

# **Fractured Verdict by a Balanced Voter Mindset which Thwarted BJP'S Ascendency in Rajasthan: An Analysis of General Election 2024**

**Om Mahala & D. Sudhir**

## **Abstract**

The general election 2024 in India's largest State proved to be a disappointing one with a fractured verdict to the incumbent Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as it fell very short of what it anticipated. Just after registering a victory by defeating the Indian National Congress (INC) in the assembly election in Rajasthan that was held six months before the Lok Sabha election, BJP failed to convince the voters in its favour. Despite ruling at the Centre and the State and having the distinction of clean swept and nearly similar (one seat won by alliance partner RLTP) in 2014 and 2019 respectively, the saffron party couldn't repeat the same feat in 2024. After a decade, INC opened the parliamentary account in Rajasthan and shared the honours with its alliance partners, under INDIA Bloc as a part of pre-poll understanding. The fragmented voter decision in the State has made the BJP depend on coalition parties for government formation at the Centre.

## **Introduction**

The two phase polling for 25 Lok Sabha seats in Rajasthan had voted for 12 constituencies during Phase I and 13 constituencies in Phase II with BJP and INC candidates as major contestants in the poll fray. With confidence taking the ride from the assembly election, the party in power at the Centre, BJP went to the polls in all seats without poll alliance. Under the INDIA bloc, INC entered the fray contesting in 22 constituencies and a prior seat sharing with Bharat Adivasi Party (BAP), Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI (M)) and Rashtriya Lok Tantrik Party (RLTP), the last three were given a seat each to contest.

The State voters delivered a fractured verdict not inclining their

preference to one party as they voted earlier in two elections and caused dismay to the BJP's expectations. It also shattered the party's objective of *Abki baar 400 paar* (This time, above 400) and made BJP bank on regional parties to prove the majority. The BJP was forced to satisfy with 14 seats out of 25 it contested and lost in 11 seats, INC bagged 8 and its three alliance parties won in the seats they contested. What were the reasons that prevented the BJP from repeating the clean sweep? Is it INC's gain at the cost of BJP? Why the voters' mandate was divided? How INC lead the opposition and its allies secure seats even after being chastised as an association devoid of consensus? Why BJP couldn't capitalize on the Prime Minister's charisma?

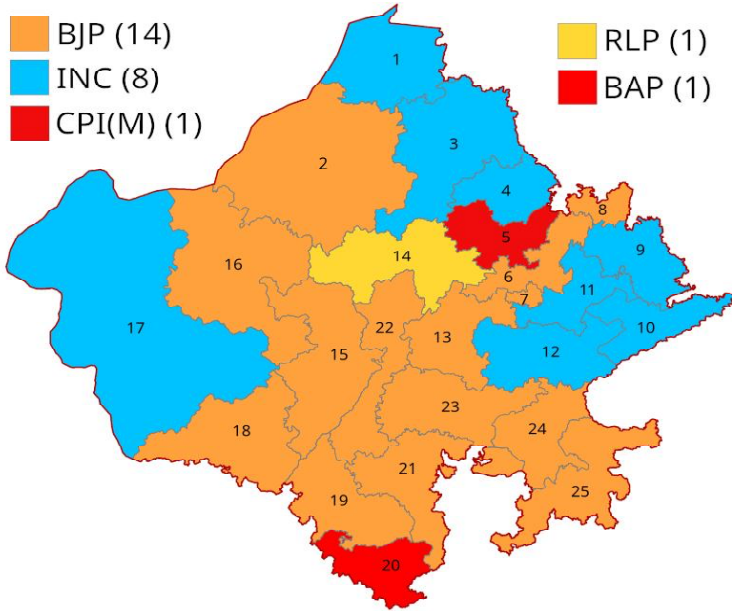
This election saw a combination of national and local issues influencing the voter's minds with neither issue overpowering the other exclusively in the entire state. Instead, the State witnessed either of the issues taking control of voting behavior in region specific contests not entirely diluting the other issues. When the notification for the election was announced in March 2024, issues like farmers' protest, Agniveer and Constitution in danger which are of national interest gained importance as a matter of debate in many States including Rajasthan. Local issues like unemployment, water crisis (ERCP), law and order, corruption, paper leak, ticket distribution, caste and party leadership also influenced the mandate. Compared to the previous two Lok Sabha mandates, BJP lost the 2024 fray and INC gained some confidence in this election after bowing down in the assembly outcome.

