

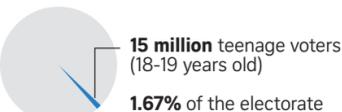
Road to the ballot box

As the world's largest democracy holds elections, a look at what is at stake and the key players.

THE ELECTION IN NUMBERS

900 million

eligible voters



300 million

Facebook users and 200 million on WhatsApp, prompting all political parties to launch social media campaigns

11 million

polling officials to be deployed to conduct the elections

2,293

political parties are registered, but not all participate in elections. In 2014, 464 parties took part

The Lok Sabha

House of the People



272

seats needed to take power at the Centre. In 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party won 282, the first time any single party took power with an absolute majority in 30 years. The Congress party won only 44 seats.

500b rupees

(\$59.8 billion)
The cost of holding elections, according to the New Delhi-based Centre for Media Studies

KEY STATES & ELECTION PHASES

RAJASTHAN

- **Seats:** 25
- **Ruling party:** Congress, led by Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot
- **Why it matters:** The party that wins state elections in Rajasthan often goes on to win the national one too. The Congress party won the last state election, held in December last year, giving it momentum. A farm crisis will play a major role.

MADHYA PRADESH

- **Seats:** 29
- **Ruling party:** Congress, led by Chief Minister Kamal Nath
- **Why it matters:** The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) lost in recent state elections even though the Hindi heartland state is a stronghold. It remains to be seen if Congress can perform as well in federal elections.

MAHARASHTRA

- **Seats:** 48
- **Ruling party:** BJP, led by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis
- **Why it matters:** Agrarian distress is a key issue in this state, which is perhaps the worst affected. The BJP and right-wing partner Shiv Sena hope to stave off the challenge from a partnership between Congress and Nationalist Congress Party.

KARNATAKA

- **Seats:** 28
- **Ruling party:** Congress and Janata Dal (Secular), led by Chief Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy
- **Why it matters:** With the BJP facing the risk of losing seats in key strongholds, states like Karnataka could play an important role in taking its tally past the halfway mark. The BJP has a strong presence in the coastal region of the state, but a recent attempt to topple the state government failed.

KERALA

- **Seats:** 20
- **Ruling party:** Left Democratic Front, led by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan
- **Why it matters:** The BJP does not have any elected member in the Lower House of Parliament from this state and is hoping to make inroads. A controversy over the entry of women into the Sabarimala temple has angered Hindus, which could benefit the BJP. The 2018 floods and political killings in Kerala will also be key issues.

TAMIL NADU

- **Seats:** 39
- **Ruling party:** All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), led by Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami
- **Why it matters:** This election is a key test for the AIADMK and opposition Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) following the deaths of their long-time leaders, Ms Jayalitha Jayaram and Mr M. Karunanidhi. The BJP has struck an alliance with the AIADMK while the DMK has allied with Congress.

UTTAR PRADESH

- **Seats:** 80
- **Ruling party:** BJP, led by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath
- **Why it matters:** India's most populous state accounts for the highest number of parliamentary seats among all Indian states. It is a key battleground between the BJP and Congress and the regional alliance between the Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party and Rashtriya Lok Dal. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's constituency, Varanasi, is in Uttar Pradesh, and so is Mr Rahul Gandhi's Amethi.

BIHAR

- **Seats:** 40
- **Ruling party:** BJP and Janata Dal (United), with Chief Minister Nitish Kumar
- **Why it matters:** The BJP is hoping to pick up as many seats as possible in the Hindi heartland state in an alliance with regional parties Janata Dal (United) and Lok Janshakti Party. Mr Kumar's habit of dumping alliance partners remains a worry for the BJP and others.

