

Seven Decades of Democracy: India's Political Evolution and the Road Ahead

¹Aamir Suhail, ²Dr. Mamta Sharma,

¹Research Scholar, ²Professor,
Department of Political Science,
Meerut College, Meerut, India

Abstract : India's democratic journey since 1947 represents one of the most significant experiments in post-colonial democratic governance. This paper analyses India's political evolution through distinct phases of democratic development, examining how institutional changes, electoral dynamics, and socio-political transformations have shaped the contemporary democratic framework. Employing Linz and Stepan's democratic consolidation framework alongside Kohli's institutional analysis, the study traces India's transition from the Congress-dominance system through coalition politics to contemporary democratic challenges. The research examines persistent tensions between democratic deepening and institutional erosion, investigating how Indian democracy navigated crises while maintaining electoral continuity. Drawing on comparative democratisation literature and contemporary political developments, the paper concludes by assessing prospects for democratic resilience amid emerging challenges of political polarisation, technological disruption, and institutional decay. The study contributes to understanding how large, diverse democracies sustain legitimacy while managing pluralistic complexities in rapidly changing global contexts.

INTRODUCTION

India's democratic experience offers unique insights into post-colonial democratic consolidation processes, representing the world's largest democracy with over 900 million eligible voters. The significance of examining India's political evolution lies in understanding how democratic institutions adapt to diverse challenges while maintaining electoral legitimacy across more than seven decades of independence. This paper addresses the central research question: **How has India's democracy evolved institutionally and politically since 1947, and what factors explain its resilience amid contemporary challenges to democratic governance?**

The theoretical framework draws on Linz and Stepan's (1996) democratic consolidation model, which emphasises behavioural, attitudinal, and constitutional dimensions of democratic stability. In addition, Kohli's (2001) institutional analysis of India's democratic success provides insight into how federal structures, electoral competition, and party systems contribute to democratic durability. Together, these frameworks enable a systematic analysis of democratic evolution while identifying factors that explain both stability and vulnerability within India's political system.

The paper is organised into sections examining distinct phases of political development, institutional transformations, and contemporary challenges. Each phase incorporates comparative perspectives from democratisation literature while highlighting India-specific dynamics. The study concludes by evaluating prospects for democratic resilience and drawing lessons for both Indian democracy and broader comparative democratisation scholarship.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Democratic Consolidation Theory

Democratic consolidation, as conceptualised by Linz and Stepan (1996), requires behavioural acceptance of democratic rules by political actors, attitudinal legitimacy among citizens, and constitutional consensus on democratic procedures. This framework facilitates analysis of India's democratic trajectory by examining how each dimension evolved across different political phases. Behavioural consolidation refers to political actors accepting democratic outcomes even when electorally disadvantaged, while attitudinal consolidation involves widespread citizen belief in democracy as the most legitimate form of governance.

Constitutional consolidation entails agreement on fundamental democratic institutions, including federalism, electoral systems, and judicial independence. India's Constitution, adopted in 1950, established a parliamentary democratic framework with federal structures, providing an institutional foundation for democratic consolidation. However, consolidation remains an ongoing process requiring continuous institutional adaptation to changing social and political contexts.

Institutional Analysis Framework

Kohli's (2001) institutional analysis emphasises how specific institutional arrangements contribute to democratic success in diverse societies. Key factors include federal structures accommodating regional diversity, competitive party systems ensuring electoral contestation, and autonomous institutions maintaining checks and balances. This institutional perspective complements consolidation theory by focusing on concrete mechanisms that sustain democratic governance in complex, plural societies.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative historical-institutional methodology, tracing political developments across distinct phases while assessing institutional performance. Primary sources include constitutional amendments, Election Commission data, and

parliamentary proceedings, supplemented by scholarly analyses of India's political transformations. Comparative democratisation literature is used to contextualise India's experience within broader global patterns.

Phase I: Foundation and Congress Dominance (1947–1967)

Institutional Foundations and Nation-Building

The immediate post-independence period established the foundational pillars of Indian democracy through constitutional adoption and institutional development. The Constitution of India, which came into force in 1950, created a parliamentary system combined with federal structures designed to manage India's extraordinary linguistic, religious, and cultural diversity (Austin, 1999). Universal adult franchise was introduced at independence, a radical democratic choice in a society marked by widespread poverty, illiteracy, and social stratification.

