

Supporters of Narendra Modi's party, the BJP, outside its headquarters in New Delhi yesterday

MONEY SHARMA/AFP/GETTY



INDIA

# Modi claims victory for alliance as parliamentary majority is slashed

By Krutika Pathi And Sheikh Saaliq  
IN NEW DELHI

India's prime minister, Narendra Modi, claimed victory for his alliance in the country's general election as votes were still being counted last night, but the results showed that his majority was massively reduced.

Mr Modi faced a stronger than expected challenge from the opposition, which rejected his mixed economic record and polarising politics.

The prime minister, 73, said that his National Democratic Alliance would form the government for a third consecutive time. "Today's victory is the victory of the world's largest democracy" he added.

Last night, India's election authority confirmed that the coalition led by Mr Modi had secured the 272 seats needed for a majority in the lower house of the country's bicameral parliament, the Lok Sabha.

It is only the second time that an Indian leader has retained power for a third term, after Jawaharlal Nehru, the country's first prime minister.

However, Mr Modi looked set to be well short of the landslide 400 seats he vowed to win, and his own Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) looked unlikely to secure more than 240 seats.

Since he took power 10 years ago, riding his Hindu nationalist base, Mr Modi has been the ruling alliance's unquestioned leader, with concerns growing about what his opponents

see as a slide towards authoritarianism. The reduced mandate for Mr Modi's alliance makes it much harder for him to make changes to India's secular constitution that opposition groups had warned against.

Any such measures require the support of two-thirds of members of parliament. Concerns have grown in recent years that the BJP's Hindu nationalist agenda has polarised the

country with Mr Modi himself turning up the rhetoric, accusing the main opposition Congress party of appeasing Muslims to win votes.

The opposition alliance is projected to win 230 seats but final figures are not expected until today.

"This is public's victory and a win for democracy," said Mallikarjun Kharge, president of Congress.

Mr Modi pledged to make good

on his election promise to turn India into the world's third-biggest economy, from its current fifth place. He said that he would advance defence production, boost jobs for youth, raise exports and help farmers.

"This country will see a new chapter of big decisions," he added.

"We will continue the good work done in the past decade to keep fulfilling the aspirations of people."

## Analysis

### Shock result will weaken PM's personal brand

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India's authoritarian prime minister, Narendra Modi, appears to be heading for a third term in office. But he's lost face – or more specifically, dozens of seats and his big majority, as millions of Indians desert his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), angered by its nationalist propaganda, corruption and surging unemployment.

The serious setback, and revival of the opposition, may also curb Modi's bombast on the international stage.

Modi likes to present himself as a *vishwaguru*, or teacher to the world, as a result of the crushing electoral mandates he's previously enjoyed in the world's most populous country – and democracy – with

950 million registered voters. But in a symbolic reversal of Modi's fortunes, yesterday the BJP conceded a constituency where the inauguration of a grand Hindu temple just months ago by the premier was regarded as an event that would cement his legacy and another steamrolling BJP victory.

The Hindu nationalist party also looks set for heavy losses in the bellwether northern state of Uttar Pradesh, as the opposition socialist Samajwadi Party and the Indian National Congress, fronted by Rahul Gandhi, of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, raced ahead in more than half of its 80 seats.

Two regional allies in Modi's coalition, the Telugu Desam Party and Janata Dal (United), say they will still back him. So although Modi's party looks like it will have a greatly reduced majority, the coalition, is in a much stronger position now.

But it's not the same as the BJP claims that it would romp to a win. Chietigij Bajpae, a senior

research fellow for South Asia at London's Chatham House think-tank, said: "Falling well short of its 370-seat target (400 with coalition partners) will make the BJP more beholden to coalition partners in the National Democratic Alliance that it leads. It is also likely to dent the Modi brand to some degree."

Dr Subir Sinha, director of the SOAS South Asia Institute in London, told *i*: "It will be interesting to see how Modi (*inset yesterday*) reacts when he has been used to big majorities.

Domestically, large parts of his programme – like labour forms – will be put on hold.

"Internationally, a lot of his bluster was about the fact that he had a massive mandate from the world's biggest population.

"That was how he was pressing his claims for things like a permanent seat on the UN Security Council." He added: "This bluster was built on weak foundations, and these look even weaker now."



**i** Mr Modi's critics say his **Hindu-first politics** have bred intolerance and the economy, the world's fifth-largest and one of the fastest-growing, has become more unequal.