

# Was There a Diversity Dividend in the 2024 Elections?

## The States of India Push Political Diversity

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The 2024 Lok Sabha election result is best seen as a “diversity dividend.” The Bharatiya Janata Party fell short of a majority but managed to come back to power under the umbrella of the alliance it led—National Democratic Alliance. The Congress increased its share of seats and its alliance was 60 seats behind the ruling coalition. The “diversity dividend” is clearly noticed in the elements of visible distinctiveness in the verdict in each state of the country. The 2024 verdict is a clear assertion of the states of India being the real centre of politics.

Several months after the results of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections were announced, the debate on who actually won the elections continues unabated. The silently assertive Indian voter has clearly spoken. Yet, every political actor wishes to craft their own takeaway from the electoral verdict. The electoral outcome of 2024 truly reflects a diversity dividend. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which had exuded confidence of winning a third term and set a target of 370+ for itself, was halted in its march with way smaller numbers. It had to claim its victory under the wider cloak of the alliance it was heading. As the people’s verdict became increasingly evident, the BJP was downplaying its own (under) performance and turning the spotlight of attention on the majority secured by the coalition—the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). During the last 10 years, when the BJP had secured a majority on its own, the NDA coalition was still retained, often as a belated afterthought.

With the BJP unable to secure a majority on its own, it became imperative to foreground the alliance, as the winner of the election. The opposition alliance led by the Congress party was merely 60 seats behind the ruling coalition in the new Lok Sabha. This clearly changed the contours of the political competition between the two alliances (Shastri et al 2024).

Why does the 2024 verdict represent a diversity dividend? Each political player has some gains from the verdict. The total number of parties represented in the new Lok Sabha is 41 with the “effective number of parties” (ENP<sup>1</sup>) being 4.1 (by seats). Thus, not only competitiveness of

elections increased this time around, but the scope of representation also broadened. Moreover, the diversity across states asserted itself more than the last two Lok Sabha elections. Every region has a different political message. Every state appears to have crafted a unique political outcome. While initially, all discussion was about the overall “all-India” trends, it is quite clear that the outcome was shaped by results from some states and the magnitude of the setback for BJP too was kept limited by some states.

This election outcome, therefore, poses a challenge for analysis. On the one hand, the ideas of Hindutva (as pursued by the BJP) and *nyaya* (as propagated by the INDIA bloc) constituted the larger all-India umbrella, the campaigns, the contests and the outcomes have a distinct state specificity to them. This situation in a sense takes us a step beyond the earlier discussions about states being the main theatre of politics (Yadav and Palshikar 2008, 2009) and choices and alerts us to a more complex and symbiotic relationship between the “all India” and the “state level” in shaping the outcomes. Thus, a more nuanced way of reading the 2024 electoral verdict is to view it from the prism of the states of India while keeping in mind both the all-India factors and ramifications. In spite of many issues being raised about the nature and quality of India’s democracy, these results, thus, present us with political diversity that might become the basis for a fresh lease to democratic competition in India.

The complex jigsaw that the overall national message represents make sense when each individual piece of the jigsaw is analysed and its role in the larger picture is truly captured. The outcome is distinctly different in every state of the country with a unique set of factors providing an explanation. Neighbouring states produced different electoral outcomes.

We at EPW would like to thank the guest editors Sandeep Shastri, Suhas Palshikar, Sanjay Kumar for putting together this special section on the states-based analysis of the General Elections 2024.

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The story in Himachal Pradesh was distinctly different from the one in Haryana and Punjab. If Uttar Pradesh (UP) produced one result, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh (MP) had a different electoral trajectory. The West Bengal voters provided an electoral flavour which was way different from Odisha while the five states of the south (Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka) had their own unique electoral narratives. The 2024 electoral outcome clearly placed the states of India as the centre of Indian politics. It is for this reason that the Lokniti-CSDS analysis of the 2024 elections, being featured in the *Economic & Political Weekly*, mounts the telescope of analysis in the states of India. A detailed analysis of the verdict in 11 key states is thus undertaken.

