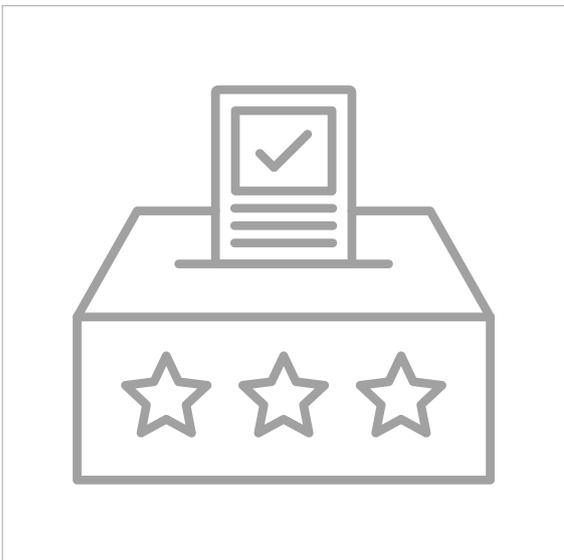


# The Great Indian Democracy

an initiative echoing the  
significance of using one's right  
to vote

by Cambridge AS Level

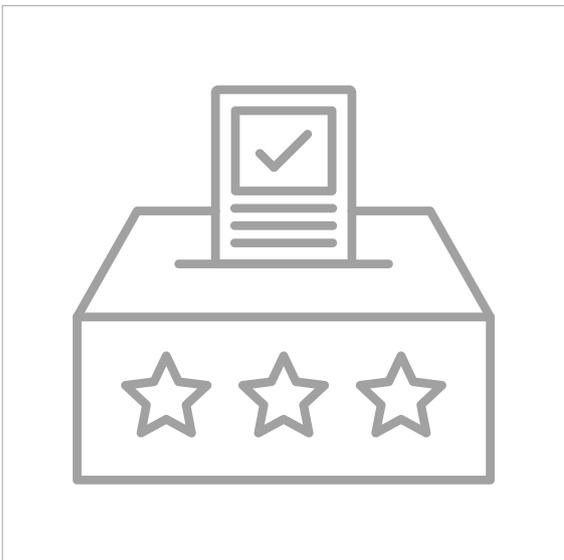


EVERY VOTE MATTERS.

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# Preface

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We, the students of Cambridge AS Level, stand at the threshold of becoming the next generation of active citizens. We believe that the act of voting is not just a right; it is a powerful tool that allows us to have a say in the decisions that shape our society. With this collection of essays that explore various dimensions of a democracy, we aim to underscore the importance of this fundamental democratic process and encourage every eligible individual to exercise their right to vote.

Each writing in this collection is a testament to our collective belief in the power of voting. Written by students from various backgrounds, these pieces reflect a wide range of perspectives and experiences. Together, they form a compelling narrative that highlights the significance of every single vote.

As you read through this compilation, we invite you to reflect on the power of your vote. Let these words encourage you to take part in shaping the future of our society. Together, we can make a difference, one vote at a time.

Let's make our vote COUNT.

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# THE “DEATH” OF DEMOCRACY

“There was never a democracy yet that did not commit suicide”, John Adams once remarked. This statement can very well be applied to the current governmental system of India. The country once known to be a beacon of democracy has forgotten all the values that Nehru laid out



in his “Tryst with Destiny” on the auspicious occasion of 15th August 1947 and is now heralded an electoral autocracy or even a disguised dictatorship.

Even from afar, the political reality in india is plain to see and unpleasant to behold. This is especially disheartening for those who have wished the country well and regarded it as the “world’s largest democracy”. However, the present circumstances of the country point towards a completely opposite direction. The political party in power as of now in actuality is a party supportive of majoritarianism. With no actual policies or agendas suggestive of these, “secular”, “democratic”, “pluralist” etc. remain to be futile words written in our constitution. Some policies adopted by the government residing over the parliament which solidify the above claims are:

Some leaders from the ruling party have moved to further limit Muslims’ rights under the controversial citizenship law, which has the power to render millions of muslims in India stateless.

Farmers protest against the government’s farm laws due to concerns about exploitation without minimum support price, dismantling of market infrastructure, and fear of corporate dominance jeopardizing livelihoods.

Top of Form Critics argue that governments at the central and state levels have targeted journalists, artists, and dissenting voices, using various tactics to suppress criticism and control the narrative.



In addition to these, it is popular belief that under the leadership of Mr. Modi, his party has centralized powers within the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), diminishing the autonomy of other institutions. Decisions are often perceived as being made unilaterally by the PMO, with limited consultation.

The cabinet ministers have also been accused of eroding the independence and

integrity of pivotal institutions of the Indian government such that the Election Commission, the judiciary and media which discredits the so-called system of "checks and balances."

Some economists also argue that the government's economic policies, such as demonetization and the implementation of the goods and services tax (GST), have been implemented without sufficient consultation and have resulted in adverse effects on certain segments of the population.

Such instances force us to go in retrospect and ask ourselves if we really are living in the country once deemed to be an embodiment of social, political and electoral economy. However, amidst these challenges, the preservation of democratic principles remains paramount, calling for collective vigilance, advocacy, and a renewed commitment to safeguarding the foundations of democratic governance for future generations.

DHAIRYA MEHRA

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# PLEBISCITE FOR A UNION

United we stand?



One nation, one election. Many divisions, united action. It is one of the most polarising concepts gaining traction in India. Isn't it ironic? an ideology meant to bring people together is causing political divide throughout the nation. The concept of "one nation, one election" has already been proposed and investigated by several organizations, including the Law Commission, the Election Commission, and legislative committees. A few others have included it in their election manifestos. Even so, unanimity amongst political groups seems to be a far-fetched dream.