## **BJP- INC Electoral Appraisal**

A glimpse in the fig 1 states that BJP dominated the middle and south-west Rajasthan comprising the regions of Mewar, Marwar and Hadoti areas and the India bloc were comfortable in Shekhawati, North and North-East regions of the State. The BJP failed to capitalize on the popularity it gained in the assembly elections as half of the seats secured by Congress were dominated by the BJP in assembly polls. Besides, to capture the Hindu vote bank, the solemnized pomp and ceremony of Ayodhya's Ram Mandir inauguration in January 2024 didn't come to the BJP's rescue.

Table 1 compares the Lok Sabha seats won by Congress to the earlier assembly election held in 2023. The data shows the party dominated in 4 parliamentary constituencies having won 5 or more than 5 assembly seats in each of the Lok Sabha constituencies. The party was successful in maintaining its popularity among the voters in Churu, Ganganagar, Karauli-Dholpur and Jhunjhunu.

**Fig 1:** Party wise seats secured during the general elections 2024



**Source:** [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2024\\_Indian\\_general\\_election\\_in\\_Rajasthan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2024_Indian_general_election_in_Rajasthan)

In Churu, BJP's denial of party ticket to the sitting and two time MP Mr. Rahul Kaswan by nominating Mr. Devendra Jhajharia, a former Paralympics medalist cost dearer to the party. The former hailing from the Jat caste and having a strong background of politicians (Both his father and grandfather elected to legislature) shifted his loyalties to INC. The Congress waiting for a strong candidate, immediately offered him the ticket and he ultimately won.

The SC reserved Karauli-Dholpur, Ganganagar and Bharatpur convinced that the BJP a threat to the Constitution. In Bharatpur Lok Sabha constituency, INC couldn't get a single seat in assembly election 2023, but in general election 2024 the party won the parliamentary seat by leading in 5 assembly segments. The aggressive campaign by INC that the BJP will truncate affirmative action if they form the government and Samvidhan should be protected to secure the interests of disadvantaged sections was received well among the SC voters. With three each reserved SC and ST seats, BJP won one each reflecting voter's disenchantment and lost four.

**Table 1:** Comparison of seats secured by INC during parliamentary elections 2024 to the seats won by parties during assembly elections 2023.

Sl.No.	Parliamentary Constituency	Assembly	Seats won Segments by BJP - assembly elections-2023	Seats won by INC and others- assembly elections-2023	Won by other parties - Assembly elections 2023
1	Bharatpur	8	06	—	02
2	Barmer	8	05	01	02
3	Churu	8	02	06	—
4	Dausa	8	05	01	02
5	Ganganagar	8	02	05	01
6	Jhunjhunu	8	03	05	—
7	Karauli-Dholpur	8	02	05	01
8	Tonk- Sawai Madhopur	8	05	03	—

*Source:* Compilation from the data collected.

Tonk-Sawai Modhopur has considerable Muslims with 2,42,689 voters constituting 12.5% as per voter list analysis (Chanakyya, n.d.). The BJP's Mr. Sukhbir Singh Jaunapuria lost by 63,828 votes to the Congress contestant Mr. Harish Chandra Meena with a percentage margin of 5.29%. It is the Muslim community played a vital role in favouring the Congress against BJP. Interestingly, none of the parties in the State distributed ticket to a Muslim candidate though the community vital in deciding voter's mandate. Though, Mr. Meena hails from the tribal community, he emerged victorious from an unreserved parliamentary constituency.

In Barmer, the BJP stood third as the independent Mr. Ravindra Singh Bhati stood second and INC's Mr. Ummeda Ram Beniwal emerged victorious. The difference in votes polled between the INC and BJP was 2,86,733 reflecting the voters rejecting the ruling party. Mr. Beniwal, who hails from the Jat community had the backing of his caste and added the Muslims and Dalits in his favour. The constituency also achieved the distinction of highest voter turnout of 75.93%. In Dausa, INC candidate Mr. Murari Lal Meena won with a majority of 2,37,340 voters against his BJP rival Mr. Kanhaiya Lal Meena. The Gujjar's and Meena's were influential in preferring the INC against BJP.

