

WINNING FORMULA: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON BJP'S STRATEGY

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The Bharatiya Janata Party's [victory in Gujarat](#) eclipses its [loss in Himachal Pradesh](#): not only is Gujarat a bigger State, but the scale of the party's sweep in the western State also overshadows its narrow loss in the hill State. For the Congress, its [victory in Himachal Pradesh is meagre consolation](#) against the backdrop of its decimation in Gujarat where it had to be content with 17 of the 182 Assembly seats, as compared to 77 in 2017. With another five-year term now, the BJP will rule Gujarat for 32 years, almost matching the Left Front's 34-year rule in West Bengal that [ended in 2011](#). The BJP increased its vote share, from 49% in 2017 to 53% now. AAP finished a distant third in Gujarat, but its furious foray into the State gained it a 13% voteshare, and also [national party status](#). AAP's entry triangulated the Gujarat contest, which worked to the BJP's advantage. The BJP made inroads into tribal regions and rural constituencies which constituted patches of the Congress's strength, after AAP's generous promise of welfare schemes succeeded in seeding a new kind of class politics in the State. It was Prime Minister Narendra Modi leading the campaign all the way for the BJP, and his popularity, which was unlinked to the performance of the State government, helped power the BJP to a historic victory.

The Himachal Pradesh outcome is instructive of the latent anti-incumbency that the BJP faces, and the Opposition's occasional capacity to harness it. The Congress ran a sedate campaign in both States. In Gujarat it did not work at all for the party, but in Himachal Pradesh, it did because of the anti-incumbency factor. In Gujarat, the combined vote share of Congress and AAP hovers around 40% — less than the Congress's alone in 2017. In Himachal Pradesh, Mr. Modi's extensive campaigning was not enough. In Gujarat, the BJP had pulled out all the stops after it [faced setbacks in 2017](#), while the [Congress has lost steam](#) since then. With renewed vigour, AAP will now try expanding to new territories, potentially muddying the waters for the Opposition, and aligning with the BJP's Hindutva ideology. The outcomes of Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh demonstrate that the [BJP's status as the hegemon remains unchallenged](#) in Indian politics, Mr. Modi is more popular than his party, and the Opposition is unable to create the politics or programmes that can challenge the BJP. While the BJP has a universal formula that is largely successful across regions, the opposition to it can sustain only with State-specific strategies.

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