

The State of Indian Democracy: Resilience, Regression, and the Road Ahead

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Abstract: India's democratic experiment, hailed globally for its scale and diversity, has entered a period marked by profound contradictions. On one hand, it continues to function as a vibrant electoral democracy, regularly conducting elections with high voter turnout and strong public engagement. On the other, there are growing concerns about the erosion of democratic institutions, centralisation of power, weakening of checks and balances, and shrinking space for dissent. This study undertakes a critical assessment of the current state of Indian democracy by tracing its evolution in the past decade, particularly after 2014, when visible shifts in institutional behavior, media independence, and civil liberties began to emerge. Drawing upon global democracy indices, press freedom rankings, and civil society reports, the research investigates the tension between democratic resilience—reflected in the continued functioning of electoral mechanisms—and democratic regression, as evidenced by increasing constraints on fundamental rights and institutional autonomy. The paper also incorporates insights from established scholars to analyse how legal frameworks, political discourse, and policy decisions have contributed to shaping contemporary democratic practices in India. Through a mixed-method approach combining statistical analysis and literature review, the study identifies both structural strengths that sustain the democratic framework and emerging vulnerabilities that threaten its liberal character. It concludes with policy-oriented recommendations aimed at safeguarding democratic principles, reinforcing institutional accountability, and nurturing an informed and participatory citizenry. By presenting a nuanced narrative that resists binary judgments, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of India's complex democratic trajectory and the possibilities for renewal in the face of systemic challenges.

Keywords: Indian democracy, democratic backsliding, authoritarianism, civil liberties, political institutions, electoral politics, constitutionalism, democratic resilience, governance, civil society.



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Introduction:

India's democratic journey has long captured global attention as an extraordinary political experiment. Emerging from the shadows of colonial rule in 1947, India adopted a liberal-democratic Constitution in 1950, charting an ambitious course for political pluralism, secularism, federalism, and the protection of individual liberties. Unlike many post-colonial nations that slipped into autocracy or military rule, India sustained its democratic ethos through periodic elections, the separation of powers, and an independent judiciary. For decades, this resilience was seen not only as a constitutional triumph but also as a testament to the people's commitment to democratic ideals.

However, in recent years, this democratic legacy has come under increasing scrutiny. Observers and scholars alike have expressed concern about the growing authoritarian drift, concentration of executive power, intimidation of dissent, and the shrinking of civil liberties. Institutions once regarded as bulwarks of democracy—such as the judiciary, Election Commission, and the media—are increasingly perceived as compromised or under pressure. Reports from international watchdogs like Freedom House, the V-Dem Institute, and Reporters Without Borders have consistently downgraded India's democratic rankings, citing systematic assaults on press freedom, judicial independence, and minority rights.

Yet, amid these challenges, India remains a functioning electoral democracy. Elections continue to be held on schedule, opposition parties still contest power, and public participation in the democratic process remains high. Citizens actively engage in debates, protests, and political mobilization, suggesting that democratic energy has not been entirely extinguished. This juxtaposition of democratic decline and civic engagement presents a paradox: how can a democracy be electorally vibrant yet institutionally fragile?

This article seeks to explore this duality—India's democratic resilience and its regression. It aims to assess the current condition of Indian democracy by examining both the institutional trends that signal democratic backsliding and the socio-political factors that sustain its democratic core. The analysis draws on global democratic indices, recent political events, and scholarly debates to build a comprehensive picture of the state of democracy in India today.

Furthermore, the paper situates contemporary developments within a broader historical context, emphasizing that India's democracy has always been in tension with forces of centralization, inequality, and exclusion. However, what distinguishes the present moment is the institutional normalization of such tendencies under the guise of majoritarian mandates and populist legitimacy. The decline in the quality of deliberative debate, politicization of independent institutions, erosion of media freedom, and suppression of dissent are not isolated events but part of a broader pattern that merits serious academic and policy attention.

