



Shielding
your future

SSF

SCUTUM SECURITY FIRST

Focus Info

YOUR VOTE
MATTERS



India

General Elections

Towards a third term for Narendra Modi and his Hindu policy



The **970 million voters in the “biggest democracy in the world”** have started going to the polls for the **general elections scheduled from 19 April to 1 June**, which will either confirm or reject Narendra Modi as prime minister. **In power since 2014**, Modi has significantly changed the Indian political landscape, turning the country in to what today some people call an **“illiberal democracy” due to greater authoritarianism** and an **“ethnic democracy”** due to his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) having **imposed *Hindutva***.

The elections, in which the members of the lower house of parliament (***Lok Sabha***) will be elected, will take place in 7 phases over 44 days, before the **results are announced 4 June**. In order to make sure the elections go ahead smoothly, **tens of thousands of members of the security forces** will be deployed throughout the whole period. India is the scene of repeated **political violence** during major elections.

The opposition, currently in a weak position, does not appear able to put up a fight against the BJP. However, although **Modi’s win is beyond doubt**, the size of his victory is yet to be determined. In fact, the BJP is hoping to win a constitutional majority of 400 seats in the ***Lok Sabha*** in order to assert its domination across the political landscape and implement its nationalist policy. **What kind of political prospects can the elections offer today and in the future?**

As a popular prime minister, what has Narendra Modi achieved?

73-year-old Narendra Modi is still popular after 10 years in power. An omnipresent prime minister, he has centralised his party around one single figure, his own. His popularity, driven by **his oratory skills, is partly derived from his domestic policy concerning security and the image he has succeeded in projecting on the international stage.** In addition, his last term in office will be remembered for the agricultural crisis, the imposition of Hindutva and the strengthening of authoritarianism.



Modi giving a speech on Independence Day 15 August 2022

The agricultural crisis (2020-2021, also 2024), a sensitive issue for a prime minister from a largely rural country

In India, around **40% of the population** works in the agricultural sector, which accounts for **15% of GDP**, thereby giving farmers **considerable political influence**. Faced with deep-rooted structural difficulties (need for investment and modernisation, weather conditions etc.), **tension arose with the government** in September 2020 when parliament passed three laws, without consulting the farming unions, which were aimed at **liberalising agricultural trade**. Specifically, they concerned the “*mandi*” system, state-regulated markets guaranteeing farmers the sale of their essential products, such as wheat or rice, at a minimum price.

In response, tens of thousands of farmers, mostly from Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, **surrounded the capital for 15 months**. Confronted by the historic protest movement, which continued despite tough repression (around 700 dead), Modi eventually moved to **suspend his reform**, which set a precedent for the prime minister, unaccustomed to negotiation and who for the first time backed down in the face of a social movement.

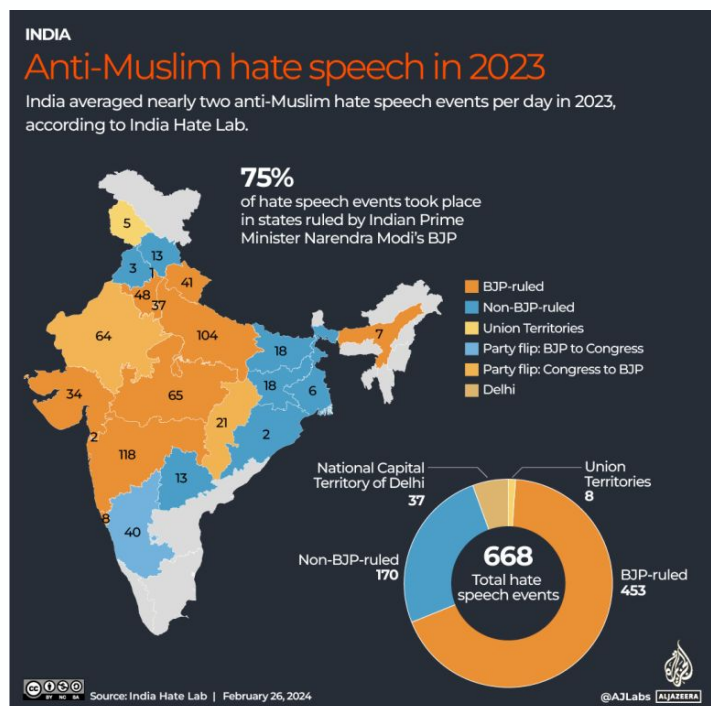
More than two years later and while no decision has been taken, **anger is mounting once more** over the main demand of an increase in the minimum prices for the cereals they grow, and for this scheme to be extended to all crops. 12 February, farming groups, such as Samyukta Kisan Morcha and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, staged another march towards Delhi (*Dilli Chalo*), giving rise to **fears of another siege of the capital** with the elections looming. The Indian government then barricaded the city, but did not resort to the use of extreme police brutality, aware that the excessive use of force could damage the image of a leader on the side of the poor carefully constructed by the prime minister.