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**Table 2:** Percentage of Voter turnouts during Lok Sabha elections 2019 and 2024.

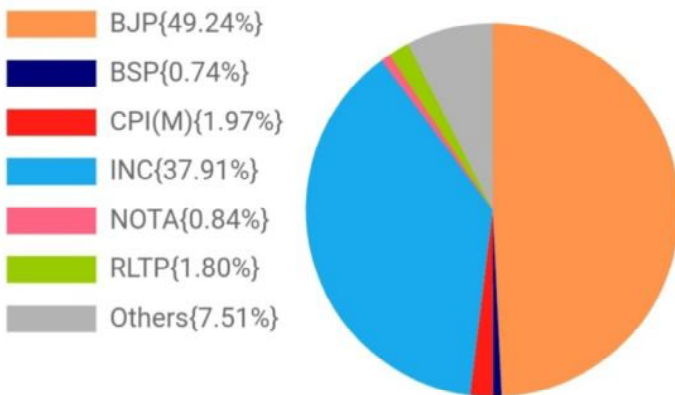
Constituency	Voter Turnout -2024 %	Voter Turnout -2019 %	Variation +/- %
GANGANAGAR	66.59	74.77	-8.18
BIKANER	54.11	59.43	-5.32
CHURU	63.61	65.9	-2.29
JHUNJHUNU	52.93	62.11	-9.18
SIKAR	57.53	65.18	-7.65
JAIPUR RURAL	56.70	65.54	-8.84
JAIPUR	63.38	68.48	-5.1
ALWAR	60.07	67.17	-7.1
BHARATPUR	52.80	59.11	-6.31
KARALI-DHOLPUR	49.59	55.18	-5.59
DAUSA	55.72	61.5	-5.78
TONK-SAWAIMADHOPUR	56.58	63.44	-6.86
AJMER	59.66	67.32	-7.66
NAGOUR	57.23	62.32	-5.09
PALI	57.19	62.98	-5.79
JODHPUR	64.27	68.89	-4.62
BARMER	75.93	73.3	2.63
JALORE	62.89	65.74	-2.85
UDAIPUR	66.66	70.32	-3.66
BANSWARA	73.88	72.9	0.98
CHITTORGARH	68.61	72.39	-3.78
RAJSAMAND	58.39	64.87	-6.48
BHILWARA	60.37	65.64	-5.27
KOTA	71.26	70.22	1.04
JHALAWAR-BARAN	69.71	71.96	-2.25
Total	61.53	66.34	-4.81

**Source:** [https://election.rajasthan.gov.in/Lok\\_Sabha\\_Election\\_2024/Loksabha\\_Elections\\_2024.aspx](https://election.rajasthan.gov.in/Lok_Sabha_Election_2024/Loksabha_Elections_2024.aspx)

Table 2 presents the comparison of voter turnout in 2024 and 2019. In 2024, the State registered an overall 61.53% of voters casting their preference, while the nation had the corresponding figures of 65.79%. The Congress won three seats and BAP won one out of 9 seats crossed

the overall turnout of 61.53%, the rest won by BJP. There are 14 constituencies falling below the State and Nation's average. The Dalit pocket of Karauli-Dholpur with 49.59 % and Barmer with 75.93% stood at the bottom and top respectively in the turnout percentage. Compared to the corresponding voter turnout figures between the 2024 and 2019 elections, three constituencies Banswara, Barmer and Kota registered an increase in polling percentage. The rest 22 seats registered a negative percentage. Contrary to the usual assumption that low turnout favours the ruling party as increased polling participation is a wave of anti-incumbency, the outcome represents neither of the assumptions and concludes that voter turnout has nothing to do with favouring or not favouring the parties contesting. A difference of -4.81% was recorded between the total turnouts of the two elections compared. In terms of percentage in the seats secured to the total seats by the two national parties, the voters' mandate was similar in assembly and Lok Sabha. The BJP percentage to the seats secured to the total seats in assembly election was 57.75% and in Lok Sabha election it got 56%. The INC bagged 35.5% in the assembly election and 32% in the Lok Sabha to the corresponding percentage. The voters delivered similar outcome in the parliamentary election to the one they did in the assembly election.

