



Center for Asian Democracy

India General Election 2024 Pre-Election Report

CAD Research Brief

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April 2024 // University of Louisville

Cover Image: Source: SAJJAD HUSSAIN/AFP/Getty Images

Country Profile

Overview

The Republic of India is a democratic republic located in South Asia. It is the most populous country in the world with 1.42 billion people, having overtaken China's 1.4 billion sometime in April 2023. India gained independence from the British in 1947 after a decades-long independence movement led by the Indian National Congress, which counted Mahatma Gandhi and the first prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, among its members. The government of India was influenced by the Westminster system of Britain. Its legislature consists of a bicameral parliament, the lower house of which elects a prime minister who serves as the country's chief executive. Its judiciary is headed by the Supreme Court of India and its head of state is a president elected by the parliament and state legislative assemblies.



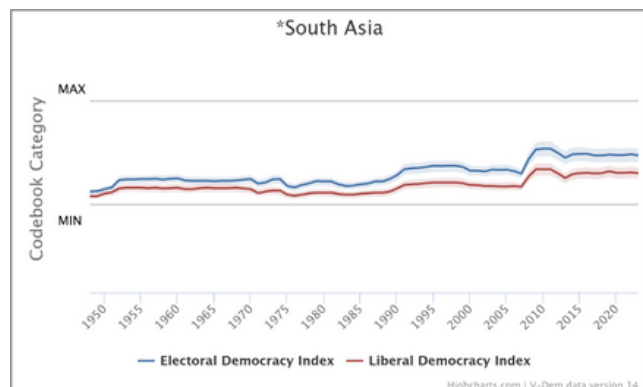
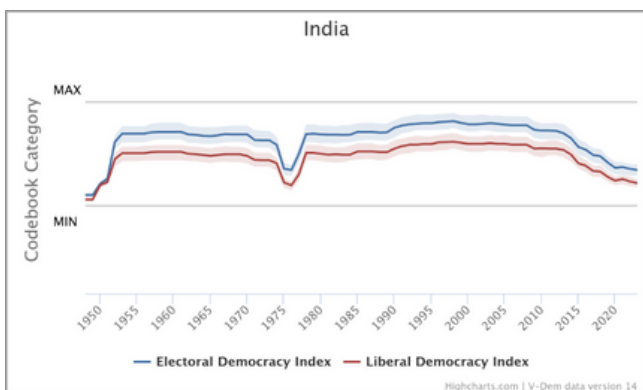
Map/Constitution/Population
 April 2023 population: 1,425,775,850 (UN Projections)

Measures of Democracy

India's electoral and liberal democracy ratings peaked in the late 1990s with scores of 0.75 and 0.59 respectively. Since the mid-2010s however, both rankings have dramatically decreased. The country's 2023 rankings, 0.38 and 0.28, are below average for South Asia, which has an electoral democracy rating of 0.48 and a liberal democracy ranking of 0.35. Compared to its neighbors, India's electoral democracy score is slightly higher than that of rival Pakistan's 0.34 while considerably below Nepal's 0.68.

Media Freedom

In 2023 Reporters Without Borders ranked India 161st out of 180 in terms of media freedom. The quality of Indian press freedom has corroded significantly since the BJP came into government in 2014. Prime Minister Modi has fostered close personal relationships with media moguls in the country, and federal agencies have harassed outlets critical of his governance. BJP-encouraged animosity towards journalists has resulted in a portion of BJP supporters, referred to as bhakts, engaging in online harassment campaigns of journalists critical of Modi and his leadership.



	INDEX 2023	INDEX 2022
	161 / 180	150 / 180
	Score : 36.62	Score : 41
POLITICAL INDICATOR	169 33.65	145 40.76
ECONOMIC INDICATOR	155 34.15	149 30.36
LEGISLATIVE INDICATOR	144 42.92	120 57.02
SOCIAL INDICATOR	143 45.27	127 56.25
SECURITY INDICATOR	172 27.12	163 20.61

Election Profile

The Indian General Election will be held from April 19-June 1, 2024. It will decide who fills the 543 seats of the lower house of parliament, the Lok Sabha. The results of this election will determine if the current prime minister, Narendra Modi, will remain in office for a third 5-year term, or if the opposition will form a government. Coinciding with the general election, the states of Odisha, Arunachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, and Sikkim will be holding their legislative assembly elections.

Candidates and Parties

The seats of the Lok Sabha, are filled via first past the post elections that occur in each of India's 543 single-member electoral districts. 84 seats are reserved for members of scheduled castes and 47 seats are reserved for scheduled tribes, groups who are considered vastly disadvantaged. This year these elections will be held in seven phases and span 44 days. There are two coalitions vying for the majority of seats needed to form a government.