The stakes are high in the run-up to the general elections, with an opposition that is still struggling to organise itself but has focused its campaign on the concerns of farmers and other disadvantaged groups.

The central role of Hindutva or the formation of an ethno-religious nation

The BJP, the political arm of Hindu nationalism, has been campaigning since its creation in 1980 for the **assimilation of the Indian nation into the Hindu majority** (80% of the population).

Without a political majority, the first BJP governments carefully avoided pursuing its most divisive demands. However, following the last general elections (2019), which saw Narendra Modi gain in strength, the BJP **made a bold return to promoting Hindutva** (Hinduism).



Source: India Hate Lab. Aljazeera. 26 February 2024.

Today as the leader of this ideology, Narendra Modi is using it as a **springboard to win a third term in office**.

The **Muslim minority** of 200 million Indian people is the prime target of the policy as they are presented as a **threat to the Hindu majority**. Several laws influenced by this ideology have been passed in recent years, such as the 2019 **Citizenship Amendment Act**, disqualifying Muslim refugees from being eligible for Indian citizenship. In addition, the Supreme Court also upheld the **revocation of the autonomy of Jammu and Kashmir** in December 2023.

In January 2024, a new milestone was reached when the **Indian secular republic moved into "a new era"**, which was personally announced by Narendra Modi at the inauguration in Ayodhya of a temple dedicated to the god Ram, built on the ruins of a mosque destroyed in 1992.

The gradual construction of an illiberal democracy

Since he came to power, Narendra Modi has been unstoppable in his efforts to **undermine the opposition**, notably through tax reassessments and police investigations. From 2014 to 2022, 95% of the investigations carried out by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) were focused on the opposition (54% of ED investigations and 60% of CBI investigations under the previous government).

Because of this drift, today Swedish institute, V-Dem, classes India among the **"electoral autocracies"**, which appear to be democratic regimes, but in reality undermine the independent and neutrality of checks and balances (justice, media - Reporters Without Borders ranks India in 161st place out of 189) and use them against the opposition.

Most recently, 21 March 2024, **Arvind Kejriwal**, the chief minister of the state of Delhi, was **arrested for corruption** in a case described by his supporters as a "political conspiracy", less than one month before the national elections. About one month previously, his party, the **AAP**, had agreed on an alliance with the **Congress Party** in order to share the seats in five states (Delhi, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana and Chandigarh) during the next elections. His arrest sparked **large-scale demonstrations** in Delhi and in Punjab State, also led by the AAP.



Arvind Kejriwal 2 April 2023

Meanwhile, the Congress Party, the leading opposition party, reported that the central tax authorities had frozen millions of dollars in its bank accounts, crippling its ability to campaign.

Faced with the might of the BJP, the opposition is struggling to establish itself

With a 78% approval rating (Morning Consult, February 2024) and 48% of voting intentions (CSDS, April 2024), Narendra Modi is the clear favourite to win the general elections that will not offer much suspense.

Against him he will face the leader of the Congress Party, **Rahul Gandhi**, who only has **27% of voting intentions** according to the latest polls. Following two fiascos in 2014 and 2019, the heir to the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty is still widely considered to be out of touch with the concerns of ordinary Indians.

His alliance with other parties is also struggling to convince. Launched in the summer of 2023, the **Indian National Development Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) is a highly heterogeneous union**, with no overall vision, split between some forty parties with regional and/or religious roots.



Rahul Gandhi

As the only opposition party with a pan-Indian presence, the Congress Party has joined forces with groups as diverse as communists, far-right nationalists and Muslims. What is more, it has lost any historical influence it might have had and now only has around fifty seats in the *Lok Sabha* (301 for the BJP), which is relatively close to certain parties that are therefore finding it difficult to accept its leadership in the Alliance, which is now being undermined by infighting.

In some constituencies however, the opposition parties have succeeded in agreeing on presenting a single candidate against the BJP, which dominates the states in the north and west, but is weaker in the south and east. These deals, aimed at limiting the scattering of votes, could help them maximise their chances of winning seats, given the single-round voting system.