The process of nation-building during this phase involved continuous institutional experimentation. The States Reorganisation Act of 1956 demonstrated democratic responsiveness to linguistic and cultural demands by reorganising state boundaries along linguistic lines. This reform helped defuse potentially destabilising identity-based conflicts and established a precedent for resolving political demands through constitutional means rather than coercion (Brass, 1990).

Jawaharlal Nehru's leadership during this period prioritised institution-building over charismatic authority. Parliamentary conventions, cabinet responsibility, and judicial independence were carefully nurtured, ensuring that democratic procedures became embedded beyond individual leadership (Guha, 2007). The first general elections of 1951–52 represented a critical democratic milestone, validating the legitimacy of electoral democracy through peaceful mass participation. The Indian National Congress secured 364 of 489 Lok Sabha seats, but elections were genuinely competitive, with socialist, regional, and communal parties participating actively in the process (Weiner, 1987).

The Congress System and Democratic Legitimacy

Rajni Kothari's (1970) concept of the "Congress system" provides a useful framework for understanding democratic functioning during this phase. Rather than operating as a monolithic party, Congress functioned as a broad coalition encompassing diverse ideological factions, social interests, and regional elites. Political competition was internalised within the party, allowing democratic contestation while maintaining overall system stability.

This system enabled democratic procedures to function effectively in a highly fragmented society. Congress acted as an umbrella organisation that mediated conflicts among social groups, from rural agrarian communities to urban professionals, thereby maintaining political integration. Opposition parties, though electorally weak at the national level, played a crucial role in shaping public debate and policy alternatives, particularly at the state level (Rudolph & Rudolph, 2008).

However, Congress dominance also produced structural vulnerabilities. The absence of a strong national opposition limited external accountability, while centralised decision-making concentrated power within the party leadership. These weaknesses became increasingly evident by the early 1960s, as economic challenges, food shortages, and leadership succession issues began eroding Congress's hegemonic position (Kohli, 2001).

External Shocks and Early Democratic Stress

The 1962 Sino-Indian War exposed significant governance and strategic failures, producing a major psychological and political shock. While the conflict strengthened nationalist sentiment in the short term, it also undermined confidence in executive decision-making and accelerated internal dissent within Congress (Raghavan, 2010). Economic stagnation, inflation, and rising unemployment during the mid-1960s further strained the legitimacy of the dominant-party system.

By the time of the 1967 general elections, these cumulative pressures had weakened Congress's ability to manage diverse interests within a single-party framework. Although the party retained national power, it lost control in several states, signalling the end of uncontested dominance and the beginning of a more competitive democratic phase.

Analytical Assessment of Phase I

Phase I demonstrates that democratic consolidation in India was achieved not through the absence of conflict but through institutional mechanisms capable of absorbing and managing social diversity. Federalism, electoral competition, and constitutional flexibility allowed democracy to take root despite adverse socio-economic conditions. At the same time, the limitations of dominant-party democracy laid the groundwork for subsequent democratic transformations.

Phase II: Crisis and Fragmentation (1967–1989)

Electoral Competition and the Emergence of Coalition Politics

The 1967 general elections marked a decisive turning point in India's democratic trajectory, signalling the erosion of Congress dominance and the emergence of competitive multi-party politics. Although the Indian National Congress retained power at the national level, its parliamentary majority was substantially reduced, and it lost control of government in eight major states (Weiner, 1987). This electoral outcome demonstrated the maturation of democratic competition and the electorate's willingness to punish incumbents for governance failures.

The significance of the 1967 elections lay not merely in electoral arithmetic but in the transformation of the party system. Regional parties such as the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Tamil Nadu and the Akali Dal in Punjab consolidated power at the state level, reflecting the deepening of federal democracy and the political articulation of regional identities (Brass, 1990). These developments underscored the capacity of India's democratic framework to accommodate diversity through electoral and institutional channels rather than through extra-constitutional conflict.

The decline of Congress dominance also exposed structural weaknesses within the party. Factionalism, leadership struggles, and declining organisational cohesion reduced its ability to function as a broad-based integrative force. The split of the Congress Party in 1969 formalised these internal divisions, producing rival factions and fundamentally altering the dynamics of national politics (Guha, 2007).

