

# Indian churches delighted at 'secular' coalition win: A victory for a nonsectarian society

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Churches and Christian groups in India have hailed as a victory for secular governance and a nonsectarian society the convincing victory of the ruling coalition, which did much better than preelection polls suggested it would.

The United Progressive Alliance coalition government led by the secular Indian National Congress Party won 262 of the 543 seats in India's parliament, although the most optimistic poll forecasts had estimated only 215 seats for the ruling alliance.

"The vibrant and responsible electorate of the Indian democracy have reaffirmed their faith in the UPA in a historic manner," said the National Council of Churches of India on May 18. "It is . . . an expression of the wish of the people that India is a secular and democratic country," said the NCCI, which has 30 Orthodox and Protestant churches.

The church council noted that the election to choose India's 15th parliament had taken place "in the context of blistering heat and divisive politics"—an apparent reference to the Bharatiya Janata Party, reputed for its Hindu nationalist agenda.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India likewise praised voters for making the "right choice." Prime Minister Man mohan Singh will continue to head the government, in which the coalition is still ten seats short of an overall majority.

"This is a great victory for secularism. The Indian people have given a clear verdict," said Vincent Rajkumar, director of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society. "The Indian voters have shown that they do not want people to be divided on the basis of religion." *-Ecumenical News International*