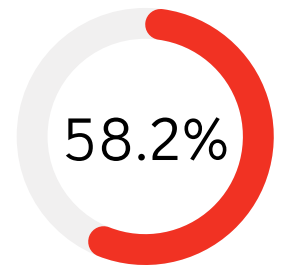
National Democratic Alliance

The National Democratic Alliance, led by the right-wing Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, currently has a majority in the Lok Sabha, having won 354 seats in the last election. 303 of those seats were won by the BJP, while the remaining 51 were won by allied regional parties. The NDA candidate for Prime Minister is the highly popular Narendra Modi, who has held the position since 2014.

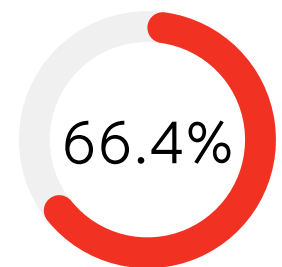
Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance

The Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) is led by the Indian National Congress, a party generally linked with secularism and centrism. The INDIA coalition is new for this election. The member parties currently hold 122 seats in the Lok Sabha, 50 of which belong to the INC. The coalition has not yet announced who it will put forward as prime minister in the event they win a majority of seats. As part of seat-sharing negotiations with the smaller parties in the coalition, the INC announced that it would not take the office of prime minister, though it is uncertain whether the party will stay true to that statement. Various names have been floated as candidates for the position, among them Rahul Gandhi, the former president of the INC, who was unjustly disqualified as a member of parliament last year, Mamata Banerjee, chief minister of West Bengal and founder of the Trinamool Congress, and Mallikarjun Kharge, the current president of the Indian National Congress and chair of the INDIA alliance.

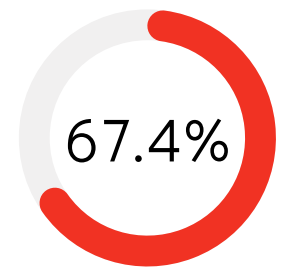
Recent Voter Turnout



2009



2014



2019

The election commission announced on February 9th 2024 that over 968.8 million people are registered for the upcoming election, noting a significant increase in registration amongst women, disabled persons, and youth.



Supporters shower Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Assam Chief Minister Hamanta Bishwa Sarma with flower petals as they arrive to a rally in Guwahati, India. Source: AP



Opposition leaders gathered during the INDIA's second meeting. Leaders left to right: Mamata Banerjee, Rahul Gandhi, Mallikarjun Kharge, Sharad Pawar, Source: ANI

Public Opinion

E236.- Democraticness in own country

Base=7,771 Weighted results	Chronology of EVS-WVS waves			TOTAL
	2005-2009	2010-2014	2017-2022	
Not at all democratic	10.9	3.3	5.0	5.6
2	-	1.7	3.5	1.7
3	-	2.4	3.5	2.0
4	-	6.4	4.6	4.4
5	31.8	15.1	6.2	17.4
6	-	15.8	10.2	10.5
7	-	19.2	19.0	14.2
8	-	16.6	17.4	12.5
9	-	8.2	9.2	6.3
Completely democratic	31.4	10.2	15.0	16.7
No answer	0.1	1.1	-	0.6
Don't know	25.8	-	6.5	8.0
Base mean	1,483	4,033	1,583	7,099
Mean	6.53	6.60	6.82	6.64
Std Dev.	3.26	2.15	2.50	2.50
(N)	2,001	4,078	1,692	7,771

Perception of Indian Democracy

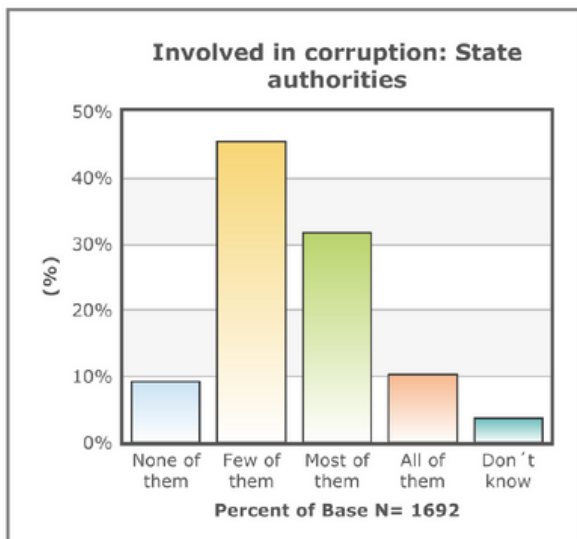
When asked to rank how democratic India is on a scale of 1-10 with 1 meaning not at all democratic and 10 meaning completely democratic, respondents tended to provide middling answers, with the mean response being 6.82. This is fairly consistent with the response participants gave in two prior editions of the survey, with mean responses of 6.6 in 2012 and 6.53 in 2010. This is noteworthy, given that India's V-Dem ratings have significantly declined during that time period.