The question of whether simultaneous elections could be held was first discussed not so long ago, in 1983. In its 170th report, the law commission proposed that the Lok Sabha and all state assemblies be elected at the same time. A parliamentary standing committee conducted a study in 2015 that examined the viability of holding simultaneous elections and outlined several advantages, including lower expenses and more effective administration. The report did, however, also take into account objections made by opposition parties who criticized the notion due to its potential effects on federalism and the establishment of democratic safeguards.

Evidently, conducting elections at different levels of government incurs substantial expenses. According to CII (The Confederation of Indian Industry), a country that is perpetually in election mode has an impact on capital expenditure and infrastructure-related projects since it causes delays in project implementation because of missing permissions and approvals during the model code of conduct. During this time, the capacity of government employees is also limited by elections. Synchronizing these elections would reduce the financial burden on the exchequer, promoting efficient allocation of resources towards development initiatives.

Additionally, it is undeniable that elections frequently result in the degradation of public discourse because of divisive topics, hate speech, and increased political rivalry. Frequent elections can lead to a perpetual state of campaigning, diverting policy makers' attention from governance.

Regular elections also result in government employees, including ministers, dedicating more of their time to campaigning than to their official responsibilities. This way, the government comes to a standstill. Aligning election cycles could provide longer periods of stable governance, enabling elected representatives to focus on fulfilling their electoral promises and implementing long-term policies, hence, effectively doing their job.

On one hand, simultaneous elections may encourage higher voter participation by reducing voter fatigue associated with frequent trips to the polling booth. A single-election event might also attract more attention from the electorate, leading to increased engagement and awareness.

On the other hand, in countries with federal structures like India, states enjoy significant autonomy in determining their electoral schedules. Any attempt to synchronize elections at all levels would require constitutional amendments and consensus among states, which may prove to be a daunting task.



Critics argue that synchronizing elections could lead to an imbalance of power, favoring national parties over regional ones. Smaller parties, which often rely on local issues and sentiments, might find it challenging to compete effectively in a unified election scenario. This will lead to the marginalization of regional issues. Larger national-level issues will overshadow smaller and locale-specific issues in simultaneous polls. As a result, political discourse will become more homogenized, and minor parties and states will find it more challenging to present their positions to the country.

Consequently, holding simultaneous elections might undermine the essence of democracy by limiting the frequency of electoral accountability. Critics fear that longer tenures between elections could reduce the government's responsiveness to the electorate's changing needs and preferences.

Typically, conducting elections on such a massive scale requires meticulous planning and logistical arrangements. From security deployment to the availability of electronic voting machines, synchronized elections pose significant administrative challenges, especially in countries with vast geographical diversity and logistical constraints.

Many claim the idea of hosting simultaneous elections is "unconstitutional" because they advocate for the early dissolution of state legislatures, which would be "against the will of the people." Additionally, the opponents contend



that any modifications to the terms would go against the fundamental framework of the constitution since it sets fixed terms for parliament and assemblies.

The concept of one nation, one election, presents

both opportunities and challenges for democratic governance. While it promises efficiency, stability, and cost-effectiveness, its implementation requires careful consideration of constitutional, legal, and logistical aspects. Moreover, safeguarding federal principles and ensuring democratic accountability are imperative in any discussion about synchronizing electoral cycles. As countries deliberate on this proposition, it is essential to engage in thorough deliberation, taking into account diverse perspectives and potential ramifications, to make informed decisions that uphold the integrity of the democratic process.

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# NOTA

## The Silent voice of Dissent

In a world of imperfect choices, does 'none of the above' offer a clearer voice? In an era marked by growing disillusionment with traditional political options, 'none of the above' (nota) emerges as a potent symbol of democratic dissent, offering voters a tangible means to express dissatisfaction, challenge the status quo, and demand greater accountability in electoral processes. The recent emergence of nota in India is a testament to the lack of confidence expressed by the average Indian in regards to the candidates.

Since, 27th September 2013 when Nota was originally introduced by the Supreme Court it has only grown in popularity, with over 1.08% of all voters voting for Nota in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. In the 2019 Lok Sabha election nota actually secured more votes than the win margin in 3 constituencies. Thus, proving that the presence of nota has resulted in a shift to a more engaged and discerned electorate in Indian democracy.

Nota also has a very positive effect on voter turnout as it ensures that no individual is required to vote for the lesser evil and allows them to show their dissatisfaction by remaining neutral. 2019 was the highest voter turnout with over 67.4 percent of Indians-615 million showing up to poll booths in one of the largest democratic exercises in history. It was also the first time where the difference between male and female voters was negligible.

The Supreme Court, on April 26, agreed to examine a plea seeking directions to the Election Commission of India (EC) to frame guidelines or rules, for elections in which none of the contesting candidates individually surpass the none of the above (nota) category, the EC responded that if nota gets the highest number of votes, the candidate who got the second highest would be declared the winner.



It appears that there is a clear consensus among people demanding that more power be handed to nota, majority votes for nota shouldn't just act as a symbol of dissatisfaction but also as a need for change. A large majority of people believe that in case of a nota majority, re-elections should be conducted with parties forced to field different candidates in order to uphold the spirit of democracy.

The main focus of current candidates is on targeting their opposing candidates and their policies and manifestos rather than introducing their own unique policies for the betterment of their constituents, this is because they believe they just need to be better than their opposition rather than being appealing to the people. Politicians' mindsets would be drastically altered by this shift since they would be terrified of being re-elected.

Nota, however, has a number of obstacles and restrictions in place that limit its ability to function as a vehicle for democratic speech. Since nota has no direct impact on election results, many contend that it is toothless. Even if nota receives the highest number of votes, the candidate with the second highest votes will still win the election. Thus, people believe since voting for nota doesn't have any significance it is better not to vote at all.