Populism, Centralisation, and Democratic Tensions

Following the party split, Indira Gandhi adopted a populist political strategy aimed at rebuilding electoral legitimacy through direct mass mobilisation. The “Garibi Hatao” (Remove Poverty) campaign during the 1971 elections exemplified this shift, combining redistributive rhetoric with centralised leadership (Kohli, 2001). While the strategy succeeded electorally—producing a decisive mandate—it also marked a departure from the institutionalised, consultative style of governance associated with earlier Congress leadership.

Populist mobilisation strengthened executive authority while weakening intermediary institutions such as the party organisation, cabinet processes, and parliamentary deliberation. The increasing concentration of power in the Prime Minister’s Office reduced internal checks within the political system, heightening tensions between democratic responsiveness and institutional accountability (Rudolph & Rudolph, 2008).

At the same time, social and economic pressures intensified. Inflation, unemployment, and labour unrest during the early 1970s generated widespread dissatisfaction. Mass movements led by opposition figures and civil society groups, particularly the Bihar movement under Jayaprakash Narayan, articulated demands for political reform and ethical governance. These movements represented democratic mobilisation outside formal party structures, signalling both democratic vitality and systemic stress.

The Emergency and Democratic Breakdown (1975–1977)

The declaration of the Emergency in June 1975 constituted the most severe rupture in India’s democratic history. Fundamental rights were suspended, press freedom curtailed, opposition leaders imprisoned, and executive authority expanded through constitutional amendments (Austin, 1999). The Emergency exposed vulnerabilities in India’s democratic consolidation, particularly the susceptibility of institutions to executive overreach under conditions of political crisis.

However, the Emergency also revealed unexpected sources of democratic resilience. Judicial responses, though initially deferential—as seen in the ADM Jabalpur case—eventually contributed to the restoration of constitutional balance through later judgments such as *Minerva Mills v. Union of India* (1980), which reaffirmed the basic structure doctrine and limited parliamentary supremacy (Mehta, 2022).

Equally significant was popular resistance. Underground political mobilisation, civil society activism, and dissent within the bureaucracy and media sustained democratic norms despite repression. The lifting of the Emergency and the subsequent general elections of 1977 marked a democratic watershed. The defeat of the Congress Party and the peaceful transfer of power to the Janata Party coalition demonstrated the electorate’s capacity to punish authoritarian behaviour through constitutional means (Guha, 2007).

Post-Emergency Adaptation and Federal Rebalancing

The Janata government (1977–1979), though short-lived, played a critical role in democratic restoration. The 44th Constitutional Amendment reversed many Emergency-era provisions, strengthened protections for civil liberties, and limited the scope of future emergency declarations (Austin, 1999). These reforms reflected institutional learning and reinforced constitutional safeguards against authoritarian drift.

The late 1970s and 1980s witnessed renewed federal assertion, as state governments exercised greater autonomy and regional political identities gained prominence. This period also saw the consolidation of coalition politics at the state level, creating laboratories for alternative governance models and policy experimentation (Palshikar, Suri, & Yadav, 2014).

At the national level, Indira Gandhi’s return to power in 1980 and subsequent leadership under Rajiv Gandhi reflected attempts to combine centralised authority with modernisation and administrative reform. While Rajiv Gandhi introduced technological and governance innovations, his tenure was marked by corruption controversies and challenges to federal accommodation, particularly in Punjab and Assam (Brass, 1990).

Analytical Assessment of Phase II

Phase II highlights the dual character of India’s democratic evolution: heightened vulnerability coexisting with institutional adaptability. The Emergency exposed weaknesses in behavioural and constitutional consolidation, yet the restoration of democracy through elections reaffirmed attitudinal commitment to democratic norms. The expansion of electoral competition, federal pluralism, and judicial assertiveness during this period strengthened democratic foundations while simultaneously introducing new challenges of governance complexity and political fragmentation.

Phase III: Coalition Politics and Economic Liberalization (1989–2014)

Transition to Multiparty Competition and Coalition Governance

The general elections of 1989 marked the consolidation of coalition politics as a durable feature of Indian democracy. The decline of single-party dominance at the national level gave way to multiparty competition, with governments increasingly dependent on alliances among national and regional parties (Weiner, 1987). The National Front government represented a heterogeneous coalition that reflected the diversification of political representation along regional, caste, and ideological lines.

This transition signified democratic deepening rather than instability. Coalition governance expanded political inclusion by enabling previously marginalised social groups and regions to gain representation through regional parties and caste-based mobilisations (Chandra, 2004). The emergence of parties such as the Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party, and Telugu Desam Party reflected the politicisation of social justice claims within the democratic framework.

