

### Versione Italiana

The Congress Party has nine lives, like cats: maybe more. Contrary to all the polls and all the observers (including myself), in the recent Indian elections the party has risen from its ashes, and the promise is that in the coming years it will give the now reduced Prime Minister Narendra Modi a hard time. Nevertheless, Modi earned a third mandate at the head of the government in New Delhi, a feat that had previously only been achieved by Jawaharlal Nehru, one of the heroes of the struggle for independence.

But let's see the results announced on June 4<sup>th</sup>, at the end of a six-week electoral process which saw the participation of over 640 million voters (there were almost 970 million eligible voters out of a population of 1.4 billion people):

Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party) obtained 240 seats (out of the 543 in the Lok Sabha, the Parliament);

the coalition led by the BJP itself, the National Democratic Alliance or NDA, had 293 seats, 20 more than the 272 needed to have a majority and form the government;

the opposition coalition called INDIA, led by Rahul Gandhi's Congress Party, obtained 230 seats, far exceeding forecasts. The Congress Party alone has almost doubled its representation, going from 52 to 99 deputies. A key role in the legislature will fall to two allies of the BJP, the Telegu Desam Party - a regional party in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh - which had 16 deputies, and the Janata Dal (United), which is strong in Bihar (north) but also in the small states of Arunachal Pradesh (north-east, on the border with China) and Manipur (east), which had 12. Both are led by long-standing politicians: Chandrababu Naidu is the leader of the Telegu Desam, while Nitish Kumar is at the head of the Janata Dal.



Modi supporters in Hoshiarpur, Punjab, May 30, 2024

Modi, in his “victory” speech, barely hiding his disappointment, thanked the voters and underlined that the BJP alone had more seats than the opposing coalition and that it will form the next government. All true, except that he himself had repeated many times during the electoral campaign that his party’s objective was to “exceed 400” deputies. The 230 it got is just over half of that. The entire BJP campaign – which is also clearly prey to pollsters and observers – was centered on him.

What was very serious for the party was the clear defeat it suffered at the hands of the Samajwadi Party (a regional party allied with the Congress) in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, the enormous territory which is home to 240 million people, elects 80 deputies and which until now has always been dominated by the BJP. To understand the context better, the Ayodhya temple, built on the rubble of a mosque demolished by Hindu extremists in a violent campaign against Indian Muslims that marked the beginning of the BJP’s growth in the 1990s, is located in Uttar Pradesh. This year, Modi’s party and its allies had 36 MPs while the rival NDA had 43.



Rahul and his mother Sonia Gandhi after voting

On the opposition front, the results are a great success for Rahul Gandhi and his sister Priyanka, who supported him in the campaign, particularly in Uttar Pradesh. While Modi's "magic" seems to have vanished, that of the family that has dominated the Congress since its foundation, the Nehru-Gandhis, seems to have been rediscovered after the failures of recent years.

Indian commentators highlight the problems caused in society by the overwhelming economic growth of the past ten years, the "Modi decade": unemployment, which particularly affects the new generations, and inflation, which at times has appeared out of control. Furthermore, many see the aforementioned results out of Uttar Pradesh as proof that the politics based on the opposition between Hindus (80 percent of the population) and Muslims (14 percent) which made the BJP's fortune has exhausted its role, and that citizens are now more concerned with the practical problems of everyday life such as housing, work, and future prospects for their children and grandchildren.

The situation of the leaders of the only two national parties, the BJP and the Congress, is now reversed compared to previous years: Rahul Gandhi, 52 years old, can look to the coming years with optimism. He will have to try to consolidate the alliances that made such a good result in the

The Congress Party is Resurrected, and a Reduced Modi Hangs On

elections possible, hoping to sit in the prime minister's chair in the future; on the contrary, Modi (74 years old) is beginning to decline and the search for a possible successor will begin in his party, with the controversial interior minister Amith Shah in pole position.

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Translation by Paul Rosenberg

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