

Delhi Assembly Election: The BJP's Push to Topple the AAP

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Summary

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is looking to unseat the incumbent Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government in the upcoming Delhi Assembly election. Despite the AAP's strong performance in the last two Delhi Assembly elections, the BJP believes that there is anti-incumbency against the AAP.

While 2024 was a packed election year for India, with the holding of general elections and several assembly elections, 2025 is expected to be much less busy. The first elections for 2025 will be held in Delhi – one of only two states that are scheduled to go to polls this year – on 5 February 2025, with the results out on 8 February 2025.

In many ways, elections in Delhi, which does not have the powers of a full-fledged state, hold more symbolic than political value. Indeed, there is an [ongoing legal battle](#) over the special constitutional status of Delhi and whether a 2023 ordinance issued by the Union government taking over powers of the Delhi state government to pass laws related to 'services' is legitimate or not. Politically it is an anomaly that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which stormed to power at the Centre in 2014, has not been able to form the government in Delhi since 1998. This is even more striking since the BJP won all seven parliamentary (Lok Sabha) seats in Delhi in the 2014, 2019 and 2024 general elections. The BJP is going all out to make amends this time and defeat the two-term Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government.

The contest in Delhi is, for all purposes, a bipolar one between the AAP and the BJP. For the last two Assembly elections in 2015 and 2020, the AAP won nearly 54 per cent of the vote share and 67 and 62 of the 70 seats in the Delhi Assembly respectively. The BJP, which was a distant second in terms of seats, won 32 per cent of the vote share in 2015 and 39 per cent in 2020. This is despite winning 46 per cent of the vote share in the 2014 general election and 57 per cent in 2019. In contrast, the AAP won 36 per cent of the vote share in 2014 and 18 per cent in 2019. Effectively, the AAP has benefitted from a massive vote swing in its favour between the general and Assembly elections. In the 2024 general election too, the BJP won 54 per cent of the vote share, compared to the AAP's 18 per cent. The question is whether the BJP can minimise the swing in favour of the AAP during the Assembly elections.

The BJP believes the outcome this time will be different from the last two elections. The primary reason for the BJP's optimism is that it senses anti-incumbency against the AAP and former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. Kejriwal had first hit the headlines during the India Against Corruption (IAC) movement in 2011. Subsequently, he, along with a few others from the IAC, founded the AAP in 2012. The party saw immediate success, something

unusual in Indian politics, by winning 28 seats in the 2013 Delhi Assembly elections and then winning a handsome majority in 2015 and 2020.

However, Kejriwal's image has been tarnished in recent times with the arrest of senior AAP leaders, including him, for their alleged involvement in a liquor policy scam. Kejriwal was arrested on 21 March 2024, but he was given interim bail to campaign for the 2024 general elections and then sent back to jail. Kejriwal took the matter to the Supreme Court, which granted him bail on 13 September 2024. He has been vociferous that the BJP government at the Centre is conducting a vendetta against him by using central investigative agencies like the Enforcement Directorate. In an attempt to sway public opinion, Kejriwal resigned as chief minister after his release from jail in September 2024 and picked a senior member of his party, Atishi Marlena, to replace him. He has promised to return as chief minister only if his party is voted back to power in the coming election.

The BJP is also attempting to [match the welfare policies of the AAP](#) that have significantly contributed to the latter's electoral success. The AAP manifesto for the 2025 election has a number of direct cash transfers and schemes targeted at women, the elderly and students. The BJP too has promised direct cash transfer schemes, much like what it did in Maharashtra in 2024. Despite Prime Minister Narendra Modi's public criticism of the '*revdi* culture' or electoral freebies, the BJP manifesto has a slew of sops for Delhi voters. The BJP has also promised to continue existing Delhi government schemes like electricity and water subsidies.

All the top BJP leaders, including Modi, have been campaigning for the Delhi election. One of the perceived weaknesses of the BJP, however, is the absence of a chief ministerial face. There are several senior BJP leaders, such as former member of parliament Parvesh Verma who is running against Kejriwal in the Delhi constituency, in the fray. However, none of them have been projected as chief minister. This is in line though with the BJP's electoral strategy in other states.

The Congress, which held power in Delhi from 1998 to 2013, is contesting too but is not seen as a serious contender. In the past two Assembly elections in 2015 and 2020, the party won 10 per cent and four per cent of the vote share respectively but not a single seat. The Congress and the AAP, which are part of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance, have also not tied up for the Assembly elections. This could end up hurting the AAP and benefitting the BJP in constituencies where the margins of victory are small.

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