Coalition politics also required new institutional practices to manage diversity and ensure policy coherence. The development of **Common Minimum Programmes** became a key innovation, providing agreed policy frameworks that balanced divergent party interests while maintaining governmental functionality (Palshikar et al., 2014). Although coalition governments faced challenges of instability and negotiation costs, they demonstrated the capacity of democratic institutions to adapt to pluralistic competition.

Economic Liberalization and Political Fragmentation

The economic reforms initiated in 1991 represented a watershed moment in India’s political economy. Liberalisation coincided with heightened political fragmentation, challenging assumptions that market-oriented reforms require strong, centralised governments. Instead, successive coalition governments sustained and expanded reform processes, demonstrating institutional resilience and policy continuity (Kohli, 2001).

The Congress-led governments in the early 1990s initiated macroeconomic stabilisation and structural reforms, while later coalition governments—including the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA)—continued liberalisation in areas such as telecommunications, infrastructure, and financial regulation. This cross-party consensus on economic reform reflected democratic accommodation between market imperatives and electoral accountability. However, coalition politics also introduced new governance challenges. Policy paralysis during the UPA's second term and high-profile corruption scandals, such as the 2G spectrum and coal allocation cases, undermined public trust in political institutions (Vaishnav, 2017). These controversies highlighted how fragmented authority and coalition bargaining could weaken accountability mechanisms and facilitate rent-seeking behaviour.

Deepening Democracy through Institutional Innovation

Despite governance challenges, this phase witnessed significant democratic innovation aimed at deepening participation and accountability. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments of 1992 institutionalised Panchayati Raj and urban local self-government, decentralising power and creating new arenas for grassroots democratic participation (Hasan, 2012). These reforms brought millions of citizens—particularly women and marginalised groups—into formal political processes.

Legislative innovations further strengthened democratic accountability. The Right to Information Act (2005) empowered citizens to scrutinise government functioning, while the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (2005) expanded social citizenship by guaranteeing employment rights (Jayal & Mehta, 2010). These initiatives demonstrated how democratic competition and civil society mobilisation could drive institutional responsiveness and inclusive policy outcomes.

Social Movements and Democratic Contestation

The period from 1989 to 2014 was marked by vibrant social and political movements that reshaped democratic discourse. Mandalera politics foregrounded questions of social justice and representation, while environmental, anti-corruption, and rights-based movements expanded democratic participation beyond electoral arenas (Varshney, 2024). These movements functioned as mechanisms of democratic pressure, compelling governments to address demands for inclusion, transparency, and accountability. At the same time, identity-based mobilisation and communal polarisation intensified, particularly during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Episodes of communal violence and contentious politics underscored tensions between democratic mobilisation and social cohesion, raising questions about the quality of democratic deliberation within an increasingly competitive political environment (Brass, 1990).

Analytical Assessment of Phase III

Phase III illustrates the complex interaction between democratic deepening and governance strain. Coalition politics expanded representation and institutionalised pluralism, while economic liberalisation reshaped state–society relations and policy priorities. Democratic resilience during this period was sustained through electoral competition, institutional innovation, and social mobilisation, even as fragmentation and corruption posed challenges to governance effectiveness.

Phase IV: Majoritarian Democracy and Contemporary Challenges (2014–Present)

Return to Single-Party Dominance and Leadership Centralisation

The 2014 general elections marked a structural shift in India's party system with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) securing a single-party majority in the Lok Sabha. This outcome ended nearly twenty-five years of coalition governance and inaugurated a new phase of majoritarian democracy characterised by strong executive leadership and centralised decision-making (Vaishnav, 2017). Narendra Modi's leadership style emphasised personalised authority, direct communication with voters, and the marginalisation of intermediary institutions such as party forums, parliamentary committees, and federal consultative mechanisms.

This return to single-party dominance altered democratic dynamics in significant ways. While electoral legitimacy remained robust, the reduced effectiveness of opposition parties raised concerns about the quality of democratic competition and institutional checks. The BJP's organisational strength and ideological coherence enabled policy decisiveness but also concentrated power within the executive, challenging traditions of consensus-based governance that had developed during the coalition era (Palshikar et al., 2014). The 2019 general elections further consolidated this trend, with the BJP securing an even larger parliamentary majority. These outcomes reflected popular endorsement of majoritarian governance while simultaneously intensifying debates about pluralism, minority representation, and institutional autonomy within India's democratic framework (Varshney, 2024).

