

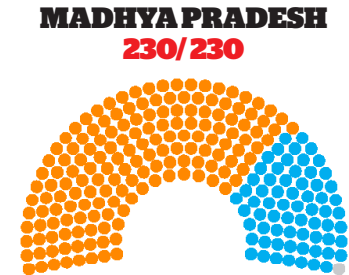
In boost for Modi, BJP sweeps polls in three Indian states

India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Sunday won regional votes in three out of four major states, in a big boost for Prime Minister Narendra Modi ahead of a national election due by May.

The central states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, and the southern state of Telangana, voted last month in the last set of provincial elections before the national poll, in which Modi will seek a third term.

The BJP comfortably won Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh from the main opposition Congress and retained Madhya Pradesh, vote-counting data from the independent election panel showed.

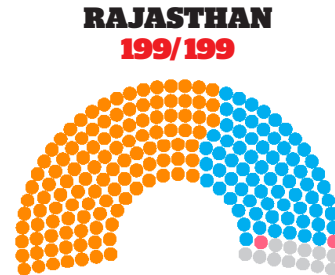
The BJP's performance was better than widely expected as opinion and exit polls had suggested a



BJP	163
CONG+	66
BSP+	0
OTH	1

close contest between Modi's party and the Congress.

Modi remains widely popular after a decade in power and surveys suggest he will win again next year.



BJP	115
CONG+	70
BSP+	2
OTH	12

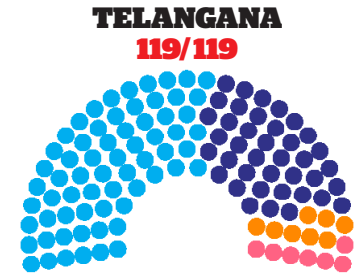
However, a 28-party opposition alliance led by the Congress has come together to jointly fight the BJP, posing a renewed challenge.

But the alliance did not feature



BJP	54
CONG	35
BSP+	1
OTH	0

in the state polls due to internal rivalries and it was a direct contest between the BJP and the Congress. Although Congress won Telangana, its second victory in the south this



CONG+	65
BRS	39
BJP+	8
AIMIM	7
OTH	0

year, Sunday's outcome is seen as a setback. The four states are home to more than 160 million voters and account for 82 seats in the 543-member parliament. — REUTERS