

Insight into the Rajya Sabha Elections 2022

- Julian Paul Leon Knappe

On June 10th, 2022, polls for 57 Rajya Sabha seats, spread across 15 states, were held. In 11 of the 15 states, the results of the elections were all but predetermined as there were no opposing candidates.ⁱ Only in four states – Maharashtra (6 Seats), Rajasthan (4 Seats), Karnataka (4 Seats) and Haryana (2 Seats) – the election outcome was still indeterminate.

The Rajya Sabha, the Council of States, is the upper house in India's bicameral parliamentary system. Together with the Lok Sabha, the first chamber of the Indian parliament, it forms the Parliament of India. The members of the Rajya Sabha are elected indirectly by the State Legislatures and some Union Territories. A few members are also directly appointed by the Indian President, Shri Ram Nath Kovind.

But why are the elections of the Rajya Sabha so crucial?

Firstly, the Rajya Sabha is a review body that provides oversight of the laws passed by the Parliament. It also enjoys near parity status with the Lok Sabha as far as the legislative process is concerned.ⁱⁱ This legislative power gives the Rajya Sabha a status that is on par with the Lok Sabha and provides the possibility for parties to actively influence legislation.

Secondly, the Union Government cannot pass any law on issues reserved for the States (listed under the State list; the other lists are Union and Concurrent lists) without authorization from the Rajya Sabha.ⁱⁱⁱ Therefore, it represents an important organ to impact legislations pertaining to States. In order to influence for example topics regarding public order, the prison-system and public health, parties aim to increase the number of their members within the Rajya Sabha.

Thirdly, it should be noted that with a two-thirds majority, the Rajya Sabha is able to empower the government to provide more all-India services, applicable to both the Union and the states.^{iv} This can be seen as an important tool to quickly make standardised decisions nationally, especially in times of crisis. Last but not least, in addition to the state representatives and the members of the Lok Sabha, the delegates of the Rajya Sabha are part of the electoral college for the presidential elections. Hence the Rajya Sabha elections could impact the presidential elections. However due to the strength of the BJP-led alliance, it seems certain that their candidate – who still has to be nominated – will move into the Raisina Hill located Rashtrapati Bhavan. Ahead of the presidential elections, the Rajya Sabha results can act as a morale booster for the ruling alliance.^v Additionally, the elections are an indicator of the direction the political winds are blowing in the states of Karnataka, Haryana, Maharashtra and Rajasthan.^{vi}

In case of Maharashtra and Haryana, the vote count went on until after midnight. By winning an extra seat in Karnataka and Haryana, the BJP sprung a surprise coup.^{vii} In Karnataka the BJP was able to acquire the missing votes, to win their third seat in the state. The BJP were guaranteed two seats with their 120 Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), another 15 were required to meet the target of 45 votes to gain a third seat. In Haryana, the BJP supported its second nominee, independent candidate Kartikeya Sharma, who outwitted Congress candidate Ajay Maken by a wafer-thin margin.^{viii} Previously the Congress had falsely tweeted

that their candidate Ajay Maken, had won the Rajya Sabha election.^{ix} The short-lived victory celebration was later blamed on miscommunication.

The BJP was also victorious in Maharashtra, where they were able to pouch 3 of the 6 seats. With its own MLA votes, the BJP would have only been able to win 2 seats. However, independent MLAs as well as smaller parties had announced in advance that they would support the BJP's candidate. With their help, the BJP was able to generate the missing 19 votes to win the third seat. Only in the state of Rajasthan, the BJP suffered a loss. Here the BJP was unable to get the independent candidate – media baron Subhash Chandra – elected.^x Even though the BJP promised him the 30 remaining votes, Subhash Chandra came up short of the required 41 votes, because none of the Congress Members cross voted as expected beforehand. Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot of the Congress Party ensured that all his MLAs voted as per plan,^{xi} making the Congress win 3 of the 4 seats in Rajasthan.

