

Something positive for religious minorities in India

Modi's party suffers crushing defeat in Delhi elections. Religious minorities applaud landslide victory of Kejriwal's anti-corruption party



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's all-conquering Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was brushed aside in Delhi state elections on Tuesday with anti-corruption campaigner Arvind Kejriwal's party winning by a landslide.

In an initial tally, the Aam Admi Party (AAP) won or was leading 66 of the 70 seats in the Delhi Assembly, while Modi's BJP took only three seats despite the prime minister personally leading his party's election campaign in the capital.

The Congress party, which had ruled Delhi for 15 years up to 2013, failed to win a single seat.

"Delhi has voted against the negative politics of the BJP and the Congress," leading AAP figure leader Sanjay Singh told ucanews.com.

"The people of Delhi have taken the lead in introducing a new style of politics. We will meet people's expectations. This mandate will bring in change to national politics," he said.

Kejriwal, a former civil servant who is tipped to become chief minister, said he will be a politician "for all" and will focus on fighting corruption.

He formed the AAP two years ago after a popular anti-corruption campaign failed to gain political support.

The party made an impressive first outing in Delhi elections in 2013, winning 28 seats.

Kejriwal, with the help of Congress, formed a government, but he quit as first minister last year after his anti-corruption bill was shot down.

During his campaign, Kejriwal apologized for hastily resigning. His party members, most of them first time politicians, also campaigned on a platform of transparency and clean politics.

"These elections will go down in history as a turning point — a game-changer," said AAP spokesman and former journalist Ashutosh, in a column published on a news site today.

This proved clean and affordable politics is possible, he said, adding that the AAP won by having the moral edge over its opponents despite not having the same resources as the BJP and Congress.

Indians "are fed up with traditional politics of money power, muscle power and manipulation. They are looking for an alternative," Ashutosh said.

AAP's spectacular victory "will start a new alignment of forces; a new dawn has appeared. The common man can now afford to enter politics and succeed. It will no longer be a game played only by scoundrels," he said.

Opponents of the BJP saw the election results as a damning assessment of Modi and his policies.

The vote in Delhi is "against a communal brand of politics" and the "re-conversion" of Christians which the BJP supports, said KC Tyagi of the Janata Dal United party.

His view was echoed by Christian leaders, who say the BJP's landslide victory in national elections last May and gains in state polls since then has emboldened Hindu fanatics, sparking a wave of violence against religious minorities such as Christians and Muslims.

According to a report released recently by the Mumbai-based Catholic Secular Forum, "thousands of Muslims and Christians were forcefully reconverted in the last year while Christians experienced 120 attacks on their people and institutions.

More than 7,000 faced threats, the report also said.

"This APP victory in its wake will bring greater security to religious minorities in general and Christians in particular. It will also strengthen people's faith in India's secular and democratic system," said Father Dominic Emmanuel, a political observer and Delhi archdiocese spokesman.

"It's a major breakthrough for the country's politics," he said.

Samuel Jayakumar, a member of the National Council of Churches in India, said the APP victory is a "clear message for the Modi government on how it had been treating minorities".

BJP leaders, including Modi, failed to condemn a spate of recent attacks on Christians and churches in Delhi and elsewhere.

Their decision not to speak out against the attacks had a significant impact on the election results, Jayakumar said.

Vijayesh Lal, secretary of the United Christian Forum, said it was "a clear message that there is no place for sectarian and narrow politics in India".

The kind of politics BJP "plays in is not viable in the country;" he said.

"You cannot oppress minorities and get away with it," he added.

Additional reporting by AFP

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