



**GENERAL ELECTIONS
2009: INDIA POLL BRIEF**

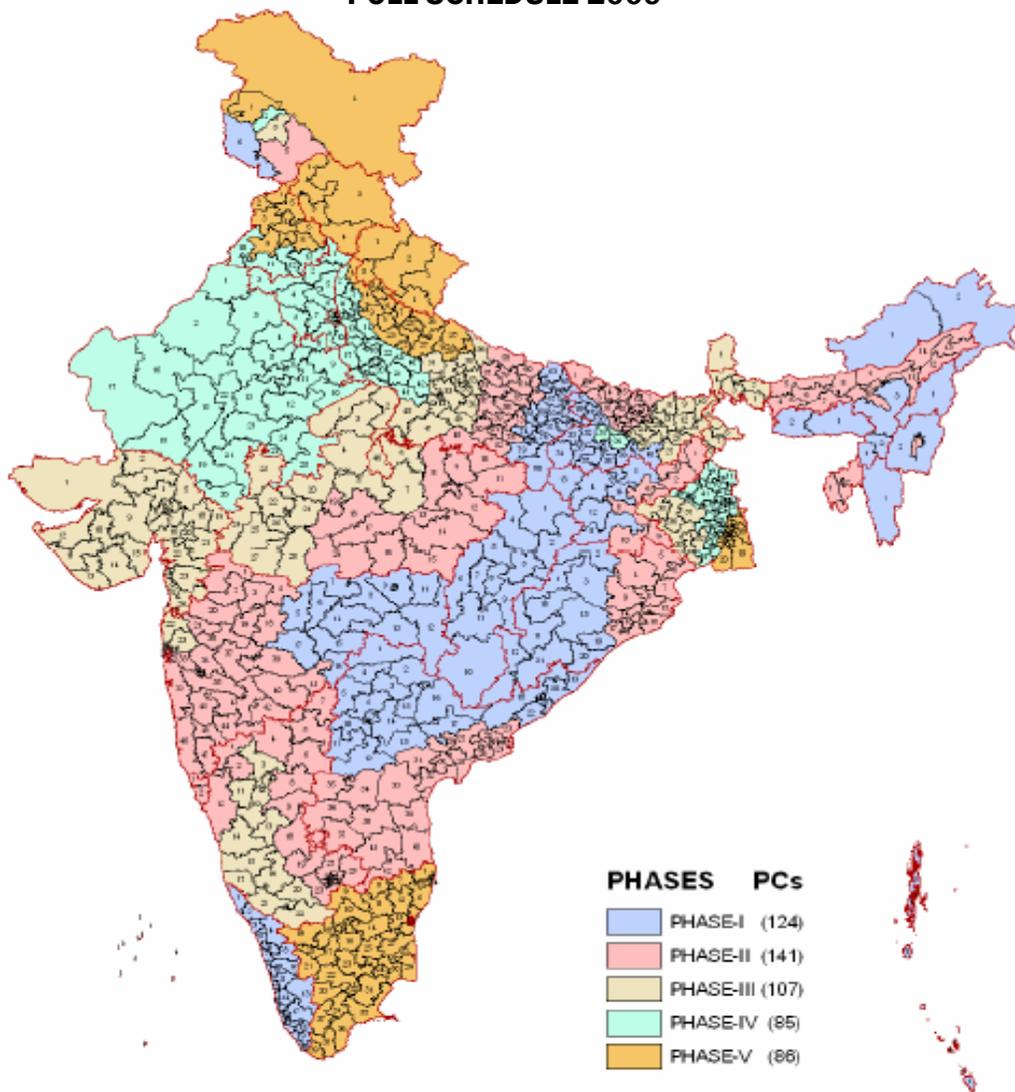
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BACKGROUND

India is currently holding its 15th general election, the largest democratic election in the world. 4,617 candidates from 300 parties in 543 constituencies will battle it out for an electorate of 714 million eligible voters. Perhaps 400 million will actually exercise their franchise, making this the greatest exercise of the democratic will in human history. The massive election is being held in five phases on April 16, April 22-23, April 30, May 7 and May 13, 2009, and the results of the election will be announced in a single phase on May 16, 2009.

POLL SCHEDULE 2009



This election will be decisive for many reasons. For the first time, it is expected to attract a large number of young voters, particularly first-time voters. Connecting with young people has become a major strategy for political parties, leaders, advertising agencies and media houses alike. Estimated at 40 percent of the total population of 1.2 billion, youth opinion in this election will matter greatly.

Additionally, the Indian political field that consists of the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) finds itself threatened by the emergence of regional and caste-based parties. This has resulted in an intensive search by the parties for suitable allies with whom to form electoral alliances. Most political observers are predicting that local considerations could take precedence over national grandstanding.

Indian Parliamentary Structure

India is a federal republic. [The Parliament](#) is the highest legislative body of the state. It is divided into the Upper House ([Rajya Sabha](#)) and Lower House ([Lok Sabha](#)). The Lower House is composed of representatives of people chosen by direct election on the basis of universal adult suffrage. The country has been divided into 543 parliamentary constituencies. The Upper House members are chosen by the elected members of the state and territorial assemblies. The individual states have their own governing body (known as [Vidhansabha](#)) and the representatives are elected by direct election on the basis of universal adult suffrage.

