

2014 Lok Sabha elections: What's in store for Madhya Pradesh?

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Shreyes Shekhar analyses recent elections and historical trends to predict the outcome of Lok Sabha elections in Madhya Pradesh.

Madhya Pradesh is a stronghold of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), as was reinforced by assembly elections held in November 2013. In the elections, the incumbent Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan retained power, winning an impressive 165 seats in a legislative assembly of 230. The state assembly elections likely foreshadow a BJP win in Madhya Pradesh in the Lok Sabha elections, unless an anti-incumbency wave resulting from the large-scale administrative failures redirects votes to the Congress Party or the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). It is more likely, however, that those who voted for Congress and the BSP during assembly elections will lean toward the BJP in the upcoming polls.

Indeed, in a Lokniti-IBN National Tracker poll conducted in Madhya Pradesh, 62 per cent of the respondents preferred to see BJP candidate Narendra Modi as the prime minister. Notably, 79 per cent of the respondents believed that the credit for the assembly election victory went to Chouhan, with only 4 per cent believing that Modi was responsible for the party's impressive performance in the state— an indication that voters are able to divorce the national elections from the state elections to some extent.

Madhya Pradesh, which sends 29 members to the Lok Sabha, has traditionally been a BJP stronghold: the last time the Congress Party won more seats than the BJP in the state was in the 1991 elections, during which Congress won the 11 seats that are now part of Chattisgarh (Sarangarh, which was one of the eleven, has now been abolished), winning only four more than the BJP in the rest of the state.



The state is divided into 51 districts (following the creation of Agar Malwa in August 2013), which can be split into 10 divisions — Bhopal (with 25 seats), Chambal (13), Gwalior (21), Indore (37), Jabalpur (38), Narmadapuram (11), Rewa (22), Sagar (26), Shahdol (8), and Ujjain (29). The BJP won a majority of the seats in all 10 zones listed above during the state elections. Moreover, in most of the zones, the BJP won comfortable majorities—it won more than 60 per cent of the seats in eight of the 10 districts, including 75.68 per cent in Indore, which sends 37 representatives to the state assembly, and a whopping 96.55 per cent of the seats in Ujjain, which sends 29 representatives. The Congress' best performance, as a proportion of the seats on offer, came in Gwalior, where it won 9 of the 21 seats, or 42.86 per cent.

In terms of constituencies, it seems that the Congress will only challenge the BJP in six of the 29 constituencies in the state—Guna, Satna, Mandla, Chhindwara, Khargone, and Sidhi. Of these, only Guna, which is Jyotiraditya Scindia's seat, and Chhindwara, which is Kamal Nath's, appear to be fairly safe bets for the Congress. Even in Chhindwara, the BJP won four of the seven constituent Vidhan Sabha seats, and based on those results it seems Nath's seat – which he has won in all Lok Sabha elections since 1980, except in a 1996 by-election – is under some threat.

In the Bagelkhand region, Satna and Sidhi are leaning toward Congress and BJP, respectively, with both parties winning four of the seven constituent Vidhan Sabha seats in these districts. (In Satna, the BSP won the Raigaon seat, which gives the BJP only two seats there.) The large population of Thakurs and Brahmins in this region gives the BJP the upper hand; the BSP's victory in one seat can perhaps be attributed to the population of Vaishyas, who were looking for a third alternative. Despite the presence of Ajay Singh, the opposition leader in the Madhya Pradesh assembly, and the son of Arjun Singh, the former Union Minister of Human Resource Development, [Congress only received 40.91 per cent of the seats](#) – 9 of the 22 – in the division.

Mandla, which is in the Mahakoshal region, promises a closer race: Congress and the BJP each won four seats in the state elections. In 2009, the seat was won by Congress' Basori Singh Masram, who defeated the BJP's Faggan Singh Kulaste, who had held the seat from 1996-2009. A vote for Modi at the centre could, conceivably, win Kulaste the seat again; it remains, however, a toss-up between the two parties. Similarly, Khargone (West Nimar), which is in the Nimar region in southwest Madhya Pradesh, was also split between Congress and the BJP (four seats each). Khargone has a considerable tribal population, and this might help the BJP, which currently holds the seat.

Should the BJP hold on to its traditionally strong constituencies, and be the subject of strong campaigning from Chouhan, and possibly even Modi, the party could win up to 25 seats this time— a repeat of its 2004 performance. For the Congress party, meanwhile, a repeat of the impressive performance in the 2009 elections, when it won 12 seats, is highly unlikely. It would take local anti-incumbency or aggressive campaigning from Scindia, Nath and Singh, or a combination of both, for the BJP to lose seats in Madhya Pradesh.

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