

Elections in India, Modi's Comeuppance: The Waning of Hindutva

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Lock them up. The whole bally lot. The pollsters, the pundits, the parasitic hacks clinging to the life raft of politics in the hope of earning their crust. Yet again, the election results from a country have confounded the chatterers and psephologists. India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, was meant to romp home and steal the show in the latest elections. The Bharatiya Janata Party was meant to cut through the Lok Sabha for a third time, comprehensively, conclusively. Of 543 parliamentary seats, 400 were to be scooped up effortlessly.

From a superficial perspective, it was easy to see why this view was reached. Modi the moderniser is a selling point, a sales pitch for progress. The builder and architect as leader. The man of temples and faith to keep company with the sweet counting of Mammon's pennies. Despite cherishing an almost medieval mindset, one that rejects Darwinian theories of evolution and promotes the belief that Indians discovered DNA before Watson and Crick, not to mention flying and virtually everything else worth mentioning, Modi insists on the sparkle of development. Propaganda concepts abound such as Viksit Bharat (Developed India). The country, he dreams, will slough off the skin of its "developing" status by 2047, becoming a US\$30 trillion economy.

The BJP manifesto had pledges aplenty: the improvement of the country's infrastructure, the creation of courts programmed to be expeditious in their functions, the creation of "high-value" jobs, the realisation of India as a global hub for manufacturing.

The electors had something else in mind. At the halfway point of counting 640 million votes, it became clear that the BJP and its allies had won 290 seats. The BJP electoral larder had been raided. The Modi sales pitch had not bent as many Indian ears as hoped. The opposition parties, including the long-weakened Congress Party, once the lion of Indian

politics, and the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance, had found their bite. States such as Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Maharashtra, had put the Hindutva devotees off their stroke.

Despite Modi's inauguration of a garish temple to Ram at Ayodhya, occupying the site of a mosque destroyed by mob violence (the cliché goes that criminals return to the scene of their crime), the Socialist party and Congress alliance gained 42 of the 80 seats on offer in Uttar Pradesh. A rather [leaden analysis](#) offered in that dullest of publications, *The Conversation*, suggested that Hindu nationalist policies, while being "a powerful tool in mobilising the BJP's first two terms" would have to be recalibrated. The theme of religious nationalism and its inevitable offspring, temple politics, had not been as weighty in the elections as initially thought.

For such politics watchers as Ashwini Kumar, the election [yielded](#) one fundamental message: "the era of coalition politics is back". The BJP would have to "put the contentious ideological issues in cold storage, like the uniform civil code or simultaneous elections for state assembly and the Parliament."

While still being the largest party in the Lok Sabha, the BJP put stock in its alliance with the National Democratic Alliance. The NDA, said Modi, "is going to form the government for the third time, we are grateful to the people". The outcome was "a victory for the world's largest democracy."

Modi, sounding every bit a US president dewy about the marble virtues of the republic, [romanced](#) the election process of his country. "Every Indian is proud of the election system and its credibility. Its efficiency has not [*sic*] match anywhere else in the world. I want to tell the influencers that this is a matter of pride. It enhances India's reputation, and people who have a reach, they should present it before the world with pride."

For a man inclined to dilute and strain laws in a breezy, thuggish way, this was quite something. Modi spoke of the Indian constitution as being "our guiding light", despite showing a less than enlightened attitude to non-Hindus in the Indian state. He venerated the task of battling corruption, omitting the fact that the vast majority of targets have tended to be from the opposition. The "defence sector", he vowed, would become "self-reliant".

In an interview with the PTI news agency, the relentlessly eloquent Congress Party grandee Shashi Tharoor had [this assessment](#). The electorate had given a "comeuppance" to the BJP's "overweening arrogance" and its "my way or the highway attitude". It would "be a challenge for Mr Modi and Amit Shah who have not been used to consulting very much in running their government and I think this is going to test their ability to change their way of functioning and be more accommodative and more conciliatory within the government and also I hope with the Opposition."

Whatever Modi's sweet words for the Indian republic, there was no getting away from the fact Hindutva's juggernaut has lost its shine. We anticipate, to that end, something amounting to what Tharoor predicts to be a "*majboor sarkaar* (helpless government)" on fundamental matters. Far better helpless in government than ably vicious in bigotry.

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