

Maharashtra Assembly Election: Battle of Two Coalitions

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Summary

Maharashtra will see a single-phase election on 20 November 2024. The electoral battle for one of India's largest and wealthiest states is between two opposing coalitions – the ruling Mahayuti, in which the Bharatiya Janata Party is the largest constituent, and the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi comprising the Congress and the factions of two regional parties.

Close on the heels of the Haryana and Jammu and Kashmir polls, yet another set of elections is taking place in India. The biggest of these is the single-phase Maharashtra Assembly election that will be held on 20 November 2024. The smaller state of Jharkhand is seeing elections over two days on 13 and 20 November 2024. Alongside these two states, there are a host of byelections – 48 Assembly seats and two Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) seats – taking place across India. The results of all the polls will be announced on 23 November 2024.

The Maharashtra election is undeniably the most important of the polls, given the size and wealth of the state. It also presents a very complicated political terrain even by the normal standards of Indian politics. This is primarily because the two opposing coalitions – the ruling Mahayuti and the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) – both comprise factions of the same party. The Mahayuti consists of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the faction of the Shiv Sena led by Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and the Ajit Pawar wing of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). The MVA, on the other hand, comprises the Congress, the Uddhav Thackeray faction of the Shiv Sena and the Sharad Pawar wing of the NCP. Thus, making any predictions about the election result is hazardous.

A [pre-poll survey by CSDS-Lokniti](#) provides some numbers though it steers clear of predicting vote shares and seats. According to the survey, the proportion of voters who said they were dissatisfied with the incumbent Mahayuti government was smaller than the share who said they were satisfied with it. Around 20 per cent of the respondents said that they were “fully satisfied” with the government compared to 18 per cent who were “fully dissatisfied” with it. The two most important issues for voters are unemployment and inflation.

One of the more politically salient issues is that of reservation for Marathas who comprise around 28 per cent of the state's population. Most of the respondents, including non-Marathas, in the CSDS-Lokniti survey back the reservation demand of the Marathas. [Manoj Jarange Patil](#), who has been spearheading the agitation for Maratha reservation, was expected to contest the Assembly election but pulled out recently. He has also asked the candidates backed by his movement to withdraw their nominations. This could impact the state's two regions where Patil and the Marathas have more influence: the Marathwada

region, which has 46 Assembly seats, and Western Maharashtra, which has 70 seats. Patil's withdrawal could benefit the MVA, since in the 2024 general elections, he had campaigned against the BJP and the Mahayuti.

While the incumbent government's welfare schemes and infrastructure projects are popular among the voters, the CSDS-Lokniti survey also shows [significant dissatisfaction](#) with them. Corruption was one of the issues on which the government was rated poorly, with nearly 42 per cent of the respondents saying corruption had increased under the Shinde government. This goes against one of the prominent claims of the incumbent that the earlier Thackeray government was corrupt. In fact, Thackeray is the most preferred chief ministerial candidate with Shinde in second place.

The ruling alliance has sought to counter negative sentiments by announcing in its final budget in June 2024 the [Ladki Bahin Yojana](#) (Beloved Sister Scheme), which provides a monthly ₹1,500 (\$24) direct cash transfer to 25 million eligible women in Maharashtra. The scheme is modelled on the Ladli Behna scheme in Madhya Pradesh which contributed to the BJP's victory there against formidable odds in 2023.

The opposition MVA alliance will be banking on its performance in the 2024 general elections where it had won 30 of Maharashtra's 48 parliamentary seats. The break-up of the MVA's seats was 13 for the Congress, nine for the Thackeray faction of the Sena and eight for the Sharad Pawar wing of NCP. This has been reflected in the seat-sharing formula for the 288 Assembly seats with Congress fielding candidates in 102 constituencies, the Thackeray Sena in 94 and Sharad Pawar's NCP in 85. For the Mahayuti, in the general elections, the BJP won nine seats followed by the Shinde faction of the Sena at seven and the Ajit Pawar wing of the NCP at one. The BJP is contesting the lion's share of Assembly seats at 148 followed by the Shinde Sena at 85 and Ajit Pawar's NCP at 55.

The vote share of both the competing coalitions in the general elections was around 44 per cent which will give the ruling Mahayuti alliance hope. The recent Assembly elections in Haryana, where the BJP beat off incumbency and its below-par performance in the general elections in the state to win a clear majority, has also given a boost to the ruling alliance.

While Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been addressing several election rallies in Maharashtra, the BJP is also focusing on local issues and targeting both the upper caste and Maratha vote as well as the Other Backward Class and Dalit communities. A strong performance for the ruling alliance will not only turn the narrative away from the BJP's poor performance in the 2024 general elections, it will also allow the party to retain control of one of India's richest states.

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