

# India's opposition in disarray after BJP's Delhi victory

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The exit polls for the National Capital Territory of Delhi elections on 5 February 2025 correctly predicted a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) victory. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), confident in a win based on its development agenda, faced BJP's campaign — driven by anti-incumbency and corruption allegations against AAP leadership. But Delhi's election outcome was shaped by a hardline campaign and modern strategies rather than being a reflection of electoral fervour.

Corruption allegations relating to the Delhi government's privatisation of liquor retailing in the city, and extravagant expenditures at the Chief Minister's residence, damaged the AAP's credibility. These issues led to a nearly 10 per cent decline in its vote share — 43.8 per cent — while the BJP's share rose by 7.3 per cent to 45.8 per cent.

Delhi, with a per capita income of Rs 461,910 (US\$5319) in 2023–2024, exemplifies how economic stratification influences electoral outcomes. Wealthier neighbourhoods in South Delhi largely backed the BJP, while East Delhi displayed mixed voting patterns. The AAP retained its dominance in North Delhi, emphasising localised political loyalties.

The working and lower-middle-class voters in Outer and East Delhi backed the AAP, prioritising unemployment and inflation. Middle and upper-class voters favoured the BJP, with 76 per cent citing corruption and 59 per cent prioritising development.

The AAP's performance in lower-income constituencies declined by 8.2 percentage points, with a 12-point drop in affluent areas. The BJP's victory underscored the opposition's weakness — the AAP's national expansion diluted its once-dominant Delhi focus, making it vulnerable to corruption charges.

Despite the BJP's control over Delhi's administrative machinery through the Lieutenant Governor's office — which frequently obstructed AAP government initiatives — the BJP successfully showcased governance issues as administrative oversight rather than political obstruction. Corruption issues were given more media attention than problems with structural governance and the AAP did not adequately explain how these administrative roadblocks hindered service delivery.

Ultimately, the people regarded alleged corruption as a higher priority than governance mechanisms, demonstrating how short-term scandals can obscure long-term problems.

The BJP's own record of corruption and its attacks against the AAP starkly contradict each other. BJP allegations against the former AAP Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal gained popularity, despite BJP lawmakers also facing corruption charges. The campaigns against the AAP, especially the liquor policy and Sheesh Mahal scandals, resulted in people having tangible examples of corruption.

Kejriwal and other leaders' imprisonments also harmed the AAP's anti-corruption narrative. The middle-class voters who once formed the AAP's core voter base received the allegations well, suggesting that people view corruption in context rather than in comparison.

The AAP's national expansion diverted a previously uniform focus on Delhi. This weakness was successfully used by the BJP to its own advantage. The AAP's leadership was forced to shift attention from Delhi to different states. This strained financial and human resources, with leaders having to divide their time between different states. Kejriwal himself spent significant time outside Delhi, lengthening the decision-making process and making government less responsive. The BJP made AAP's strength into a liability, painting the party as ambitious yet unfocused — and raising doubts about whether Delhi was still a top priority.

The 2025 elections highlighted the opposition's failure to counter the BJP's electoral machinery. Despite anti-incumbency sentiment, opposition parties lacked compelling counter-narratives.

The divided multi-party Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance, which aimed to collectively oppose the BJP's electoral machinery, now confronts an existential crisis. Uniting only behind an anti-BJP logic will be insufficient — opposition parties require a persuasive vision that appeals to a broader voter base. In the absence of internal changes, improved coordination and a total overhaul of their political narratives, opposition parties may become onlookers.

In Delhi, the BJP presented itself as the only option against the AAP's inadequacies, pledging to enhance urban infrastructure, enforce laws more rigorously and provide a much-needed boost to Delhi's economy.

The BJP's use of technology, social media and digital outreach also had a significant influence on the elections. The BJP's ability to utilise data-driven campaign methods, micro-target constituents and customise messaging for various locations significantly influenced indecisive voters. In contrast, the opposition depended on conventional campaigning methods and was unable to engage the electorate in a dynamic and personalised manner.

The AAP and Congress have traditionally depended on the politics of subsidies and welfare initiatives to maintain their electoral support. But the BJP has shown that a combination of welfare initiatives and a development-focused government was more appealing to voters. The BJP's commitment to improved infrastructure, smart city projects and optimised business ecosystems appealed to voters desiring economic and social stability.

The 2025 elections have shown that Indian politics transcends regional conflicts — evolving into a broader ideological struggle where the government, public perception and strategic alliances determine victory. Without recognising this reality, the opposition will be unable to overcome this electoral defeat.

With no major assembly elections in the near future, the opposition must reassess its strategies to counter the BJP in the 2029 general elections. A revised, progressive strategy is essential. Whether the opposition will learn from these lessons remains an open question — the opposition's response to this defeat will influence India's political track for the upcoming decade and beyond.

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