The centrality of the role of the states in the shaping of national politics was also evident in the nature and structure of the alliances that the elections produced. A few critical distinctions in the NDA and the INDIA coalition: first, both alliances were made up of one party that had a wider national presence, and its other constituents were essentially state based parties. Second, the composition of the two alliances was distinctly different—the BJP made up for 80% of the NDA coalition while the Congress was a little over 40% of the INDIA coalition. The number of those not part of either coalition had shrunk to 18. Third, the strength of the non-BJP NDA had risen to 53 (compared to 50 in 2019) and the BJP had fallen by over 63 seats. In other words, the NDA shrank because its main anchor had failed to perform adequately. In the case of the INDIA coalition, it was a newly minted alliance—though somewhat of a revised United Progressive Alliance (UPA). The Congress saw an 80% rise in its seats from 52 to 99. The other parties in the INDIA coalition also saw an increase in their share of seats. Principal among them were the Samajwadi Party and the Trinamool Congress. Thus, for the INDIA coalition, almost every member benefited and contributed to its overall numbers.

The electoral battle of 2024 was not merely in the states of India but also in different regions of India. This time

around, the BJP expanded its electoral presence in the South and the East. At the same time, it faced a retreat in the North and West of the country. The Congress drew its numbers from key states across regions while its alliance partners drew their numbers from specific states in particular regions. The decline in the seats of the BJP was largely on account of its performance in the Hindi heartland states of UP, Rajasthan and Bihar and the reversals it faced in Maharashtra, Karnataka and West Bengal. It made up for some of these losses in Telangana and Odisha but the recovery was far less than its deficits. Importantly, carefully crafted social coalitions that varied across states helped both the alliances. The BJP project of nationalisation of its social base appears to have faced a roadblock. It finds itself drawing support from disparate social groups in different states as is borne out by the in-depth analysis of electoral outcomes in different states. The Lokniti-CSDS post-poll survey 2024 provides some insights to understanding the twists and turns that explain the electoral outcomes. This overview article highlights the broad patterns, and the accompanying state-based articles assess the same in more detail.

### Contextualising the 2024 Verdict

The backdrop for the 2024 elections was set by multitrack political developments. For the BJP, it was completing a decade in power and was keen to stake a claim for a third successive term (Shastri et al 2022; Palshikar et al 2019; Palshikar et al 2017). The electoral victories it was able to secure in the assembly polls in key states of the Hindi heartland—Rajasthan, MP and Chhattisgarh—in December 2023, played a key role in shaping its campaign pitch. The party had fought all the state assembly elections (including Telangana and Mizoram) held at the end of 2023 without a chief ministerial face in any state. The party campaign revolved around the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi with a special focus on what was projected as the achievements of the union government. The same template was repeated by the party in the Lok Sabha polls. The party set a target of 370+ for

itself and 400+ for the NDA. This became its key campaign slogan. A focus on the 10 years of the Modi government and a promise of fulfilling the “Modi guarantee” were the twin planks of its electoral promise. The tone and tenor of its electoral campaign gave an impression of great confidence and exuberance (Shastri and Palshikar 2024). The Lokniti-CSDS pre-poll survey 2024, done prior to the first phase of voting, provided some indications of the public mood. The gap between those who felt that the BJP-led government should be given another term in office and those who were not inclined to do so was a mere 5 percentage points. Compared to the Lokniti-CSDS post-poll study of 2019, those who favoured a second term for the government had dipped by 3 percentage points. The Lokniti-CSDS post-poll survey indicates that the level of support for another term for the incumbent government was like what was seen in 2019, though the percentage of those who opposed another term had increased and those who remained non-committal had correspondingly declined (Table 1). The Lokniti-CSDS pre-poll survey indicates that for those who favoured another term for the incumbent government, six of every 10 praised the governance and welfare measures it implemented. More than half of those who did not favour another term for the incumbent were critical of it on two important economic issues—unemployment and price rise.

The opposition led by the Congress faced multiple challenges in stitching together (and sustaining) an alliance to challenge the ruling coalition. Rahul Gandhi, the Congress leader, had led a spirited “Bharat Jodo Yatra” that crisscrossed the country for four and a half months.<sup>2</sup> He followed it up with a two-month “Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra” in the run-up to the elections in early 2024.<sup>3</sup> The second yatra began soon after the formation of the INDIA coalition<sup>4</sup> and

**Table 1: Should the Government Get Another Chance?**

|             | Pre-poll 2024 | Post-poll 2024 | Post-poll 2019 |
|-------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| Yes         | 44            | 47             | 47             |
| No          | 39            | 38             | 35             |
| No response | 17            | 15             | 18             |

Source: National Election Studies done by Lokniti-CSDS over time.

many hiccups were encountered as this yatra went along.<sup>5</sup> As the election dates neared, there were challenges in seat-sharing (especially in West Bengal and Punjab) within the coalition and very limited joint campaigning. Rather than adopting a national strategy, the INDIA coalition preferred to adopt a state-specific approach, to ensure a focus on local issues.

