

Indian General Elections 2024 and the Impact of Muslim Votes

Mumtaz Fatima

This year, India held the world's largest parliamentary elections to elect a new government. It is one of the most populous countries in the world: its population is 1.4 billion people, and about 970 million registered voters participate in these elections, as every person who reaches 18 years of age is eligible to vote. The 18th general election was held this year to elect 543 representatives in seven phases, starting from April 19 and ending on June 1, the results of which were announced on the fourth of the same month.

Muslim participation in parliament:

Muslims play a prominent role in India's general elections, and their votes are influential, as they represented about 15 percent of India's population as of the 2011 census, and 15 percent of the Indian Parliament. They should have at least 75 representatives, however the number of Muslim representatives was 29 in 1998, 32 in 1999, 36 in 2004, 30 in 2009, only 23 in 2014 and 25 in 2019. Historically, since 1952, the overall representation of Muslims in the Lok Sabha remains less than 6% of all elected representatives, while representation in the Rajya Sabha, the upper house, is slightly higher at 10.5%. These representations do not fully reflect their proportion against their population density.

A look at the percentage of the Muslim population and the influence of their votes:

Given the Muslim population in India, most of them live in different states. The largest number of Muslims live in the state of Uttar Pradesh, which has the most seats in the House of Representatives (Lok Sabha), as it includes 80 seats out of 543 seats, and 38.4 million Muslims live there according to the 2011 census, where they constitute about a fifth of the state's population. The state of West Bengal ranks second in terms of the number of Muslim population, as their number reaches 24.6 million Muslims in the state, making up 27 percent of the state's population. Other states that include a large

number of Muslims are the states of Bihar, Assam, Kerala, and Karnataka in southern India, Jammu and Kashmir and Lakshadweep are the only union territories with a Muslim majority in the country.

In India, there are about 50 electoral districts where the percentage of Muslims among the electorate is more than 30 percent and their votes have a significant influence, but we find that non-Muslim candidates win in these electoral districts in most cases due to the division of Muslim votes between the various secular parties. For example, Malda Uttar, a parliamentary constituency in the eastern Indian state of West Bengal, where Muslims make up about 45 percent of the electorate, saw the victory of the BJP candidate in the 2019 general elections. This happened because the Muslim vote was split between candidates from three parties that claim to be secular; Isha Khan of the Congress, Noor of the TMC, and Biswanash Ghosh of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M).

For whom do Muslims vote?

Historically, Muslims vote for the Congress party that has led India the longest, and tend to vote largely for secular parties. They also get support from Muslim parties such as the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) in Kerala, the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) in south India, the All India United Democratic Front (AIUFD) in north-east India, and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and National Conference (NC) in Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh regions of northern India.

Active secular parties in various states with a high Muslim population include the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Uttar Pradesh, the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) in Bihar, and the TMC in West Bengal.

But in most cases, the various secular parties seek only the Muslim vote, and do not nominate Muslim candidates even in constituencies with a large Muslim population. Rather, these parties present strong candidates looking to consolidate votes in their favor, which ultimately results in vote splitting among these secular parties, resulting in the defeat of Muslim candidates and the victory of non-Muslim candidates in most cases. For example, in West Bengal, votes are split between TMC, INC and CPI(M), while in Uttar Pradesh, votes are split between SP and BSP, and in Kerala, votes are split between INC and CPI(M).

It seems that the national and regional parties that claim to be secular do not seek to transfer their non-Muslim votes to a Muslim candidate, or do not want to transfer them, and use Muslims as a vote bank in most cases. Muslims have no choice but them, and

there is no party that raises their issues and represents them in Parliament, while The number of Muslims exceeds 15 percent, and they constitute the largest minority and second largest majority in India. It is necessary for Muslims to have their own party in each state, so that they do not rely solely on secular parties that may exploit Muslims.

It can be said; If the Muslim votes come together for a stronger candidate against the BJP and that candidate wins; This will not increase the percentage of Muslim representatives in Parliament, because there is very little nomination of Muslims in the elections, even by secular parties.