A guaranteed victory for the BJP, towards the construction of a Hindu nation

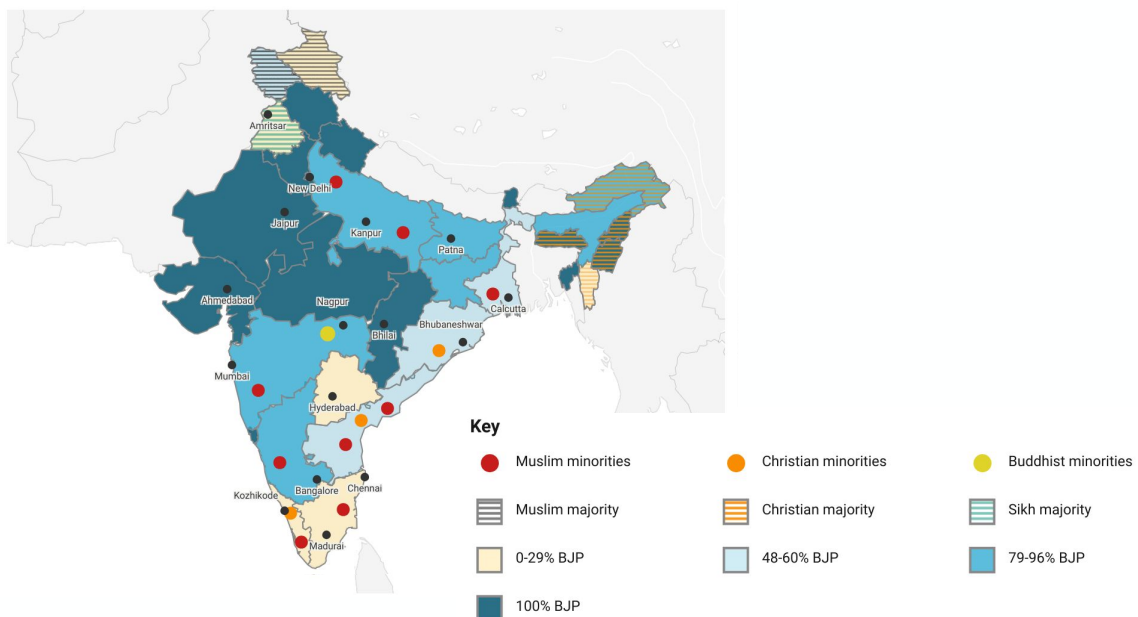
In November 2023, the regional elections in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Telangana confirmed the leadership of the BJP and further weakened the opposition, with the Congress Party now only in control of 3 states out of 28.

Furthermore, in the highly unlikely event of the opposition winning, it could attempt to change the laws passed by the BJP, but would come up against a major problem: the now undeniable influence of the mould of Hindu nationalism within society. The country has in fact already moved towards the creation of a Hindu state, a path from which it will be difficult to deviate.

For the BJP therefore, the main challenge in the general elections is to obtain a constitutional majority of at least 400 seats in parliament, which would allow it to assert its domination across the political landscape, but also to **pursue a harder line, with a primarily cultural agenda**. Its plans include a Uniform Civil Code for all religious communities, to prevent minorities from continuing to benefit from "personal laws". India could then become a religious state, permeated by the BJP-RSS vision of what it means to be Hindu.

Voting intentions in favour of the BJP for the 2024 elections and religions in India

The map shows the percentage of seats expected to be won by the BJP and its allies in the 2024 general elections, as well as the distribution of religious communities in India, thus illustrating the importance of religion in the choice of vote.



Areas without hatching are predominantly Hindu.

Map: Scutum Security First (SSF) • Source: Statista & Le Monde Diplomatique • Created with Datawrapper

SSF Information & Analysis



Monitoring, Risk Assessment and Forecasts

A key player in **international risk prevention and management**, Scutum Security First (SSF) is the French benchmark for travel risk management and security information (alerts, global monitoring, country profiles, customised studies).



Alerts 24/7

Round the clock safety-security alerts covering 203 countries and territories in both French and English.



Country Profiles

Safety situation analysis according to area and type of risk for every country in the world.



PMPR

Point Mensuel des Pays à

Risques: the SSF monthly report on high-risk countries providing a calendar of notable events in the month to come.



Customised Studies

Reports and monitoring targeting a specific area, country or security issue.