

A voter at the ballot boxes, 1952.
Photo Division, Govt. of India (public domain)

75 Years of Voting in Independent India

Lok Sabha elections, 1951–52 to 2024

CPRG CENTER OF POLICY RESEARCH AND GOVERNANCE

Timeline, 1950–2024

● General election ○ Other milestone

1950 ○ **Election Commission set up**
25 January. Marked as National Voters' Day since 2011.

1951–52 ● **1st General Election**
Polling begins on 25 October 1951 in Himachal Pradesh and ends in February 1952. 17.3 crore electors, 489 seats, turnout 45.7%.

1957 ● **2nd General Election**
19.4 crore electors. Turnout 47.7%. 42 independents are elected, the most at any general election.

1961 ○ **Two-member constituencies abolished**
From 1962, every Lok Sabha constituency elects one member.

1962 ● **3rd General Election**
21.6 crore electors. Turnout 55.4%.

1967 ● **4th General Election**
The electorate crosses 25 crore. Turnout 61.0%.

1971 ● **5th General Election**
27.4 crore electors. Turnout 55.3%.

1977 ● **6th General Election**
32.1 crore electors and 543 seats. Turnout 60.5%.

1980 ● **7th General Election**
35.6 crore electors. Turnout 56.9%.

1982 ○ **First use of an electronic voting machine**
In an assembly by-election at Paravur, Kerala.

1984 ● **8th General Election**
40.0 crore electors. Turnout 64.0%.

1989 ● **9th General Election**
The first with a voting age of 18. Electors rise by about a quarter, to 49.9 crore.

1991 ● **10th General Election**
The electorate crosses 50 crore. Turnout 55.9%. Punjab votes in 1992.

1993 ○ **Photo identity cards for electors**
Electors' Photo Identity Cards (EPIC) are introduced.

1996 ● **11th General Election**
13,952 candidates, the most at any election. The security deposit is raised to ₹10,000 afterwards.

1998 ● **12th General Election**
4,750 candidates, the first election under the higher deposit. Turnout 62.0%.

1999 ● **13th General Election**
62.0 crore electors. Turnout 60.0%.

2004 ● **14th General Election**
EVMs are used at every polling station. 67.1 crore electors.

2009 ● **15th General Election**
71.7 crore electors. Turnout 58.2%.

2013 ○ **NOTA and Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT)**
The Supreme Court directs a "None of the Above" option. VVPAT is first used, at Noksen in Nagaland.

2014 ● **16th General Election**
Turnout rises 8.2 points to 66.4%, the largest increase between two elections. NOTA is on the ballot for the first time.

2019 ● **17th General Election**
The highest turnout so far, 67.4%. Women's turnout (67.2%) passes men's (67.0%). Every EVM has a VVPAT. 78 women are elected.

2023 ○ **Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam**
The 106th Amendment receives assent on 28 September. It takes effect after the next delimitation.

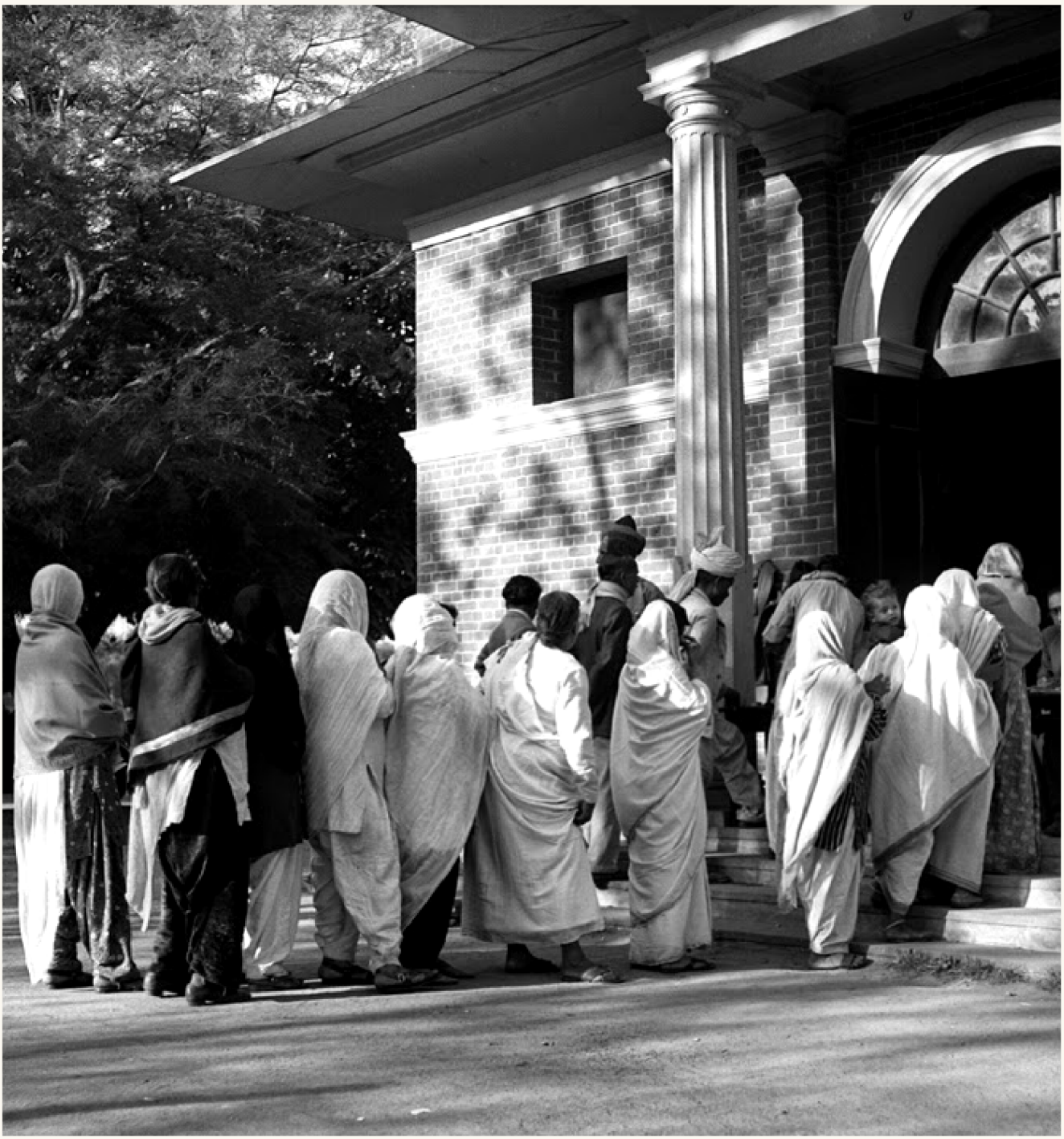
2024 ● **18th General Election**
98.0 crore electors at 10.5 lakh polling stations. Turnout 66.1%.