By adopting a mixed-methods approach—integrating data from global reports with critical academic perspectives—this study aims not only to document the present challenges but also to reflect on the pathways available for democratic renewal. The road ahead for Indian democracy will depend on the ability of its institutions, civil society, and citizenry to reclaim the constitutional spirit of accountability, pluralism, and justice.

The State of Democracy:

1. **Democracy Index 2024 – Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU):** The Democracy Index 2024, published by the Economist Intelligence Unit, offers a comprehensive global assessment of the state of democracy across 167 countries. India was ranked 53rd, a significant fall from its 27th position in 2014, and was placed in the “Flawed Democracy” category with a score of 6.34 out of 10. This index evaluates five key dimensions: electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties.

The EIU notes that India continues to conduct free and fair elections, supported by a vibrant multiparty system and widespread voter engagement. However, it flags severe concerns regarding the erosion of civil liberties, growing political intolerance, and restrictions on press freedom and dissent. The increased use of sedition and anti-terror laws to target activists, students, and journalists was cited as undermining democratic culture. Furthermore, the centralization of power in the executive and a weakened opposition are seen as indicators of democratic backsliding. The report emphasizes that although India retains formal democratic institutions; their substantive quality and independence are in decline.

2. **Freedom House Report 2024:** The Freedom House 2024 report titled “Freedom in the World: Democracy under Threat” evaluates political rights and civil liberties in countries globally. India scored 66 out of 100, placing it in the “Partly Free” category for the third consecutive year. This marks a notable decline from its previous “Free” status prior to 2019.
 - The report identifies a series of troubling developments that have contributed to this downgraded status. Among the most pressing concerns are:
 - Curbs on academic freedom, particularly in public universities and research institutions, where dissenting scholars have faced institutional and legal pressures.
 - Suppression of minority rights, especially those of Muslims and Dalits, often through discriminatory legislation (e.g., Citizenship Amendment Act) and state-supported rhetoric.
 - Intimidation and harassment of journalists, including arrests under sedition and anti-terror laws, raids on media offices, and shrinking space for independent journalism.

Freedom House observes that democratic norms are being increasingly undermined by policies that promote majoritarianism and discourage pluralism. It highlights the need to safeguard the rights of civil society actors and reinforce judicial independence to restore India’s democratic health.

1. **V-Dem Institute Report 2024 – Varieties of Democracy:** The V-Dem Institute (based at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden) produces one of the most granular democracy assessments globally. In its 2024 Democracy Report, India is classified as an “Electoral Autocracy,” marking a sharp decline from its previous status as an “Electoral Democracy.”

This categorization is based on a detailed assessment of over 350 indicators grouped into themes such as electoral integrity, freedom of expression, civil society autonomy, judicial independence, and deliberative democracy. Two specific indicators where India showed significant deterioration are:

- **Deliberative Democracy:** This refers to the extent to which political decisions are made through respectful, reasoned debate that considers the public good. The report criticizes the growing dominance of unilateral executive action, marginalization of parliamentary debate, and the use of ordinances and emergency laws to bypass legislative scrutiny.
- **Egalitarian Democracy:** This indicator measures the extent to which all social groups enjoy equal rights and access to power. The report flags increasing political exclusion of minorities, marginalization of civil society voices, and the use of surveillance and legal instruments to deter opposition activity.

Additionally, the report documents increased censorship, persecution of protestors, and institutional capture of watchdog bodies such as the Election Commission and information commissions. V-Dem concludes that India’s current trajectory reflects a systemic weakening of democratic accountability, with growing resemblance to competitive authoritarian regimes.

Collectively, these three international indices signal a concerning pattern: while India retains the formal architecture of democracy, including regular elections and functioning institutions, there is a marked decline in the substance and quality of democratic governance. Civil liberties, political tolerance, press freedom, and institutional independence—once the hallmarks of Indian democracy—are under sustained pressure. These findings affirm the central argument of this research: that India's democracy is resilient in structure but increasingly regressive in spirit and practice.