The response across media landscape was relatively unambiguous. On one hand the BJP is displayed as the clear winner of the elections thus gaining tailwind for the upcoming presidential elections. On the other hand, the Congress Party has suffered yet another political setback. Furthermore, BJP's win in Maharashtra is considered a major blow for the ruling alliance of Shiv Sena, NCP and Congress.^{xii}

After an impressive demonstration of power, the BJP looks ahead to the presidential election with confidence in victory for its presidential nomination. On July 18th an electoral college of around 10.86 lakh votes will determine India's next president. The BJP-led alliance is estimated to have close to 50 percent of votes and expects non-aligned regional parties like the Yuvajana Shramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP) and Biju Janata Dal (BJD) to support their candidate.^{xiii}

Overall, the Rajya Sabha elections have once again underlined the clout and power of the BJP. Looking ahead, it would certainly appear that the largest democracy will continue on its Modi-led trajectory of governance in the years to come at least till 2024.

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- ⁱ The Hindu (2022). “Beyond the numbers: On the Rajya Sabha elections”. Online: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/beyond-the-numbers/article65523693.ece>
- ⁱⁱ Times of India (2022a). “Explained: Why Rajya Sabha elections are important”. Online: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/explained-why-rajya-sabha-elections-are-important/articleshow/92126904.cms>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Times of India (2022a). Explained: “Why Rajya Sabha elections are important”. Online: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/explained-why-rajya-sabha-elections-are-important/articleshow/92126904.cms>
- ^{iv} Times of India (2022a). Explained: “Why Rajya Sabha elections are important”. Online: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/explained-why-rajya-sabha-elections-are-important/articleshow/92126904.cms>
- ^v PTI (2022). “Ahead of President election, Rajya Sabha poll result boost for BJP”. Online: <https://theprint.in/india/ahead-of-president-election-rajya-sabha-poll-result-boost-for-bjp/992604/>
- ^{vi} The Hindu (2022). “Beyond the numbers: On the Rajya Sabha elections”. Online: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/beyond-the-numbers/article65523693.ece>
- ^{vii} Times of India (2022b). “Rajya Sabha elections 2022: How BJP surprised opponents in 3 states, got 9 seats in kitty”. Online: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/videos/toi-original/rajya-sabha-elections-2022-how-bjp-surprised-opponents-in-3-states-got-9-seats-in-kitty/videoshow/92151210.cms>
- ^{viii} Times of India (2022b). “Rajya Sabha elections 2022: How BJP surprised opponents in 3 states, got 9 seats in kitty”. Online: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/videos/toi-original/rajya-sabha-elections-2022-how-bjp-surprised-opponents-in-3-states-got-9-seats-in-kitty/videoshow/92151210.cms>
- ^{ix} Debanish Achom (2022). “After Celebration, Congress Says Ajay Maken Lost To BJP-Backed Media Baron”. Online: <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/rajya-sabha-elections-congress-wins-seat-in-haryana-beats-bjp-backed-media-baron-3057328>
- ^x Times of India (2022b). “Rajya Sabha elections 2022: How BJP surprised opponents in 3 states, got 9 seats in kitty”. Online: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/videos/toi-original/rajya-sabha-elections-2022-how-bjp-surprised-opponents-in-3-states-got-9-seats-in-kitty/videoshow/92151210.cms>
- ^{xi} Times of India (2022b). “Rajya Sabha elections 2022: How BJP surprised opponents in 3 states, got 9 seats in kitty”. Online: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/videos/toi-original/rajya-sabha-elections-2022-how-bjp-surprised-opponents-in-3-states-got-9-seats-in-kitty/videoshow/92151210.cms>
- ^{xii} News18 (2022). “Maharashtra: BJP wins 3 of 6 Rajya Sabha seats in major setback to ruling Sena-NCP-Cong alliance”. Online: <https://www.news18.com/news/politics/rajya-sabha-election-live-updates-results-2022-rajasthan-haryana-karnataka-maharashtra-bjp-congress-livenews-5343607.html#138319>
- ^{xiii} Economic Times (2022c). “Ahead of the President election, Rajya Sabha poll result boost for BJP”. Online: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/ahead-of-president-election-rajya-sabha-poll-result-boost-for-bjp/articleshow/92145479.cms>

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