Additionally, there is a general feeling of misunderstanding and uncertainty among voters about nota; many do not completely get its importance or how it works inside the democratic system. This ignorance is especially common when it comes to marginalised and vulnerable communities, who are reluctant to voice their displeasure with the candidates on offer.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of nota ultimately depends on how political leaders and parties handle it, even though it might be a beneficial weapon for expressing public discontent. If nota fails to tackle the root causes of public discontent, it could be written off as a token gesture rather than a force for positive change.

In conclusion, nota is essential to India's democracy because it gives people a way to voice their disapproval of the political establishment. It reminds politicians of the significance of attending to the concerns of the electorate and enhances accountability and civic involvement. Nota is a potent instrument in india's continuous efforts to ensure that every citizen's voice is heard and valued during the electoral process. This is part of the country's ongoing search for a more inclusive democracy.



ADVIT SETHI

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# BALLOTS & BETRAYAL

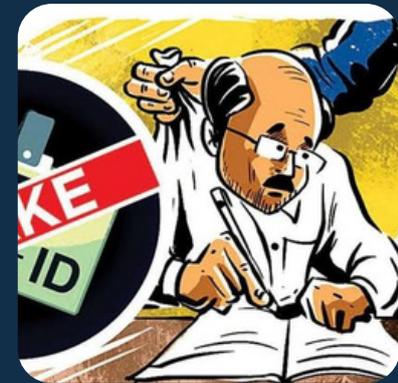
## Unmasking Electoral malpractices in India.

The electoral process in India, a cornerstone of democracy is marred by a plethora of malpractices that undermine the very essence of free and fair elections, perpetuating systematic flaws and eroding public trust in the democratic institutions.

The first general elections in India were held between 25 October 1951 and 21 February 1952. Malpractices began to emerge due to various factors, including political competition, socioeconomic disparities and weaknesses in governance and oversight. Electoral malpractices such as vote buying, booth capturing and electoral fraud, have eroded public trust in the electoral process.

Firstly, nominees indulge in various kinds of malpractices but the most prevailing is vote buying. Candidates or their supporters offer money or goods in exchange for votes. Vote buying distorts the democratic process by substituting the free expression of citizen's will with the exchange of money or goods for votes. Instead of voters making informed choices based on their beliefs and preferences, their decisions are influenced by material incentives offered by political actors. Candidates often illegally seize polling booths by armed individuals to manipulate voting. This often involves the use of violence, intimidation and coercion to control polling stations. This poses a significant threat to public safety and can result in injuries, fatalities and widespread fear among voters and election officials.

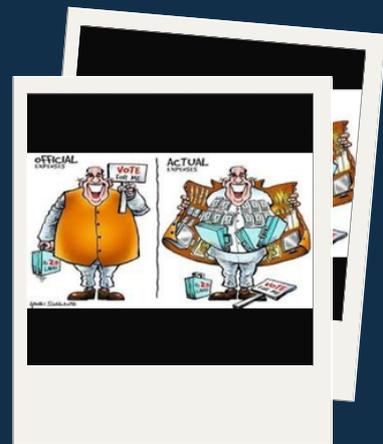
Secondly, threats aimed at influencing voters to support a particular candidate or party, the integrity of the election is compromised and the outcome may not accurately reflect the will of the electorate. According to the Hindustan Times, in the 1971 general elections, voter intimidation was so widespread that in January, the usual atmosphere on the streets of the state capital reflected fear and dread. In Madras and other districts, party functionaries told voters and absolute commissioners, that voting for their party was the only way to ensure that their names were included in the ration cards.



Furthermore, spreading false information or rumours to sway public opinion is very appealing to candidates to ensure votes. Various parties are involved in such activities mostly in Punjab and Gujarat. Another malpractice that caught my sight is liquor distribution. The normalisation of alcohol consumption as a tool for political influence perpetuates harmful drinking patterns and contributes to alcohol-related health problems in communities.

Additionally, The Election Commission of India plays a key role in overseeing elections. The ECI operates within the framework of electoral laws and regulations designed to prevent malpractices ensuring transparency and accountability.

To conclude, the participation of parties in such atrocious activities threatens the democratic foundation of Indian elections. From vote buying to liquor distribution these malpractices undermine the very essence of democracy, eroding public trust and subverting the will of the people. Concerted efforts must be made to address these issues through comprehensive reforms, stringent enforcement of electoral laws, and fostering a culture of transparency and accountability. Only by unmasking and confronting electoral malpractices can India uphold the integrity of its democratic process and ensure that every ballot truly counts.