Ruling Government

The ruling coalition, known as the [United Progressive Alliance](#) (UPA) and led by the Congress, is headed by Prime Minister [Dr. Manmohan Singh](#). The party has succeeded in raising India's international standing with the signing of the controversial Indo-U.S. nuclear deal. However, on the domestic front, it has drawn a lot of criticism for issues like administrative corruption and national security. Congress, which is the major party in the UPA, is also tactfully pitching Rahul Gandhi to represent the fifth generation of his family to lead the party.

MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES



Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP): It is one of the major opposition parties led by Mr. L.K Advani. In 1996 it emerged as the single largest party in a hung parliament and then in 1999 came into power as a part of NDA Alliance under the leadership of [Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee](#). The party still has not escaped its origins as the political wing of the 'Hindutva' movement that has an extremist fringe and is guilty of violence against India's minority groups.



Indian National Congress: This is the oldest Indian political party. It is currently the single largest political party in the Lok Sabha and leads the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), the ruling coalition of political parties heading the government of India.



Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP): The party was formed to chiefly represent the socially disadvantaged classes. The party has its main base in [Uttar Pradesh](#) of Indian state. [Ms. Mayawati](#), president of the party, is also a potential prime ministerial candidate.



Samajwadi Party: The party believes in democratic socialism and opposes uncontrolled entry of multinational companies to India. The party has a significant presence in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. The party supported the Congress led UPA after the left parties withdrew support over the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal.



Communist Party of India (Marxist): The party is part of the coalition of leftist and communist parties, also known as [the Left-Front](#) in national media. The party opposes deregulation of the labor market and privatization. It has also been against India's recent nuclear treaty with the United States and withdrew support to the Manmohan Singh government over the issue. West Bengal and Kerala are its strongholds.

PARTY MANIFESTOS

Indian National Congress

- Stimulating demand in the domestic economy to ensure there is more purchasing power in the hands of the people and more liquidity for companies
- Zero tolerance toward terrorism from whatever source it originates
- 33 per cent reservation for women in Parliament and state legislatures, which it had failed to do in the last five years, due to stiff opposition by some of its allies.
- Increasing public investment in agriculture and infrastructure
- Food security
- Generating more jobs

BJP

- With a view to focus on the urban middle class, the BJP promises to exempt income tax for families earning less than Rs 300,000 annually (Rs 25,000 a month)
- Anti-terror mechanism revival
- Energy security
- Ensuring assured income for farmer

- Framing policies to meet the concerns of Young India, and empowering young people to make full use of their abilities
- Fulfilling basic needs in education, healthcare, housing and cultural development
- Promoting sports and protecting women's rights

KEY ISSUES LIKELY TO IMPACT THE ELECTIONS

- **Terrorism and national security:** 2008 witnessed a series of terrorist strikes on prominent cities in India, culminating in the terrorist attacks in Mumbai, the commercial capital, in November. The UPA government was criticized of being soft on terror and failing to take a tough stand against Pakistan, whose citizens were reportedly involved in the Mumbai terror attacks.
- **Nuclear deal:** India's civilian nuclear agreement with the United States raised a major political controversy in India in 2007 and 2008. The UPA faced its first [confidence vote](#) in the lower house of the parliament after the Left Front led by [Communist Party of India](#), withdrew support over the issue in July 2008. The issue of the nuclear deal has not died and is being raised by all political parties in their election campaigns.
- **Global slowdown/job loss:** The Indian economy is experiencing a downturn. Labor-intensive, export-oriented industries such as textiles and garments, gems and jewelry, leather, handicrafts and processed foods have witnessed job losses, while employment opportunities in the information technology sector have diminished. Government measures to counter the impact of a global slowdown will play a crucial role in the elections.
- **Foreign relations:** Strengthening political and economic relations with the countries of the European Union, ASEAN, African and Arab nations is high on the agenda of all political parties. Besides actively persuading Pakistan to abandon its present policy of hostile interference in India's internal affairs by aiding cross-border terrorism, a significant impetus exists to enhance relations with the United States, Japan, South Korea, Iran and Israel.
- **Inflation:** Inflationary pressures have been high due to high oil, metals and food prices. It is one economic phenomenon that directly impacts voters in India, especially the economically disadvantaged areas who tend to go out and vote in larger numbers than those living in more affluent areas and the middle classes.

CONCLUSION

India's 2009 parliamentary election is difficult to predict. No one expected the Congress victory in 2004. Opinion polls indicate none of the three coalitions – the UPA, the NDA led by the Hindu nationalist opposition Bharatiya Janata Party or the Third Front grouping of leftist and regional parties – are likely to be in a position to form a stable government in New Delhi. The winner is likely to be a patchwork of alliances. The new government is expected to reflect the rise of regional parties and their leaders against the waning appeal of national parties such as Congress, BJP and the left.