One did notice a very heated election campaign with a lot of charges and countercharges being made. The Lokniti-CSDS post-poll survey indicates that two-thirds of the respondents reported taking a decision on whom to vote for only after the candidates were announced. Nearly one-fourths said that they took this call on the day of voting or a few days prior to voting. This does imply that the issues raised in the campaign, the assurances held out by parties, and the attack on their rivals could well have impacted their final decision. Among those who voted for the BJP, there was a greater likelihood that the decision was made prior to the start of the campaign, while in the case of the Congress, the party vote did get a boost in the middle of the campaign.

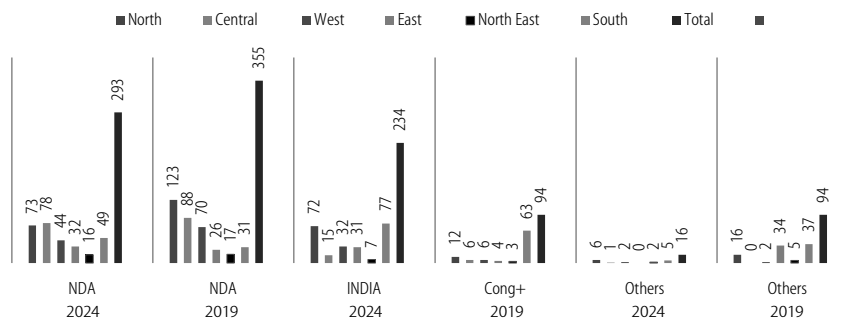
As one of the longest seven-phase elections extended over a six-week period,<sup>6</sup> one could notice a sense of fatigue among voters, candidates and political parties. The voter turnout dipped marginally by less than 1 percentage point (as compared to 2019) with a little over two-thirds of the registered voters exercising their franchise (66.33%).

## Explaining the Verdict

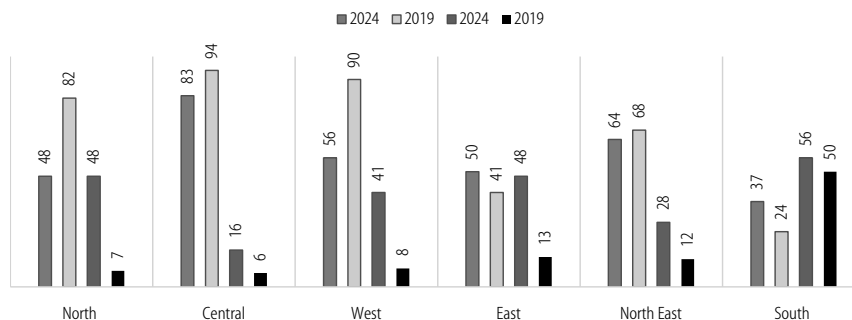
The verdict of 2024 ended a decade of a single party securing a majority in the Lok Sabha and heralded a return to genuine coalition governments. If one were to undertake a region-wise analysis, the BJP having to fall back on the NDA is clearly linked to its performance in key regions.

**Region- and state-wise analysis:** If the electoral outcome was to be examined in different regions,<sup>7</sup> the real shortfall for the BJP (and the NDA) was in North and Western India where its numbers fell by close to 40% compared to 2019. It did make marginal gains in the South (the boost in Andhra Pradesh on account of

**Figure 1: Region-wise Performance of Alliances—2019 and 2024**



**Figure 2: Conversion of Contests into Victories—2019 and 2024**



the alliance) and the East (the Odisha victory). With the opposition alliance expanding (as compared to what it was in 2019), it saw a rise in seats in all regions. It saw a sevenfold increase in the East, a fivefold rise in the North and West, doubled in Central and North East India and saw a marginal gain in the South. The seats won by parties outside the two alliances have significantly shrunk<sup>8</sup> (Figure 1).