Introduction

India's first general election began on 25 October 1951, when voters in the hills of Himachal Pradesh went to the polls. The rest of the country voted over the next four months. By February 1952, an electorate of 17.3 crore had elected the 489 members of the first Lok Sabha.

This report covers the eighteen Lok Sabha elections held since then: the size of the electorate, turnout, candidates, parties, women in Parliament and the polling stations that make it all work.

Between 1951-52 and 2024, the electorate grew from 17.3 crore to 98.0 crore and turnout rose from 45.7 to 66.1 per cent. There were 1,96,084 polling stations at the first election and 10,52,664 at the latest. The number of women elected to the Lok Sabha went from 21 to 74.



Women voters wait their turn at a polling station at Modern High School, New Delhi, 1952. Photo: Photo Division, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India (public domain).

The first general election, 1951–52

The Election Commission was set up on 25 January 1950. Less than two years later it held India's first election under universal adult franchise.

There were 17.3 crore electors, 489 Lok Sabha seats, 1,874 candidates and 53 parties. Elections to the state assemblies were held at the same time. Polling began on 25 October 1951 in Himachal Pradesh, and most of the country voted in December and January.

Each polling station had a row of ballot boxes, one per candidate, each marked with the candidate's party symbol. A voter dropped the ballot paper into the box of their choice.

The Commission set up 1,96,084 polling stations. Each was meant to serve about a thousand voters at most, and 27,527 of them were kept for women only. Turnout was 45.7 per cent.



Shyam Saran Negi of Kalpa, Kinnaur, voted in October 1951 and is remembered as independent India's first voter. He voted in every election after that until his death in 2022. Photo: PIB / ECI, 2017 (GODL-India).

> "It would have been impossible for the vast majority of the voters who are illiterate to mark their votes on ballot papers with the names of the contesting candidates printed on them."
>
> Election Commission of India, Report on the First General Elections in India 1951–52 (1955). This is why every candidate had a ballot box with a party symbol on it.



Chief Election Commissioner Sukumar Sen and P.S. Subramaniam, Secretary to the Election Commission, examine sample ballot boxes designed for the election, October 1951.



A polling officer marks a voter's finger with indelible ink before she votes, Delhi, 14 January 1952.

Photographs: Photo Division, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India. 1951: PIB photo archive; 1952

Sources: ECI, Report on the First General Elections in India 1951–52 (1955); ECI Statistical Report 1951; Lok Sabha Secretariat

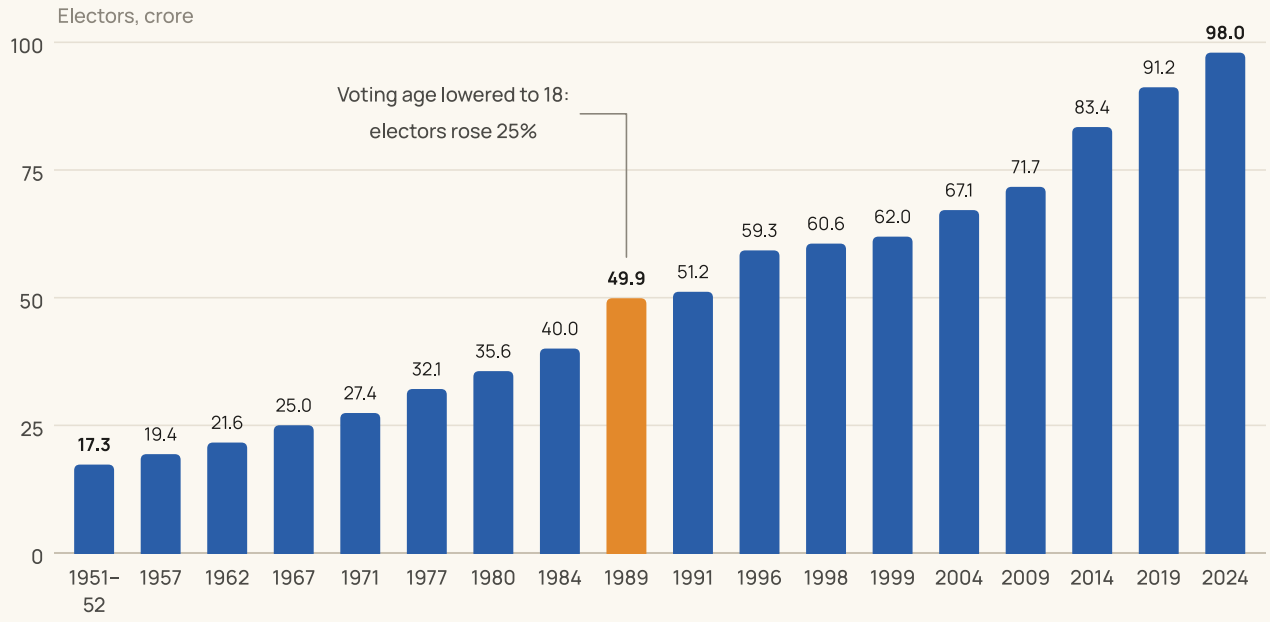
Electors

The electorate grew from 17.3 crore in 1951-52 to 98.0 crore in 2024, about 5.7 times.

The number of registered electors has increased at every general election. It crossed 25 crore in 1967, 50 crore in 1991 and 90 crore in 2019. In 2024, 97.98 crore people were registered to vote for 543 seats.

The biggest jump came in 1989. The Constitution (Sixty-first Amendment) Act, 1988 had lowered the voting age from 21 to 18, and the number of electors rose by about a quarter, from 40.0 crore in 1984 to 49.9 crore.

