



Exit Poll : Modi all set for a third win

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If the science of opinion polling is anything to go by, Chief Minister Narendra Modi is likely to create an electorally dominant coalition by returning to power in Gujarat. The findings of The Indian Express—CNN-IBN—Divya Bhaskar—CSDS suggest that despite losing some popular support, the BJP in Gujarat has retained much of the edge that it had over the Congress in the last decade or more. The polls suggest that the BJP improved its performance in the last elections and is likely to return a very impressive performance in the second phase of polling.

We estimate that the BJP will end up between 92-100 seats and, thus, win a clear majority in the 182 member Gujarat assembly. The Congress, on the other hand, is expected to improve its tally from 51 in the last elections to 71 but fall short of challenging the BJP. The BSP and other rebels may cut into the votes of the main parties but are not expected to move into double digits.

The best news for the BJP comes from North Gujarat region that went to polls in the second phase. Here within the Congress appears to have taken a toll on the party and the BJP appears all set to repeat its spectacular performance in the 2002. It may lose a few seats in Central Gujarat region, the epicentre of anti-Muslim riot that the BJP swept in the elections that year, but is likely to retain an upper hand. The Congress can still have some success in South Gujarat, the predominantly tribal and conventionally pro-Congress region of the state, but there are not many seats here and the Congress cannot hope for a sweep. Similarly the Congress can expect to pick some additional seats in Saurashtra-Kutch region, but not as many as would be needed to cover the massive deficit in Central and North Gujarat.

A quick analysis of the social patterns of voting suggest that though the Congress did make some inroads in the coalition of forward castes and some OBCs that the BJP has built in the state, it did not succeed in creating a coalition of its own. The much hyped Patel revolt was confined to Leuva Patels, mostly from Saurashtra. The other forward castes including the Rajputs, stayed solid with the BJP. Some Koli and other lower OBC voters did shift to the Congress but not in the proportions that the Congress had hoped for. What would disappoint the Congress leaders most perhaps is that the party to take a decisive lead among Dalit and Adivasi voters, a lead Congress used to enjoy in the state. The Adivasi voters in Central Gujarat who shifted to the BJP in 2002 have appeared to have stayed back with the Congress, of course, extended support en masse to the Congress.

In this election too, the BJP continued a massive lead in urban areas, but did not fall behind the Congress in rural areas either. Youth below 25 did support the BJP in greater proportions, but there is little evidence to suggest that the BJP disproportionately.

If the poll findings are indeed reflected in the final outcome on December 23, the BJP would have won the election, each on a different issue. The Assembly election of 1995 was a delayed mandate on Ram Mandir, the 1996 election on the Hajuria-Khajuria defections and the 2002 elections on the Godhra aftermath. The election of 2007 appears to have been driven by the personality of Narendra Modi and the positive evaluation of the BJP government. At least it appears to have succeeded in turning this election to be a plebiscite on himself. No other Congress or the BJP came anywhere close to Modi in popularity rating. Although the government's performance rating dropped at the end and the proportion of those who did not wish to give it another chance went up, in all the Modi government was assessed positively by the people.

Exit polls are expected to be the final word in election forecasting and are therefore definitive in their project report sounds tentative and uncertain, there are some reasons that we wish to share with our readers.

* In a direct and close two-horse race as this one, even the smallest swing of votes can make a big difference. Forecasting such a race requires precision of votes estimates that sample survey does not provide.

* As we reported in our pre-poll survey, in exit and post-poll too we find substantial evidence of over-reporting for the Congress party. We cannot be very sure of the extent of this over-reporting.

* This time we also came across an unusual degree of silence. About one-sixth of the voters quizzed during the pre-poll survey and many voters during the exit poll refused to answer the question about voting or put a blank ballot box. Most of those who did not answer were Congress sympathisers.

In our analysis we have adjusted for these possible errors and over-reporting. But it is in the nature of such adjustments that these can never be estimated precisely. There is no tested and tried methodology for that. If in the final analysis reporting and deceptive silence turns out to be bigger than we estimate, the BJP could fall below the majority. It would be unwise to be definite about this election before the actual counting of votes on December 23.