

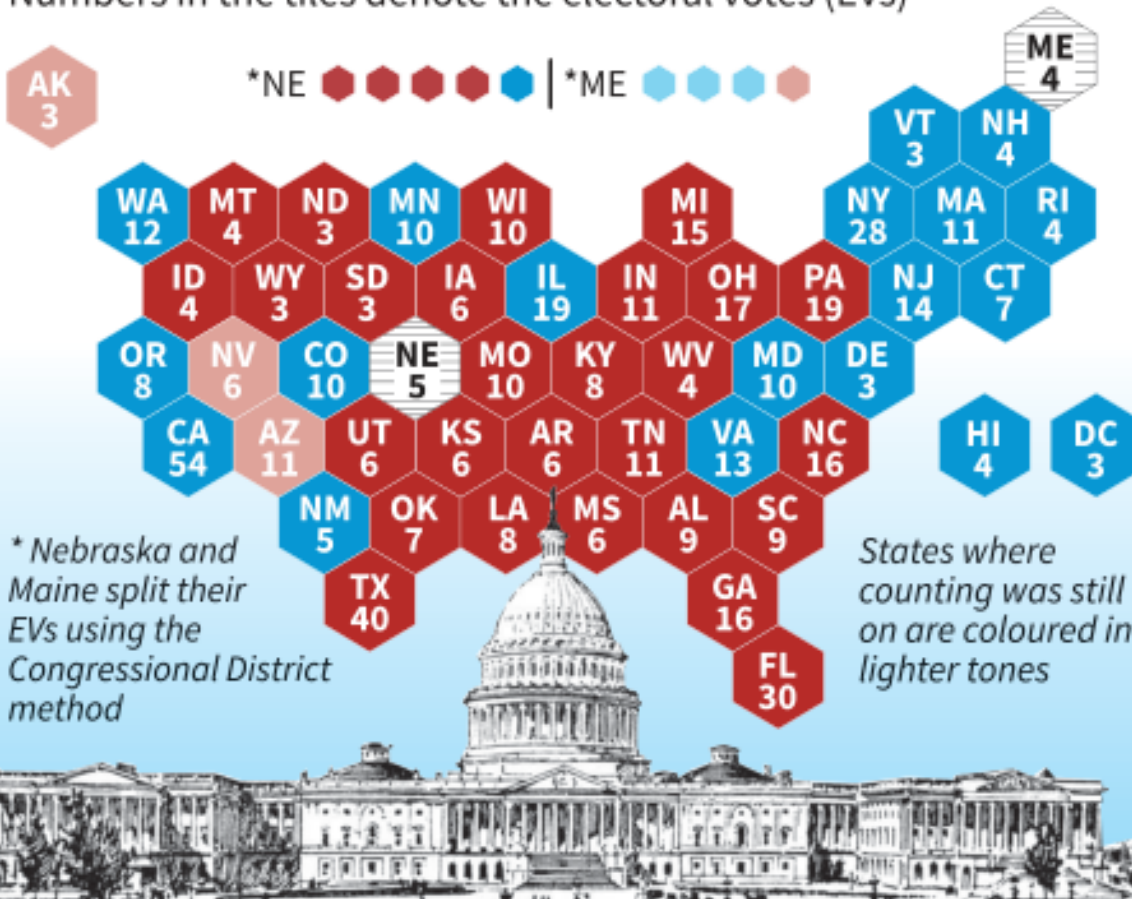


## Donald Trump makes historic comeback

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### U.S. rolls out a red carpet

The tilemap depicts the State-wise results. States won/led by Trump are in red while those won/led by Harris are in blue. Numbers in the tiles denote the electoral votes (EVs)



**CONTEXT:** Former U.S. President and Republican Donald Trump won a second term in office, defeating Vice-President Kamala Harris, the Democratic nominee, to become the 47th President of the United States.

Mr. Trump, 78, is only one of two Presidents elected to a non-consecutive second term, and he will also become the oldest President at the time of entry into office. U.S. President Joe Biden, 82, was pressured by his party to not seek another term, owing to concerns around age-related cognitive issues.

Mr. Trump also won Ohio, Iowa, and West Virginia — States that are home to large numbers of blue-collar workers and form the Rust Belt, along with Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Ohio. Having lost two crucial battleground Sun Belt States — North Carolina and Georgia — Ms. Harris's chances of winning were next to impossible after she lost Pennsylvania.

