

# [***India votes in second phase of national elections with Modi's BJP as front-runner***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BWH-S1X1-DYMD-6219-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Associated Press

April 26, 2024 Friday 4:44 PM GMT

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**Section:** INTERNATIONAL NEWS

**Length:** 766 words

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**Dateline:** NEW DELHI

**Body**

NEW DELHI — Millions of Indians voted Friday in a moderate turnout in the second round of [*multi-phase national elections*](https://apnews.com/article/india-election-modi-bjp-democracy-8998fe6aba5fa26debc0f82c4e2ccf69) as Prime Minister Narendra Modi sought to galvanize voters with his assertive brand of [*Hindu nationalist* ***politics***](https://apnews.com/article/india-election-narendra-modi-hindu-nationalism-rss-79c30c8ae750a9c037d86b9e2c1b640c).

People lined up outside polling stations as voting opened at 7 a.m. local time and braved hot summer weather with temperatures soaring up to 42 degrees Celsius in the afternoon.

The election authority said in a statement that approximately 60.96% of 160 million eligible voters exercised their right to cast a ballot in the second round.

The outcome of Friday’s voting will be crucial for Modi’s Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, as the 88 constituencies up for grabs across 13 states include some of its strongholds in states like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra.

Most polls predict a win for Modi and the BJP, which is up against a broad opposition alliance led by the Indian National Congress and [*powerful regional parties*](https://apnews.com/article/india-modi-opposition-elections-alliance-cracking-ce93caddc7eb0ea4880b1bd77069efc2).

Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi is running in Wayanad constituency in southern Kerala state for a second time, after he was defeated in 2019 elections by Smriti Irani, a BJP leader, in the northern Indian city of Amethi — a traditional stronghold for the Nehru-Gandhi family.

Other prominent candidates in the second phase of voting include Shashi Tharoor of the Congress party, [*popular BJP Bollywood star*](https://apnews.com/article/india-general-elections-2024-bollywood-modi-nationalism-2aea78fec4324d805d74ddc2bff9f633) Hema Malini and actor Arun Govil, who played the role of Hinduism's revered Lord Ram in a 1987 television adaptation of the ancient epic Ramayana.

Prime Minister Modi urged people to vote in record numbers to strengthen democracy.

“I especially urge our young voters and women voters to turn out in great numbers. Your vote is your voice!” Modi said in a message on the social media platform X before voting began Friday.

The BJP has already won one parliamentary seat from Surat in Gujarat state, where the Congress party candidate was disqualified Monday. Election officials said they found discrepancies in the signatures on the nomination and other candidates pulled out of the contest, leaving BJP nominee Mukesh Dalal as the winner by default.

Nearly 970 million voters — more than 10% of the world’s population — will elect 543 members to the lower house of Parliament for five years during the [*staggered election, which runs until June 1*](https://apnews.com/article/india-election-2024-explainer-41d7aa3131dc0c7e0df1ea4be6b6a4c7). The votes will be counted on June 4. There are a total of 28 states in India.

The turnout in the [*first phase of polling on April 19*](https://apnews.com/article/india-election-voting-begins-7ea0983c9b7bc7506c8457f44afcfd64) was estimated at around 62% of 166.3 million eligible voters.

By comparison, India’s 2019 national election registered the highest-ever voter turnout — 67.11% — in the history of Indian parliamentary elections. The turnout is expected to increase for five more rounds of voting.

Voters’ relative apathy has surprised some political analysts, but they say that the BJP remains a front-runner.

"You could argue that the listlessness is a consequence of a foregone conclusion,” said Pratap Bhanu Mehta, an Indian political scientist.

"But for Modi’s party which is expecting to win 400 of the 543 seats the joyous surge is missing," he said in an article in the Indian Express daily.

However, Prime Minister Modi said “Phase Two (voting) has been too good!”

Critics of the prime minister, an [*avowed Hindu nationalist*](https://apnews.com/article/india-election-narendra-modi-hindu-nationalism-rss-79c30c8ae750a9c037d86b9e2c1b640c), say India’s tradition of diversity and secularism has come under attack since the BPJ won power a decade ago. They accuse the party of fostering religious intolerance and sometimes even violence. The party denies the accusation and says its policies benefit all Indians.

[*Modi stirred a huge controversy*](https://apnews.com/article/india-election-modi-muslims-congress-hate-speech-90f70cfae68d39ecc80a90acab6e3e00) over the weekend when he said that the Congress party, if voted to power, would distribute the country’s wealth among “infiltrators” and “those who have more children,” in an apparent reference to the Muslim community.

Hindus make up 80% of India's 1.4 billion people, while Muslims account for 14% and Christians and Sikhs 2% each.

The Congress party leaders met with election officials and urged them to investigate whether Modi’s comments violated the body’s code of conduct that bars politicians from appealing to voters based on caste and religious feelings.

The BJP also filed a complaint against Congress's Gandhi, accusing the opposition leader of falsely asserting that poverty was increasing and driving a wedge between the North and South of India based on language and region to disrupt the electoral environment.

The election authority recognized the complaints on Thursday and asked the presidents of the two parties to file their responses by Monday. The authority is expected to give its ruling next week.

**Load-Date:** April 26, 2024

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