

The 2024 Indian Election Results and Its Development Correlate

By

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi has just begun his third consecutive term. Since the country's independence in 1947, only the Congress stalwart, Jawaharlal Nehru, had the honor of being the country's Prime Minister for three consecutive terms. Prime Minister Modi has thus rewritten history. Although the actual number of parliamentary seats for the Lok Sabha that the National Development Alliance (NDA, led by Prime Minister Modi) has been somewhat less than most opinion and exit polls predicted, NDA still has a comfortable majority.

Upon swearing in as the Prime Minister for a third consecutive term, he has formed his cabinet. In his third term, Prime Minister Modi has a job cut out for him: fostering rapid economic growth, reducing the economic and social inequities in the country, and at the same time raising the status of the country on the world stage – Vishwa Guru – as he is so fond of referring to it.

Even as he focuses on achieving these forward-looking goals for the country, it is also an opportune time to take a look at the political landscape that emerged from the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. This Note attempts to do that: it decipher the correlation between the State-wise election results and State-wise socioeconomic development, the latter represented by the State-wise Human Development Index (HDI). HDI is a composite measure of socioeconomic development that not only includes per capita income but also incorporates health and education indicators of the population. More specifically, HDI has three components: per capita income, educational achievements, and health indicators, all three weighted equally. In one simple stroke, the HDI, as the very name suggests, reflects the socioeconomic development, not the just the per capita income, of a State. (<https://globaldatalab.org/shdi/table/shdi/IND/>).

Thus, HDI is a much broader measure of socioeconomic development than per capita income in whatever way the latter is measured – at current prices, at constant prices, or at purchasing power parities. HDI had its origins in the scholarly work of two well-known economists – Mahbub Ul Haq and Amartya Sen. The Index ranges from 0 to 1; But to make it user-friendly, I have multiplied the published figures by 100, so it ranges from 0-100. This does not any harm the Human Development Index, or the results derived from it.

In examining the State-wise correlates of the 2024 election results, I ask a specific question: is there any correlation between the State-wise number of parliamentary seats won by the NDA (led by the Bharatiya Janata Party) and the State-wise measures of HDI. The average HDI for all the States in India stands at 63.3, with Kerala posting the highest figure of 75.2, closely followed by Goa (75.1), Chandigarh (74.4), and

Puducherry (72.1). In contrast, at the lower end of the spectrum, Bihar has the lowest HDI of 57.1, closely followed by Uttar Pradesh (59.2), Jharkhand (58.9) and Madhya Pradesh (59.6).

The Figure below has a robust message. In general, it seems that there is a negative correlation between the number of parliamentary seats won by the NDA in a State and the States' level of Human Development Index. The two lines in the Figure – one representing the State-wise number of parliamentary seats won by the NDA and the other representing the State-wise Human Development Index – are almost the obverse images of the other. When one falls the other rises and vice versa.

For example, the peaks in the number of parliamentary seats won by the NDA in States like Bihar, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Odissa, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh coincide with the troughs in the Human Development Index. In a somewhat similar vein, troughs in the number of parliamentary seats won by the NDA coincide with the peaks in the Human Development Index in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, and a number of smaller States, such as Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Chandigarh, Andaman Nicobar island etc.

Interestingly, a 2021 paper by the Pew Research Center, authored by Jonathan Evans, found that “in the 2019 general elections, BJP received some of its highest vote shares in the Northern (68%) and Central (65%) regions of the country. By comparison, 46% of Hindu voters in the East and just 19% of the South Indian voters said that they voted for the BJP” (<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/08/05/in-india-hindu-support-for-modis-party-varies-by-region-and-is-tied-to-beliefs-about-diet-and-language/>). We now know most of the voters for the BJP and its allies came mostly from regions with low socioeconomic development, represented by HDI, which is a far better proxy for socioeconomic development than the per capita income.