Political Protest

India has much higher rates of participation in political demonstrations than its neighbors. 21.6% of respondents claimed to have attended a lawful demonstration and 30.4% suggested they might. In neighboring Bangladesh, only 6% of respondents claimed to have attended a protest, in Myanmar only 5.2%, and in Pakistan only 9.8%. This kind of political activism also appears to be on the rise, given that in 2012 only 18.4% of respondents made the same claim, and 15% in 2007.

Political action: Attending lawful/peaceful demonstrations

	TOTAL	ISO 3166-1 numeric country code			
		Bangladesh	Myanmar	India	Pakistan
Have done	11.4 (696)	6.0	5.2	21.6	9.8
Might do	27.2 (1,656)	41.6	20.3	30.4	19.9
Would never do	52.7 (3,205)	41.6	73.8	39.2	58.0
Don't know	8.2 (498)	10.2	0.7	8.8	11.0
No answer	0.5 (32)	0.6	-	-	1.3
(N)	(6,087)	(1,200)	(1,200)	(1,692)	(1,995)



State Corruption

Perception of political corruption in India is slightly low when compared with other countries in the region. 42% of participants from India claimed to believe that most or all state authorities were corrupt. In Bangladesh this figure is 51.2% and in rival Pakistan, it is 56.2%.

The Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance

The INDIA coalition is one noteworthy new feature of the 2024 election campaign. On July 18th, 2023 leaders from over two dozen opposition parties announced the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance, or INDIA. This coalition's name is seen as an attempt by opposition parties to use the nationalist rhetoric typical of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). It is replacing the older opposition alliance, the United Progressive Alliance, which governed India until 2014, when the BJP-led NDA came into power. INDIA is headed by the Indian National Congress, and chaired by the INC's president Mallikarjun Kharge. Many of the other members are regional parties formed in opposition to the INC when it was still the dominant force in Indian politics. INDIA was formed not out of any unified policy agenda, but primarily to defeat the Bharatiya Janata Party and to oust Prime Minister Narendra Modi. According to Kharge, the main goal of the coalition is to "safeguard democracy and the constitution," which the coalition claims are threatened by the Modi government. The BJP has heavily criticized the coalition, claiming its leaders are not concerned with the development of India, but are simply power-hungry.

INDIA has faced setbacks that call into question whether or not the alliance will remain unified enough to present a proper challenge to the NDA. On January 28th of this year, Janata Dal-United chief Nitish Kumar resigned as Bihar Chief Minister, abandoning his alliance with Rashtriya Janta Dal and INDIA to reform his government in a coalition with the BJP and others from the NDA. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee announced that her party, the Trinamool Congress (TMC), would opt for a post-poll formulation between regional parties as opposed to contesting the Lok Sabha elections as a part of the INDIA. These events coincided with rumors of rocky relationships between the Congress and other regional parties. More recently however, the INC has successfully reached seat-sharing arrangements with key regional parties the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) of Delhi and Punjab, and the Samajwadi Party (SP), which is the main opposition party in BJP-controlled Uttar Pradesh. Some INC members are hopeful that these recent successes will put the TMC under pressure to contest their elections in alliance with the INDIA.

INDIA's struggle to reach seat-sharing agreements and its lack of ideological cohesion raise questions about its capacity to oppose the NDA and BJP, despite its recent successes with the AAP and SP. The alliance got an opportunity to test its strength during by-elections last year. Just two months after the opposition formally announced their new alliance, seven by-elections occurred in six states. Of these elections, the BJP won two assembly seats and retained one, while each of the four remaining seats was won by an opposition party. The by-election in Ghosi, Uttar Pradesh, an incredibly important state given its population, was particularly noteworthy. In recent years, the BJP has found a lot of success campaigning in Uttar Pradesh. In this by-election, however, the INDIA-backed SP won by a margin of 42,000 votes.