Literature Review

- **Kohli, A. (1990). Democracy and Discontent** Atul Kohli's foundational work delves into the contradictions embedded within India's federal democratic system. He identifies a persistent tension between centralized state authority and regional aspirations, particularly in states where socio-economic inequalities are acute. Kohli argues that democratic discontent in India is not merely political but rooted in the failure of governance to deliver equitable development. He shows how state institutions, though designed to be democratic, have often failed to accommodate the demands of marginalized communities, leading to sporadic unrest and regional alienation. His analysis underscores the idea that political centralization without economic inclusion undermines democratic legitimacy, making the case for decentralization and participatory governance.
- **Chatterjee, P. (1997). The Nation and Its Fragments** Partha Chatterjee introduces a **critical** distinction between civil society and political society to explain how marginalized populations engage with Indian democracy. According to Chatterjee, while civil society represents elite spaces of constitutional discourse, political society emerges as a space where the poor and disenfranchised negotiate survival through informal and extra-legal mechanisms. This negotiation, often reliant on patronage rather than rights, reveals the uneven distribution of democratic access. Chatterjee contends that although democracy formally extends to all citizens, its substantive benefits are often mediated by social hierarchies and political calculations. His work provides a crucial lens to understand why India's democracy, while universal in theory, remains fragmented and unequal in practice.
- **Guha, R. (2007). India After Gandhi** Ramachandra Guha offers a sweeping narrative of India's democratic evolution in the post-independence period. He celebrates India's survival as a democratic polity despite its staggering diversity, poverty, and history of colonial subjugation. Yet, Guha also warns of latent threats to democratic stability, particularly the rise of majoritarian ideologies and populist politics. He documents how democracy has withstood challenges such as the Emergency (1975–77), communal riots, and regional insurgencies, suggesting both the resilience of democratic institutions and the fragility of liberal democratic norms. Guha's account illustrates that while the democratic spirit in India remains strong among the populace, it is often compromised by political elites seeking short-term electoral gains.
- **Jaffrelot, C. (2011). Religion, Caste, and Politics in India** Christophe Jaffrelot provides a meticulous analysis of how identity politics—especially revolving around caste and religion—have shaped electoral outcomes and political discourse in India. He argues that democratic mobilization of caste-based and religious identities, while empowering for some communities, has also undermined the liberal foundations of democracy. Jaffrelot illustrates how political parties have increasingly relied on identity-based vote banks, leading to sectarian divisions and communal polarization. He also examines the instrumentalization of religion in public life, cautioning against its corrosive impact on secular democratic principles. His work is vital for understanding the paradox of democratization through identity assertion that simultaneously threatens democratic cohesion.