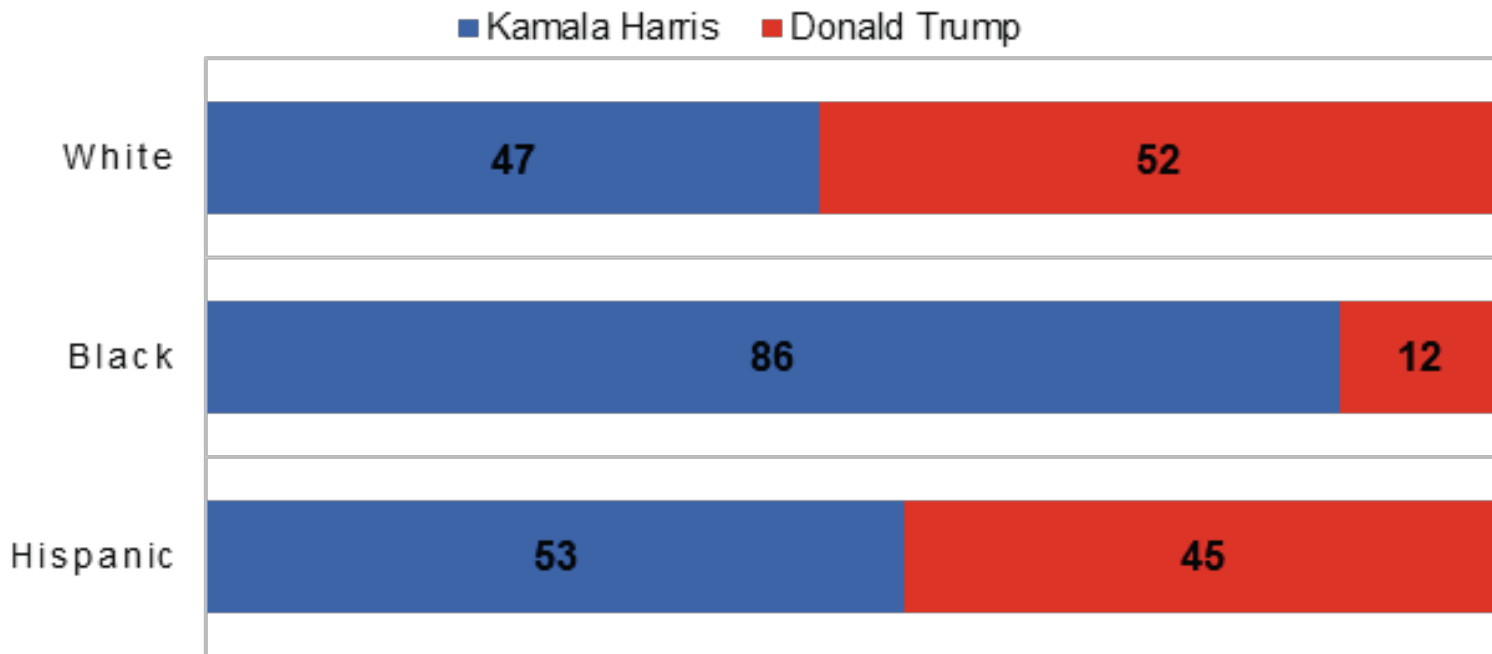


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## Exit Poll Results (Edison Research Via Reuters)



**FIGURE:** Bar chart representation of the Exit Poll results (Edison Research via Reuters).

Ms. Harris, who could have become the first Indian American and Black woman President campaigned on a theme of unity as she reached out to Independents and traditional Republicans who did not back Mr. Trump. She also focused on the risks to women’s reproductive rights, especially restrictions on abortions, under a conservative government. Her campaign dwelt on the authoritarian tendencies and plans of Mr. Trump.

By Wednesday afternoon, the Associated Press had called 292 Electoral College votes for Mr. Trump and 224 for Ms. Harris. At least 270 votes, distributed unevenly across States, are required to win the Presidency. Mr. Trump was already projected to win the popular vote by Wednesday morning. George W. Bush won the popular vote in 2004, the last Republican to do so until now. Republicans also gained control of the Senate, increasing their tally to 52 of the 100 seats, even as the contest for the U.S. House of Representatives remained open. If Republicans win the House, they would control the White House and U.S. Congress, enabling them to push through a conservative agenda in Washington. Republicans took control of the Senate, increasing their tally to at least 52 of the chamber’s 100 seats.