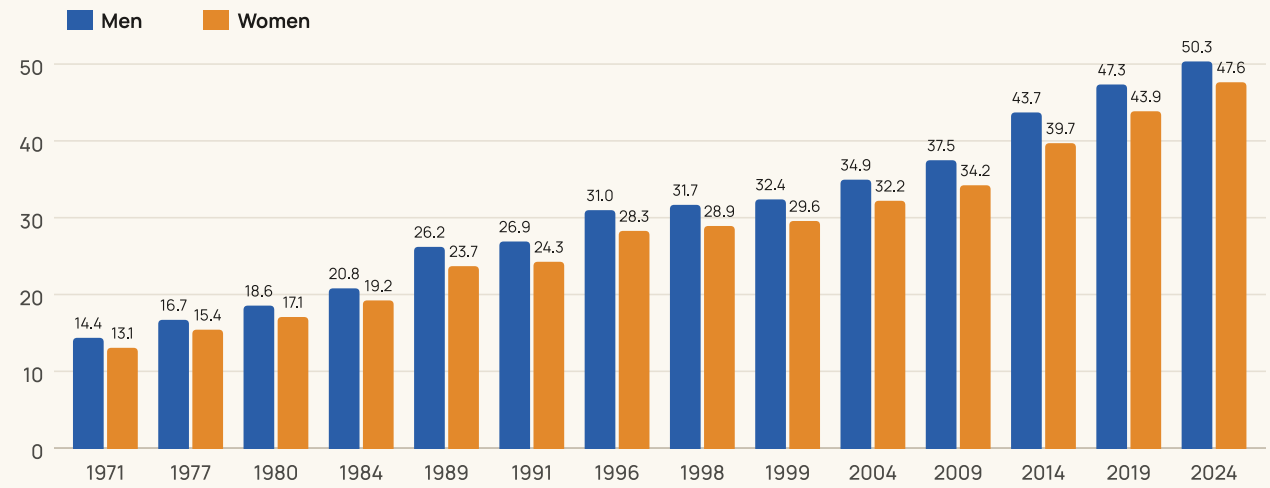
Registered electors at each Lok Sabha general election



Source: ECI, Atlas: General Election to Lok Sabha 2024 (2025), Table T11.1.

Electors by gender, 1971–2024

Crore



Source: ECI Atlas 2024, Annexure II; ECI Statistical Reports 1980, 2004 and 2019 for exact counts. ECI's complete figures by gender start in 1971.

Voter turnout

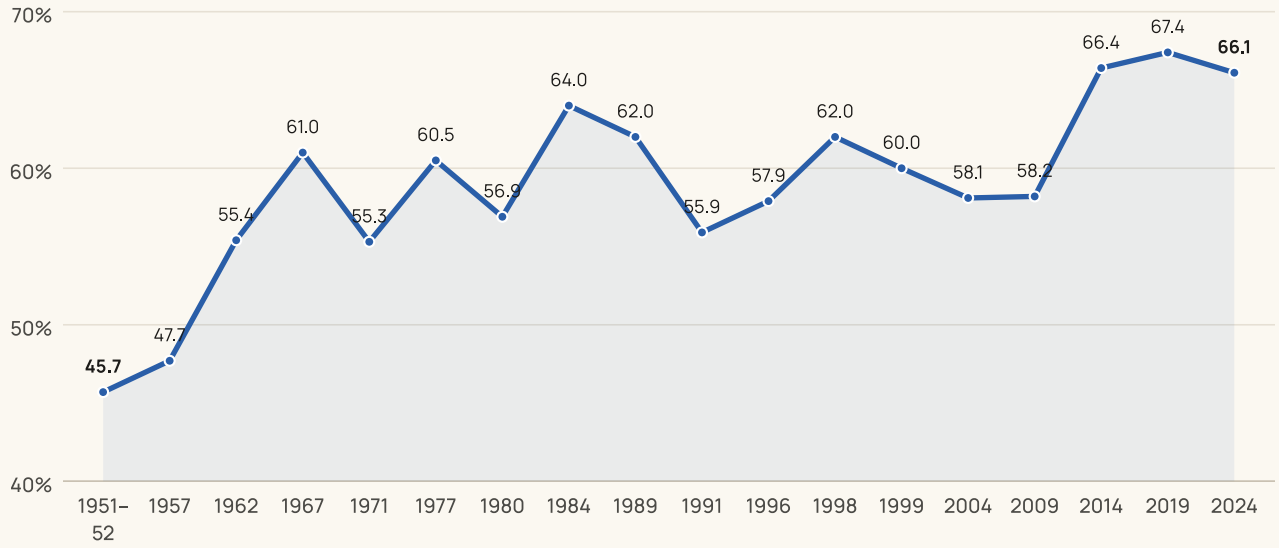
Turnout rose from 45.7 per cent in 1951-52 to 66.1 per cent in 2024. The gap between men and women has closed.

Turnout went up through the 1950s and 1960s, reaching 61.0 per cent in 1967. It was 60.5 per cent in 1977, the first election after the Emergency, and 64.0 per cent in 1984. From 1989 to 2009 it stayed between 56 and 62 per cent.

In 2014 it rose 8.2 points to 66.4 per cent, the largest increase between two elections, and in 2019 it reached 67.4 per cent, the highest so far. In 1971 men voted at a rate 11.8 points higher than women. By 2019 women's turnout had passed men's, and it stayed slightly ahead in 2024.

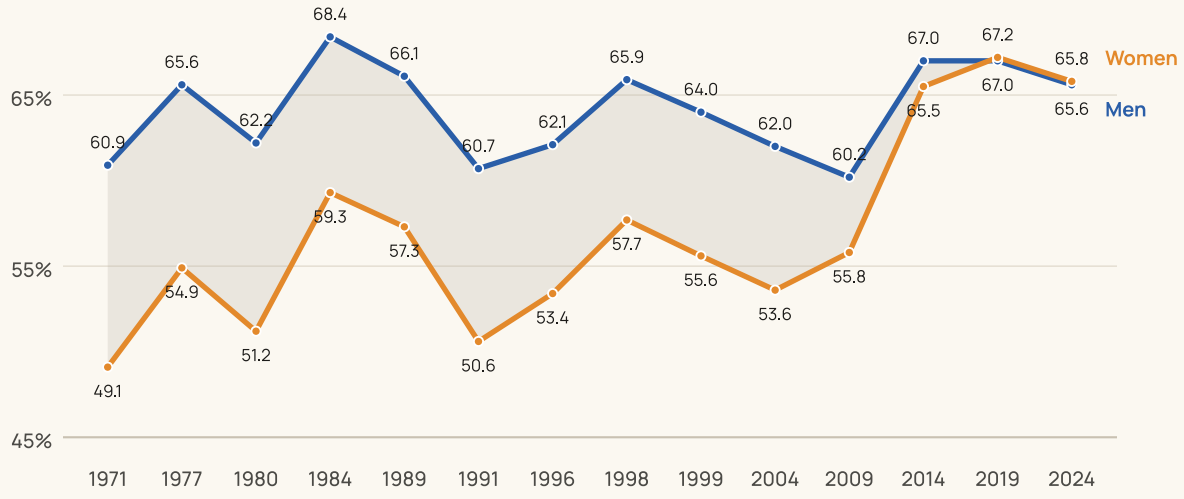
Voter turnout at each Lok Sabha general election

