

Why the BJP Won Uttar Pradesh

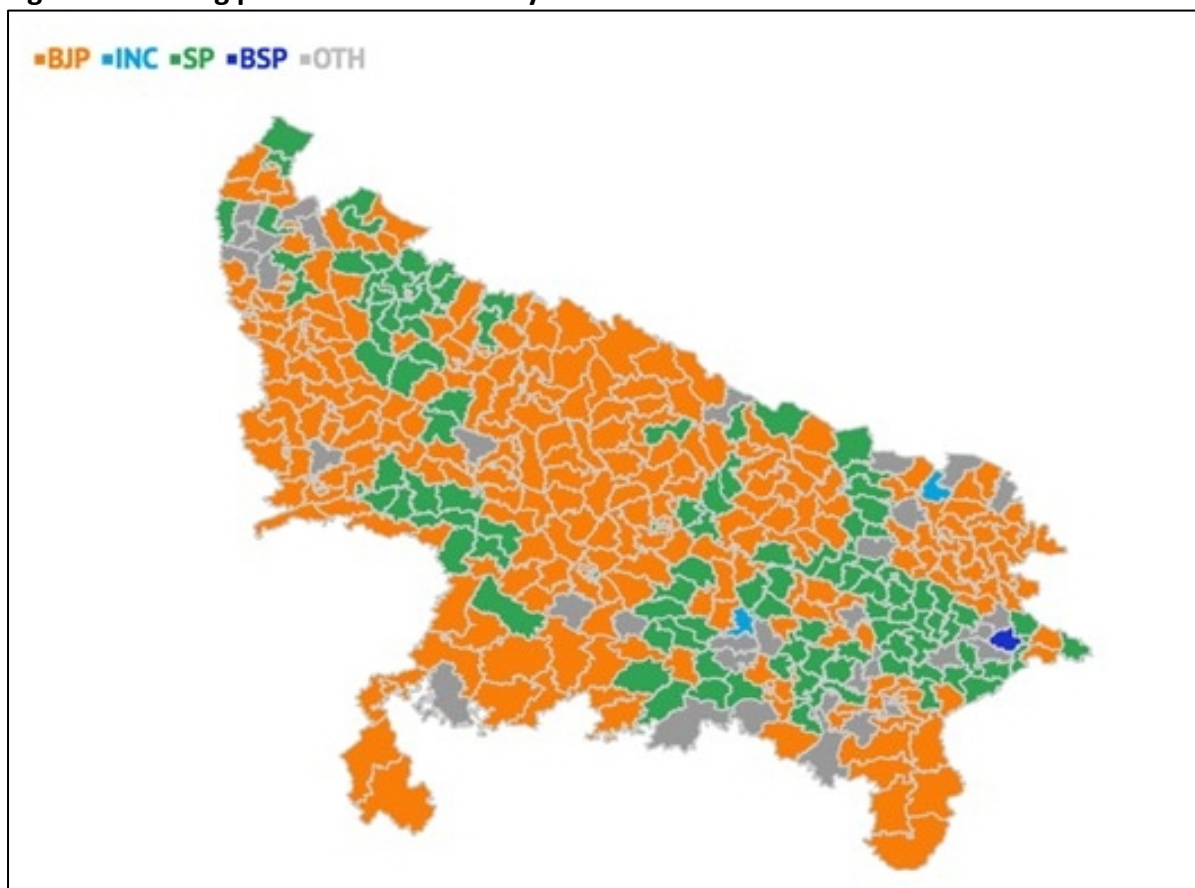
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Summary

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies returned to power in India's largest and most populous state in what was a bipolar contest between the BJP and the Samajwadi Party. The BJP's comfortable victory was founded on several factors, including the social coalition that voted for it and the success of its welfare policies.