Rahul Gandhi on his Bharat Jodo Yatra ("Unite India March") that started near the southern tip of India and ended in Jammu and Kashmir. Source: PTI

Democracy: Challenges and Potential Backsliding

Farmers' Protests

The farmers' protest of 2021 gained international attention due to the scale of the movement and its success in pressuring Narendra Modi's government into repealing a set of controversial agriculture laws. On February 13th of this year, farmers from roughly 200 agricultural organizations and unions yet again loaded their tractors and began their journey to Delhi to protest for, among other things, minimum support prices on crops, the waiving of agricultural loans, and universal pensions for farmers over sixty. In preparation for the protest the government of India deployed 5,000 police and paramilitary members with anti-riot equipment such as water cannons along the roads leading to Delhi. Government limited internet access in a number of areas. This protest represents a unique challenge to the BJP's reelection campaign. Roughly 2/3 of India's population relies on agriculture for its livelihood, and agriculture contributes 18.3% of India's total GDP.

Electoral Bonds Controversy

In 2017, the BJP-led government introduced an electoral bonds system. This system allowed individuals and organizations to donate to political parties by purchasing electoral bonds which the parties could then utilize without disclosing donor details. The introduction of the system coincided with amendments to India's Income Tax Act and the Representation of People Act that removed donation limits for corporations and permitted anonymous political donations. The arrangement was challenged in court in 2017 by the Association of Democratic Reforms and the non-profit Common Cause. In November 2023, the Supreme Court declared the electoral bonds system unconstitutional and ordered the State Bank of India to disclose the names of all donors. Afterward, leaders of the Indian National Congress claimed that donations to the BJP corresponded to companies facing raids by federal agencies and/or companies later receiving projects from BJP-ran state governments. From 2018 and 2024 the BJP received bonds worth \$987 million; in second place was the INC which received \$233.5 million.

Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

After the events of October 7th in Israel, Prime Minister Narendra Modi hastily issued a statement of solidarity with Israel. The Indian government also reiterated its official policy supporting a two-state solution to the conflict. It has largely remained neutral concerning Israel's response to the attacks, though has voted in favor of a ceasefire at the United Nations. This reflects a tension between Indian domestic and foreign affairs. Domestically, the Hindu nationalists who constitute much of the BJP voter base tend to be pro-Israeli, seeing their movement and Zionism as kindred spirits. That being said, India has close ties to Muslim-majority Persian Gulf states such as Qatar for energy needs. This forces the BJP to strike a delicate balance: being too supportive of Israel could damage their relationship with Gulf states, while being perceived as unsupportive of Israel could alienate domestic voters and strain economically-important ties with Israel.



Farmers rest outside their tractors and trucks after driving them to the border of Punjab Source: Midhat Fatimah/DW



Bharatiya Janata Party supporters wave Indian and Israeli flags at a rally in New Delhi Source: Getty Images/Pradeep Gaur/SOPA Images/LightRocket

Spotlight on the Campaign Trail



Bharatiya Janata Party supporter carrying a gada, a type of blunt mace used by the Hindu deity Hanuman, at a campaign rally. Source: AP



Law makers from India's opposition parties march against the Modi government during a protest outside the Indian parliament. Source: AP Photo / Altaf Qadri



Train passengers sleep in front of a "Modi selfie point" Source: [Prashant Bhushan on X: "Modi's selfie points installed at our cost showing the reality of New India! https://t.co/q6QwJDTBgT" / X \(twitter.com\)](https://t.co/q6QwJDTBgT)



Workers put up cutouts of Narendra Modi next to those of Hindu deity Lord Ram to celebrate the opening of the temple in Ayodhya, India. Source: AP Photo / Deepak Sharma



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Prime Minister of Nepal Sher Bahadur Deuba (not pictured) perform a shilanyas ceremony of in Lumbini, Nepal. Source: Indian Ministry of External Affairs



Workers constructing barricade to prevent protestors from entering New Delhi. Source: AP Photo/Manish Swarup

Further Reading

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About the Center for Asian Democracy

The mission of the Center for Asian Democracy, established at the University of Louisville in 2006, is to promote research and teaching about democracy and the prospects for democratization in Central, South, Southeast, and East Asia. Through publications, conferences, workshops, visiting scholars programs, colloquia, and research projects in Asian countries, the Center creates a forum for studying political dynamics in this vital region. The Center is led by Dr. David Buckley, Paul Weber Chair of Politics, Science and Religion, and Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Louisville.

About the Author

Wade McGuire is a sophomore at the University of Louisville majoring in Political Science and Humanities. Her academic interests are American Law and South Asian religious traditions. Over the summer she worked as an intern for the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights.

Acknowledgments

CAD thanks Graduate Research Assistant Taylor Martin for assistance in formatting this report. The conclusions and recommendations of this Center for Asian Democracy publication are solely those of its author(s) and do not reflect the views of the center, its leadership, or other scholars.

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