Share of electors who voted, %



Turnout of men and women, 1971–2024

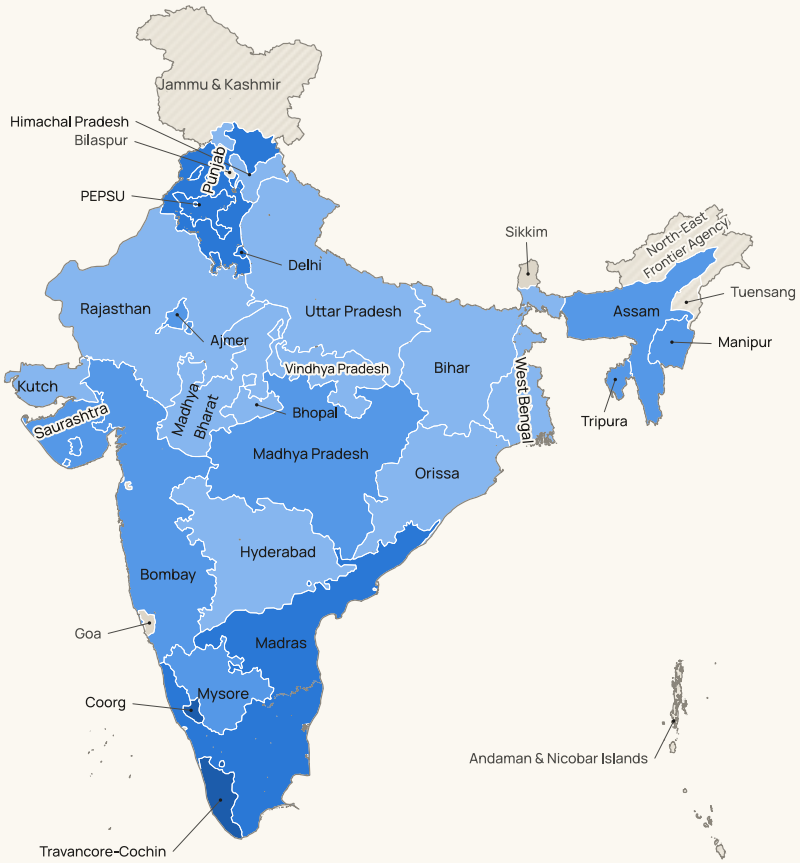
Share of male and female electors who voted, %



Sources: ECI Atlas 2024, Annexures I and II. In 1951-52 and 1957, some constituencies elected two members; turnout for those years is ECI's share of electors who voted. ECI's complete turnout figures by gender start in 1971.

Turnout by state

In 1951-52, 15 of the 25 states that voted had turnout below 50 per cent. In 2024 the lowest figure was 56.3 percent, in Bihar.

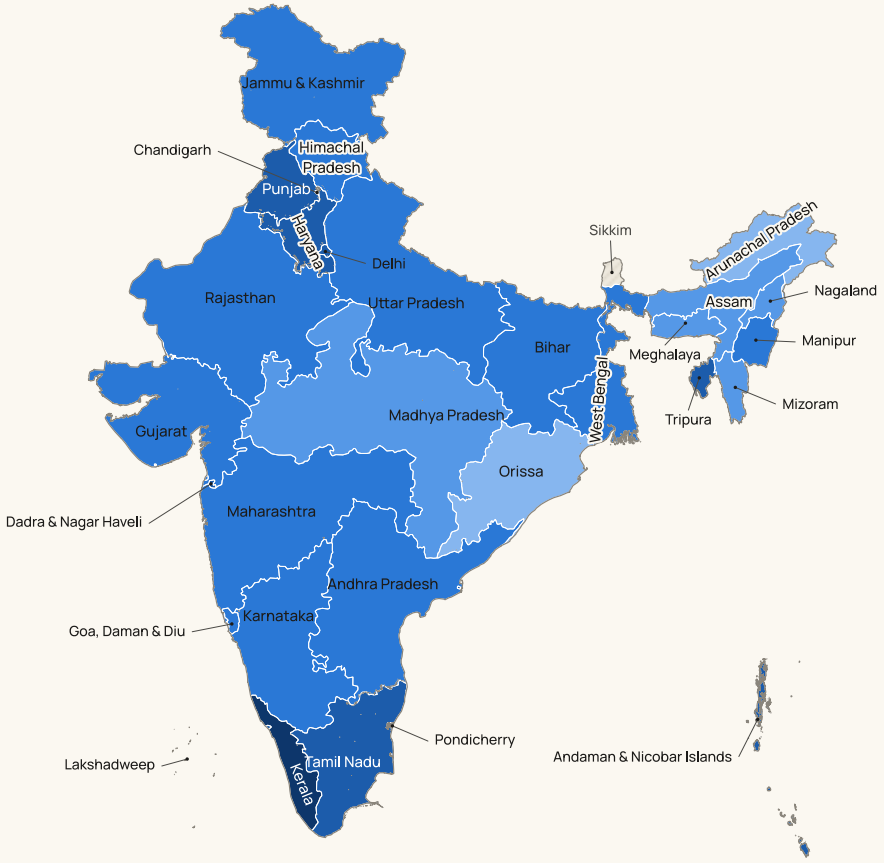


1951–52

First Lok Sabha

All-India turnout was 45.7 per cent. It was highest in Travancore-Cochin, at 71.0 per cent, and lowest in Himachal Pradesh, at 25.3 per cent.