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# FAITH AND POLICY

## Navigating the complex nature of religion in politics

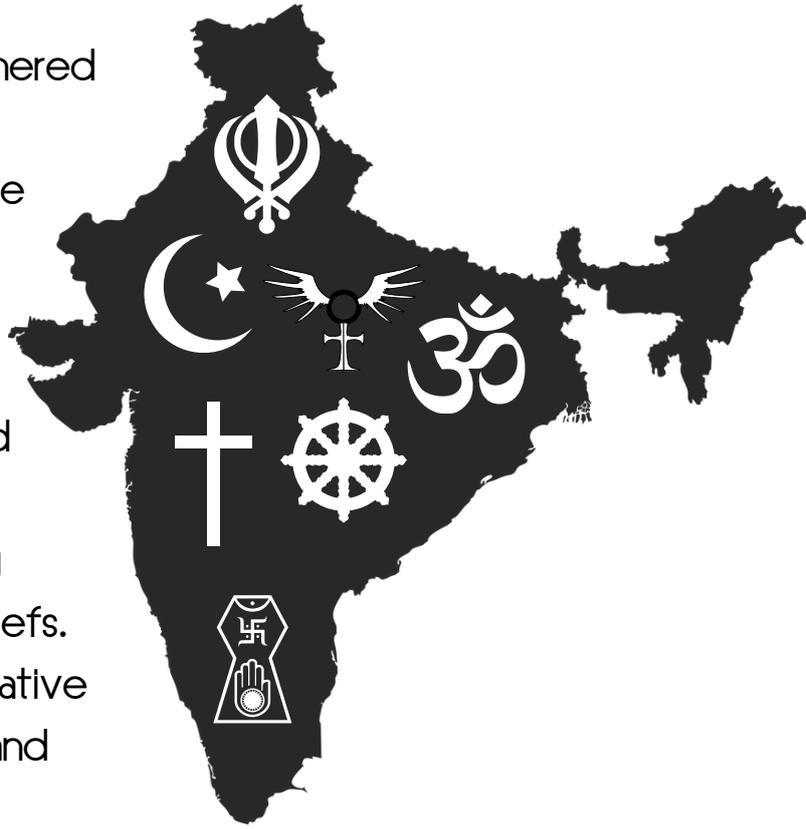


Mahatma Gandhi once said "I could not live for a single second without religion. Many of my political friends despair of me because they say that even my politics are derived from religion. And they are right. My politics and all other activities of mine are derived from religion." [1] He articulated that when referencing "religion," he wasn't specifying any singular faith such as Hinduism or Islam, but rather the collective moral principles inherent in all religions, which he deemed as constituting a genuine form of religion. He believed that politics must be guided by ethics drawn from religion.

In contemporary India, the intertwining of religion and politics has grown increasingly intricate. Political factions leverage the dominant religion of their respective regions as a tool to rally and expand their support. This trend has become particularly popular in modern India, notably over the past decade. Various religious conflicts in the country, especially, the socio-political divide between the Hindu and Islamic population has become a means for modern parties to mobilise maximum support

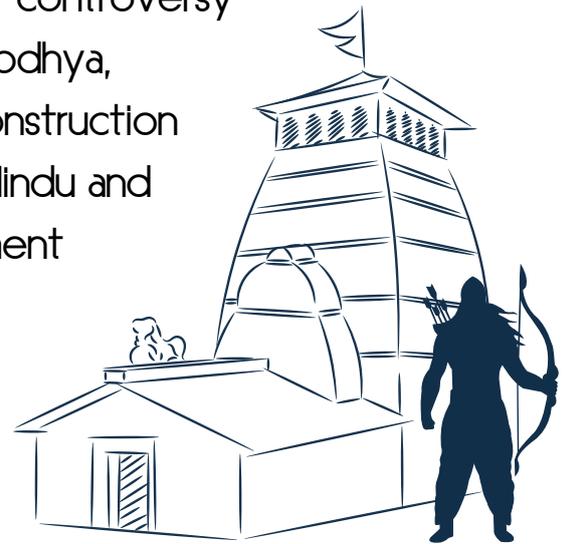
This conflict can be dated back to the time of independence from the colonial rulers. An occasion meant for celebration, which spiralled into widespread riots marked by violence and bloodshed. The grim aftermath of the 1947 Partition of the Indian subcontinent witnessed up to two million lives lost in horrifying circumstances. Approximately 14 million refugees, unprepared for horrors, faced an unprecedented nightmare. This partition, marking the creation of Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan, triggered one of the largest mass migrations in history, accompanied by unimaginable levels of violence. As the provinces of Punjab and Bengal were divided, around seven million Hindus and Sikhs, as well as seven million Muslims, found themselves in unfamiliar territories. Many, hoping to return to their perceived homes, left behind their possessions, to embark on perilous journeys to India or West/East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), with many never reaching their destinations. [2]

This practice of religious intolerance and communalism on religious lines has slithered its way into modern India and has become predominant in the minds of those who hold stake in the decision-making of the country. There is a specific recurring pattern which is visible during religious riots. It typically commences with agitated crowds taking to the streets, armed and inciting violence, accompanied by insulting remarks aimed at other faiths and their beliefs. This aggression often escalates with instigative speeches delivered by certain politicians and religious figures. Subsequently, as tensions



begin to subside, accounts emerge of individuals from diverse religious backgrounds extending aid to one another amidst the turmoil, in order to rejuvenate the sentiments of secularism and foster communal harmony among people.

These religious riots have been apparent in the recent controversy surrounding the construction of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh. The site designated for the temple's construction has long been a focal point of contention between Hindu and Muslim communities. Presently, with the commencement of the Ram Mandir's construction, the ruling party is leveraging this development to gather support from the Hindu demographic, while opposition factions are rallying support from Muslims and other minority groups. They highlight the ruling party's alleged bias towards the Hindu majority, suggesting that unless removed from power, such favouritism will persist at the helm of governance.



The influence of religion on politics is also quite evident in the case of the state of Manipur. Manipur is predominantly divided between two communities: The Meitais

who live in the Imphal valley and the Kukis, who inhabit the surrounding hills. The Meiteis, mostly Hindus, are more prosperous and wield greater financial and political power than the predominantly Christian Kukis.

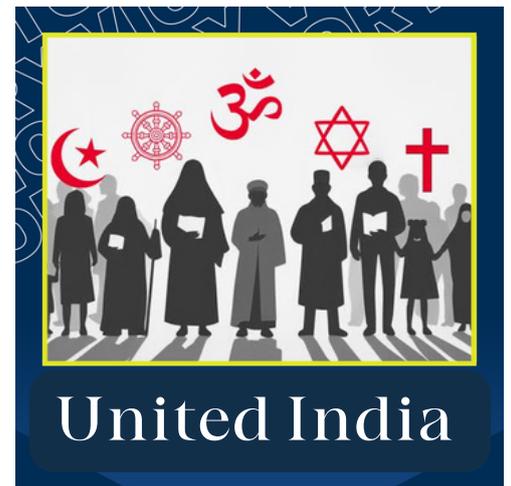
The valley, which constitutes 11% of Manipur's land, has 40 seats in the legislative assembly, while the hills, covering 89% of the area, have only 20 seats. This disparity is partly due to population differences—57% in the valley versus 43% in the hills—but the seat distribution remains disproportionate. Further compounding the issue, Meiteilon is the official language of Manipur, reflecting favouritism towards the Meitei community.

