



# **The democracy Report India's Voting history, Leadership shifts and structural Risks in the Modern Political Economy**

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## **Abstract**

The research paper provides an in-depth exploration of the significance of democracy, its essential functions, and its importance in India. It is particularly on the Indian context, emphasising the historical developments related to youth and women's voting, especially during the pivotal year of 1947 and the subsequent changes in Indian democracy following the Emergency of 1975. The paper analyses the political transformations that took place under Indira Gandhi in 1975 and connects these historical events to the current political landscape under Narendra Modi's leadership. It highlights pressing challenges such as economic inequality, the rise of nationalism, the erosion of checks and balances, and concerns regarding press freedoms in India. Moreover, the paper discusses the decline in youth voter participation, which is largely attributed to a deficiency in political education. It also addresses broader themes of human rights, advocating for a universal approach to these rights and promoting the need for a more representative democracy that effectively serves all citizens.

Keywords-Democracy, Human Rights, Women in politics, Press freedom in India.

## **Introduction**

The word 'democracy' is a term that comes from Greek and it is made up of two other words: *demos* = People and *kratein* = to govern, to rule. "Democracy" can then be literally translated by the following terms: Government of the People or Government of the Majority. The democracy plays a vital role in our life. The democracy causes consequences and benefits to our nation. There are 195 countries in the world. This includes the 193 member states of the United Nations, plus the Holy See and the State of Palestine, which have non-member observer status. According to the country every citizen has the right to vote and elect the political party to govern the country. According to Abraham Lincoln "the government of the people, by the people, and for the people".

## History of Indian Democracy

After India gained Independence and adopted democracy in 1947<sup>1</sup>, the government was initially dominated by Congress because the constituent assembly framed the Indian constitution under the leadership of B.R. Ambedkar, who served as the chairman of the Drafting committee. The Congress government was closely associated with Mahatma Gandhi who was unfortunately assassinated in 1948 by the Independence India and served 17 years. For the next four decades, the Indian Congress dominated Indian governance. India with its enormous regional, linguistic and religious diversity was initially viewed by many international observers as a nation unlikely to sustain democratic elections. However, contrary to these expectations, India successfully conducted the first general election and the Congress party secured the momentous victory. Despite the complex social difficulties, the Congress party managed to maintain the unity among the people and govern, democratically despite challenges faced after conducting the election. In the 1970s, Indira Gandhi became a central figure in India's politics, after the 1975 emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi and the 42 Constitutional Amendment, which significantly expanded the power of the central government. The emergency lasted for 21 months, civil rights were curtailed, political opposition was arrested and thrown in jails and press media was totally restricted. After the emergency, in 1977 Indira Gandhi lost power in central, and the coalition government came into power. During this tenure the Bangladesh Liberation War fought against the Pakistani military, they committed genocide against Bangladeshis who protested against the Pakistani. In response, Indira Gandhi ordered military intervention, leading to India's support in the creation of Bangladesh. Her empathetic leadership during this period earned her the reputation of being the "Iron Lady" of India. Following her assassination in 1984 her son Rajiv Gandhi became the Prime minister of India and got a landslide victory is more appropriate in the election. However, the Congress party gradually declined this political dominance with time. Over the 25 years Congress party and the coalition government had alternated power. Since 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party has held the power of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Central power. The BJP nationalist ideology, has often been associated with the Gujarat 2002 riots, which occurred when Modi was the Chief Minister of Gujarat the state. The riots triggered to burning train in Godha, which killed the Hindu pilgrims and was alleged to have been carried to Islamic extremists. The consequence was that many people lost their lives in these riots and the communal violence spread all over Gujarat, the most of the victims were Muslims. Modi's administration was accused of failing to prevent the violence, but he was later cleared of any wrongdoing by the courts.

## Challenges of democracy in India

Indian democracy is now facing serious challenges, unlike China. India has not achieved comparable levels of economic growth<sup>2</sup>, and a significant portion of its population continues to live in poverty. There exists a pronounced wealth gap between the rural and urban areas, with major metropolitan cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad and Bengaluru, there is a big difference between the rich and the poor. Many of them work for low wages, which makes them feels hopeless and frustrated.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/04/democracy-india>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/04/democracy-india>

In recent years, nationalism has grown stronger, and this has often led to increase the hatred and unfair treatment of religious minority groups, including Muslims and Dalits. The Bharatiya Janata Party supports Hindu nationalists and presents itself as a party of Hindu culture. Its leaders often say that the British divided Indian politics by using caste and the party now tries to bring unity among the people. However, instead of promoting Hinduism spiritually, they are often seen opposing other religions like Islam. The BJP claims that other parties favour Muslims. In Assam and the Northeast, people are concerned about illegal immigrants from Bangladesh because of this, the government introduced rules to determine who qualifies as a citizen. In, 2019, a law called the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) was passed. After that, 1.9 million people, many of them Muslims were excluded from the citizenship list and could be placed in detention camps. These actions have created anger among the people because they targeted religious groups. People who protest peacefully are sometimes in jailed without trial, and the police are often violent.