- Under 45%
- 45–55%
- 55–65%
- 65–75%
- 75% and over
- No poll held

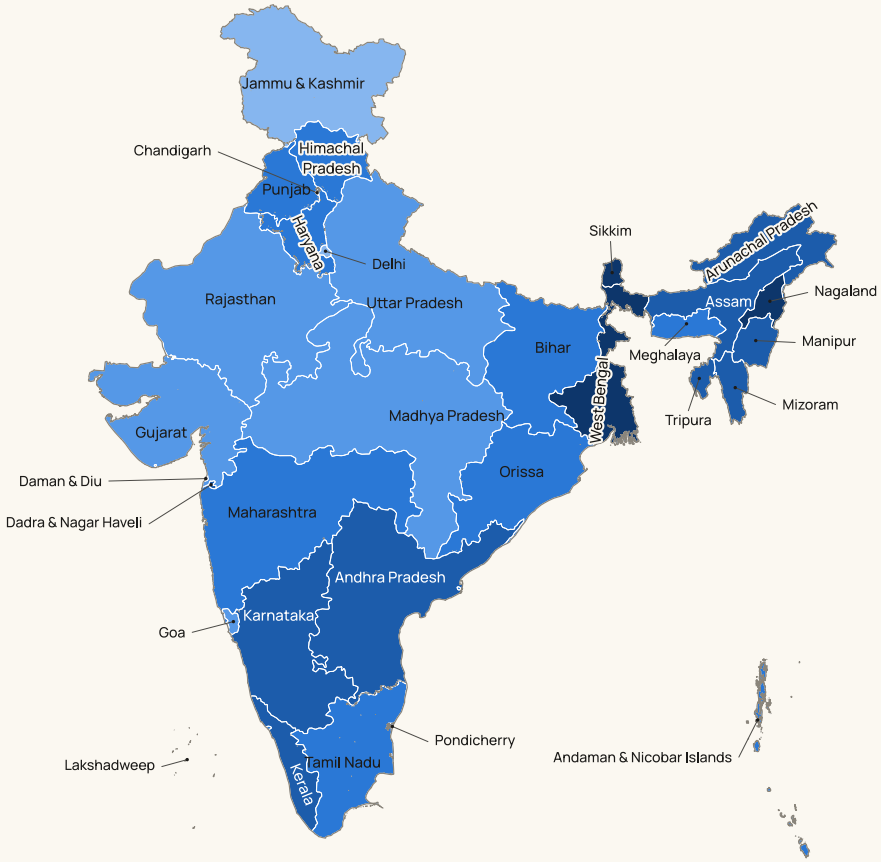


1977

Sixth Lok Sabha

All-India turnout was 60.5 per cent. It was highest in Lakshadweep, at 84.6 per cent, and lowest in Arunachal Pradesh, at 24.5 per cent.

- Under 45%
- 45–55%
- 55–65%
- 65–75%
- 75% and over
- No poll held

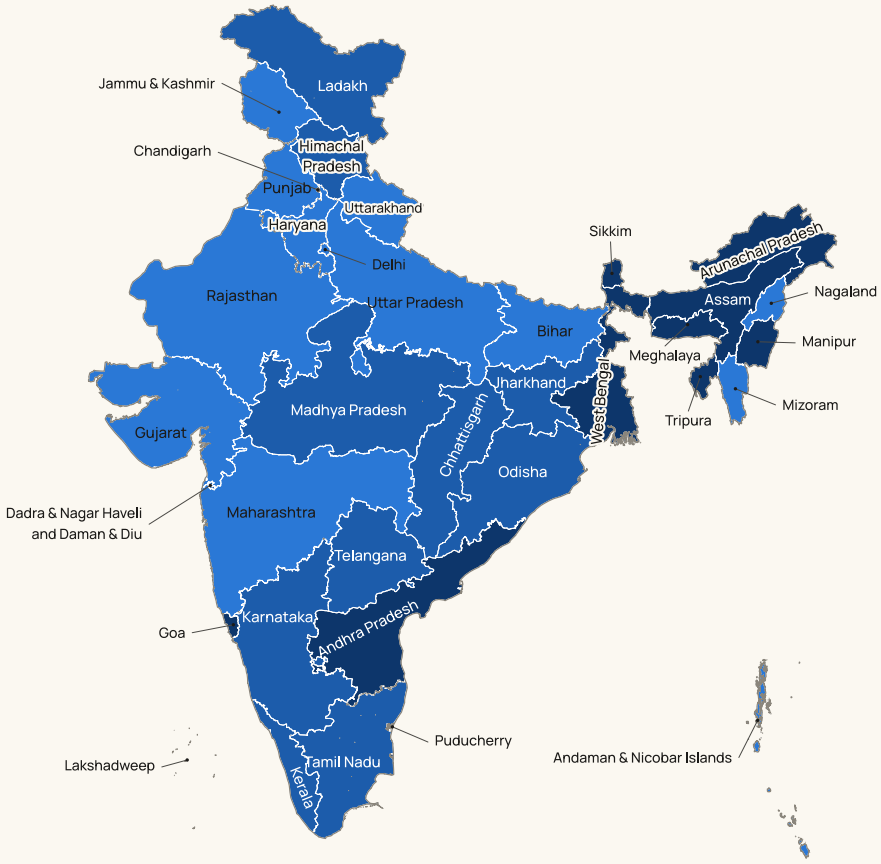


1999

13th Lok Sabha

All-India turnout was 60.0 per cent. It was highest in Sikkim, at 81.7 per cent, and lowest in Jammu & Kashmir, at 32.3 per cent.

- Under 45%
- 45–55%
- 55–65%
- 65–75%
- 75% and over
- No poll held



2024

18th Lok Sabha

All-India turnout was 66.1 per cent. It was highest in Lakshadweep, at 85.0 per cent, and lowest in Bihar, at 56.3 per cent.

- Under 45%
- 45–55%
- 55–65%
- 65–75%
- 75% and over
- No poll held

Share of electors who voted in each state and union territory, with states as they were at each election. Sources: ECI Statistical Reports 1951 (Vol. I), 1977 (Vol. I), 1999 (Vol. I) and 2024 (Report 12); turnout counts contested seats only. No poll in 1951-52: Jammu & Kashmir and Andaman & Nicobar (members nominated), NEFA and Tuensang, Bilaspur (uncontested); in 1977: Sikkim (uncontested).

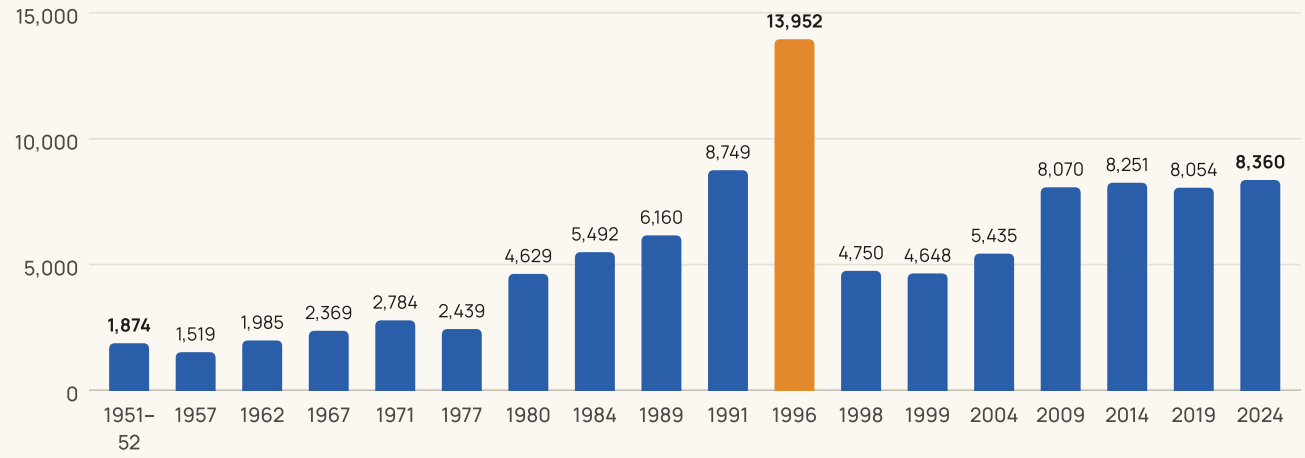
Candidates and independents

There were 1,874 candidates in 1951-52 and 8,360 in 2024. The most was 13,952, in 1996.