If we analyse the vote share between BJP and INC, there is a disparity of 11.33% and cost the BJP 8 seats deficit. In 2019, BJP secured 24 seats with a 58.47% vote share and INC had a share of 34.24, drawing a blank. The difference in vote share between the national parties in 2019 was 24.23% and Congress gained a 3.67% vote share in 2024.



**Fig 2:** Party wise vote share in General Election 2024

**Source:** results.eci.gov.in

The analysis will reflect the seats won by the Congress in Lok Sabha election constitutes the constituencies dominated by the party earlier during the assembly election as well it won in the BJP bastion that had dominated previously in the assembly elections. In contrast the BJP couldn't secure a single seat where the Congress dominated during assembly elections. The saffron party did win in the parliamentary constituencies which the party's influence already prevailed in assembly elections.

### **The Allies Victory**

A pre-poll alliance brokered under the INDIA bloc among INC, CPI(M), RLTP and BAP and the Congress gave a seat each to its allies. The CPI(M) added one seat, Sikar to the account of India bloc, where, its candidate Mr. Amraram, four time MLA defeated his nearest BJP's Mr. Sumedhanand Saraswati by a margin of 72,896 votes (Rewal, 2024). The Latter represented the Sikar Lok Sabha seat earlier two terms and the former lost six Lok Sabha contests he fought previously. After 30 years, the Communist Party gained ground in the State. The Sikar district was at forefront of backing the agitating farmers and the Agnipath Scheme that snatched the BJP's victory. With 79% of rural population, farming as a major occupation, the constituency that comprises Sikar and part of Jaipur Districts, raised its voice in support of Minimum Support Price (MSP) for the farmers and loan waiver. The Jat community, a dominant in the district voted BJP in 2019 election and this time they shifted their support to Mr. Amraram, a Jat who was vocal in support of agrarian community. The district is considered as one among in sending a maximum number of its youth to the Indian Army, the Agnipath scheme was not a welcome offer and it hurt the BJP's candidate. The alliance was successful to convince the voters that their interests would be served better if they vote against the ruling party.

IN South Rajasthan the BAP won three assembly seats in 2023 elections and continued its victory in the lone seat it contested. Its candidate Mr. Raj Kumar Roat, won from Banswara Lok Sabha constituency with a margin of nearly 2.5 lakhs over Mr. Mahendrajeet Singh Malavia of BJP. The constituency comprises the districts of Dungarpur and Banswara with eight tribal reserved assembly segments have been raising voices in support of tribal identity, the formation of Bhil Pradesh and the enhancement of their representation (The Hindu, 2024). In the assembly elections, BAP won Aspur, Chorasi and Dhariawad with the last two comprising in the Banswara Lok Sabha Constituency. Mr.

Roat incidentally defeated INC rebel Mr. Arvind Sita Damor too where the Congress partymen openly supported the BAP candidate. Mr. Malvia shifted his loyalty from Congress, which didn't go well with the voters. In addition, consistent appeal for the welfare of the tribals by BAP for raising nutritional standards, unemployment and increase for the reservation had a positive impact on the public. Even the Bagidora by poll was won by Mr. Jai Kishan Patel of BAP by over 50,000 votes asserted tribal importance in the State. Out of three ST reserved seats, BAP, INC and BJP shared the honors reflecting the support lost to the latter. In 2019, all three were won by BJP.

The Nagaur seat, predominantly Jat dominates with 18.75% voter population and witnessed a fight between two of its contests from the same caste. Mrs. Jyoti Mirdha once a Congressite turned to BJP for 2023 elections and Mr. Hanuman Beniwal was previously associated with the saffron party till 2018 and formed RLTP after his expulsion from BJP. In 2019, Mrs. Jyoti Mirdha was in INC and Hanuman Beniwal who won the election had BJP backing (Iqbal, 2024). This is the only seat in the State where BJP had an understanding with RLTP. In 2024, the scene was reversed as Mrs. Jyoti Mirdha defected to the ruling party before assembly polls and contested on a BJP ticket in the assembly as well as Lok Sabha, which she lost both. In 2024, Mr. Hanuman Beniwal was in alliance with INC and defeated the BJP candidate by a surplus of 42,225 votes and the disparity in vote share between them is 3.41%.