Yet another way of looking at the performance of the alliances is to assess the percentage of seats won compared to those contested—often referred to as their “strike rate.” The NDA saw a sharp fall in its conversion of contests to victories in North, West and Central India. In 2019, it had won 90% of the seats it contested in Western India. Those numbers witnessed a sharp fall in 2024 to just above 50%. In North India, it fell to less than half as compared to 82% in 2019. It did improve marginally in the East and the South. In the case of the INDIA coalition, its conversion of contests to victories as compared to the Congress-led alliance in 2019 sees an improvement across regions. The most noticeable improvements have been in North, Western and Eastern India (Figure 2).

The loss for the BJP was starkly evident in North India, especially in UP,

Rajasthan and Haryana. The BJP tally fell by 29 seats in UP alone. The UP paper highlights the factors that contributed to the decline of the NDA and the improved performance of the Samajwadi Party and Congress alliance. In Central India, the NDA tally fell by 10 seats in Bihar. In Western India, the BJP lost 14 seats in Maharashtra as compared to its 2019 tally. The NDA numbers fell by an additional 10 seats as compared to the previous elections. The BJP’s improved performance in the East was on account of its victories in Odisha. The NDA added to their number in the South with their good performance in Andhra Pradesh. Its gains in Telangana were offset by its losses in Karnataka.

## The setback for the BJP and the implications of political polarisation:

It may be important to note that the BJP lost one-third (100) seats that it won in 2019. In one-fourth (23 of 224) of the seats it won by securing 50% of the votes in 2019, it lost the seat this time around. This caused a massive negative swing against the BJP in its stronghold seats. The average victory margin for the BJP in 2019 was around 2.32 lakh votes. This time around, it was 1.91 lakh votes. In the 203 seats that the BJP ensured a re-election of its candidate, the victory

margin was down to 2.02 lakh votes. Its average victory margin in the additional 37 seats its won (total 240) was 1.28 lakh votes.

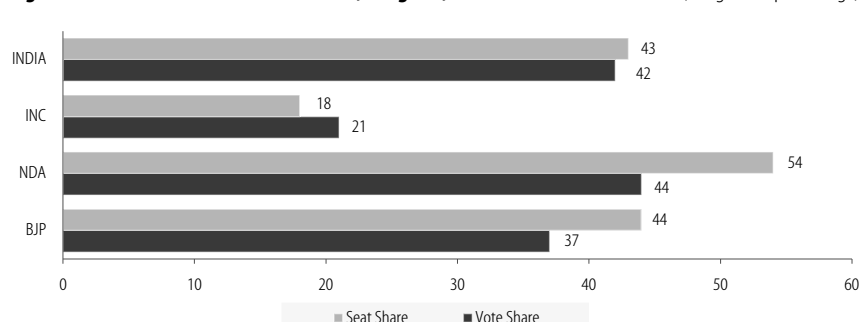
An analysis of the vote share—seat share percentages of the two major parties and their allies is indicative of the close nature of the contest. The NDA managed to win over a majority of the seats with a 44% vote share. There was a 10 percentage point gap between vote share and seat share with the seat-share being higher. In the case of the BJP, this gap reduces to 7 percentage points. In the case of the Congress, the gap between the two is 3 percentage points with the vote share being higher than seat share. The gap is just 1 percentage point in the case of the INDIA coalition, with seat share being higher (Figure 3). The BJP had a much higher seat share percentage as compared to votes in many states of the Hindi heartland, including Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, MP, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Delhi as well as Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Karnataka, Tripura and Telangana. On the other hand, in key states of the South like Tamil Nadu and Kerala and states like Manipur, Punjab and West Bengal, the vote share percentage was significantly higher than its seat share. The trend for the Congress is essentially the reverse in the above states.

The Lokniti-CSDS post-poll survey indicates the clear polarisation in terms of political support that one noticed among the electorate. More than three-fourths of those fully satisfied with the government voted for the BJP and its allies. Half of those somewhat satisfied with the incumbent government voted for the NDA. More than three-fourths of those fully dissatisfied with the performance of the BJP government voted for the parties in the INDIA coalition.