Indian's population is growing rapidly. In northern states, people have less education and fewer jobs. In southern states, people are more educated. Even though many people are ready to work, jobs are not available. Unemployment has reached in the highest level in 40 years.

Another major concern is that many of the politicians elected in the 2019 parliamentary elections were facing serious criminal charges. This raises the question among the people how strong and fair is India democracy.

In a democratic country like India, the press plays a crucial role in amplifying the voices of the people and holding the government accountable. It highlights injustices and addresses matters of public concern. However, the recently released World Press Freedom Index has raised serious concerns regarding the state of press freedom in India, ranking it 159 out of 180 countries in the 2024 index. Challenges to press freedom include the concentration of media ownership, with a significant portion controlled by a few powerful individuals who have close ties to political entities. This ownership structure limits the diversity of viewpoints and undermines unbiased reporting. Journalists reporting on sensitive topics such as corruption, communal riots, and other government-related issues face violence, with some tragically losing their lives, such as Mukesh Chandrakar. Numerous others have faced similar fates while uncovering the harsh realities of society. Additionally, the misuse of laws, such as Section 124 of the Indian Penal Code, often supports restrictions on press freedom. Political corruption within the media is also a significant concern; for instance, a large share of India TV is owned by the Adani Group. The prevalence of fake news and hate speech, especially during the rise of social media, poses further challenges to democracy. These issues hinder the press's ability to inform the public accurately and fairly. Journalists may avoid certain topics or adopt a softer tone to evade backlash or legal consequences, harming their commitment to truthful reporting. Furthermore, the government can influence media through advertising, leading to biased coverage that Favors the ruling party<sup>3</sup>.

### Challenges Faced by Women

Women today are taking on leadership roles across various fields, including business, medicine, law, architecture, engineering, and politics. They are challenging the conservative mindset that has historically limited their access

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.drishitias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-editorials/press-freedom-in-india-challenges-and-strategies>

to these positions. Despite their leadership skills, women remain underrepresented in politics globally. They often participate less in discussions, have limited knowledge of political systems, and are less likely to run for political office compared to men. For instance, in Panchayat politics in India, while women may receive nominations to run for office, governance is often dominated by their husbands or brothers. This situation highlights societal perceptions of women. The true development of a nation relies on the equal involvement of both men and women, yet women's issues are often overlooked due to their lower political participation. After India gained independence, the status of women began to improve, allowing them to engage in political, economic, social, and religious life. Education has played a crucial role in this transformation, enabling women to become doctors, lawyers, teachers, scientists, and leaders. A notable example is Indira Gandhi, who served as Prime Minister from 1966 to 1977 and again from 1980 to 1984.

The 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution in 1992 mandated the reservation of one-third of seats for women in Panchayati Raj institutions to encourage their political participation. However, the reality often falls short of this intention.

Some of the challenges women face in political leadership include:

- Limited access to funding and fewer opportunities compared to their male counterparts.
- Restricted networking opportunities, as many women lack access to established political circles.
- Discrimination arising from societal norms and perceptions about women's capabilities.
- Social barriers, such as a lack of basic political rights and high illiteracy rates among women from poor families.
- Cultural obstacles, where societal values may discourage girls' education and perpetuate caste discrimination.
- Poor health services, particularly for girls at birth, affect their overall well-being.
- Violence, including sexual violence, poses a significant threat to women in public life.
- Domestic responsibilities, such as household chores and childcare, which leave little time for political engagement.

In summary, while women are making progress in leadership roles, systemic challenges continue to hinder their full participation in politics and governance.