Additionally, Meiteis benefit from the Inner Line Permit, which restricts non-Manipuris from occupying their land. This clear governmental favouritism, likely aimed at securing the support of the Hindu majority, has fuelled feelings of alienation among the Kukis, who have demanded a separate state within India. These tensions have culminated in violent communal riots, driven significantly by religious factors. These riots have escalated further and for nearly a year, Manipur has been plagued by severe ethnic violence.

Despite the escalating crisis, the government, politicians, and biased media largely remained silent, attempting to downplay the issue. However, as the situation spiralled out of control and the Supreme Court intervened, they could no longer ignore the turmoil. The Indian government maintained its silence for 77 days, during which, according to official estimates, 50,000 to 60,000 people were displaced, becoming refugees in their own country. Between 140 to 200 people were killed, and more than 5,000 incidents of arson were reported.



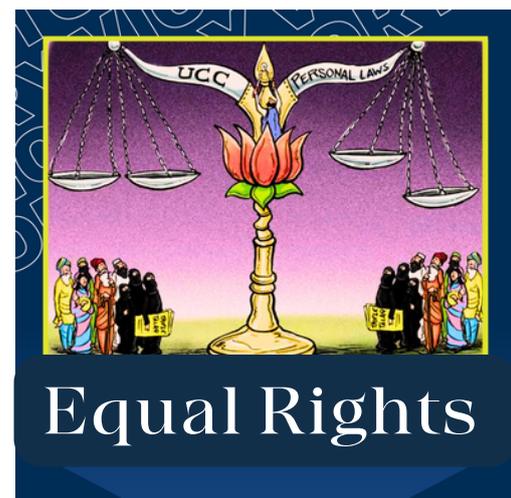
Another instance is the strategic manoeuvring of certain regional parties to mobilise voters along religious lines. The voters become so blinded by religious values and beliefs that they frequently lose sight of the paramount necessity: the nation's development. Leaders who prioritize developmental objectives over religious affiliations are often marginalized and are perceived as outsiders.



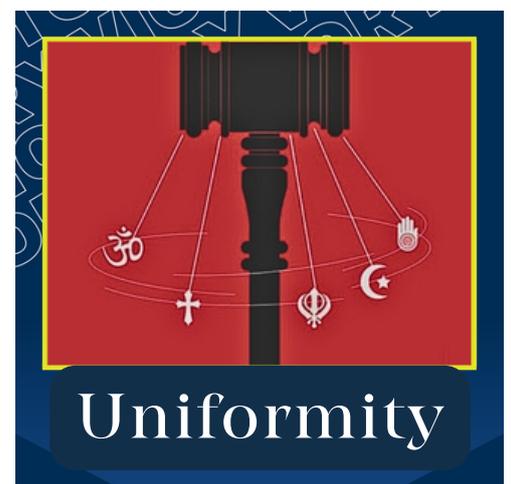
However, alongside the negative influence of religion in politics, there are positive dimensions as well. Often, decisions are made to ensure the inclusion of all religious minorities, striving to prevent anyone from feeling alienated.

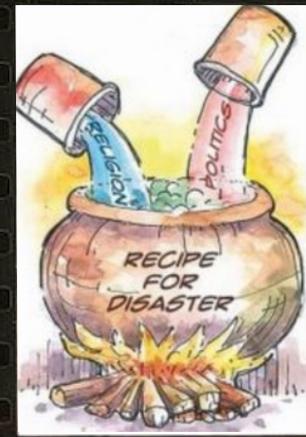
While these decisions may stem from self-serving motives, such as securing votes, they frequently result in benefits for the nation and its citizens.

An example of this is the recent proposal to implement the previously introduced Uniform Civil Code. It has been pledged that this code will be implemented if the Bhartiya Janata Party, the ruling party, is re-elected.



Essentially, this code aims to establish a uniform set of laws applicable to all religious communities in India regarding personal matters such as marriage, adoption, succession etc. Consequently, numerous laws tailored for specific religions, including the Hindu Marriage Act (1955), the Hindu Succession Act (1956), the Muslim Personal Law Application Act (1937), etc. would be rendered obsolete.[3]





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Despite several controversies and debates, the civil code is a commendable initiative that will promote consistency and equality

Another notable example is the ban on triple talaq, which has gathered significant political support, particularly among Muslim women. The passing of this bill ensures that women are not abandoned and shields them from domestic abuse. The criminalization of instant triple talaq carries penalties of up to three years of imprisonment along with substantial fines.[4]

While concerns have been raised regarding why only Muslims are penalized for abandoning their wives, with demands emerging to enact laws to punish husbands of other religions who do the same, it is undeniable that this bill marks a significant stride forward for the nation and for the overall protection of women.

In conclusion, religion has a multifaceted influence on politics, encompassing both its pros and cons. Despite several efforts, religion has stayed intertwined with politics and it always will. Thus, the crucial question arises: To what extent should religion be allowed to influence political activities?

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# SOCIAL MEDIA

<The Current Zeus of Indian Democracy>



From Elton John to aspiring Mahatma Gandhi, everybody is on social media. The interesting part is that nowadays everyone is so overtly interested in politics and voicing their views that it's hard to tell who the actual politician is. Today social media is so impactful, it's making parties change ideologies right before the elections. Its effect on Indian politics is especially notable. So this makes us wonder what real impact it has on politics. Frankly speaking, a whole lot. .

Holding great significance in the Indian elections, social media has given full authority to everyone across the world to comment on and question their future leaders' posts. While influencing voters' opinions, shaping political discourse, and critically analyzing the ideologies of various contenders, it has become a common point for debate (and dissent) about something or the other.