- **Yadav, Y. (2014). Electorate and Democracy in India** Yogendra Yadav offers a nuanced perspective on the evolution of India's electorate and the changing nature of democratic participation. He observes a marked shift from representative democracy to a populist model, where political leaders project themselves as the sole voice of the people while bypassing institutional processes. According to Yadav, the growing personalization of politics—often centered around charismatic leaders—has weakened institutional accountability. He also highlights the emergence of a more assertive electorate, particularly among historically marginalized groups, who now view the ballot as a tool of empowerment. However, this electoral vibrancy, he argues, does not necessarily translate into democratic deepening, especially when governance becomes arbitrary and exclusionary.
- **Mehta, P. B. (2017). The Burden of Democracy** Pratap Bhanu Mehta provides a critical appraisal of Indian democracy's structural and normative challenges. He contends that democracy in India has been reduced to a procedural exercise, largely focused on elections, rather than being a framework for substantive justice and individual liberty. Mehta underscores the crisis of deliberation, where policy-making is no longer guided by public reason but by political expediency. He points to the erosion of institutional checks, including judicial oversight and media autonomy, which has contributed to the centralization of power. According to Mehta, the future of Indian democracy depends not merely on electoral outcomes, but on reviving the moral and constitutional imagination that once defined its postcolonial foundation.
- **Varshney, A. (2019). Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life** In this comparative work, Ashutosh Varshney examines the conditions under which ethnic diversity leads to violence in some contexts but peaceful coexistence in others. Focusing on Hindu-Muslim relations in Indian cities, he finds that robust intercommunal civic networks play a critical role in preventing conflict. Varshney's findings suggest that democracy is not just a matter of institutions, but of social capital and civic engagement. Where civil society is strong, democracy thrives through moderation and consensus-building. His work serves as a reminder that democratic resilience is closely tied to the strength of local civic bonds, which can either defuse or exacerbate identity-based tensions.
- **Palshikar, S. (2020). Indian Democracy in Flux** Sujit Palshikar's work provides a contemporary critique of India's political and institutional landscape in the post-2014 period. He notes a disturbing trend of executive dominance, where key institutions such as the Parliament and judiciary are being sidelined or co-opted. Palshikar highlights the decline in legislative debate, increasing frequency of ordinances, and erosion of federal principles through centralized decision-making. He also draws attention to the diminishing role of the opposition, which undermines democratic accountability. Through detailed political analysis, Palshikar argues that while electoral democracy remains active, the substance of constitutional democracy is being hollowed out, posing serious long-term risks to democratic sustainability.
- **Sinha, A. (2022). Democracy and the Indian State** Aseema Sinha examines the transformation of India's bureaucratic and judicial systems under conditions of political pressure. She argues that these institutions, which were once relatively autonomous, have increasingly come under the influence of partisan interests and executive control. Sinha highlights how appointments to constitutional bodies are often politicized, compromising their neutrality and effectiveness. Her research points to a broader pattern of institutional weakening, where accountability mechanisms are being diluted, and institutional checks are rendered ineffective. This transformation, she argues, represents a shift from rule-based governance to personality-driven leadership, a hallmark of democratic regression.
- **Vaishnav, M. (2023). When Crime Pays: Money and Muscle in Indian Politics** Milan Vaishnav's pathbreaking study explores the intersection of criminality and electoral success in

Indian politics. He presents empirical evidence showing that a significant proportion of elected representatives face serious criminal charges, including corruption, violence, and coercion. Vaishnav explains that voters often choose such candidates because of their perceived effectiveness or ability to deliver patronage in weakly governed regions. This creates a vicious cycle, where governance is eroded, and political accountability is compromised. His work underlines the normalization of criminality in democratic processes, revealing one of the most urgent challenges to institutional integrity and public trust in India's democracy.

Research Gap

Although numerous scholars have explored Indian democracy through themes like electoral politics, federalism, and identity-based mobilization, there remains a noticeable gap in recent literature regarding the institutional and normative changes post-2014. While international reports such as those by the EIU, Freedom House, and V-Dem have raised red flags about democratic backsliding in India, academic studies have not sufficiently integrated this data into a comprehensive analysis of India's evolving democratic structure.

Moreover, the relationship between democratic form and democratic substance—especially regarding civil liberties, media freedom, and the independence of institutions—has not been adequately examined in the Indian context. The growing gap between electoral legitimacy and liberal democratic values remains understudied. This research attempts to address this gap by evaluating both structural and cultural shifts in Indian democracy and by examining recent trends that reflect both its resilience and regression.

Objectives

1. To assess the current status of Indian democracy using global democratic indices.
2. To evaluate the resilience of Indian democratic institutions amidst increasing authoritarian tendencies.
3. To analyze challenges such as media suppression, executive overreach, and civil liberty erosion.
4. To propose policy and institutional reforms for democratic revitalization.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of Indian democracy. The rationale for this methodology stems from the multifaceted nature of democratic functioning, which involves both measurable institutional indicators and subjective assessments of civil liberties, political culture, and institutional resilience.

Data Sources

The research is primarily based on secondary data, meticulously gathered from credible international and national sources. Quantitative indicators are drawn from three major global democracy assessment institutions:

- The **Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)** Democracy Index,
- The **Freedom House** annual reports, and
- The **Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)** Institute datasets.