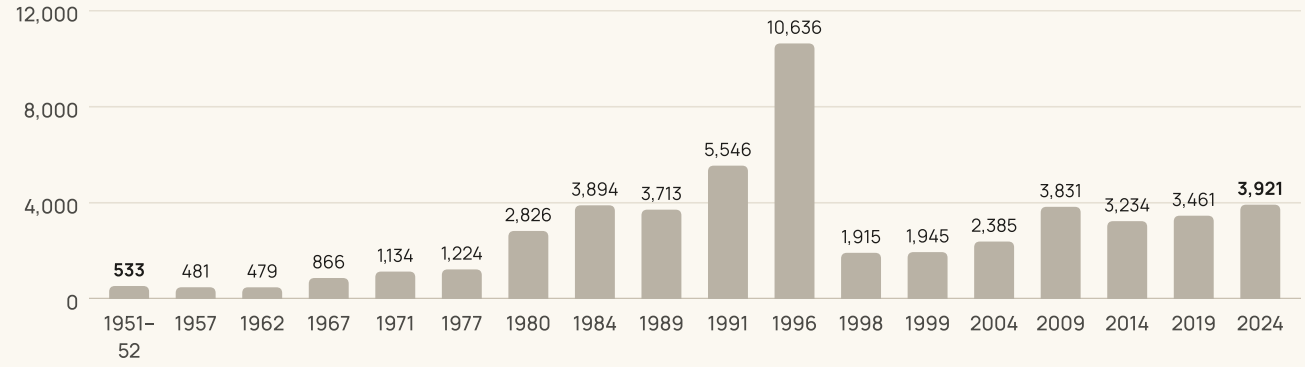
Candidate numbers climbed steadily to 13,952 in 1996, more than 25 for every seat. After that election, Parliament raised the security deposit for Lok Sabha candidates from ₹500 to ₹10,000 (from ₹250 to ₹5,000 for SC and ST candidates). In 1998, the first general election under the higher deposit, there were 4,750 candidates. The number has since increased to 8,360 in 2024.

Much of the rise and fall came from independent candidates: 10,636 stood in 1996, compared with 1,915 in 1998. Few independents win. 37 were elected in 1951-52, one in 1991 and seven in 2024. In 2024, 7,190 of the 8,360 candidates lost their deposits.

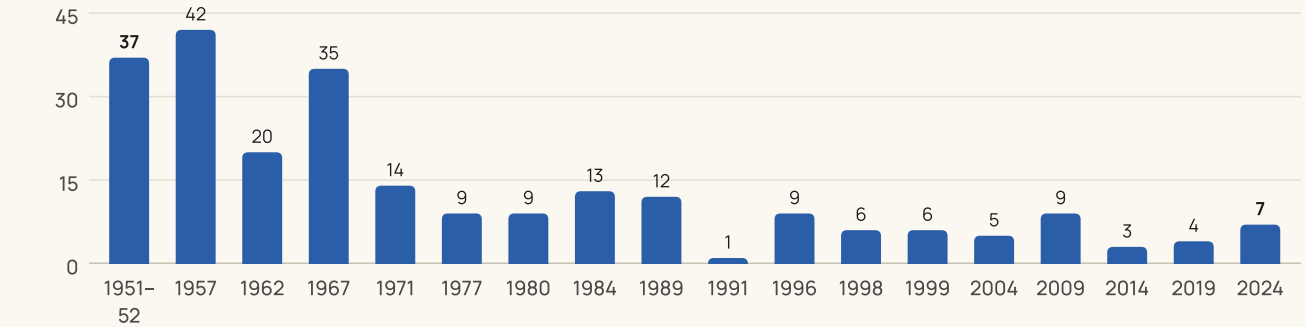
Candidates contesting each Lok Sabha general election



Independents contesting



Independents elected



Sources: ECI Atlas 2024, Annexure I; ECI Statistical Reports (Performance of National Parties vis-à-vis Others); Representation of the People (Amendment) Act, 1996.

Parties and vote share

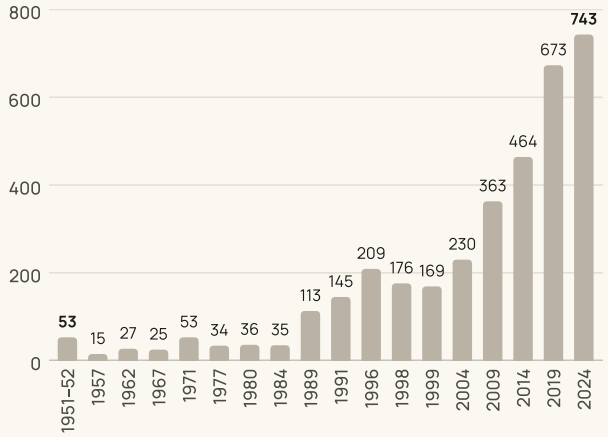
53 parties contested in 1951-52 and 743 in 2024. In 2024, 41 parties won at least one seat, the most so far.

National parties won 76.0 per cent of the vote in 1951-52 and 85.1 per cent in 1980, their highest share. In 1984, the Congress won 414 seats, the most won by a single party at a Lok Sabha election.

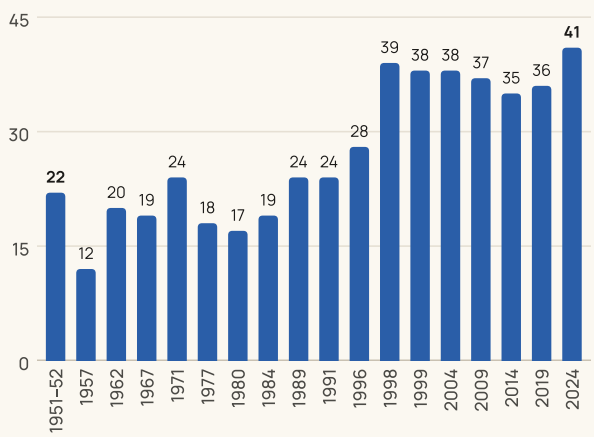
No party won a majority on its own in the seven elections from 1989 to 2009. The largest party won between 145 and 244 seats. State parties won 9.3 per cent of the vote in 1989 and 28.9 per cent in 2004.

The BJP won a majority on its own in 2014, with 282 seats, and in 2019, with 303. In 2024 no party reached 272.