Nicola Formichetti once remarked, "The dark side of social media is that, within seconds, anything can be blown out of proportion and taken out of context. An it's very difficult to not get swept up in it all".

Not only are his rivals constantly throwing shade at him, but even the people have stopped the heavy cheerleading to a great extent because of the recent facts revealed about him on—you guessed it, social media! His followers were quick to fire back though, instantly gearing up to clear his name. It's almost as if the leaders don't have to do anything at all these days, they just sit back relax and watch all the drama play out.

This is just one part of the story though.

Social media has COMPLETELY changed India. More specifically, "The Great Indian Politics". But at the end of the day, it's politics! so how clean can it truly be? So, yes! Even though social media helps provide a place for people to chat, it often becomes too easy to blur the lines between real arguments and straight-up manipulation.

Up until recently- it may come as a shock to people but digital rallying has topped the charts, becoming very popular. Viral memes, hashtags, and videos have not only helped them send their message to the people but have also succeeded in entertaining them. A great example would be the plethora of memes being shared these days by The Indian National Congress. But BJP isn't lagging anywhere behind. By sharing slogans like "Jana Sangh ko vote do, beedi peena chhod do; beedi meh tambaku hai, Congress waala daku hai", they aren't eaving any questions unanswered.

And this isn't even new! In 1978, Indira Gandhi, after losing the elections in Rae Bareli, remarked humorously, " Ek sherni, Sau langur; Chikmagalur, Chikmagalur". Talk about a rebound!



To take this on more of a sentimental note, some may argue that social media has helped make a change in the emotional aspect of things.

Well, most agree to disagree here.

Old habits die hard, they say, so if a party is spreading communist ideas, it is going to continue doing just that. It could even be facile for them to disseminate such ideas through social media!



But just like everything, even social media has its pros and cons. At one end, it allows the politician to have a one-on-one conversation with his/her followers whilst addressing concerns and strengthening their support. Since the Indian democracy pledges to be transparent, this provides a sense of accessibility to the voters as it allows them to voice their concerns. Since social media provides an open place to speak out, voters also get a chance to make sure that parties adhere to the rules made by the election commission.

However, looking at the evidence, social media hasn't fully replaced in-person elections. It might have weakened the old ways, but safe to say, they are still rocking on. Other stuff aside, one can agree on the fact that Indian politics has never been completely clean, but social media has helped bring out a great deal of information. It has emerged as a strong force that has helped bind the Indians together against the malpractices that earlier persisted in the country.

But ever since the rise of digital democracy, geographical, cultural, and even political barriers have been shattered. This has caused a digital revolution that is fueled by smartphones.

Almost every place in India has smartphone users. People from Mumbai can connect with people from Kannur, a small town in Kerala just by a WIFI. The situation today is extremely different from what it used to be. Back then there were only six landline phones for every thousand Indians.



Many didn't even know what a smartphone was! Earlier, everything was on paper. Print thrived in India and this was the very way parties rallied. Times have changed A LOT since then. The smartphone has helped social media become what it is today. Furthermore, It is estimated that by 2026 the country will be home to 1 billion smartphone users with one kind of social media or the other.

Oddly enough, The parliamentary election of 2019 is even called the WhatsApp election by some that's how influential this new social media app has been in the Indian elections. Not just that, 'social media elections' have proved to be cost-effective, more inclusive, convenient, and less labor-intensive as well. And, as political parties are the most visible institutions of Indian democracy, using social media to uplift themselves has proved to be immensely successful because social media, is the most visible institution of the population's life today.



Social media also helps raise another relevant issue, which is the lack of internal democracy among parties. Usually, major party decisions and even major policy changes are made without consulting all the party members. This not only increases the feeling of alienation but also creates a lack of trust within the party itself. How can one expect the followers to trust a leader when their party members don't trust them and can't resonate with them?

Social media has also come off as a hero for the lower-ranking members of parties. It has given them a platform thereby increasing the influence of even the 'insignificant members' and has aided the process of getting them their well-deserved rights. It helps to raise the issues without hiding them and this is what leads to development and enhances democracy in a country.



Needless to say, social media has made its mark by shaping Indian politics in an agathokakological way. It has, many times, made contenders question their life decisions, give up on their motto, and at the same time has made them stronger and a better fit for becoming the leaders of the country. The way it has tied conflicting opinions together and has made seemingly similar opinions look like the complete opposite is remarkable.



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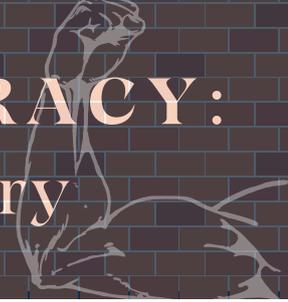
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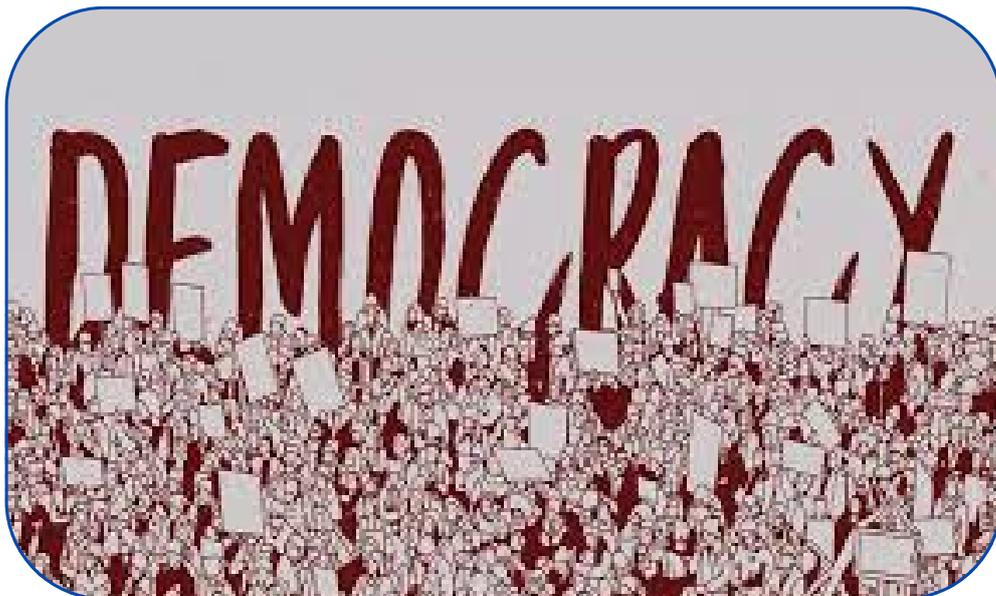
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# THE RESILIENCE OF DEMOCRACY: India's Enduring Success Story