At the outset, the Jat caste supported INC in every election and Mrs. Jyoti Mirdha's grandfather Mr. Nathu Ram Mirdha was a freedom fighter and one of the most popular leader of Rajasthan, represented Lok Sabha six times as a Congress representative. In addition to the MSP and loan waiver issues, the wrestler's agitation against Mr. Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh added fuel to the community's discontent. As the majority of the wrestlers who protested were Jats, the voters were convinced that the BJP was against them and if the party won, they would have to struggle for their interests. Even, Mrs. Mirdha wearing saffron robes didn't go well within the caste.

There was an allegation against the Vice President of India Mr. Jagdeep Dhankar on his frequent visits to Jat dominated constituencies on one pretext or the other to influence the community. His visits in a social gathering or a cultural engagement drew flak by the opposition before assembly election that he is gathering Jat favoritism towards the BJP. The actions of august office brought discontentment among the non-jat voters towards the party. On the other hand, RLTP successfully

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garnered the support extended by INC which continued the upper hand that gained in the assembly elections as INC's Mr. Harendra Mirdha defeated Mrs. Jyoti Mirdha by a margin of 14,620 votes. Besides, the mandate was swayed by Mr. Beniwal's appeal against BJP's involvement in electoral bond corruption. The constituency being caste sensitive, the Jats were influential in defeating BJP.

### **BJP's Fiasco**

The poll analysts are convinced that BJP's loss is more impactful to Congress's gain in their sojourn to win the elections. The saffron party with vigor to gain 400 seats in the lower house coined *Abki baar 400 par* (claimed as public coined the word) triumphed in 14 seats only. Why the BJP couldn't record a decisive victory in 2024 and fail to achieve a clean sweep as anticipated?

In the past, the BJP in power at the Centre and the State at the same time witnessed a Lok Sabha poll fray with its CM performing a vital role and acting as visible face of the party in appealing the voters. Post assembly elections in November 2023, party's high command sprang a surprise and brought newcomer and first time MLA Mr. Bhajan Lal Sharma as the CM by sidelining former CM Mrs. Vasundhara Raje, a charismatic leader. A sense of discontent spread among her supporters and the party workers who favour her to be the CM of the state. With the new entrant weak to handle the Lok Sabha elections, poor performance in the last six months with no major welfare policies, extra involvement of party's central leadership and inner party feud plummeted the seats and the vote share in the State. The double engine sarkar promised more and delivered less causing dissatisfaction among the public.

The BJP high command Ignored Mrs. Raje by not offering her the CM post was to thwart her from becoming a power center in the state. The Rajputs were annoyed as their community was not offered the premier post. In addition, they were also unhappy as the State government led by BJP didn't extend enough support after the killing of Mr. Sukhdev Singh Gogamedi. Mrs. Raje associated with the Jats from her estranged husband's side as he comes from the caste and sidelining former State BJP President Mr. Satish Poonia without giving any special responsibility in the elections added fuel to the fire among the Jat voters. When Mrs. Raje was sidelined, leaders aspiring to become CM from Yadav among OBCs and SC community felt displeased.

The Meena community which constitutes 7% of the approximately 14% of State's tribal population was dissatisfied when their leader and senior MLA Mr. Kirodi Lal Meena was not made CM and was given insignificant ministry compared to his stature. The caste mostly resides in Dausa, Karauli, Bharatpur, Sawai Madhopur, Kota, Udaipur and Jaipur districts. Except for Jaipur and Jaipur Rural seats, in remaining constituencies Dausa, Karauli-Dholpur, Tonk-Sawai Madhopur and Bharathpur the BJP lost. The last seat belongs to the CM and he couldn't secure a victory for the party.

The Congress jibe against a tripartite understanding involving the Centre between Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh on the Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project (ERCP) now called as Parvati-Kalisindh-Chambal Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project (PKC-ERCP) went well among the voters of eastern Rajasthan (PTI, 2024). The Congress alleged the project would be beneficial to the neighboring state and hurt the State farmers' interests affecting the voting in the eastern districts of Dausa, Karauli-Dholpur, Tonk Sawai-Madhopur, Bharatpur and paving for BJP's loss in these constituencies.