### The Leadership Sweepstakes

The BJP (and the NDA) had entered the 2024 election campaign banking heavily on the image and popularity of Prime Minister Modi. Before every phase of voting, he led the party campaign, in the states going to the polls. He addressed 206 public events during the election campaign (Hindu 30 May 2024). He also gave over 80 interviews to select

**Figure 3: Vote Share and Seat Share of BJP, Congress, NDA and INDIA Coalition** (all figures in percentage)



Source : Election Commission of India data.

journalists and media houses (Deccan Herald 28 May 2024). The BJP election manifesto was titled “Sankalp Patra”—Modi’s Guarantee 2024. The centrality of the role of Prime Minister Modi was evident in the fact that all the 441 BJP candidates (as well as the 100 candidates from non-BJP NDA parties) sought votes for a third term for Prime Minister Modi. The Lokniti-CSDS post-poll survey provides two important data points that indicate the impact of the leadership factor in the 2024 elections. When asked for their preferred Prime Minister after this election, the preference for Modi as the Prime Minister fell by 5 percentage points as compared to 2019. Additionally, the gap between Modi and Rahul Gandhi as the preferred Prime Minister reduced by 9 percentage points as compared to 2019. Among those who voted for the BJP, there was a decline of 10 percentage points in support for Modi as the preferred Prime Minister. A similar decline is noticed in the preference of those who voted for non-BJP NDA candidates. In six states of India, Gandhi was ahead of Modi as the preferred Prime Minister. These include key states like Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Kerala and Maharashtra. Given the centrality of the role of the Prime Minister in the NDA campaign, the decline in the preference for Modi as the preferred Prime Minister is indicative of the limited impact of this factor in swaying the vote towards the NDA

(Shastri et al 2024; Shastri 2019; Shastri and Syal 2017).

**Question asked:** After this election, who would you prefer as the next Prime Minister of India? (Do not offer any name, record exact answer.)

A second indicator of the limited impact of the leadership factor was seen in the popular response to the question in the Lokniti-CSDS survey on whether respondents would have voted differently if Modi were not the Prime Ministerial candidate of the BJP (and NDA). The same question was asked in the post poll. This time around, one-fourth (25%) of the BJP voters said that they would have changed their voting preference if Modi were not the Prime Ministerial candidate of the party. In 2019, one-thirds of those who voted for the BJP (32%) took the stand that they would have changed the way they voted if Modi were not the Prime Ministerial candidate. In 2014, a little over one-fourths (27%) took that stand. A similar trend is seen among the voters of the non-BJP, NDA parties. Once again, given the pre-eminence that the BJP (and NDA) gave to their leadership as part of the campaign, the reduced impact of this factor is clear. In the accompanying articles on different states, this factor is assessed by the respective authors.

**Economic factor and electoral outcome:** Reference has been made in earlier segments that the Lokniti-CSDS post-poll survey provided indications of the fact that a majority of those not in favour of the BJP being given another term in office were unhappy with its performance on two important fronts—employment

**Table 2: Preferred Prime Minister Choice—Support for Narendra Modi, 2014–24**

|           | 2024 | 2019 | 2014 |
|-----------|------|------|------|
| All India | 41   | 46   | 35   |

All figures in percentages.

Question asked: After this election who would you prefer as the next Prime Minister of India? (Do not offer any name, record exact answer).

Source: Lokniti–CSDS National Surveys.

generation and controlling inflation and price rise. In past surveys too, it has been found that issues linked to employment, price rise and inflation have been among the top five problems highlighted by the respondents. However, in the past, while it was clearly identified as a challenge, the respondents either saw an incumbent government as the one best suited to find a solution or prioritised other issues when deciding on which EVM button to press.

Four important aspects of the impact of welfare schemes have been assessed based on the Lokniti-CSDS post-poll survey 2024 (Kailash 2024). First, the analysis found that except the public distribution scheme (PDS), on all other four schemes on which response was sought<sup>9</sup>, less than half the respondents reported benefiting from them. About the PDS, the 2024 survey found that two-thirds of the respondents (67%) claimed to have benefited from it. This is a staggering reporting of increase as compared to what was reported in the 2019 survey when four of every 10 (43%) reported benefiting. Second, the assignment of credit to the union government for the welfare schemes has witnessed an increase in the 2024 survey.

Third, and most importantly, there is a distinct difference in the developmental aspirations of BJP and Congress voters. Voters who seek to privilege infrastructure development over public assistance programmes are twice as likely to vote for the BJP as compared to the Congress. This possibly explains the negative impact of the economic issues on the BJP in 2024. Finally, there was a clear 10 percentage point difference between the crediting of welfare schemes to the union government and vote for the BJP. Thus, with price rise and unemployment being highlighted by several respondents, the absence of visible solutions to these problems seems to have also played on the mind of the voters. The state-by-state analysis that forms part of the election analysis articles highlights the unique impact of economic factors in different states.