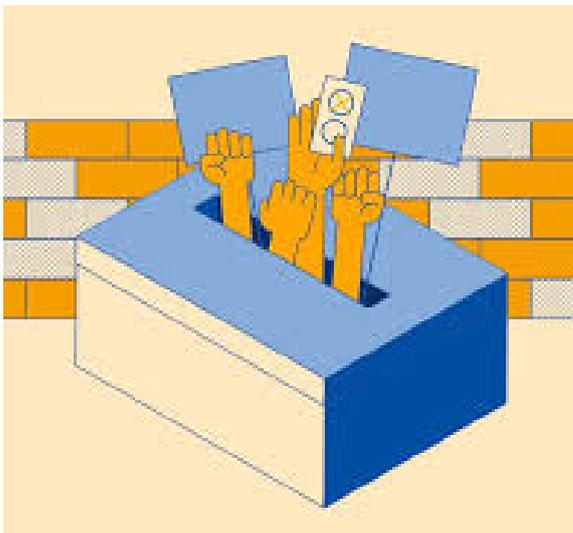


In the vast tapestry of global politics, India stands out as a beacon of democracy. Since gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1947, India has navigated through a myriad of challenges, emerging as the world's largest democracy. Its success story is not merely a tale of political institutions but a testament to the resilience and adaptability of its diverse populace. Through a historical lens and contemporary examples, this essay explores the success of democracy in India.



India's democratic journey was born from the struggles against colonialism and the vision of its founding fathers, such as Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. The Indian Constitution, adopted in 1950, laid the groundwork for a democratic framework, guaranteeing fundamental rights and establishing the principles of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity. Despite facing formidable challenges, including poverty, illiteracy, and social disparities, India chose the path of democracy, ensuring political participation for all citizens regardless of caste, creed, or gender.

One of the hallmarks of Indian democracy is its vibrancy, evidenced by the robust electoral process. With over 900 million eligible voters, India conducts the largest democratic elections globally, ensuring the voice of every citizen is heard. Despite logistical hurdles, elections are conducted regularly at the national, state, and local levels, showcasing the democratic spirit ingrained in the Indian psyche. Furthermore, India boasts a dynamic multiparty system, fostering healthy political competition and accountability. The peaceful transfer of power between different political parties reflects the maturity of India's democratic institutions. Moreover, the presence of a vigilant media and active civil society acts as watchdogs, ensuring transparency and challenging authority when necessary.



Democracy in India extends beyond the ballot box to inclusive governance and policy-making. The decentralization of power through Panchayati Raj Institutions empowers local communities, enabling grassroots participation in decision-making and development initiatives. Initiatives like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) ensure livelihood security for millions in rural areas, epitomizing democracy's commitment to social justice and inclusive growth.

Moreover, affirmative action measures such as reservations for historically marginalized groups in education and employment opportunities aim to address historical injustices and promote social equality. The empowerment of women through reservation of seats in local bodies and legislative assemblies is another milestone in India's democratic journey, amplifying diverse voices and perspectives in governance.

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Central to India's democratic success is the adherence to the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary. The Indian Supreme Court, as the guardian of the Constitution, has played a pivotal role in upholding democratic principles and protecting fundamental rights. Landmark judgments, such as *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala* and *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India*, have expanded the horizons of civil liberties and reinforced the constitutional framework.

Moreover, judicial activism has filled the voids left by legislative and executive inaction, addressing issues ranging from environmental conservation to electoral reforms. The judiciary's ability to act as a check on arbitrary state power and safeguard individual liberties underscores the strength of India's democratic institutions.

Despite its successes, Indian democracy faces persistent challenges, including corruption, communalism, and regional disparities. The erosion of democratic norms, attacks on freedom of expression, and polarization along religious and caste lines pose threats to India's democratic fabric. However, these challenges also present opportunities for introspection and reform, reaffirming the commitment to democratic values and pluralism.

In conclusion, India's success as a democracy is not merely measured by the longevity of its institutions but by the vibrancy of its democratic ethos. From its historical foundations to contemporary challenges, India's democratic journey embodies the aspirations and struggles of its diverse populace. As India continues to evolve, its commitment to democracy remains unwavering, serving as an inspiration for nations striving for political freedom and social justice.

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# THE END OF ELECTORAL COMPETITION



## Exploring Dead Rivalry in Contemporary Politics

Almost 8 in 10 Indian adults have a positive view of Modi, 55% have a very optimistic opinion. The two-time prime minister's reputation challenges everything conventional in India and much of the democratic world today. With his passion and determined leadership, Modi has carved a special place in the hearts of millions of people and cemented his authority as a beacon of hope and progress for the country. Despite changes in politics, Modi's unwavering support remains a testament to his unique connect with the masses. The opposition, once considered a formidable force, now finds itself in a sea of uncertainty and unable to cope with voters like the BJP. In fact, the BJP's dominance has reached such heights that the idea of a campaign seems almost useless, and the party's lack of controversy baffles observers. As Modi continues to shape India's destiny, his unwavering popularity is a evidence to his vision and the unwavering faith of the people he serves.