The Rajasthan BJP banked on the charisma of Prime Minister more compared to the local leadership. The credit of winning 14 seats goes to the PM and the Star campaigners from the Centre. With Mrs. Raje confined to Jhalawar-Baran constituency, inexperience and internal squabbles in the State unit and partymen discontent against Mrs. Raje not becoming the CM overshadowed the PM's popularity and ultimately cost the party in losing the seats.

### **Congress's Passable Torpor**

Compared to zero balance in the last two poll expeditions, the INC improved its tally of seats, yet inadequate to gain ascendancy. In 2024, Congress can boast of sending eight elected members to the lower house of parliament. In his appeal to the voters, the outgoing Chief Minister Mr. Ashok Gehlot, asserted the party will win double digit seats and INDIA bloc government will form with *Winds of Change* swinging towards the alliance (PTI, 2024). Why the grand old party could secure only 8 seats out of 22 it contested and stood at a distance to its expectations? Congress appeal to initiate for caste census for the nation, Rahul Gandhi's persevered Bharath Jodo Yatra, and Constitutional trepidation could hardly capture public attention. What reasons can the party take note of as conclusions for its failure to defeat the ruling party in Rajasthan?

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Electoral debacles have a preponderance of causal effect than instantaneous actions of the parties. The Congress party's past regime in the assembly was engulfed in corruption charges, paper leaks in competitive exams and internal squabbles. The ₹ 2.31 crore in cash and one kilogram weighed gold were seized from a locked almirah in Yojana Bhavan, a government building (PTI, 2023). Months before the assembly polls in May 2023, much to the party's embarrassment, Sanik Kalyan Minister Mr. Rajendra Singh Gudha barbed the government by alleging that corruption has surpassed the 40% mark (A poll criticism against the BJP government in Karnataka elections as 40% commission government) and broke the record. Another allegation on minister Mr. Mahesh Joshi's involvement in Jal Jeevan Mission scandal of ₹ 1000 crore made the party unpopular among the voters and gave leverage to the BJP.

Internal Squabbles between former CM and his former deputy Mr. Sachin Pilot dented the party's image in the public. The party was hallowing in unity having two factions one led by Mr. Gehlot and the other by Mr. Pilot traded allegations of favouritism in ticket distribution during the Lok Sabha election. Though the central leadership tried to bury the visible patches in the party, many appeared larger in size than those that they buried. With Mr. Gehlot's domination supported by President, Pradesh Congress Committee Mr. Govind Singh Dotasra and State Party incharge S.S. Randhwa, continuing over all the constituencies Mr. Pilot was sidelined and his influence was felt only in a few seats.

The fateful event occurred on 25 September 2022 of the mass resignation of 82 Congress MLAs in favouring Mr. Gehlot against Mr. Pilot becoming CM sent a message to the voters that the party central leadership and Rajasthan Congress have no cordial terms. The MLAs loyal to incumbent CM didn't turn up to meet the party observers Mr. Mallikharjun Kharge and Mr. Ajay Maken sent by party President Mrs. Sonia Gandhi. The no show of MLAs struck a blow to the image of the leaders among the voters. With no unity within the cadre, public thought of Congress as not an altogether alternative to BJP.

The National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) brought a report on the State standing on top accounting for 5399 rape cases in the year 2022 (ETV Bharath, 2023). The State registered third in the country for the highest number of crimes against women and BJP traded allegations that women are unsafe under Congress government developing a sense of discontent among the Rajasthan public. The Congress Manifesto of promising a caste census once they formed the government at the Centre alienated the voters of the general and unreserved category who feared

the social strata enumeration would exhaust their meager public employment opportunities.

## Conclusion

The public mandate 2024 in Rajasthan was a see-saw voter opinion on both the national parties. Though one can hardly draw a conclusion having uniform reason, the divided mandate foiled the BJP's hopes of government formation with the sole majority and gaining ascendancy. With the loss of seats, the BJP reluctantly entered the coalition network sharing power with regional political parties. The voter's decision was rationale in out rightly rejecting preference to single party and delivering a balanced mandate in ensuring representative democracy. Equilibrium in elected members from multi party will prevent any party becoming authoritarian. Finally, the political parties learned the voters' potentiality in deciding their destiny.

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