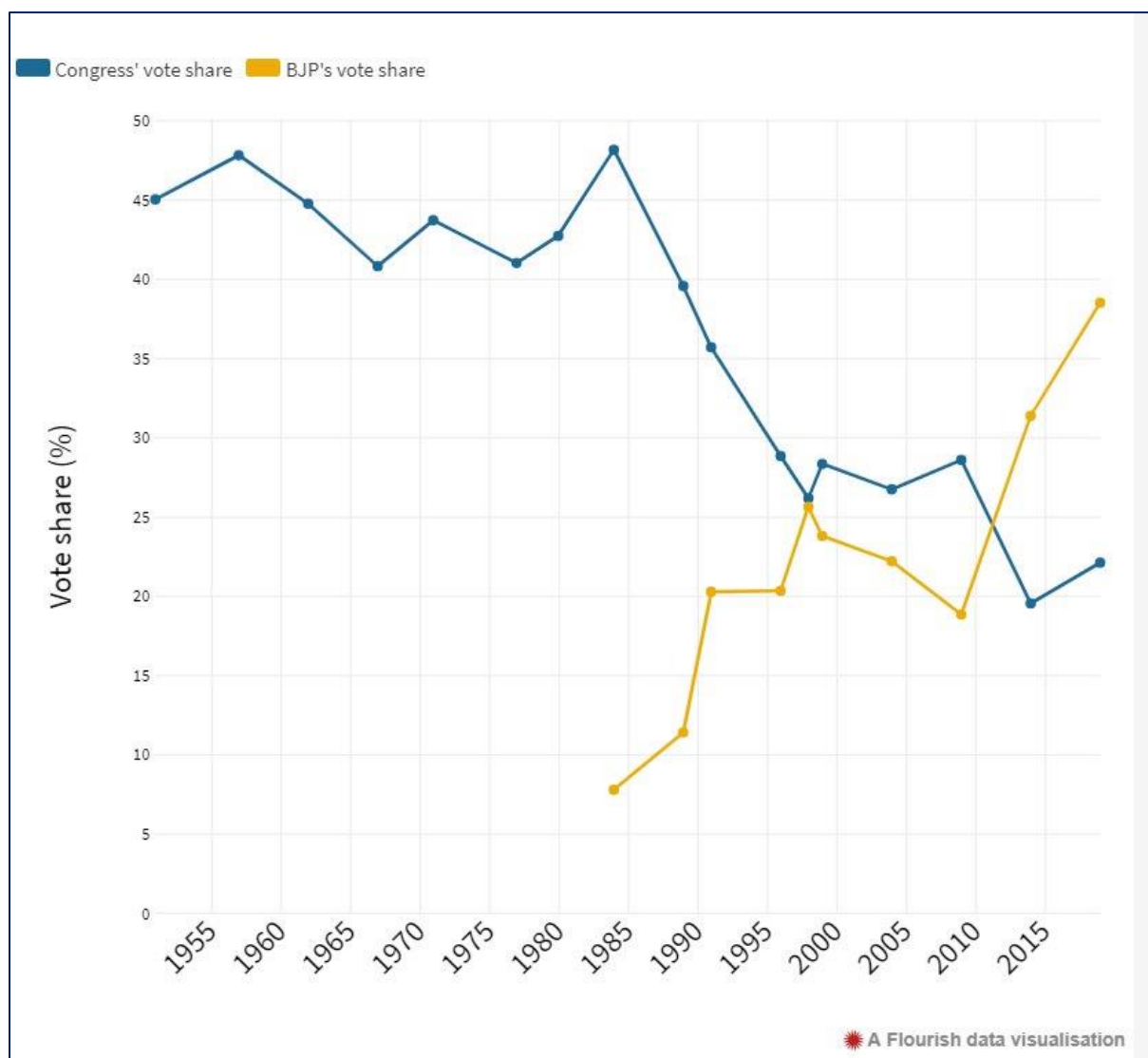
ensuring that the election was also about the ambitions of India's younger generation born in the 21st century.

The 2019 elections attracted a final turnout of over 67.11%, or 603.7 million voters, across 542 constituencies. It is significant to note that this is the highest ever voter turnout, both in terms of absolute numbers as well as in percentage terms, in the history of Indian general elections. The percentage was 1.16% higher than the corresponding number in the 2014 elections in which the turnout stood at 65.95%. A look at the state-wise voter turnout in the current Lok Sabha poll shows that the polling percentage was higher in 18 states/ union-territories as compared to 2014. Further, this election saw the highest recorded participation in Indian elections by women, which helped close the gender gap. For the first time in the history of Indian elections, the female voter turn-out equalled the male voter turn-out. The number of elected women MPs was also at an all-time high, with 78 women (14%) being elected to the 17th Lok Sabha.



