

Polling Dates in Five Indian States Announced: High Stakes for Political Parties

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Summary

Five Indian states will go to the polls from 10 February to 7 March 2022. While voting will be held in seven phases in Uttar Pradesh and two phases in Manipur, it will be conducted over a single day in Punjab, Goa and Uttarakhand. The results will be announced on 10 March 2022. Though these elections are crucial for many political parties, the stakes are high for the Bharatiya Janata Party.

The Election Commission (EC) of India has announced the [polling schedule for five states](#), putting to rest speculation that the elections could be postponed due to the surge in COVID-19 cases. While Uttar Pradesh (UP) will go to poll in seven phases – from 10 February to 7 March 2022 – Manipur will be completed in two phases. Voting in Punjab, Goa and Uttarakhand will be held on a single day. Counting will take place on 10 March 2022. The EC has also introduced strict COVID-19 protocols, banning physical election rallies and roadshows till 15 January 2022, when it will assess the situation and decide on the future course of action.

Decidedly, UP is politically the most critical state. With a population of 150 million people, it has 403 assembly seats out of which the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won 312 seats in 2017. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is seeking re-election in a state which has not had an incumbent government return to power after N D Tiwari did so in 1985. Though Yogi was a surprise choice as chief minister in 2017, he has consolidated his hold, mainly due to the implementation of many infrastructure projects. His main political challenger will be the Akhilesh Yadav-led Samajwadi Party (SP). Having won 47 seats in 2017, the SP has stitched alliances with Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party (Rajbhar) in eastern UP and Rashtriya Lok Dal in western UP. Whilst the SP will be relying on the Muslim and Yadav votes, it has tied with the Kurmi dominated Apna Dal, which has an appeal among other backward classes. Yadav has also patched up with his estranged uncle Shivpal Yadav who is a party strong man. The Congress, under Priyanka Gandhi, has projected a 'Pink Manifesto' to appeal to women voters. This election will test Gandhi's capability to keep the Congress politically relevant and improve on the seven seats won in 2017. The Mayawati-led Bahujan Samaj Party, which won 19 seats in 2017, has been on a [steady decline](#) with quite of a few of its members switching to the SP. Despite its appeal among Dalit voters, it does not offer any significant challenge with its leader being relatively non-visible. The Aam Admi Party (AAP), trying to make inroads, had attempted an alliance with the SP but is ultimately going solo. Its leader, Arvind Kejriwal has announced free power but at best may appeal only to urban voters. Thus, in the ultimate analysis, it will be an SP versus BJP battle in the state.

Punjab, whose farmers had spearheaded the agitation against the farm laws, has its own critical importance. The Congress is trying to get its act together after its reigning chief

minister was removed to make way for a Dalit. The party, which has traditionally been led by Jat Sikhs, is trying to consolidate its hold around the 32 per cent Dalit population while retaining Navjot Singh Sidhu, a Jat Sikh, as its state party president. The BJP has not been able to re-establish its alliance with the Shiromani Akali Dal but has tied up with Amarinder Singh's Punjab Lok Congress (PLC). The AAP, which has been announcing freebies, also seems to be gaining ground. With 117 seats at stake, it appears to be three-cornered BJP-PLC, AAP and the Congress contest.

With 70 seats at stake, the BJP will be seeking to return to power in Uttarakhand. It changed its chief minister last year and is banking upon infrastructure creation to power it back. In most of the constituencies, the Congress and BJP will directly face each other. The AAP has been trying to woo voters by offering 300 units of free power and ₹5,000 (S\$91.31) as unemployment dole to the youth. The BJP, which won 56 seats in 2017, is likely to see a decline its strength, the Congress with 11 seats, may see an increase, while the AAP could win a few seats.

Manipur has witnessed an erosion in the ranks of the Congress party with BJP gaining ground. The state has a 60-member assembly. Of these, 40 are in the valley region dominated by Meitis who are Vaishnavite Hindus, while the balance 20 seats in the hill region are Christian dominated. In 2017, the BJP had cobbled an alliance comprising 29 members of its own, three from the Naga People's Party and four from the National People's Front.

Goa is likely to see an interesting contest with the Trinamool Congress (TMC) and the AAP trying to gain foothold. The incumbent BJP government is seeking to stage a comeback but without Manohar Parrikar, the architect of the 2017 win. This time, it may suffer setback in some Catholic dominated constituencies. In a 40-seat assembly, it has 25 seats while the Congress has only two. The TMC and the AAP are banking on [several leading lights](#) (former chief minister Luizinho Faleiro has joined the TMC and former deputy chief minister Dayanand Narvekar is now with the AAP) to power their campaign, setting the stage for an interesting four-pronged electoral battle in practically all the assembly segments.

For the BJP, these elections are significant as it needs to win a maximum number of assembly seats to ensure that its nominee for the President, the election for which is due in July 2022, gets elected. All the parties will await the announcement of the election results on 10 March 2022 with much anxiety.

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