To encourage greater female participation in politics, it's essential to build confidence and provide ongoing education and support. Women must help each other grow in knowledge, as this collaborative effort can lay the groundwork for collective success. Governments can play a supportive role by providing training on decision-making and public speaking, creating gender-sensitive environments within political parties, and offering quotas for women candidates. Additionally, holding meetings at convenient times and providing childcare during events



can help boost women's participation. Support from the government for female leadership initiatives, as well as a focus on education, empowerment, and equality, is vital to fostering a more inclusive political landscape<sup>4</sup>.

Only about 38% of young people aged 18 to 19 have registered to vote, which is alarmingly low. Given that there are approximately 49 million individuals in this age group, over 60% have not registered or participated in democracy. In Bihar, the situation is particularly dire, with only 9.3 lakh out of 5.4 lakh eligible young voters registered, resulting in a mere 17% registration rate. States like Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra also show very low registration rates, while Telangana stands out positively with a youth voter registration rate of around 66.7%.

There are several reasons why young people are not registering to vote. Many face logistical issues, such as difficulties with paperwork and a lack of support. Students who migrate for their studies often struggle with the registration process due to frequent changes in location and timing. Additionally, there is a general lack of awareness about the importance of voting among young people; many feel that their voices do not matter and do not understand how the system works. Furthermore, schools often do not provide adequate political education or emphasize the significance of voting and participation in democracy.

This lack of registration is a significant problem. Young people are a powerful part of a country's future, and political parties often claim to represent their interests. However, if young people do not participate in elections, their needs and opinions may not be reflected in political leadership. Given that many young people are educated, they must understand the importance of voting and engage in the democratic process.<sup>5</sup>

#### Case laws

The Keshavananda Bharati case of 1973 <sup>6</sup>is a crucial decision made by the Supreme Court. In this case, the court stated that while Parliament has the authority to amend the Constitution, it cannot alter its basic structure. This basic structure includes fundamental aspects such as democracy, fundamental rights, the rule of law, the separation of powers, and secularism.

Concerns arose when Parliament passed laws that could potentially reduce people's rights, leading many to worry about the government becoming too powerful. However, the Supreme Court stepped in to protect the Constitution, asserting that no entity, including Parliament, can undermine the core ideas and values of the Constitution. This decision emphasises the importance of balancing government power with the rights of the people, ultimately ensuring the continued protection of democracy in India today.

During the Indira Gandhi election, the Allahabad High Court<sup>7</sup> declared the election invalid due to the misuse of government resources to maintain the Prime Minister's position. In response, the government quickly passed the

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.journalofpoliticalscience.com/uploads/archives/4-1-5-990.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://adrindia.org/content/why-young-voters-are-less-interested-elections>

<sup>6</sup> Keshavananda Bharati v State of Kerala (1973) 4 SCC 225 ...

<sup>7</sup> Smt. Indira Nehru Gandhi v. Shri Raj Narain and Anr. - (Supreme Court) (07 Nov 1975) Civil Appeal Nos. 887 and 909 of 1975

39th Amendment, which introduced Article 329A to the Constitution. This amendment prohibited any judicial review of elections for the Prime Minister and the Speaker, stating that only a specially designated parliamentary body could hear cases related to these elections. This action was viewed as a serious attack on the concept of free and fair elections and the judiciary's role in reviewing electoral processes, which is a key component of the basic structure of democracy. Eventually, the Supreme Court struck down parts of this amendment, ruling it unconstitutional because it removed the people's right to challenge any election in court without providing an alternative means to do so. The High Court later rectified its earlier judgment regarding the Indira Gandhi election, confirming that the election was valid. Ultimately, the amendment was deemed unnecessary, but it remains a significant case in the context of protecting democracy and judicial independence in India.

The S.R. Bommai case of 1994<sup>8</sup> was a landmark judgment by the Supreme Court that curtailed the misuse of Article 356 by the central government to dismiss state governments for political reasons. In this case, the Governor of Karnataka wrongly reported that the ruling party had lost its majority, which led to the imposition of President's Rule without conducting a floor test. The Supreme Court subsequently ruled that the President's powers to dismiss a state government are not absolute and must be based on legitimate constitutional grounds. The court stated that such decisions are subject to review, and if there is doubt regarding the majority, it must be verified through a floor test in the assembly, rather than relying solely on the governor's assumptions. This judgment emphasized the importance of federalism in India and underscored the necessity of protecting state governments while providing a judicial check against the political misuse of power.