ASSAM

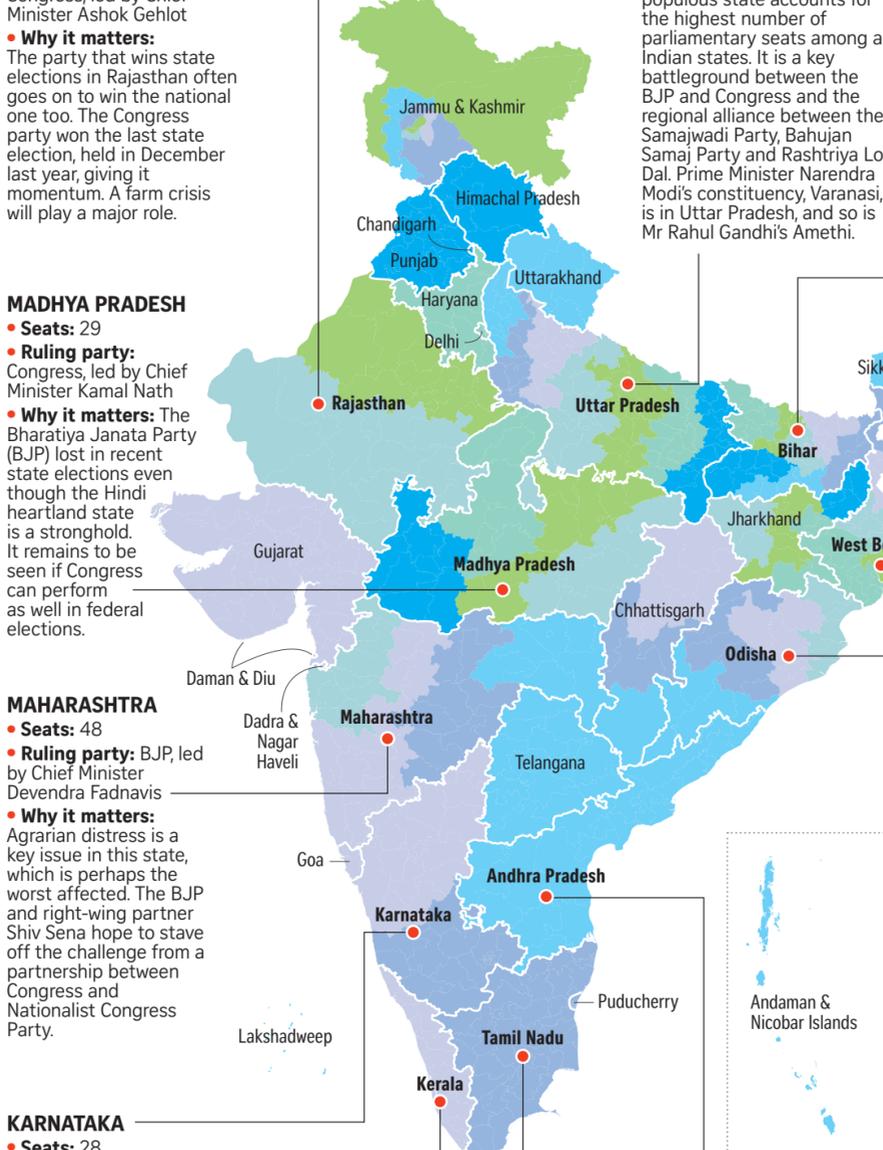
- **Seats:** 14
- **Ruling party:** The BJP, led by Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal
- **Why it matters:** The north-eastern state has seen unrest over illegal immigration from Bangladesh, and the BJP has sought to capitalise on this by identifying aliens. However, it may pay a price for its proposal to open up citizenship to non-Muslim immigrants from neighbouring countries.

WEST BENGAL

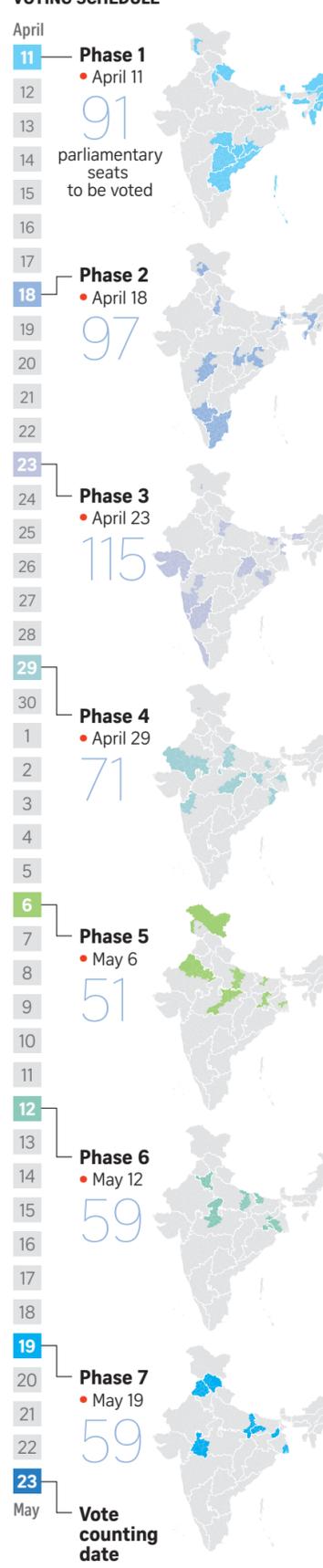
- **Seats:** 42
- **Ruling party:** All India Trinamool Congress, led by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee
- **Why it matters:** The state is a key battleground for the BJP as it seeks to compensate for any losses in key strongholds such as Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. Ms Banerjee is a key opposition politician and could be an important ally for Congress.