*14% of the 17th Lok Sabha comprises of women - the highest ever representation of women in the Indian lower house. Source: PRS India.*

The BJP's total vote share increased from 31% (171 million votes) in 2014 to approximately 37.5% (226 million votes) in 2019. The jump in the vote share and the absolute addition of votes over 2014 reveals the magnitude of BJP's electoral victory as the total number of votes for BJP rose by 32% (65 million votes) as compared to 2014. To put this in perspective, the mere increment of votes from 2014 to 2019 cast in favour of the BJP is marginally greater than the total number of votes received by President Donald Trump in the 2016 US elections. Another interesting takeaway from these elections is the fact that apart from the 303 constituencies where the BJP won, it was the first runner-up in 72 others.



*A look at the vote share of the Congress and the BJP over the years.*
*Source: The Hindu*

The NDA's biggest gains came in states like Karnataka, Bihar, West Bengal, much of the North East, Odisha, and Maharashtra. The saffron splash across a swathe of northern and western India in 2019 was similar to what occurred in

2014. The BJP won all five seats in Uttarakhand, all four seats in Himachal Pradesh and both the seats in Arunachal Pradesh. Mention should also be made of the BJP's victory in all seven seats in Delhi and all twenty-six seats in Gujarat, in what is a repeat of its performance in the 2014 general elections. Another significant mention is that despite its tally coming down by nine seats due to the *gathbandhan* of SP, BSP and the RLD, the BJP in UP won 62 seats out of 80 and for the first time achieved a vote share of 49.6%. This is approximately 7% more than the vote share it had secured in 2014. And it is for the first time since 1998 that the Congress vote share has shrunk to 6.31% in U.P., where only Sonia Gandhi managed to retain her seat in Rae Bareilly. Another for the BJP is that it has for the first time crossed the 20-seat mark in Karnataka, winning in 25 out of the 28 constituencies in the state with its vote share at an all-time high of 51.38%.

Only a handful of states bucked the pro-Modi wave: Kerala, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh. In the latter, Jagan Mohan Reddy led the Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP) to win in 22 out of the 25 constituencies decimating veteran, Chandrababu Naidu of the Telugu Desam Party.

The BJP made remarkable inroads in West Bengal, which has been strongly dominated by Mamata Banerjee's All India Trinamool Congress. Factoring in the BJP's performance in West Bengal in 2014 where it won 2 seats with a vote share of 17.02%, no one had expected the BJP to secure 18 out of 42 seats and an increased vote share of 40.25%. This election also marks the end of the presence of the Communist Party of India in West Bengal, as it could not win a single seat for the first time. Overall too, the Left Front has managed to win only 5 seats throughout the country.
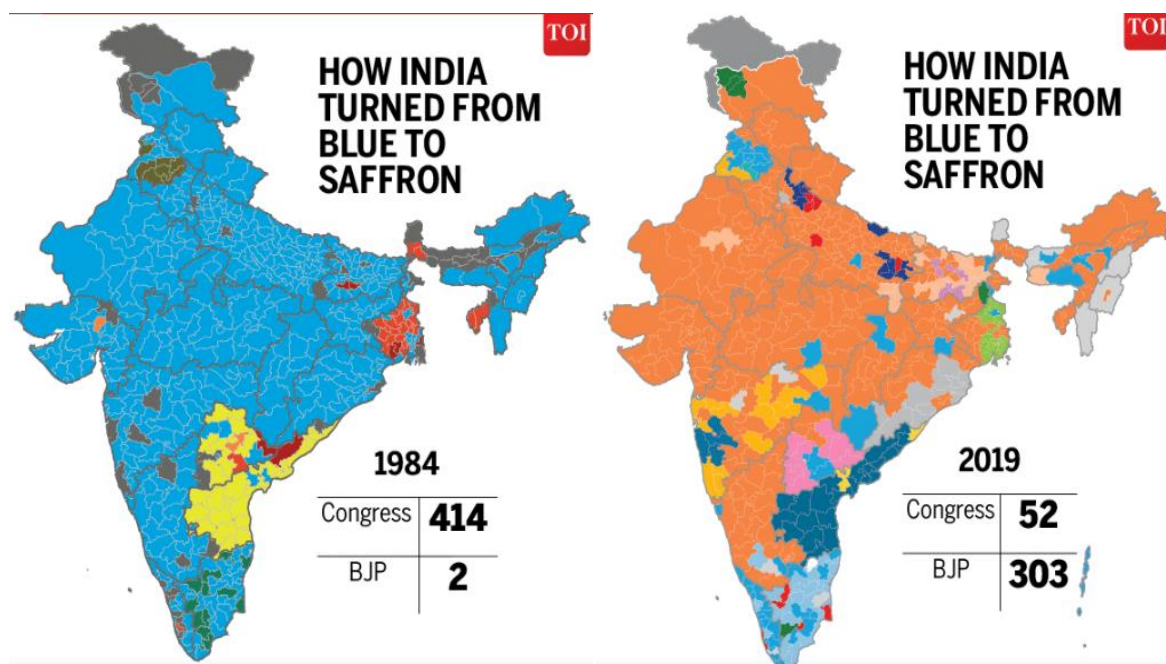
In an hour-long speech to party MPs-elect in the Central Hall of Parliament after this historic victory, PM Modi urged them to win the trust of the minorities and break the deception of exploitation of the poor in the name of vote-bank politics. He asked the 353 newly elected NDA MPs to work without discrimination on the basis of faith and caste. In addition to *sabka saath, sabka vikaas* (inclusiveness of all, development for all), Narendra Modi chose to add *sabka vishwas* (trust and confidence of all) to signal a more inclusive government over the next five years. He also acknowledged the importance of coalitions and remarked that 'NARA - national ambitions and regional aspirations' - were like two tracks of a railway line to achieve national development.

*Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his way to address the newly elected MPs of the National Democratic Alliance in the Central Hall of the Indian Parliament on May 25, 2019. Source: Twitter/ Narendra Modi*

BJP's decisive victory has pushed the Congress to the margins of national politics, unable to secure enough seats to claim the statutory position of the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha. Congress President Rahul Gandhi conceded defeat to the BJP's Smriti Irani in his constituency in Amethi, Uttar Pradesh. This is the first time since 1977 that a member of the Nehru-Gandhi family has lost an election, or a member of the family has lost in Amethi. Several Congress veterans, including Jyotiraditya Scindiya, Ajay Maken, Sheila Dikshit, and Digvijay Singh, were also defeated in the elections.

The Congress vote share has jumped marginally from 19.3% in 2014 to 19.6% in 2019. However, the party failed to win a single parliamentary seat in 18 Indian states. It has just managed to win 52 seats nationally, a disastrous showing for a party that has governed India for most of the country's post-independence history. Barring Kerala where the Congress won 15 seats, the party has not reached double figures in any other state. On the other hand, the BJP's vote share has soared past the 50% mark in at least 13 states and Union territories, a feat which the Congress party could manage only in Puducherry. Besides, the Congress tally in politically important states like Uttar Pradesh (1), Karnataka (1), West Bengal (2), and Bihar (1) was at an all time low.

*A view of how India turned from blue to saffron from the 1984 general elections to the 2019 general elections. Source: Times Of India*

Following the 17ᵗʰ Lok Sabha elections, India is now well positioned to reap the benefits of another five years of stable democratic government, which will be greatly welcomed by its friends and partners in the international community. During his first term in office, Prime Minister Modi has pursued an activist foreign policy, visited as many as 57 countries, some for the very first time by an Indian Prime Minister. He has pursued multi-dimensional engagement with all major powers, overcoming in the process some of the "hesitations of history" by pursuing an aspirational, realist and pragmatic foreign policy. Having already envisioned India as a leading power, PM Modi has indicated after his election victory that "the next five years will be the time to regain the rightful position of India in the world order".

The leaders of BIMSTEC, which links South Asia with Southeast Asia, have been invited to the Prime Minister's swearing in ceremony on May 30, indicating that regional integration under BIMSTEC will be actively pursued in his second term. A busy diplomatic agenda awaits PM Modi in the coming months, including the SCO and G-20 Summits in June, the G-7 Summit in Paris in August, the India-Russia Summit in September and the BRICS as well as India-ASEAN and East Asia Summits in November, 2019.

*The President of India Shri Ram Nath Kovind inviting the leader of the NDA, Shri Narendra Modi, to stake his claim to form the government of India on May 25, 2019. Source: Twitter/ President of India.*

The historic win of the BJP and the NDA under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi will add significantly to India's stature and profile as a vibrant democracy on the global stage, while also enabling decisive decision-making at home on India's path to progress and prosperity.

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