Institutional Challenges and Democratic Erosion

Recent scholarship and international assessments have documented signs of democratic erosion in India, including the weakening of autonomous institutions, constraints on media freedom, and increased pressures on civil society organisations (Mehta, 2022). The use of investigative agencies against political opponents, restrictions on non-governmental organisations, and the curtailment of dissenting voices have raised concerns about the erosion of liberal democratic norms.

Judicial independence has faced new pressures, although the judiciary continues to assert its authority intermittently through landmark judgments. Electoral institutions have remained operationally effective, but debates over campaign finance transparency, media bias, and the use of state resources during elections have intensified (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018).

Despite these challenges, democratic resilience remains evident. Electoral competition continues to function, state-level politics provide alternative centres of power, and civil society activism persists in contesting state policies. The 2024 general elections, which resulted in a reduced parliamentary majority for the ruling party and a renewed reliance on coalition partners, underscored the electorate's capacity to recalibrate political power through democratic means.

Technology, Digital Governance, and Democracy

Digital technology has become a defining feature of contemporary Indian democracy. Social media platforms have transformed political communication by enabling direct engagement between leaders and citizens, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers. While this has enhanced political mobilisation, it has also facilitated misinformation, polarisation, and the erosion of deliberative discourse (Vaishnav, 2017).

Government initiatives such as Aadhaar and the Digital India programme illustrate the dual impact of technology on governance. On one hand, digital systems have improved service delivery and reduced leakages; on the other, they have raised serious concerns

about privacy, surveillance, and exclusion. The increasing deployment of artificial intelligence and data-driven governance mechanisms introduces new challenges for democratic accountability and consent.

Regulating digital platforms, ensuring electoral integrity in the digital age, and balancing technological innovation with civil liberties represent critical governance challenges for India's democracy in the coming decades. Addressing these issues requires institutional adaptation and regulatory innovation consistent with constitutional values (Mehta, 2022).

Analytical Assessment of Phase IV

Phase IV reflects a complex interplay between democratic mandate and institutional strain. Majoritarian governance has enhanced decisiveness but weakened pluralistic checks and balances. While electoral legitimacy remains intact, the quality of democratic governance increasingly depends on the resilience of institutions, the vibrancy of opposition politics, and the capacity of civil society to sustain democratic norms.

Comparative Analysis and Democratic Resilience Institutional Factors in Democratic Durability

India's democratic longevity, particularly when compared to other post-colonial states, can be attributed to a distinctive configuration of institutional factors. Federal structures accommodating linguistic, ethnic, and regional diversity have played a central role in preventing democratic breakdown by providing constitutional avenues for political expression and conflict management (Kohli, 2001). Competitive elections at multiple levels of government have ensured regular accountability, while an autonomous judiciary has functioned as a crucial guardian of constitutional norms (Austin, 1999).

Comparative analysis with neighbouring South Asian states such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka highlights the significance of these institutional choices. In contrast to repeated military interventions in Pakistan or prolonged civil conflict in Sri Lanka, India's commitment to civilian supremacy and electoral continuity has enabled democratic survival despite severe internal challenges (Rudolph & Rudolph, 2008). These comparisons underscore the importance of institutionalised political competition and federal accommodation in sustaining democracy in diverse societies.

Federal democracy has been particularly effective in managing India's pluralism. The capacity to devolve power, recognise regional identities, and allow policy experimentation at the state level has reduced pressures on the central state while deepening democratic participation. This institutional flexibility distinguishes India from many post-colonial democracies that pursued centralised governance models with destabilising consequences (Manor, 2014).

Social Movements and Democratic Deepening

Democratic resilience in India cannot be understood solely through institutional analysis; it is equally rooted in sustained social movement activism. From the early years of independence to contemporary times, civil society movements have consistently expanded the boundaries of democratic participation and accountability. Movements advocating land reform, social justice, environmental protection, and anti-corruption measures have pressured governments to respond to citizen demands and institutionalise reform (Hasan, 2012).

The relationship between institutional democracy and social movement democracy has been dynamic and at times contentious. While mass mobilisation has occasionally destabilised governance processes, it has more often contributed to democratic deepening by expanding representation and strengthening accountability. The anti-Emergency movement, the Mandal mobilisation, and the Right to Information campaign illustrate how extra-institutional activism can reinforce democratic norms and compel institutional adaptation (Jayal & Mehta, 2010).