Parties contesting



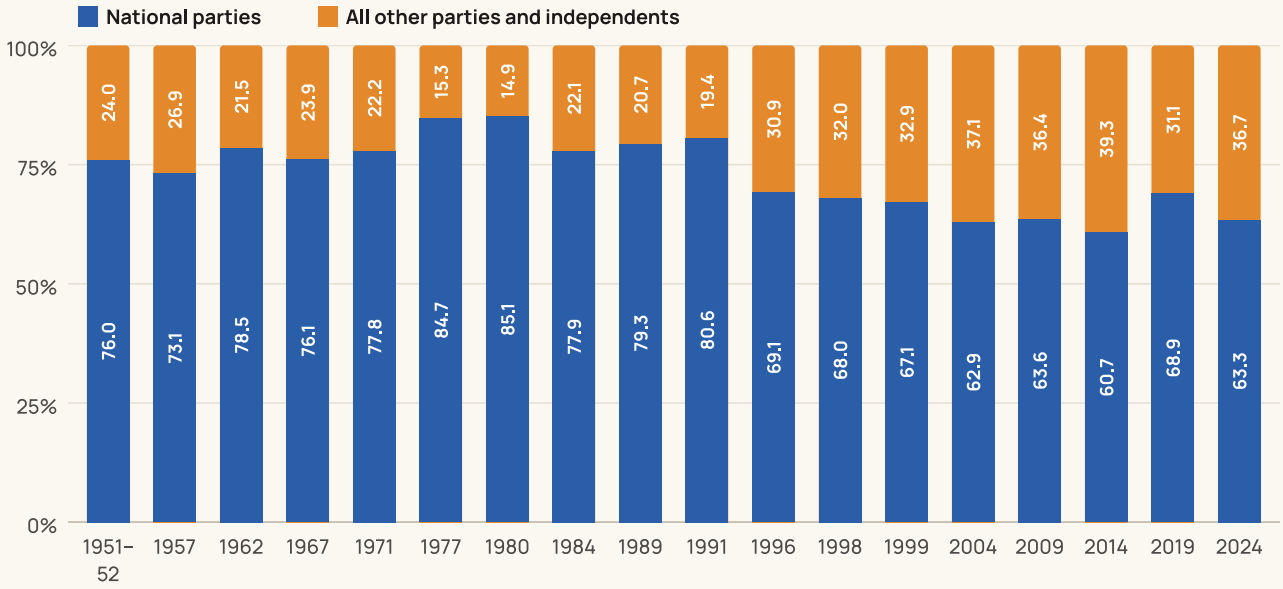
Parties winning at least one seat



Sources: ECI, Atlas: General Election to Lok Sabha 2024 (2025), Annexure I (parties contesting); ECI Statistical Reports, 1951–2024 (seats won by party).

Vote share of national parties and all others

Share of valid votes, %. National parties as recognised by ECI at each election.



Sources: ECI Statistical Reports, 1951–2024 (Performance of National Parties vis-à-vis Others). ECI recognised 14 national parties in 1951-52, four in 1957 and six in 2024. NOTA is excluded. 2024 excludes the uncontested Surat seat.

Women candidates and MPs

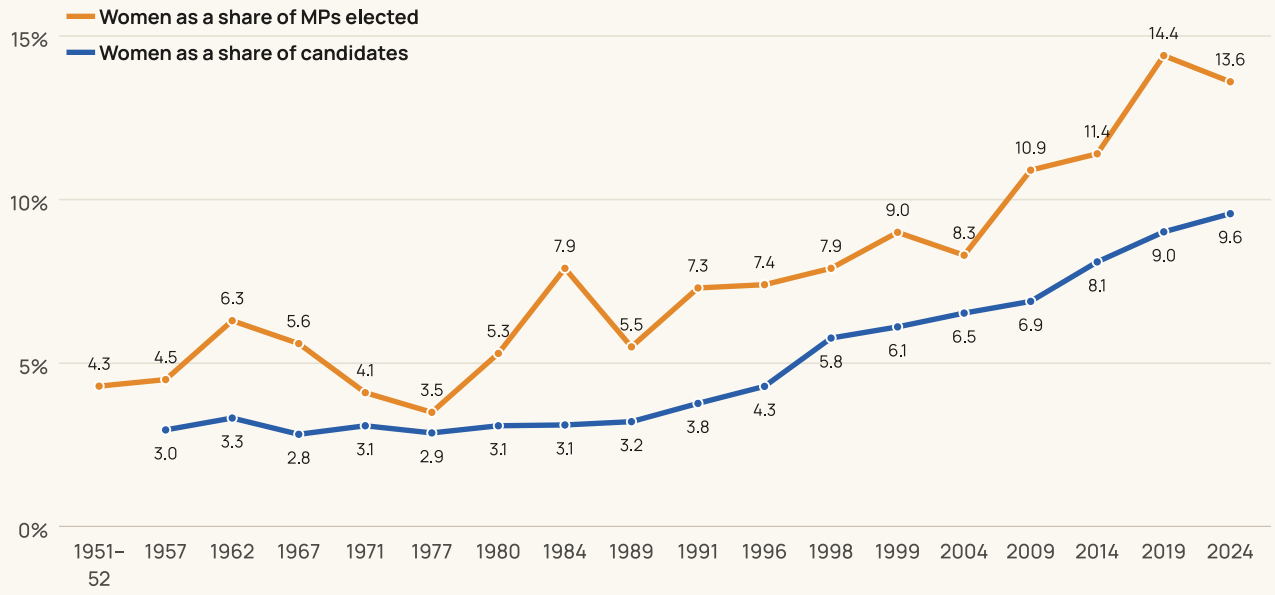
In 2024, women were 9.6 per cent of candidates and 13.6 per cent of the MPs elected.

The 1957 election is the first with candidate figures by gender. That year 45 of the 1,519 candidates were women, or 3.0 per cent. In 2024 there were 800 women candidates, 9.6 per cent of the total and the highest share so far.

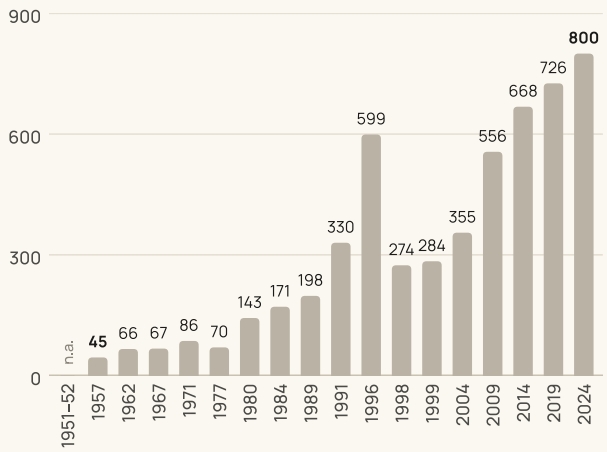
Women's share of MPs has been higher than their share of candidates in every election. The first Lok Sabha had 21 women (4.3 per cent). The number peaked at 78 in 2019 (14.4 per cent) and was 74 in 2024 (13.6 per cent). The Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023 reserves one-third of Lok Sabha seats for women once the next delimitation is done.