**Key demographic variations:** The Lokniti-CSDS post-poll survey 2024 also points out to distinct demographic factors that

impacted voting patterns. The BJP had a higher percentage of support among the younger voters while the vote for the Congress and its allies was spread across age groups. The BJP vote share increases with greater access to education while in the case of the Congress and its allies the support is uniform across education levels. While the BJP continues to hold on to the votes of the rich, the lower and upper middle classes seem to be less intense in their support to the party. The BJP appears to have held on to its support base among the poor (Kumar 2024).

Although the BJP has a certain social profile as described above, the broad pattern indicates that its electoral support is rather evenly spread. Yet, there are two baseline features of its electoral support for the BJP. One is its continued limitation in reaching out to the minorities and the other is its extraordinarily strong base among the upper castes. This time too, as in 2019, more than half of the upper-caste voters have reportedly voted the BJP (Ahmed 2024).

The real difference one notices in the share of OBC and Dalit votes is at the state level. In states like Assam, MP, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Karnataka and Odisha, the BJP was able to garner a majority of the OBC vote. However, in states like Bihar, UP, Haryana, Punjab and West Bengal, the INDIA coalition parties did better in garnering the OBC vote. Similarly, the BJP succeeded in holding on to the Dalit vote in Bihar, MP, Gujarat, Odisha and West Bengal, the opposition INDIA coalition did better among these castes in UP, Maharashtra, Haryana, Karnataka, Telangana and Punjab (Kumar et al 2024). The slippage in the OBC and Dalit votes that the BJP faced in key states accounted for the receding number of seats it won there.

### In Conclusion

The 2024 Lok Sabha polls returned the country to a phase of coalition politics at the national level. Once again, after a decade, no single party secured a majority in the Lok Sabha and the BJP was required to demonstrate its majority under the wider umbrella of the NDA. With the NDA government being in power for over three months, some would be convinced into believing that nothing

really has changed for the BJP since it came to power in 2014. The BJP still dominates the government and appears to have succeeded in giving only notional representation to the alliance partners in the Union Council of Ministers. The real political dynamics are likely to unfold when the “honeymoon” period ends. The voter in India has clearly delivered a “diversity dividend” through the 2024 verdict.

This “diversity dividend” can only be explained if one were to recognise the role of the states of India as the new centre of Indian politics. A few states—UP, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Karnataka—saw a decline in the seats won by the BJP and this was a key factor responsible for pushing it below the majority mark. The true test for the two coalitions will be the state assembly elections due later this year. The impact of these state electoral outcomes will have clear implications for how the NDA coalition takes its agenda forward.

While the BJP may appear ahead of its political rivals at the moment, the play of politics at the state level will define and decide whether this distance expands or contracts. The “diversity dividend” produced by the 2024 elections will surely be encashed at the state level. One would need to wait and see what its wider national implications would be.

### NOTES

- 1 Effective number of parties (ENP) calculated as per the Taagepera–Shugart formula. See Taagepera and Shugart (1989).
- 2 Began on 7 September 2022 and ended on 30 January 2023.
- 3 14 January to 16 March 2024.
- 4 The acronym INDIA stood for Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance.
- 5 The Trinamool Congress leadership was unhappy with the Congress leader launching the yatra without consulting the INDIA coalition partners and did not join the yatra when it entered West Bengal. Later, the Bihar segment of the yatra coincided with Nitish Kumar and the JD(U) breaking way from the INDIA coalition and joining the NDA.
- 6 The first phase of voting was on 19 April 2024 and the last phase on 1 June 2024.
- 7 North—Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh and Chandigarh, Central—Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand; West—Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Dadra, Daman; East—West Bengal, Odisha and Andaman; North East—Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland,

- Sikkim, Tripura; South—Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Puducherry and Lakshadweep.
- 8 It may be important to record that especially in West Bengal and Punjab, the INDIA coalition parties contested against each other, even as they remained a part of the alliance.
- 9 Ujjwala (free gas connection and cylinder); MGNREGS; Ayushman Bharat (free hospital treatment till ₹5 lakh per family); Awaas Yojana (housing scheme).
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