This dialectical interaction between formal institutions and popular mobilisation has enhanced democratic vitality while also generating tensions between governance efficiency and participatory demands. Nevertheless, it has enabled Indian democracy to evolve in response to changing social realities rather than stagnate within rigid institutional frameworks.

Contemporary Challenges to Democratic Resilience

Despite its durability, Indian democracy faces significant contemporary challenges that test the limits of institutional resilience. Political polarisation has intensified, particularly along religious and identity-based lines, threatening the inclusive foundations of democratic citizenship (Varshney, 2024). Polarised political competition increasingly prioritises mobilisation over deliberation, reducing opportunities for compromise and consensus-building.

Economic inequality poses another challenge to democratic legitimacy. Although economic growth has lifted millions out of poverty, persistent disparities in income, education, and access to public services undermine substantive equality. These inequalities create tensions between formal political equality and lived democratic experiences, potentially eroding citizen trust in democratic institutions (Kohli, 2001).

Technological transformation further complicates democratic governance. Digital platforms reshape political communication, electoral campaigns, and citizen engagement, amplifying both participation and misinformation. The growing use of data-driven governance and surveillance technologies raises concerns about privacy, consent, and accountability, necessitating new regulatory frameworks consistent with constitutional principles (Mehta, 2022).

Prospects for Democratic Renewal

India's democratic future depends on its capacity to address these challenges through institutional reform and democratic innovation. Electoral reforms—particularly in campaign finance regulation and media accountability—are essential for maintaining the integrity of political competition. Strengthening parliamentary oversight, revitalising federal consultative mechanisms, and ensuring judicial independence will be critical for restoring institutional balance (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018).

Equally important is the renewal of democratic culture. Sustained civic engagement, pluralistic discourse, and leadership commitment to constitutional values are indispensable for democratic resilience. India's experience demonstrates that democracy is not a static achievement but an ongoing process of negotiation, adaptation, and renewal.

Conclusion

India's democratic evolution over more than seven decades represents one of the most sustained and complex experiments in post-colonial democratic governance. From the foundational years of constitutional consolidation through phases of dominant-party rule, crisis and authoritarian interruption, coalition-driven pluralism, and contemporary majoritarian challenges, Indian democracy has demonstrated a remarkable capacity for adaptation and survival. The central puzzle guiding this study—how India's democracy has endured despite profound social diversity, economic inequality, and periodic institutional stress—can be answered only through an integrated institutional and political analysis.

The paper has shown that India's democratic resilience rests on a combination of structural and dynamic factors. Federalism has functioned as a crucial mechanism for managing diversity, enabling regional political aspirations to be accommodated within constitutional frameworks rather than through extra-constitutional conflict. Regular, competitive elections have sustained democratic legitimacy by ensuring accountability and enabling peaceful transfers of power, even during moments of acute political crisis. An autonomous judiciary, despite periods of constraint, has played a critical role in safeguarding constitutional principles and restoring institutional balance.

At the same time, democratic durability has not implied democratic perfection. Each phase of India's political evolution has generated new vulnerabilities alongside adaptive gains. The Congress-dominant system provided stability but limited accountability; the post-1967 phase expanded competition while increasing fragmentation; coalition politics deepened representation but strained governance effectiveness; and contemporary majoritarian democracy has enhanced decisiveness while weakening pluralistic checks and balances. These trade-offs underscore the central argument of this paper: democratic consolidation is not a linear process but an ongoing negotiation between inclusion, effectiveness, and institutional restraint.

Contemporary challenges—political polarisation, institutional erosion, economic inequality, and technological disruption—pose serious tests to India's democratic future. Yet the evidence presented suggests that democratic resilience remains embedded in India's political system through electoral accountability, federal diversity, judicial assertion, and sustained civil society engagement. The recalibration of political power through recent elections reinforces the continuing relevance of democratic mechanisms, even under conditions of institutional strain.

The road ahead for Indian democracy will depend on the capacity of political leadership, institutions, and citizens to reaffirm constitutional values while adapting democratic practices to new social and technological realities. Electoral and institutional reforms, renewed commitment to pluralism, and democratic regulation of digital governance will be essential for sustaining legitimacy and accountability. As the world's largest democracy, India's trajectory carries implications well beyond its borders, offering critical lessons for comparative democratisation in diverse and unequal societies navigating the challenges of the twenty-first century.

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