ODISHA

- **Seats:** 21
- **Ruling party:** Biju Janata Dal, led by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik
- **Why it matters:** The BJD has been in power since 2000 and will seek re-election in state elections that will be simultaneously held with the general elections. The BJP has emerged as the second-largest party here and could pose a significant challenge to the BJD.



VOTING SCHEDULE



KEY PLAYERS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, 68

- With humble roots as a tea-seller, the leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has proven to be popular in an aspirational India. His political rise began in his home state of Gujarat, where, as chief minister, he made the state into an economic powerhouse. Hindu-Muslim riots in 2002 failed to hold back his political career.

Congress president Rahul Gandhi, 48

- The scion of the powerful Gandhi-Nehru political dynasty in India recently received a boost following his party's win in polls in three states considered a stronghold of the BJP. His grandmother Indira Gandhi, India's first woman prime minister, and his father Rajiv Gandhi, also a prime minister, were both assassinated.

Congress general secretary in-charge of Eastern Uttar Pradesh Priyanka Gandhi, 47

- Mr Rahul Gandhi's younger sister, she formally entered politics in January to help the Congress party in the general election. Though politically untested, she is able to connect with the masses and is seen as the Congress' trump card in these elections.

BJP leader Nitin Gadkari, 61

- The Minister of Highways, Shipping and Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation is seen as a compromise prime ministerial candidate should the BJP have to replace Mr Modi in order to form political alliances. Recent comments by Mr Gadkari have been perceived as critical of the top BJP leadership.

Telugu Desam Party chief N. Chandrababu Naidu, 68

- The Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh has been trying to build Amaravati, the state's new capital city, with Singapore's help. Known for building the city of Hyderabad into an IT stronghold in India, he has been trying to unite opposition parties to form an anti-BJP alliance.

All India Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee, 64

- The Chief Minister of West Bengal is a fiery orator who has dominated state politics. She is seen as a crucial opposition politician and is at the centre of efforts to create an opposition alliance. She has given 41 per cent of the seats her party is contesting in West Bengal to women candidates.

Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati, 63

- The leader of the Bahujan Samaj Party is a former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh. Seen as a symbol of Dalit empowerment who has also successfully courted Muslims, she is not contesting any seats in this election, but is seeking to help her anti-BJP alliance with the Samajwadi Party oust the BJP in Uttar Pradesh.

Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam chief Muthuvel Karunanidhi Stalin, 66

- The leader of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam took over the reins of the party last year after the death of his father M. Karunanidhi, who dominated Tamil Nadu politics. Named after the Russian strongman, he has formed an alliance with the Congress party to contest the elections.



THE MAIN PARTIES



Bharatiya Janata Party

- India's ruling party thrives on Hindu nationalism. Some of its core election planks include the protection of cows - which are sacred to Hindus - and the building of a temple on a disputed patch of land that was once occupied by a mosque before it was destroyed in a riot.



Congress

- The Congress party is socialist and secular in orientation, but its sheen has been tarnished by corruption scandals during its last stint in government from 2004 to 2014. Its election manifesto includes a promise to provide a universal basic income to the poor.



Bahujan Samaj Party

- The party founded in 1984 represents the Dalit community, formerly known as "untouchables", and has Muslim support. It has formed an election alliance with the Samajwadi Party, once its main rival, to try and wrest control from the BJP in the state.



Samajwadi Party

- A left-of-centre party that describes itself as a democratic socialist party, it has been a dominant force in politics in Uttar Pradesh, but suffered a big defeat in the last election to the state assembly. Its support base consists of Yadavs, a powerful caste grouping, and Muslims.



Trinamool Congress

- The socialist party was formed in 1998 as an alternative to the Congress party in West Bengal, where it is in power. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is a frequent critic of Mr Modi, whose BJP has been trying to make inroads into the state.



All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam

- The Tamil Nadu party was, till recently, led by the late filmstar-turned-politician Jayalalitha Jayaram. It was formed as a breakaway faction of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, and secured a huge win in the state in the last general election.



Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam

- The Tamil Nadu regional party is steeped in Dravidian politics and draws on rationalism and socialism for its policies. The party grew as a counter to the domination of upper caste Brahmins.