## PM-Vidyalaxmi scheme

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

**CONTEXT:** The Union Cabinet chaired by PM Narendra Modi approved a new Central Sector Scheme, PM Vidyalaxmi, which seeks to provide financial support to meritorious students in their pursuit of higher education potentially covering 22 lakh students.

Under the scheme, a student who secures admission in any of the top 860 Quality Higher Education Institutions (QHEIs), both government and private, will be eligible to get collateral-free, guarantor-free loan from banks and financial institutions to cover full amount of tuition fees and other expenses related to the course.

Under the scheme, for loans up to ₹ 7.5 lakh, the student will receive a credit guarantee of 75 %, enabling banks to extend education loans to students. An outlay of ₹ 3,600 Cr. has been made during 2024-25 to 2030-31, and 7 lakh fresh students are expected to get the benefit.



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## J&K Assembly passes resolution to restore special status

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE



**CONTEXT:** The Jammu and Kashmir Assembly passed a resolution seeking restoration of special status and sought a dialogue with the Centre amid uproar and high-pitch protests by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) legislators.

Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Choudhary, while addressing the third day of the Assembly, moved the resolution. Speaker Abdur Rahim Rather put the resolution to voice vote. It was passed with the majority of legislators supporting it in the 90-member Assembly. Besides 55 coalition members of the National Conference (NC), the resolution was supported by parties outside the coalition.

Three legislators of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Awami Ittehad Party legislator Sheikh Khursheed, Independent legislator Shabir Kullay, J&K Peoples Conference chief Sajad Lone, and Aam Aadmi Party legislator Mehraj Malik supported it.

## Autonomous surface vessel completes 1,500-km voyage

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

**CONTEXT:** An autonomous surface vessel built by Sagar Defence Engineering has completed a 1,500-km voyage from Mumbai to Thoothukudi without human intervention, in an endeavour supported by the Indian Navy.

The Sagarmala Parikrama journey was virtually flagged off by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on October 29 during Swavlamban, the annual event of NIIO. The project's success was made possible by the guidance and expertise provided by the Indian Navy, including access to testing facilities and operational feedback. The Sagarmala Parikrama's success demonstrates India's ability to build autonomous maritime systems indigenously, critical to our national security.

This first-of-its-kind journey highlights India's growing expertise in autonomous maritime technology and establishes a significant milestone in developing cutting-edge, unmanned systems for national security. It is supported by the Indian Navy's Naval Innovation and Indigenisation Organisation (NIIO), the Technology Development Acceleration Cell (TDAC), and the Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) initiative under the Defence Innovation Organisation (DIO).

The Sagarmala Parikrama aligns with global advancements in autonomous surface and underwater systems. This historic milestone paves the way for future deployment of autonomous vessels in critical sea lanes, coastal surveillance, and anti-piracy operations.

## A West Asia under Donald Trump

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

A significant shift in U.S. foreign policy challenges during Joe Biden's presidency was witnessed, particularly concerning Israel and Palestine. Initially, Biden's administration aimed to expand the Arab-Israeli normalization process, building on the Abraham Accords initiated by Donald Trump. By early October 2023, Saudi Arabia and Israel were close to formalizing ties, while the Palestinian issue had been largely side-lined in regional politics. However, the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7 disrupted this approach, bringing the Palestinian conflict back to the forefront.

President Biden promptly extended his full support to Israel, which responded to the October 7 attack with a military campaign in Gaza. His administration's strategy focused on two main objectives: backing Israel's actions in Gaza and initiating diplomatic efforts to contain the conflict, aiming to avoid a broader regional war. However, a year later, the situation

has worsened. The war in Gaza has escalated, severely damaging America's global reputation and entangling the U.S. even deeper in West Asia. Over 43,000 Palestinians have lost their lives in Gaza, and the conflict has spread to Lebanon, with Israel launching its fourth invasion there on October 1. Additionally, hostilities have flared between Israel and Iran. President Biden faced accusations of complicity in what some called "Israel's genocide" of Palestinians, and his diplomatic efforts to prevent a regional escalation proved ineffective. As a result, Donald Trump, the incoming U.S. President, will inherit a volatile West Asia—a region traditionally under strong American influence—that is now in turmoil.

### Trump's record

Pro-Israel policies defined his West Asia policy during his first term in office. His administration moved the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, recognized Israel's annexation of Syria's Golan Heights, and withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal despite Iran's compliance. Trump also brokered the Abraham Accords, aimed at strengthening an anti-Iran alliance between Israel and Arab nations. Although he proposed a peace plan for Israel and Palestine in 2020, it was rejected by Palestinians as biased. Trump's strong support for Israel suggests he is unlikely to oppose its actions in Gaza. However, Israel's complex, multi-front conflicts are likely to create significant foreign policy challenges for him.