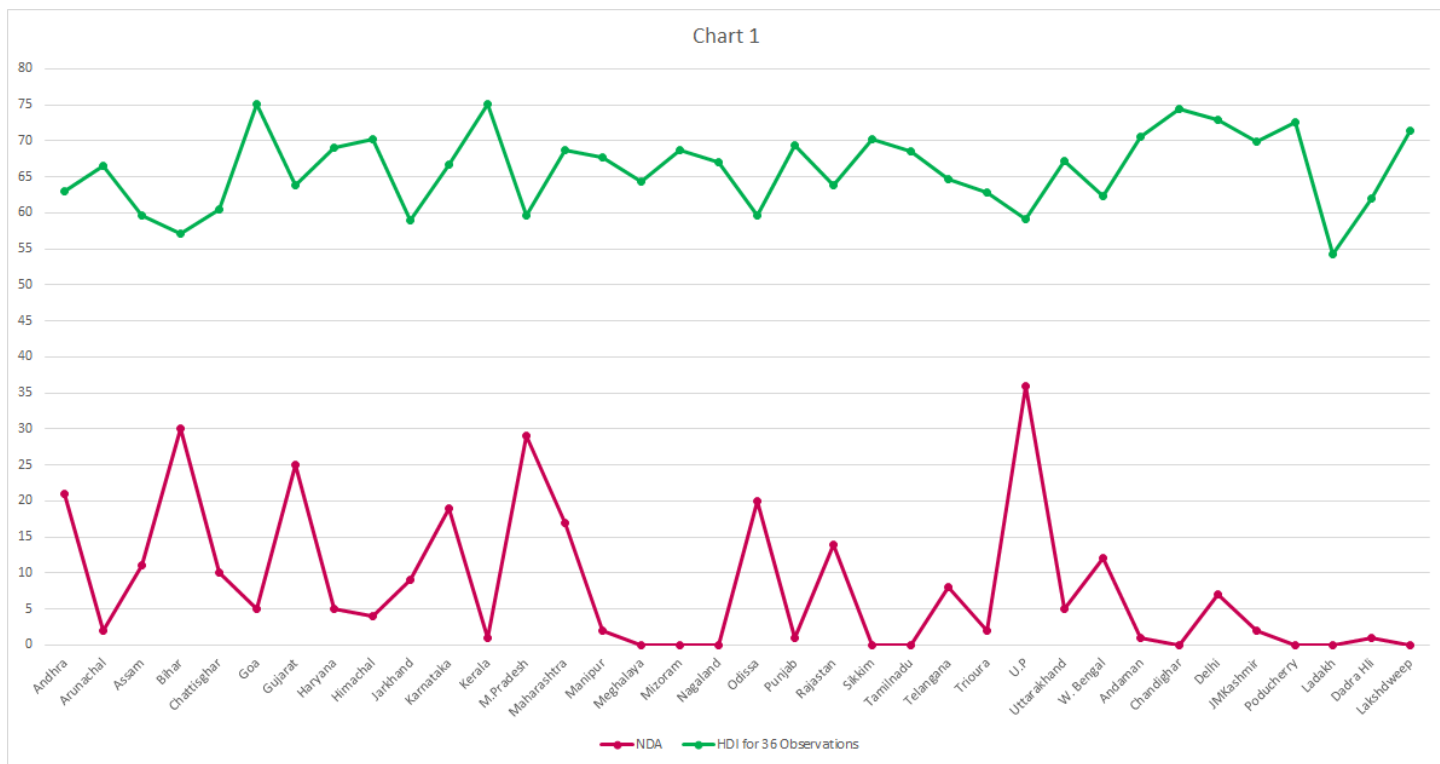
In a way, this Note extends the results of that 2021 Pew Research Center by using a much more comprehensive measure of human development. As we all now know, income is only a partial indicator of one's state of development. As this Note has shown, a state's overall human development rather than just its income levels decides the electoral outcomes for the NDA. As a result, the somewhat less-developed States seem to have voted more for the NDA, while the more developed States seem to have voted less for NDA.

As a great adage goes "a picture is worth a thousand words". I hope the one figure I have presented in this Note does convey something meaningful, if not a thousand words! There is a flood of information, news, and analysis on the 2024 Indian elections, perhaps keeping in line with the size of our country's population and also due to India's good old tradition of public debate and pluralism -- proclivity for prolixity -- that Professor Amartya Sen – had so eloquently explained in his classic book 'The Augmentative Indian'. In that spirit, this Note adds only a bit of addition to the flood of information and analysis that already exists on the 2024 Indian election results. This Note cannot thus do any harm, even if it does not do much good.

Moreover, let me admit that I am not an expert in psephology, but I have a love for numbers and a desire that most economists have – a desire to decipher a storyline from numbers by a kind of pattern-recognition technique. That is what I have attempted to do in this Note. Let me leave the readers with those thoughts for now!

Figure

State-wise Correlates Between the Number of Seats Won by the NDA and the Human Development Index



Source: Computed from data Sourced from (<https://globaldatalab.org/shdi/table/shdi/IND/>) (accessed on 14 June 2024 – for the Human Development Index and <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/lok-sabha-elections-2024-breakdown-of-state-wise-results/articleshow/110730725.cms> (sourced on 14 June 2024 for the State-wise results of the 2024 Indian election results)