

# The importance of high turnout

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The 2014 Lok Sabha election saw several previous records being shattered, participation of voters being prominent among them. At 66.4 per cent, voter turnout was the highest that India has ever seen in a national election. Compared to the turnout in 2009, the 2014 turnout was eight percentage points higher. This rise is also the highest ever between two successive parliamentary elections.

How much did this unprecedented turnout contribute to the National Democratic Alliance's sweeping victory? An analysis of the constituency-level turnout data released by the Election Commission does indicate a link between the success rate of the NDA and the increase in turnout. If we compare the percentage point increase in turnout at the constituency-level with the winning party in that constituency, we find that the Bharatiya Janata Party and its allies had a greater likelihood of winning seats where the turnout increase was higher.

A State-wise disaggregated look at the turnout figures shows an interesting mix of continuity and drastic change. Nagaland recorded the highest turnout at 87.8 percent followed by Tripura (84.7 percent) and Sikkim (83.4 percent). These

## SUCCESS RATE AND RISE IN TURNOUT

Turnout increase since 2009	Number of seats	Seats won by NDA	% of total seats won
15% points and above	70	67	95.7%
10-14.99% points	145	125	86.2%
0.1-9.99% points	267	123	46.1%
No change/decline in turnout	61	21	34.4%

*Analysis based on turnout figures released by ECI*

were the top three turnout States in 2009 also. Assam and West Bengal too recorded very impressive turnouts. Overall 17 States recorded turnouts higher than the national average and 12 were below it. At the bottom of the list was Jammu and Kashmir again, but here too the turnout jumped by ten percentage points. However this increase was largely due to the effect of a huge rise in voter participation in Udhampur and Jammu; turnout in the Kashmir Valley remained low. While both Bihar and Uttar Pradesh recorded below 60 per cent polling, the turnout rise in both States was a good 11 percentage points. Interestingly, of all the States, Goa recorded the biggest percentage point jump (+21) in turnout. In fact, barring Nagaland

which saw its turnout fall marginally, every State saw its turnout rise.

One of the major reasons for the polling percentage going up has been the increased participation of women. Nationally, 65.6 per cent of all registered female voters turned out to vote, a rise of ten percentage points. Men were only marginally ahead at 67.1 per cent. In as many as ten States, women's participation was greater than that of men.

The other interesting takeaways are that in seats with high SC and ST population proportions, the overall polling was higher compared to the turnout in seats with lesser SC and ST proportions. This pattern perhaps indicates high voting by non-ST and non-SC communities in seats where SCs and STs dominate. The overall locality-wise pattern also remains the same with semi-urban seats recording the highest turnout (68.7 per cent) followed by rural seats (66.5 per cent). Highly urban seats recorded the lowest turnout (61.1 percent) yet again, although it must be added that the percentage point increase in turnout was much higher in urban seats compared to semi-urban and rural seats. This perhaps indicates greater participation by middle and upper class voters in cities.

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