### Threads to the issues

Donald Trump might face challenges, similar to those encountered by Joe Biden in 2023. While Biden tolerated criticism of Israel's actions in Gaza, he sought to prevent a wider West Asia conflict, calling for a ceasefire but avoiding significant pressure on Israel. Despite spending \$ 17.9 billion on military aid to Israel, Biden could not contain the Gaza conflict. Trump is likely to support Israel in Gaza and against Hezbollah but would want to avoid U.S. entanglement in a regional war, primarily for strategic and national interest reasons.

Donald Trump's supporters oppose prolonged U.S. involvement in West Asia, with Vice President-elect J.D. Vance particularly critical of past wars like the 2003 Iraq invasion. Trump intends to prioritize strengthening U.S. conventional military power and focus on China as a primary foreign policy concern. A potential conflict with Iran would not align with these objectives.

Donald Trump's focus on addressing the cost-of-living crisis could be undermined by a broader conflict with Iran, which might disrupt energy supplies via the Strait of Hormuz and increase inflation. For political, economic, and strategic reasons, a larger war in West Asia would not align with the interests of a Trump administration.

### Looking ahead

Donald Trump faces the challenge of restoring U.S. influence in a destabilized West Asia, where ongoing conflicts involving Israel have harmed America's reputation and pushed the region toward widespread war. Although the U.S. remains influential, its alliances with Arab states are strained. To regain stability and credibility, Trump would need to adopt a more assertive approach to end the conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon quickly.

## Why did SC uphold U.P. madrasa Act?

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE



**CONTEXT:** The Supreme Court on November 5, 2024, upheld the constitutional validity of the Uttar Pradesh Board of Madarsa Education Act, 2004, with exceptions. The Supreme Court set aside the Allahabad High Court's decision, which had deemed the 2004 Act to be in breach of the principles of secularism.

A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, contended that provisions allowing the madrasa board to award higher degrees such as Kamil (Undergraduate Studies) and Fazil (Postgraduate Studies) contravened the University Grants Commission (UGC) Act, 1956, rendering it unconstitutional.

### How do madrasas operate?

The madrasa system has been in existence since the era of the Delhi Sultanate, receiving

patronage from the Khilji and Tughlaq dynasties. The madrasa system evolved into a distinct education system providing religious and secular learning. Notable figures such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Rajendra Prasad, and Premchand are believed to have gained their foundational knowledge from madrasas and their teachers, known as maulvis.

According to data presented by the Union Government in Parliament on February 3, 2020, India has 24,010 madrasas, with around 60 % — approximately 14,400 — located in Uttar Pradesh. These include 11,621 recognised and 2,907 unrecognised madrasas. The bulk of the funding for madrasas comes from the respective State governments. In 1993, the P.V. Narasimha Rao government recognised the necessity of integrating modern education into madrasas, resulting in the 2009 Scheme for Providing Quality Education in Madrasas (SPQEM). The Uttar Pradesh Board of Madarsa Education Act, 2004 was enacted to

- Regulate these madrasas with respect to curriculum, standard of education, conduct of examinations, and qualifications for teaching.
- Established the Uttar Pradesh Board of Madarsa Education, predominantly comprising members from the Muslim community responsible for preparing course material, granting degrees, and conducting examinations.

### What was the case?

A single judge of the Allahabad High Court on October 23, 2019, while hearing a petition filed by Mohammed Javed, expressed doubt regarding the validity of the 2004 Act. Mr. Javed appointed as a part-time assistant teacher in 2011 for the primary section of Madarsa Nisarul Uloom Shahzadpur on a fixed salary of ₹ 4,000 per month, subject to an 8 % annual increment approached the High Court

- Parity in payments with regular teachers.
- Regulate appointments to madrasas by the State government, the Madarsa Shiksha Parishad, and the district minority welfare officer.

A Public Interest Litigation (PIL) petition was filed in the Allahabad High Court challenging the validity of the UP Board of Madarsa Education Act, 2004 on the ground that it violated secularism as well as Articles 14 (equality before law), 15 (which forbids discrimination) and 21A (right to education) of the Constitution. The larger Bench accordingly framed the question of law for adjudication as — “Whether the provisions of the Madarsa Act stand the test of secularism, which forms a part of the basic structure of the Constitution of India?”

