

J&K and Haryana Assembly Elections: An Analysis of the Verdicts

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Summary

The results for the Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and Haryana were not correctly anticipated by exit polls and surveys. The National Conference-Congress alliance won fairly comfortably in J&K while the incumbent Bharatiya Janata Party received a clear majority in Haryana.

The results of the Assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and Haryana – the first states to hold elections after the 2024 general elections – were somewhat unexpected. In J&K, where elections were held for the first time since the abrogation in 2019 of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution and the bifurcation of the state into two union territories, some had expected a hung Assembly. In Haryana, many had believed that the incumbent two-term Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government would be voted out. Neither of the two scenarios played out with the National Conference (NC)-Congress alliance winning fairly comfortably in J&K and the BJP obtaining a clear majority in Haryana.

The J&K Result

In J&K, the relatively high voter turnout was a validation of the democratic process. The NC-Congress combine won 49 seats, with the BJP finishing second with 29 seats. The NC won the lion's share of seats – with 42 seats – while Congress won six. The NC's traditional rival, the People's Democratic Party (PDP), was decimated, winning three seats. Most of the newer political outfits, such as Engineer Rashid's Awami Ittehad Party, former Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad's Democratic Progressive Azad Party and Altaf Bukhari's J&K Apni Party performed poorly.

There was a divergence in the votes between the Muslim-majority Kashmir Valley and the Hindu-dominated Jammu region. The NC won a majority of its seats from the Kashmir valley and the 16 Muslim majority seats in Jammu while the BJP swept the Hindu majority seats in Jammu. Of the two central parties – the BJP and Congress -- the BJP did far better. In fact, the BJP won the highest overall vote share of 26 per cent compared to the NC's 23 per cent. However, the BJP contested only 62 of the 90 seats, choosing not to field candidates in 28 of the 47 seats in the valley. In effect, the BJP swept the 27 Hindu majority constituencies, winning 24 of these. In contrast, the Congress performed poorly, winning 12 per cent of the overall vote share, down six per cent from 2014.

The [Lokniti-CSDS survey](#) provides pointers to the J&K result. According to the survey, the two main issues for voters, besides unemployment, were the restoration of statehood for J&K and Article 370, which granted special status to the state. Over 60 per cent of the respondents backed the restoration of statehood with the numbers higher in the Kashmir

Valley. Similar numbers wanted Article 370 back, but the divergence between Kashmir Valley and Jammu was greater, with 83 per cent of respondents in the valley favouring restoration compared to 42 per cent in Jammu. Both these issues were played up by the Congress-NC combine.

The results in J&K showed that the NC benefited from a significant number of loyal voters in the Kashmir valley. Nearly 50 per cent of respondents in the Lokniti-CSDS survey said party loyalty was the main consideration while voting. The NC-Congress combine also benefitted from projecting Omar Abdullah as its chief ministerial candidate since he was the most popular choice for the position. In contrast, the PDP's voters seem to have deserted it, with the party winning nine per cent of the vote, down 14 per cent from 2014 when Assembly elections were last held. The PDP's past alliance with the BJP seems to have badly dented its support base.

The Haryana Verdict

In Haryana, despite the BJP and Congress getting almost the same vote share at around 39 per cent, the BJP won 48 seats to Congress' 37 in the 90-member Assembly. There were several primary reasons for the BJP's convincing victory.

First, although there was much talk about anti-incumbency, the [Lokniti-CSDS survey](#) found that nearly 60 per cent of respondents were happy with the incumbent BJP.

Second, the replacement of Manohar Lal Khattar as chief minister with Nayab Singh Saini before the 2024 general elections seems to have worked. According to CSDS-Lokniti, Saini's ratings were not only higher than that of Khattar but he was also ahead of Congress' Bhupinder Singh Hooda.

Third, the Congress' consolidation of the Jat vote – the community constitutes a quarter of Haryana's population – and the projection of Hooda as chief minister did not pay off. The BJP was able to trump the Congress by consolidating the non-Jat vote, comprising the Brahmins, Punjabi Khatri, Yadavs and the non-Jatav Scheduled Castes. That Saini himself belongs to the Other Backward Classes also helped the BJP.

Finally, the Congress was hamstrung by infighting. The [spat](#) between Hooda and Kumari Selja, a Dalit leader, was in the open and impacted the party's performance. The Congress' failure to tie up with the Aam Aadmi Party might also have had an impact in some constituencies where the winning margins were narrow.

Conclusion

The Haryana victory has injected confidence in the BJP after its underperformance in the general elections. The win is also a booster for the BJP ahead of the Maharashtra Assembly election in November 2024. The Congress will have to go back to the drawing board and figure out a way of making smarter alliances in situations where it is in a direct contest with the BJP.

In J&K, Chief Minister Abdullah will have his task cut out in getting the Centre to stick to its promise of restoring statehood for J&K. Besides, he will have to bridge the divide between Kashmir and Jammu as well as meet the expectations of Kashmir's youth for jobs and development.

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