Of the results to the recently held state elections in India, Uttar Pradesh (UP) was the most keenly watched. In line with what most opinion and exit polls had predicted, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies comfortably returned to power in India's largest and most populous state. The election was largely a bipolar contest between the BJP and the Samajwadi Party (SP) as seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Leading parties in UP Assembly Election 2022



Source: Data Narratives

The BJP, on its own, won 255 out of 403 seats in the UP Assembly, which was considerably lower than its tally of 312 in 2017, and 41 per cent of the vote share, which was marginally higher than in 2017. The SP won 111 seats and 32 per cent of the vote share, both of which

were significantly higher than its 2017 tally of 47 seats and 22 per cent of the vote share. However, that was not enough to bring the SP anywhere close to the majority mark. This was partly due to the collapse of the third political formation in UP, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), which won only one seat – one less than the Congress – and 13 per cent of the vote share, compared to 19 seats and 22 per cent of the vote share in 2017. The BSP's decline benefitted both the BJP and SP but did not add sufficiently to the SP to enable it to compete with the BJP. It is a telling statistic that in a triangular contest, as was the case in 2012, the SP won handsomely with 29 per cent of the vote share.

There were several reasons for the BJP's convincing victory. Firstly, the social coalition that the BJP has put together in UP since 2014 paid off once again. According to the [CSDS-Lokniti post-poll survey](#), the BJP won a clear majority of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) vote except for the Yadavs who are traditionally supporters of the SP. The BJP and its allies won 66 per cent of the votes of the Kurmis, who comprise five per cent of the population, and 64 per cent of the votes of the Koeri, Maurya, Kushwaha and Saini communities, who are four per cent of the population. A majority of the other OBC groups also voted for the BJP.

It was only the Yadavs who voted in larger numbers for the SP with 83 per cent voting for the party and 12 per cent for the BJP. It was a similar story with the Scheduled Castes (SCs) which, with the exception of the Jatavs who traditionally back the BSP, voted in large numbers for the BJP. Of the non-Jatav SCs, 41 per cent voted for the BJP coalition compared to 27 per cent for the BSP and 23 per cent for the SP. Even despite 65 per cent of the Jatavs voting for the BSP, the BJP made some gains by winning 21 per cent of their vote. It might be noted that the SP's alliance with the Rashtriya Lok Dal also failed to bring about the expected consolidation of Jat-Yadav votes. More Jats voted for the BJP than for the SP alliance, denting the prospects of the latter in western UP where the Jats are concentrated.

Secondly, the welfare schemes of the BJP government, including direct benefit transfers and free rations, paid electoral dividends. The schemes not only attracted voters from all classes, but also possibly helped the BJP cut across caste divisions to some extent, creating what some have termed a *labharthi* (beneficiary) voting bloc. These schemes also seemed to have helped the BJP gain more women votes. According to [the CSDS survey](#), the BJP coalition had a lead of 13 per cent over the SP among women compared to five per cent for male voters. This was not only due to the BJP's welfare policies but also its [rhetoric on law and order and the personal connect of Prime Minister Narendra Modi](#) with women voters. This lead though varied by caste and location and was the strongest among the upper caste and rural voters. The welfare policies also negated, to some extent, the economic concerns of the voters, including high unemployment and the distress caused by COVID-19.

Thirdly, the so-called 'double-engine' *sarkar* (government) – where the BJP was in power in both the state and the Centre – seemed to have worked for the BJP. However, according to the [CSDS survey](#), Modi was a bigger draw than UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. This once again underlined the importance of Modi in the BJP's electoral campaigns and what Neelanjan Sircar has called the [politics of vishwas \(trust\)](#).

Finally, an underlying factor was the polarisation campaign carried out by the BJP and Adityanath in particular. [According to CSDS](#), the BJP secured over 50 per cent of the votes of

the Hindus, who make up 80 per cent of the population in UP, and only eight per cent of the votes of the Muslim community, which is a fifth of UP's population. In contrast, the SP won a quarter of the Hindu vote and nearly 80 per cent of the Muslim vote.

It would be misleading to see the BJP's victory in UP as a predictor of the outcome in the 2024 general elections. However, it showcased the success of the BJP's governance policies and its poll campaign in a critical state as well as the continuing popularity of Modi. The decimation of the Congress in UP and elsewhere, as well as the spectacular victory of the Aam Aadmi Party in Punjab, have also shaken up the opposition space in the run up to 2024.

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