

The 2024 Indian general election III: Indian-Pakistani relations

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In the third part of our series, we turn to the ever-fraught relationship between India and Pakistan.



Picture credit: Dawn.com

Introduction

2024 marks the election year in both neighboring countries, raising hopes for a potential thaw in relations between the archrival neighbors, particularly with new faces at the helm. However, such expectations may not materialize, as PM Modi is inching closer to his third time premiership with BJP emerging as the single largest party winning 240 seats out of 543 in the recent elections. This is largely attributed to the meticulous use of Hindu nationalism as a tool that appeals to the majority of Indian people. Approximately 80% of the

voters identify as Hindus. Therefore, Hindu nationalism played a crucial role in formulating political election preferences. Nonetheless, the BJP-led coalition, [National Democratic Alliance](#) (NDA) won 293 seats. On the other hand, the Congress-led Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) managed to secure 232 seats, much more than expected by the [exit polls](#) and experts. This is mainly the result of their pro-poor agenda, promising more opportunities for youth, women, and farmers, and also highlighting the fact that how BJP government in the last two terms has made India less democratic and less tolerant towards non-Hindu religious minorities.

The view from Islamabad

Within the political and diplomatic circles of Islamabad, the recent Indian election results, with BJP winning, are not viewed as something very promising for bilateral relations in particular and regional stability in general. That is because BJP is known for its hard stance against Pakistan, which sells very well to the majority of Hindus. The whole ideology of the BJP is based on [Hindutva](#), “a political ideology encompassing the cultural justification of Hindu nationalism and the belief in establishing Hindu hegemony within India”. The Guardians report that India has been involved in the extrajudicial killing of 20 people inside Pakistan since 2020, the 2019 airstrikes, and the 2019 [revocation of the special autonomous status of Jammu and Kashmir](#), making it clear that India is in no mood to mend relations with Pakistan soon. On the other hand, there is hope in Islamabad that a Congress-led government in power, owing to its comparatively better democratic and secular credentials, might bring a thaw in bilateral relations after a decade of estrangement. Nonetheless, the presence of robust opposition led by Congress is perceived as positive news in Pakistan. This will result in a moderate and balanced decision-making process in India.

Furthermore, some [experts](#) believe that, since the 1999 Kargil conflict, there has been an unspoken agreement among Indian political elites that India will not have meaningful relations with Pakistan’s civilian leadership. Whether it is Congress or the BJP Government. There is a general belief among the Indian leadership that the power imbalance in between the civilian and military leadership in Pakistan, with a [tilt towards the military](#), makes it useless to engage with the civilian government. Therefore, whichever party comes into power in India is unlikely to engage with Pakistan seriously. Under the Modi government,

India consistently followed an exclusionary policy towards Pakistan. This is because they do not have any incentive to engage with Pakistan. There is no respite for Indian-Pakistan relations, irrespective of the election results.

Unless Pakistan unequivocally demonstrates a commitment to addressing India's concerns regarding terrorism and expresses willingness to engage in dialogue without the Kashmir issue dominating the agenda, prospects for positive developments in bilateral relations appear limited under the next Indian government. Given India's current reluctance to entertain gestures of reconciliation from Pakistan, the onus is on Pakistan to adopt a patient approach and observe whether India demonstrates any inclination toward constructive engagement. In the event of such a positive outcome from India, Pakistan should reciprocate accordingly, fostering a conducive environment for dialogue and cooperation between the two nations.

Conclusion

Nevertheless, the author believes that avenues such as bilateral trade, people-to-people contact, religious tourism, and cooperation on climate change issues could serve as potential areas for fostering bilateral relations. Such steps may ultimately pave the way for broader forums of bilateral dialogue to ensure peace and stability in the region.

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