Women as a share of candidates and of MPs elected

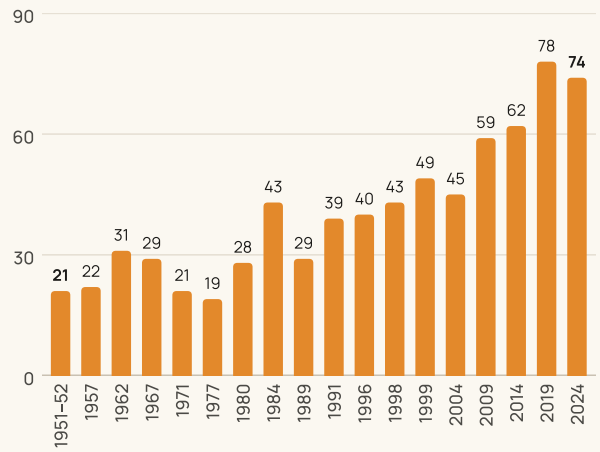
% at each Lok Sabha general election



Women candidates



Women MPs elected



Sources: ECI Atlas 2024 (Table T41.2) and Atlas 2019; PIB, General Election 2024 e-book; Lok Sabha Secretariat, Sixty Years of Lok Sabha (2012). ECI has no gender data for 1951-52 candidates (n.a.); the 1951-52 figure for MPs is the 21 women elected at the first general election, as reported by the Lok Sabha Secretariat. For 1971 this report uses 86 women candidates and 21 elected (PIB, consistent with the Lok Sabha Secretariat); ECI's 2024 Atlas lists 61 and 29.

Polling stations and voting technology

There were 1,96,084 polling stations in 1951-52 and 10,52,664 in 2024.

The number of polling stations has grown roughly in line with the electorate. In 2024 there were 10,52,664, with an average of 931 electors each. In 1951-52 the average was 883.

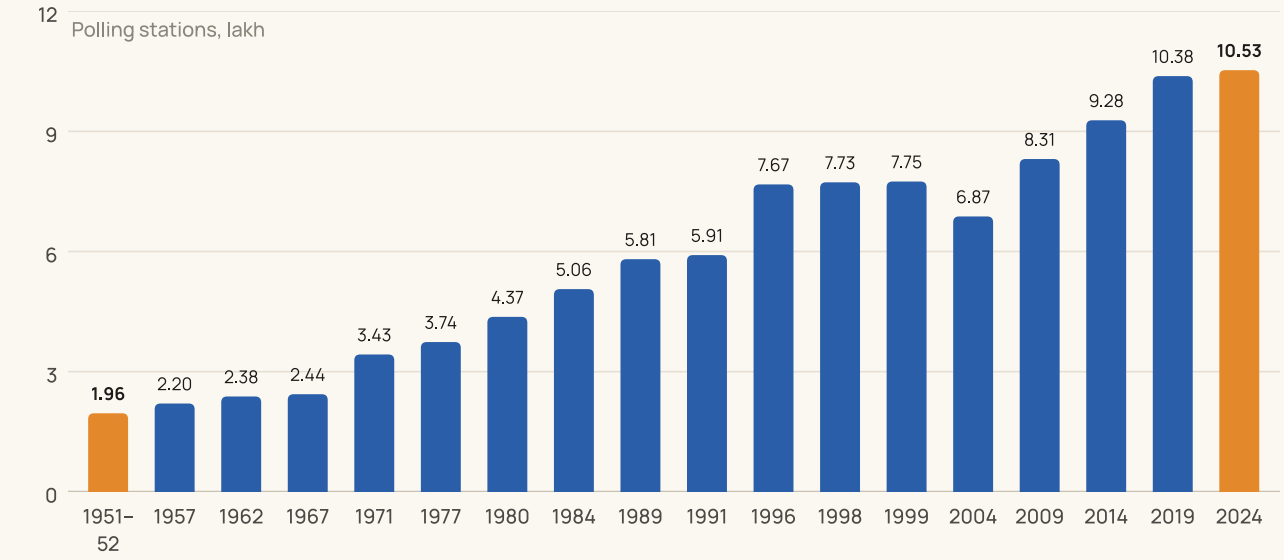
Electors' photo identity cards were introduced in 1993. Electronic voting machines were first tried in 1982, in an assembly by-election at Paravur in Kerala, and were used at every polling station in the 2004 general election. The voter-verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT) was first used in 2013, at Noksen in Nagaland, and every machine had one in 2019. Voters have had a "None of the Above" (NOTA) option in Lok Sabha elections since 2014.



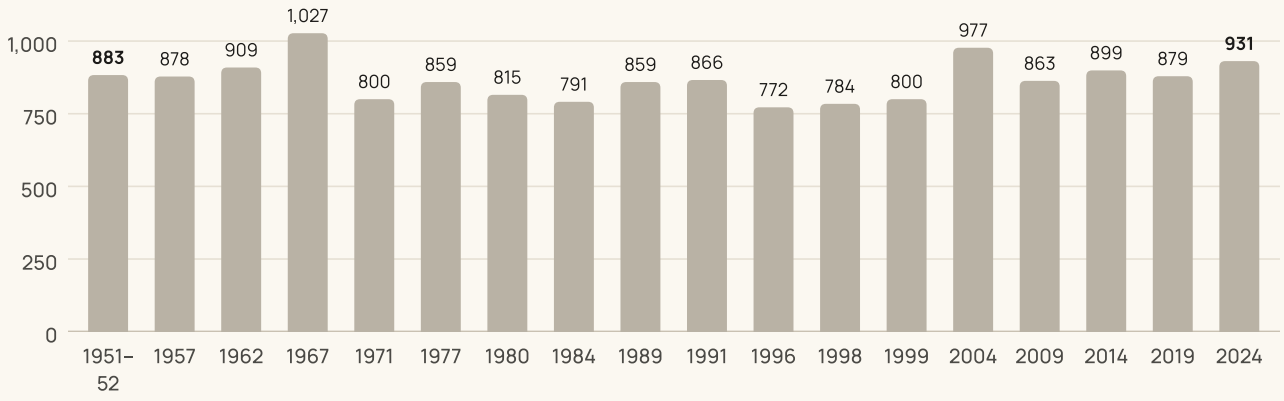
A polling officer marks a voter's finger with indelible ink, next to the control unit of an EVM, 2011. Photo: PIB / ECI (GODL-India).

Polling stations at each Lok Sabha general election

Lakh



Average number of electors per polling station



Source: ECI Atlas 2024, Annexure I. For 2009, ECI has also published 8,28,804 and 8,34,919. 1 lakh = 100,000.

About CPRG

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