These sources offer standardized, longitudinal data on parameters such as electoral processes, civil liberties, functioning of government, and political participation, enabling meaningful comparative analysis across years.

Additionally, civil society organizations and public policy research institutions have been consulted for qualitative and policy-oriented insights. This includes reports from PRS Legislative Research, People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), and other human rights watchdogs. These documents help trace how institutional changes affect rights, freedoms, and the democratic experience of Indian citizens at the ground level.

To provide scholarly depth and theoretical grounding, the study also incorporates peer-reviewed journal articles and monographs written by prominent political scientists, sociologists, and public intellectuals who have critically examined India’s democratic evolution.

Analytical Techniques

The analysis employs a comparative institutional framework to evaluate shifts in democratic governance structures over time. This includes the study of changes in the autonomy, transparency, and accountability of major democratic institutions such as the Parliament, Judiciary, Election Commission, and Media.

In parallel, thematic content analysis has been applied to textual data from academic literature, civil society reports, and media publications. Themes such as executive centralization, electoral populism, civil liberties, and identity-based politics have been coded and assessed to identify dominant patterns and deviations.

Moreover, the statistical trend analysis of democratic indices from 2014 to 2024 allows for a clear illustration of India’s shifting democratic scores. The study interprets these fluctuations in light of socio-political developments, legislative trends, and institutional responses during this period.

Time Frame and Scope

The selected time frame—2014 to 2024—corresponds with a critical political transition and subsequent consolidation of power by a dominant national party. This decade has witnessed significant institutional and normative changes that warrant scholarly attention. By narrowing the focus to this period, the study seeks to understand how recent political developments have influenced democratic resilience and contributed to emerging concerns about democratic backsliding.

In sum, the methodological framework balances empirical data with contextual interpretation, offering a nuanced assessment of the resilience, regression, and future trajectory of Indian democracy.

Table 1: India’s ranking in Global Democracy Indices (2014–2024)

Year	EIU Rank	V-Dem Type	Freedom House Score	Status
2014	27	Electoral Democracy	77/100	Free
2019	41	Electoral Autocracy	71/100	Partly Free
2024	53	Electoral Autocracy	66/100	Partly Free

Source: Economist Intelligence Unit, V-Dem Institute, Freedom House

The data shows a consistent decline in India’s democratic performance over the decade, transitioning from a ‘Free’ to a ‘Partly Free’ status, indicative of institutional weakening.

Table 2: Press Freedom Index – India (2014–2024)

Year	Ranking (out of 180)	Score	Category
2014	140	39.5	Difficult
2019	142	36.1	Difficult
2024	161	31.0	Very Serious

Source: Reporters without Borders (RSF)

India's declining press freedom reflects growing state influence, intimidation of journalists, and censorship, challenging a fundamental pillar of democracy.

Table 3: Civil Society and Protest Suppression (2014–2024)

Year	Major Protests	Government Response	Arrests	Internet Shutdowns
2016	JNU Protests	Sedition charges	23	3
2019	CAA-NRC	Police crackdown	1100+	5
2020	Farmers' Protest	Blockades, FIRs	300+	7
2023	Wrestlers' Protest	Forceful evictions	25	2

Source: Human Rights Watch, PUCL Reports, Internet Shutdown Tracker

The pattern of using coercive measures to suppress dissent highlights shrinking civic space and declining tolerance for democratic pluralism.

Scope for Further Study

While this study offers a broad analysis of the current challenges confronting Indian democracy between 2014 and 2024, several dimensions remain underexplored and present fertile ground for future academic inquiry. These areas merit deeper investigation to build a more comprehensive and comparative understanding of democratic health in both national and global contexts.