Justice KS Puttaswamy<sup>9</sup>, who passed away at the age of 98, was a respected judge and a pivotal figure in establishing the right to privacy in India. His legal career began in 1952 and included roles as an advocate and a judge on the Karnataka High Court, eventually becoming the Vice Chairman of the Central Administrative Tribunal. Throughout his career, he issued numerous significant judgments that promoted fairness and equality. After his retirement, he became the first individual to challenge the Aadhaar Card scheme in the Supreme Court, arguing that it violated citizens' privacy. His petition led to the landmark 2017 judgment in which a nine-judge bench of the Supreme Court ruled that the right to privacy is a fundamental right protected under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. Justice KS Puttaswamy made a lasting impact through his influential legal decisions, including those supporting LGBTQ+ rights. His rulings advanced the principles of fairness, human rights, and dignity, reflecting his ongoing commitment to the pursuit of justice.

**Why democracy is the best form of government** Liberal democracy is where the people have the right to speak up and make changes for the good of everyone. According to the thinker John Dewey, the cure for the

<sup>8</sup> S.R. Bommai V. Union of India, MANU/SC/0444/1994.

<sup>9</sup> Justice K.S Puttaswamy, a dedicated champion of Privacy Rights in India, passes away.

problems in democracy is more democracy.” this means that democracy gets the better and the more people get the part.

Democracy does not all at once, it grows slowly with time. For example, in the UK, most people got the right to vote in 1830, the women got it in 1918. In the USA, African - Americans in the South got full voting rights only in 1965. Democracy works by giving the right to vote and freedom of speech to the people. This makes society fairly work. But it takes time, and the changes usually start from top to down. Since 2016, many things have changed in the world, showing that democracies keep improving. If the democracies stop changing and improving it might be weak and unfair.

## Democracy and Human rights

Democracy and humans are closely connected to each other. Democracy without human rights does not exist. According to Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights <sup>10</sup>(UDHR), everyone has the right to participate in their country's government, either by directly participating or by indirectly choosing their representatives. This means that democracy is the only type that respects human rights. **Freedom of Thought, Conscience, and Religion (UDHR, Article 18)** Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance<sup>11</sup>. **Freedom of Expression (UDHR, Article 19)**<sup>12</sup>: Every has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. **Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association (UDHR, Article 20)**<sup>13</sup>: Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

## Successions

Political education and youth engagement are essential components of a healthy democracy, as young people are pivotal to shaping its future. Their voting decisions will significantly influence our collective trajectory. While recognising the importance of women's representation in politics, it is equally vital to empower women to engage actively in the political process and to assess their actual participation levels.

It is crucial to mitigate the influence of criminal elements within the political sphere. Individuals facing serious criminal charges should be disqualified from holding public office. Establishing an independent election commission is fundamental to preserving the integrity of our democratic processes. Moreover, the existence of a free press is indispensable for accountability in governance; without it, we are unable to hold those in power responsible for their actions.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/democracy>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

Our focus should also be on promoting a free press and ensuring equitable political development in both rural and urban areas, particularly for marginalised communities, including indigenous groups and the youth. Education plays a significant role in facilitating this progress.

Additionally, I propose lowering the voting age to 16. At this age, individuals often possess the capability to comprehend complex issues and demonstrate a sense of responsibility. In criminal law, a person over the age of 7 can be held accountable for their actions; therefore, it is reasonable to extend voting rights to younger citizens, as they represent the future of our nation.

Furthermore, I suggest the establishment of a committee dedicated to protecting press freedoms. This committee would address instances where individuals or groups apply coercive pressure on the media to publish or withhold specific news. By safeguarding the rights of a free press, we can enhance the integrity of our information landscape, which is vital for our democracy. We must take proactive steps to protect and advance these values for a better future.

## Conclusion

Democracy is a vital system in our government that empowers the individual participating in the governance and sharing the democratic government. The historical background started in 1947 to the present day. While India built a strong democratic system, it struggles with economic, unemployment and the division of the religious base politics.

Democracy and human rights exist together; both have a relationship with each other. People need to be able to express their opinions and participate together peacefully to make democratic governance. This rise in nationalism and the marginalization of certain communities are serious threats to democracy in India.

Additionally, young people participate the democratic politics by giving votes to their favourite party they play a crucial role in the future. This participation can lead to positive changes and ensures that everyone's voice is heard. Encouraging youth to participate in local politics to national politics and strengthen Indian politics.

For democracy to succeed, it must continue as an independent democracy where we have the right to express our opinions as well as we have human rights and encourage the citizens to participate in strong and fair government. As we look here, it is important to uphold the values of democracy, ensuring it remains the democracy of the people through the people for the people