

# [***AP PHOTOS: What's on the voters’ minds as India heads into a 6-week national election***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BTD-39X1-JC5B-G38Y-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

NEW DELHI — Raj Sud, 94, has voted in almost every election held in independent India, bearing witness to the eventful journey of a diverse, and now the world’s most populous, democracy over the last 76 years.

Nearly 970 million people are eligible to vote in [*India’s 6-week national election*](https://apnews.com/article/india-election-democracy-modi-hindu-nationalism-8f22465a6f0f021d43105a06a71d7840) starting Friday, and the elderly homemaker has a clear favorite in the race.

Most polls have predicted a victory for [*Prime Minister Narendra Modi*](https://apnews.com/article/india-election-2024-explainer-41d7aa3131dc0c7e0df1ea4be6b6a4c7) and his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party for a third straight five-year term.

“I like Modi very much. Modi is working honestly. And he is doing very good work and wants to make the whole country absolutely beautiful,” said Sud.

Modi is considered a champion of the country’s Hindu majority and has overseen rapid economic growth during his last two terms. But critics say he's also [*undermined India’s democracy*](https://apnews.com/article/india-population-ayodhya-religion-muslims-hindus-070ec1e8ec6fbd0ad2b54ab485ef9531) and its status as a secular nation with attacks by Hindu nationalists against the country’s minorities and a shrinking space for dissent and free media.

Political parties have tried to divide the voters, said financial consultant Dhiren Singh, 58, adding that “there will be a very subversive attempt to polarize them on the basis of multiple parameters.”

For the country’s 200 million [*young voters,*](https://apnews.com/article/technology-india-economy-ca599ec7f67e2c89bd2c87b4cc3ec7dd) the worries lie elsewhere. According to the Center for Monitoring Indian Economy, the unemployment rate stood at more than 7% in March.

“I’m very aware of the need to find stable employment, and I’ll be looking at each party’s track records and plans in that area before deciding who to vote for,” said Manya Sachdev, 22, a student and a first-time voter.

Another first-time voter, Ankita Jasra, said that going abroad is “more attractive” for students and “the skill and all the talents that India holds is going out to countries that are not ours.”

Many of New Delhi’s urban voters say corruption, lack of good governance and inflation are issues that need immediate attention but the opposition has failed to raise them effectively.

Riven by rivalries and political defections, an alliance of opposition parties has been further crippled by a series of arrests and corruption investigations of key leaders.

Ajay Jasra, 56, a service professional, said the opposition is “completely paralyzed” and “not doing the work of the opposition at all.”

Others, like Niranjan Kapasi, blame the entire political class for “manipulating the system by getting all the benefits with taxpayers' money.”

“I’m completely disillusioned the way the ***politics*** is, the way they are fleecing us,” said the 89-year-old retired journalist.

One thing that New Delhi’s voters, cutting across age and political inclinations, agree on is a desire to clean up the political system and make it accountable.

Yoga instructor Ajay Sud, 63, said he would like to see more honesty and ethical behavior among the politicians.

“I would like them to be more educated. And less corrupt,” said Dhiren Singh, a financial consultant.

Kuldip Chadha, 82, said that despite the scams and corruption scandals, elections in a democracy are all about hope for the future generations. “You want to see that your children, your grandchildren, they have a good way of living and how they can manage and how they can progress in an honest system.”

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