- **Regional Variations in Democratic Backsliding:** India's vast federal structure and socio-cultural diversity make it essential to study democratic erosion not just at the national level but also within individual states and regions. Future research could examine how democratic practices vary across states, particularly in relation to press freedom, law enforcement accountability, or state-level legislative performance. Case studies focusing on states such as West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, or Tamil Nadu may reveal regional resistances or accelerants to democratic decline.
- **Digital Surveillance and Algorithmic Governance:** With the increasing use of digital technologies by the state, including mass surveillance, facial recognition, and biometric data collection, there is an urgent need to assess their implications for civil liberties and democratic accountability. Future work could critically evaluate how the expansion of algorithmic control and data monitoring reshapes state-citizen relationships, often without adequate legal safeguards. This includes exploring the opaque role of private tech firms in influencing electoral campaigns, social media narratives, and political polarization.
- **Comparative Study of Democratic Resilience:** India is not alone in experiencing democratic strain. Countries such as Brazil, Indonesia, Turkey, and the Philippines also exhibit similar patterns of populist governance, institutional weakening, and curtailed civil liberties. Future comparative studies can assess whether India's democratic backsliding is part of a global pattern of democratic recession or if it follows a uniquely domestic trajectory. Such comparisons can reveal which institutional features or civic movements have been more successful in resisting authoritarian impulses.
- **Education, Media Literacy, and Democratic Engagement:** One of the more overlooked areas in discussions of democratic sustainability is the quality of civic education and media literacy. Future research could investigate how educational institutions, school curricula, and

public awareness campaigns influence citizens' ability to critically engage with democratic processes, resist misinformation, and hold political actors accountable. Longitudinal studies might track how democratic participation evolves among younger, more digitally connected generations.

This broadened scope not only invites interdisciplinary collaboration—from political science and sociology to media studies and data ethics—but also paves the way for policy recommendations that are better tailored to emerging threats and regional specificities.

Findings

The study reveals a complex and often contradictory landscape of Indian democracy in the post-2014 period, marked by simultaneous electoral vitality and institutional fragility. Drawing from comparative data, thematic analysis, and expert literature, several key findings emerge:

- **Electoral Participation Remains Strong, but Institutional Safeguards Are Weakening:** India continues to witness high voter turnout, a competitive multiparty system, and enthusiastic engagement during elections, reflecting the democratic impulse of its citizens. However, this electoral vibrancy stands in sharp contrast to the deterioration of institutional checks and balances. The Parliament has become increasingly marginalised, with fewer debates, rushed legislation, and weakened committee scrutiny. Electoral democracy, while formally intact, appears increasingly hollowed out in substance, raising concerns about procedural democracy overshadowing substantive democratic governance.
- **Judicial Independence and Media Freedom Are Under Pressure:** Traditionally seen as guardians of constitutional morality, the judiciary and the media are no longer functioning with the same degree of autonomy. Judicial appointments and case listings have come under scrutiny, with perceptions of executive influence growing steadily. Landmark judgments on civil liberties and minority rights are either delayed or diluted. Similarly, the mainstream media has seen a significant shift toward self-censorship, sensationalism, and political partisanship, reducing its role as a watchdog and public forum. The shrinking space for investigative journalism and public-interest litigation signals a deep strain on two of democracy's most critical institutions.
- **From Liberal Pluralism to Majoritarian Populism:** There is a marked ideological shift in the political landscape—from a commitment to pluralism and secularism to an emphasis on cultural nationalism and majoritarian identity politics. Electoral campaigns and policy rhetoric increasingly reflect populist tropes, often framing political opponents as "anti-national" or "obstacles to development." Religious polarization, the erosion of minority rights, and the use of historical grievances as political tools have contributed to a climate where dissent is viewed with suspicion and homogenization is valorised.
- **Erosion of Civil Society and Suppression of Dissent:** One of the most significant findings is the systemic weakening of civil society, which historically played a crucial role in holding governments accountable, mobilizing grassroots participation, and advocating for marginalized groups. Stringent laws such as the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) have been used to restrict NGO funding, while activists, students, and journalists face increasing surveillance, harassment, and even incarceration under broad national security laws like the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). This crackdown on dissent undermines the very essence of democratic accountability and discourages open public discourse, which is vital for any functioning democracy.