### Why did the High Court strike down the law?

The Division Bench of the Allahabad High Court observed that the education imparted in these institutions is “neither quality nor universal in nature” and that “the State has no power to create a Board for religious education or to establish a Board for school education only for a particular religion and philosophy associated with it.” The Bench thus concluded that the UP Board of Madarsa Education Act, 2004 violated secularism and that the government could not “discriminate” by imparting education based on religious affiliation.

The judges further noted that while “Islamic studies” is mandatory in all madrasas, essential modern subjects such as English, Mathematics, Science, and Social Sciences are either excluded or made optional. This, they reasoned, undermines the State’s constitutional obligation under Article 21A to ensure “quality” education for all children aged six to fourteen. Highlighting that “higher education” is a field reserved under Entry 66 of the Union List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution, the High Court further asserted that the State government lacks the competence to legislate on such matters. It accordingly ordered that students enrolled in madrasas be promptly accommodated in regular schools recognised by the State government.

### What was NCPDR’s response?

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPDR), the top child rights protection body in the country, told the top court that madrasas are “unsuitable or unfit” places for children to receive “proper education”. It also flagged concerns related to the curriculum, teachers’ eligibility, opaque funding, and violation of land laws to assert that such institutions fail to provide a “holistic environment” to children.

In June, the child rights body issued a series of directives urging the Chief Secretaries of all States and Union Territories to withdraw recognition of government-aided madrasas that do not comply with the Right to Education Act, 2005. Subsequently, the Chief Secretary of Uttar Pradesh directed District Collectors to examine madrasas that had enrolled non-Muslim students and ensure their immediate transfer to recognised schools. On August 28, the Tripura government issued a similar directive.

The Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, an organisation of Muslim clerics, consequently challenged these directives in the Supreme Court contending that such measures encroached upon the rights of religious minorities to establish and manage their educational institutions under Article 30 of the Constitution. Accordingly, the court directed the concerned authorities to refrain

from implementing these directives until the matter was conclusively adjudicated.

### What did the Supreme Court finally decide?

Dismissing the High Court's finding that the 2004 Act violated secularism, the Chief Justice underscored that any such purported infraction should be traced to an express provision of the Constitution and cannot simply be invalidated by making a blanket statement that it contravened the Basic Structure. "The reason is that concepts such as democracy, federalism, and secularism are undefined concepts. Allowing courts to strike down legislation for the violation of such concepts will introduce an element of uncertainty in our constitutional adjudication".

The court further opined that the State must strike a delicate balance between maintaining quality education and respecting the autonomy of minority education institutions. It underscored that the 2004 Act ought to be construed to be in consonance with Article 21A "to ensure that religious minority institutions impart secular education of a requisite standard without destroying the minority character". However, the Chief Justice cautioned that in accordance with Article 28(3) of the Constitution, a student attending a minority institution recognised by the State or receiving aid out of public funds should not be compelled to take part in religious instruction or forced to attend religious worship.

The unanimous verdict further noted that while madrasas offer religious instruction, their primary objective is to impart education, thereby bringing them within the fold of Entry 25 of the Concurrent List. The mere fact that the education sought to be regulated includes some religious teaching or instruction does not push a legislation outside the legislative competence of a State.

However, the court invalidated provisions of the 2024 Act that allowed the issuance of higher educational degrees, emphasising that such degrees are exclusively regulated by the UGC Act and thus lie beyond the legislative competence of the State legislature. Nonetheless, it clarified that this does not necessitate the annulment of the entire statute, as doing so would be akin to "throwing the baby out with the bathwater."

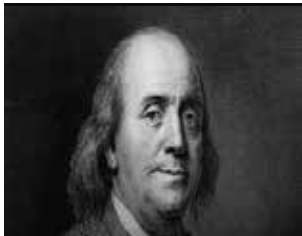
### What are the implications?

The verdict establishes a significant precedent, balancing state oversight with the protection of minority rights by upholding the 2024 Act's focus on quality education. This nuanced approach to secularism supports diversity in India's educational landscape. Iftikhar Ahmed Javed, Chairman of the Uttar Pradesh Board of Madrasa Education, noted that dismantling madrasas would negatively affect 2.7 million students and 10,000 teachers in Uttar Pradesh alone. The ruling may also lead the government to reassess its budget cuts for madrasa funding, which dropped from ₹10 crore in 2023-24 to ₹2 crore in 2024-25.



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