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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

The May 4 Verdict — What 824 Seats Across Five States Will Tell Us About India's Political Direction

 **INDIAN EXPRESS**28 April 2026 · **GS2** **GS1**

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THE EDITORIAL ARGUMENT

On May 4, 2026, India will count 824 legislative assembly seats simultaneously — across Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Kerala, Assam, and Puducherry. This is not a general election. But it will be read as one in the only way that matters: as a signal about the current alignment of India's federal politics, the durability of regional party dominance, and the BJP's ability to expand beyond its northern and western heartland.

The outcome across five very different states will say something about each of them individually. Together, they will say something about India.

WHAT EACH STATE REPRESENTS

Tamil Nadu — The most watched. A historic 85.15% turnout in a three-way contest (DMK, AIADMK, TVK) has generated enormous interest. If TVK (Vijay's party) wins significant seats, it signals that the Dravidian duopoly can be broken from within its own ideological tradition. If it wins none despite significant vote share, FPTP's structural bias against third parties will be the story. If DMK wins a second consecutive term — historically unusual in Tamil Nadu — it marks a break with the alternating pattern of Dravidian politics.

West Bengal — The most contested. TMC's Mamata Banerjee is seeking a third consecutive term in a state where the BJP made dramatic gains in 2021 (77 seats, 26% vote share) but has struggled to translate national narrative into state-level governance credibility. The Left-Congress-ISF alliance is attempting a revival in historic strongholds. Mamata's personal constituency of Bhawanipur and Suvendu Adhikari's Nandigram are the symbolic battlegrounds of a deeper contest over Bengali identity and Bengali governance.

Kerala — The test of the Left. Kerala is the only state in India where the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) has a realistic prospect of winning — and uniquely, LDF and UDF (Congress-led) have alternated power every election since 1982 without exception. If LDF wins a second consecutive term in 2026, it breaks a 44-year

pattern. If UDF returns, the pattern holds. The BJP is a distant third in Kerala but has been pushing its footprint.

Assam — BJP's northeastern anchor. Under CM Himanta Biswa Sarma, Assam has become BJP's base for northeast expansion. A second consecutive BJP win in Assam would consolidate this position. Congress and regional parties are contesting but BJP enters as the strong favourite.

Puducherry — Small but constitutionally interesting. Puducherry is a Union Territory with a legislature — governed under a structure similar to Delhi and Puducherry. The NDA-affiliated AINRC won in 2021; the current contest involves Congress, AINRC-BJP alliance, and DMK.

THE BJP'S SOUTHERN STRATEGY — A TEST

The 2026 elections are a crucial test of the BJP's capacity to expand southward. Of the five states, BJP is positioned to win only Assam convincingly. In Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Kerala, it is unlikely to form the government — but the vote share and seat count matter enormously:

- In Tamil Nadu: can BJP-NDA cross 30 seats (from approximately 20 in 2021)?
- In West Bengal: can BJP maintain its 77-seat 2021 base or does it slip?
- In Kerala: can BJP win its first seat in the state assembly?

The answers will determine whether the BJP's southern expansion is a genuine political project or a permanent plateau.

THE REGIONAL PARTY QUESTION

Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Kerala are governed by regional parties — DMK, TMC, and CPI(M) respectively — that have resisted the national BJP wave. If they retain power in 2026, it strengthens the argument that India's federal structure is durable: that regional identity, language, and social coalition continue to organise state-level politics independently of national trends.

This is not merely an academic point. It has implications for the constitutional relationship between the Centre and states, for [cooperative federalism](#) in resource sharing, and for the model of competitive democracy that India's founding fathers designed.

If regional parties hold, [federalism](#) holds. May 4 is, in this sense, a referendum on that proposition.

UPSC RELEVANCE

PAPER	ANGLE
GS2 — Polity	State elections; federal politics; regional parties; FPTP; simultaneous counting
GS1 — Indian Society	Dravidian politics; Bengali identity; Northeast politics; competitive federalism
GS2 — Governance	Election Commission; Model Code of Conduct; election management

Mains Keywords: 2026 state elections, May 4 counting, TMC, DMK, CPI-M, BJP southern strategy, regional parties, federalism, West Bengal Phase 2, Tamil Nadu TVK, competitive federalism

Prelims Facts Corner

ITEM	FACT
All results	May 4, 2026
Total seats	824 (TN 234 + WB 294 + Kerala 140 + Assam 126 + Puducherry 30)
WB Phase 2	April 29; 176 constituencies
WB incumbent	Mamata Banerjee (TMC) — 3rd term bid
WB LoP	Suvendu Adhikari (BJP)
TN turnout	85.15% — historic high
Kerala LDF-UDF alternation	44-year pattern (since 1982)
Assam CM	Himanta Biswa Sarma (BJP)
Puducherry	UT with legislature

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