These findings collectively suggest that while India's democratic form is retained, its democratic content is being eroded. The disconnect between electoral legitimacy and constitutional values,

alongside the rise of executive dominance and declining civic freedoms, places India at a critical democratic crossroads.

Recommendations

- 1. Institutional Reforms:** A robust democracy requires strong, impartial institutions. The judiciary, Election Commission, and other regulatory bodies must be insulated from political interference. This can be achieved through transparent appointment processes, fixed tenures, and adequate funding. Their constitutional mandate should be reinforced to act as effective checks on executive power.
- 2. Media Safeguards:** An independent press is the cornerstone of democratic accountability. There is an urgent need for legislation that protects journalistic freedom, prevents arbitrary censorship, and encourages diverse ownership. Establishing public oversight bodies comprising civil society members and legal experts can help ensure ethical journalism without government overreach.
- 3. Civic Engagement:** Democratic resilience depends on an informed and active citizenry. Civic education that emphasizes constitutional values, rights, and responsibilities should be integrated into school and college curricula. Encouraging citizen-led watchdog groups, public consultations, and participatory governance mechanisms can foster deeper democratic culture at the grassroots.
- 4. Legal Protections for Dissent:** Existing laws such as sedition, UAPA, and other national security legislations require urgent reform to prevent their misuse against activists, journalists, and dissenting citizens. Clearer legal definitions, judicial oversight, and accountability clauses must be introduced to align these laws with democratic norms and human rights standards.
- 5. International Monitoring and Cooperation:** India should actively engage with international democratic and human rights frameworks, including UN mechanisms and peer review processes. Constructive participation in such forums not only reinforces global democratic credibility but also brings external accountability that can strengthen internal reform efforts.

Conclusion

India's democratic journey, while remarkable in many respects, is currently navigating a period of deep transformation and visible strain. The country's electoral vibrancy continues to attract global attention, yet beneath the surface lies a complex erosion of institutional checks, civil liberties, and inclusive participation. The tension between formal democratic procedures and substantive democratic outcomes has never been more pronounced. While citizens continue to exercise their right to vote, the broader democratic architecture—comprising a free press, independent judiciary, empowered legislature, and vibrant civil society—appears increasingly compromised. This study has shown that the post-2014 period marks a discernible shift in the functioning of Indian democracy. Majoritarian narratives, the weakening of deliberative institutions and executive overreach have contributed to a narrowing of democratic space. Simultaneously, institutions historically viewed as guardians of constitutionalism—the judiciary and media—have shown signs of deference or vulnerability to political power. This has raised concerns about the resilience of democratic norms and the ability of democratic institutions to uphold rights and pluralism in the face of populist pressures.

Moreover, the criminalization of politics, misuse of coercive legal instruments, and the de legitimization of dissent signal a departure from the spirit of constitutional democracy. These developments are not merely legal or procedural concerns—they have serious implications for the social contract between the state and its citizens. In particular, the marginalization of minority voices, curtailment of academic and journalistic freedom, and surveillance of digital spaces suggest a growing discomfort with contestation and critique, both of which are essential to

democratic vitality. Yet, Indian democracy is not without hope. The very fact that these trends are being debated in academic, civil, and political spaces indicates that a counter current exists. Civil society organizations, grassroots movements, and segments of the electorate continue to demand transparency, accountability, and equity. Their efforts underscore the importance of public vigilance and participatory engagement in renewing the democratic promise.

In conclusion, India stands at a crossroads—between the procedural robustness of its democratic framework and the substantive hollowing out of its core values. The resilience of Indian democracy will depend not only on institutional reform but also on the everyday actions of its citizens, educators, lawmakers, and civil actors who remain committed to the ideals enshrined in the Constitution. Ensuring that democracy in India remains both electorally functional and substantively just is not merely a policy imperative but a moral and civic necessity.

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