While the opposition grapples with its failures in the face of Modi's high profile, dissenting murmurs echo in the streets of power. Despite the determination of its leaders, the opposition has suffered time and time again, leaving no confidence in the strong case of the BJP. The shortcomings of the opposition manifest in the many ways

First and foremost, good leadership is essential in the fight against the ruling party. Opposition parties may not have competent leaders or leaders who can provide support and offer alternative solutions. For instance, in India, BJP has leaders like Narendra Modi and Amit Shah who command significant public appeal, opposition parties often lack leaders with comparable charisma. Indian National Congress (INC), despite being one of the oldest and largest political parties in India, the INC has faced criticism for its leadership vacuum and lack of coherent strategy. The party's failure to provide strong, visionary leadership has contributed to its electoral setbacks and inability to effectively challenge the BJP.

Secondly, Opposition parties often struggle with unity and coherence, with multiple parties pursuing their own agendas and priorities. This fragmentation weakens their collective strength against the BJP. Opposition parties in India encompass a wide range of ideologies, from socialist to liberal to regionalist. Each party often prioritizes its own ideological stance and regional interests over a broader national agenda. This can lead to conflicts and disagreements on policy issues and strategies.

In addition to this, political campaigns require substantial financial resources for activities such as advertising, organizing rallies, and mobilizing voters. The BJP, being a major political party, often has access to significant funding from various sources, including corporate donations and party memberships. In contrast, opposition parties may struggle to match the BJP's financial muscle, leading to limitations in their campaign outreach and effectiveness.

Furthermore, A robust party infrastructure is essential for effective grassroots mobilization, voter outreach, and organizational coordination. This includes having well-established party offices, trained cadre, and communication channels at the grassroots level. The BJP, with its strong organizational structure built over decades, often boasts a well-oiled machinery that can efficiently mobilize supporters and voters. In contrast, opposition parties may lack such a strong and cohesive organizational setup, impairing their ability to compete on the ground.

Moreover, Effectively communicating the party's agenda is as important as formulating it. Opposition parties need to engage with voters through various channels, including speeches, rallies, media interviews, and social media. A coherent communication strategy helps in reaching out to a wider audience and building support for the party's vision. One example of an opposition party struggling to articulate a clear agenda is the Indian National Congress (INC) in recent years. Despite being a major political party with a rich legacy, the INC has faced criticism for its lack of a coherent message and leadership vacuum.

The BJP's strength lies in its ability to expand beyond its traditional strongholds and make inroads into new regions. Opposition parties may find it difficult to counter the BJP's growing influence in these areas, particularly if they are regionally concentrated. Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is overwhelmed to grow its influence from Punjab and Delhi.

In conclusion, the BJP's remarkable expansion beyond its traditional strongholds presents significant challenges for opposition parties. Fuelled by its strong organizational machinery, resource mobilization, nationalistic appeal, and effective leadership, the BJP's influence extends into new regions, making it difficult for opposition parties to counter its dominance. Overcoming these hurdles requires strategic planning, grassroots mobilization, clear messaging, and unity among opposition factions. The BJP's ability to penetrate new territories reshapes India's political landscape, posing both opportunities and obstacles for opposition parties in their quest for electoral success.



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# DISRUPTING THE BALLOT BOX?

## Reserved Seats and the election process



Democracy, in its ideal form, is a system where every citizen has an equal voice and an equal opportunity to participate in governance. However, the introduction of reserved seats in democratic processes has sparked debates about their impact on the principles of democracy and the fairness of elections. Reserved seats, although intended to address historical injustices and promote inclusivity, can often lead to disruptions in democracy and the electoral processes.

One of the primary criticisms of seat reservation in elections is that it undermines the principle of fair competition. When a certain percentage of seats are reserved for specific groups, candidates from these groups may be chosen based on their identity rather than their qualifications, experience, or vision for governance. This can lead to the selection of candidates who may not be the most capable or competent, ultimately compromising the quality of leadership and governance.

Reserved seats also have the potential to distort the electoral process. In many cases, political parties strategically allocate reserved seats to gain electoral advantages rather than to promote genuine representation. This can lead to the manipulation of electoral boundaries and the concentration of certain groups in specific constituencies, resulting in a sudden tilt in representation that does not accurately reflect the diversity of the population. Such manipulation can also cause to continue divisions within society by reinforcing identity-based politics and increasing tensions between different groups.

The potential for manipulation is another concern. Political parties, particularly those in power, may exploit reserved seats to their advantage. By strategically allocating these seats to loyal allies, they can effectively stack the deck in their favour within the legislature. This undermines the very essence of free and fair elections, which is to hold the government accountable through a representative body chosen by the people.

Furthermore, reserved seats can be misused to consolidate power in the hands of the dominant party. By strategically allocating reserved seats to their allies, a party can manipulate the balance of power in the legislature. This undermines the very purpose of elections, which is to choose representatives who will hold the government accountable.

Reservation policies, particularly in the context of political representation, can be subject to political exploitation, leading to a prioritization of short-term political gains over long-term development objectives. One of the most common forms of political exploitation of reservation policies is through vote bank politics. Political parties may strategically use reservation quotas to secure the support of specific communities or caste groups. This can involve making promises related to reservations or emphasizing identity-based issues during elections to garner votes. While this may yield immediate electoral benefits, it can also lead to a narrow focus on short-term gains rather than addressing broader development concerns

In conclusion, while the intention behind seat reservation in elections in India is to promote inclusivity and representation, there are valid concerns about its impact on meritocracy, fair competition, social cohesion, electoral dynamics, and perceptions of fairness. Moving forward, there is a need for a balanced approach that ensures diversity and representation while upholding principles of merit-based selection and equal opportunities for all candidates, regardless of their caste or community background.

Kritvi Mahajan

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